

ELTON LANE

A very big thing happened in 1939. We bought a lot from another Comptroller's Department employee, Pat Dooley. He owned an acre of wooded land on the west side of Austin. He built his home on half and sold us half. My parents hired an architect, and spent hours pouring over plans. The building was so exciting that we would go out every afternoon after my Dad got home from work to see how it was coming. It seemed very grand to me, but actually it was a small house, two bedrooms and one bath, a living room, dining room, and kitchen with a breakfast room off of it. It was built of beautiful stone, though; and set amongst the trees, it was lovely. We had a double garage with a storeroom off it with the washing machine.

The washing machine, by the way, in those days, was a big round thing which ran on electricity, (a big improvement over the wash tubs on the farms where my parents grew up), but when the clothes were done, one had to hand-feed the clothes through an attached wringer to get the water out, running them into a wash tub with clear water—doing this process several times till the soap was out. Then the clothes were piled in a basket and hung out with clothespins on outdoor lines which my Dad put up at the back of the lot. I will say that they smelled SO fresh when they were dry and you took them down to fold or iron them. Another time when doing things “green” had a big advantage—unless, of course, it rained.

Before we moved, “Santa Claus” had brought me a bicycle for Christmas, and, with some difficulty I had learned to ride it. Mother had run along behind me on a little dirt path that ran beside our house, to help me keep balanced—at which I was not great. But one day, she got hung up on the phone, and I got tired of waiting, so I just rode it! Hmmm. Anyway, this was wonderful, as there were two other girls in the new neighborhood with bicycles and lots of vacant land full of trees around us. We made elaborate paths through the “forests.” Climbing trees was also great in the area, though one time I got scared in a new tree, with Cornelia Lamb above me. She couldn't get by me, so we both yelled for her Mother (luckily this tree was close to her house) who finally came and rescued us.

We moved in the middle of a school year, and, as I said before, I had “skipped” 1B and 2B, so my second full year of school was in the third grade. My third year of school, then, was in 4A at Fulmore. So, when I moved to Pease, I was put in 4B for the first six weeks. Then, for some reason, they moved me (after my first report card) into 5A for the rest of the year. It got even wilder at the end of the year, because they added the 12th grade to Austin schools that summer. Beginning with 5th grade, students were put forward a full year, so by the fall of 1939 I was suddenly in 6B. I had started to school at 6 and a half, and by the time I was 9 and a half, I was in 6B. Luckily, I was quite tall for my age, but I've never known how much this affected my social adaptation. This also meant that at midterm, I moved from Pease Elementary School to Allen Junior High for the 7A—just before my 10th birthday.

I don't remember a lot about Pease, except that at Christmas, Mary Millsap's desk was full of presents. I had a crush on Lael Gunn, because he had such nice manners—he actually stood up and pulled out my chair for me. Dazzling at nine, I assure you. In the upper grades at Pease we had special teachers for different subjects, instead of the same

“home room” teacher for everything. I LOVED this, especially the history teacher, who was young and energetic. She also directed the pageant at the end of the year, and I had two parts. I was with my class in a Minuet—do you believe?—which we danced to a Mozart minuet, with full-length dresses and hoop skirts. Ecstasy! Even better, I got to be the narrator for one of the six scenes, describing the history behind the acted-out portions OVER A MICROPHONE. Even more ecstasy! I DO love performance.

The other thing I remember about Pease is the school song, which Wallace thinks is hilarious. It goes: Pease, Pease, a grand old school. Purple and gold for our school. Purple and gold for our school. Pease, Pease, a grand old school. (And I think there is another line which I have forgotten.)

I don’t remember whether it was this early or a bit later, but at some point I was a “Brownie,” the forerunner of being a Girl Scout. I even went away for a week’s Brownie Camp somewhere near Austin. My only real memory of it is that when I got home, Mother noticed that my panties were one short. Finally I confessed to her that they made us wash our underwear, and I didn’t want to. So I paid another Browner a pair of panties to wash mine. Honestly!

Oh, I just remembered. I had my first “date” while I was at Pease (at 9 years old, remember)—with Lael Gunn, of course. We double dated with Bobby Feather and his date, and Bobby’s father drove us there and picked us up. It was a dinner at the First Baptist Church, and I thought it was really very exciting!

During the year when I was eleven, my Dad and several other men from the State Comptroller’s Office were sent to Tulsa, Oklahoma, on an extended audit of several of the oil companies who were stationed in Oklahoma, but operated in the Texas oil fields—to make sure they were paying their appropriate Texas taxes. He was gone for months, and my folks developed the plan that Mother and I would move to Tulsa for the summer, rent an apartment, and try to live on his per diem allowance for those three months—which we did. In fact, my parents told me later that it was that summer which put us in better financial position for the first time—the first time, for instance, that we could pay for groceries as we bought them, rather than charging and paying by the month.

For some reason, this summer was a magical time for me, when my imagination was in full bloom. Toward the end of the summer, they sent me to my Dalby grandparents for a summer vacation there. I rode the bus and had to change buses twice. What I remember about it is that I made up a different name for myself and would spin tales for the nice ladies who befriended me on the bus. I told them my parents were getting divorced and were sending me to my grandparents. Oh, you wouldn’t believe the sympathy I got! What a brat!

At Allan Junior High, I encountered for the first time the “Mexican” kids, none of whom had been at Pease. My only impression was that they got to be on the program a lot in the Auditorium, doing Mexican dances in colorful costumes. That is also the occasion for my first lessons (that I remember) in race prejudice. My Mother told me not to let them put me in a locker (which were all shared by two people) with a Mexican girl. Her reason, as I recall, was that they ate different foods and thus smelled different and the smell would get into my coats and things. It never came up, but I can remember listening to her, but feeling a little puzzled. As I look back on it, that was probably because we

always ate Mexican food for special treats, but I never followed the logic through. I guess one doesn't at nine, though as I look back on it, I can remember feeling a little ashamed of Mother for saying that—it felt like an embarrassing secret.

Sometime in here, probably when I was about 11, my Mother gave me my first and only home sex instruction. It strikes me that it is another example of how different life was then. She told me that I would start menstruating and about the blood. She also, I recall, told me how painful it was and how I would probably be sick every month. But, she said, it was all worth it because that is what enabled you to have babies. A seed from the man got inside you and from that the baby grew.

I remember a kind of breathless fascination, in which I asked, "How does it get there?" She turned away, saying only, "You'll find out." Well, kids figure out things the best way they can, and for years after my periods began, I remember I never sat on the toilet seat at home during my period for fear that one of my Dad's seeds would jump inside me, and I'd have a baby I wasn't supposed to have. Isn't that pathetic?

Another pathetic part of it was that I fulfilled her teaching by getting dreadfully sick every month, sometimes vomiting and having to stay home in bed. Years later, I remember Mother saying that she guessed she should be ashamed, but she never minded when I was sick and had to stay home "because then I had you to myself." I didn't say anything, but it sent a cold chill down my back. I take one thing back, she did give one more bit of sex instruction some years later—she said that sex was "something men needed to do, so you catered to that." However, I didn't buy that one—I'd read enough romantic novels by then that I was silent, but I thought to myself: I just don't believe that; I know there's more to it than that!

In junior high, I remember that I signed up for chorus as one of my subjects, or maybe we had to, I'm not sure. Anyway, going as I did, I was surprised to be told I was an alto. We had a performance very early on, and I hadn't had time to learn the parts—especially as an alto, where we couldn't sing the tune—so the teacher told me just to mouth the words. All the rest of her life, my Mother loved to tell that story and laugh. I can't sing, but I really wasn't as bad as she made out, and that was the only time the teacher had me just mouth. It's kind of funny, isn't it, that that anesthesiologist damaged my vocal chords as a result of which my voice therapist said I should refrain from singing. Until that happened, I had never realized how much I sang—just to myself around the house or in the car or piddling. I really miss it.

Besides the earlier bladder infections, there were a couple of other important physical things in my life. One was that for years, my Mother had the doctor give me pills for thyroid problems. She was always so afraid I would gain weight that she just harped on it all the time. The doctor prescribed the medicine in capsules, but I couldn't swallow them, so we would empty the capsule out into a teaspoon of water. They tasted horrible, and my Dad thought it was absurd that I couldn't swallow them. So he decided to make me do so. I remember finally his chasing me all over the kitchen trying to throw it down my throat, but I always spit it back out. It was only years later that I learned to swallow medicine. Also, years later, a doctor told me that I didn't have any thyroid problem and that if I had EVER had one, I still would—so all that medicine was for naught. He said they used to give people that a lot when they really didn't need it.

The other was more serious. I had a severe kidney disease which I have lost the name of—nephritis or nephrosis or something like that. I had very high fever and was severely ill. The doctor came to the house and said there was a new medicine he was going to try—sulfa drugs had just been discovered. He gave me sulfa nelimide (sp?), which I was told later they only give horses now. Anyway, I got well, but ended by being anemic. Later, my friend Mary Ann Moore told me that her beloved cousin had died just the year before I had it from the same disease. Mary Ann's father, a doctor, had given her sulfa and she got better, but he couldn't get any more and she died. So I guess that was a pretty close call. There is a photograph of me and Grace Struhall who had come to visit me right after I got well, and my coat just hangs on me—I was pretty thin.

I don't remember much about junior high. I know that I had previously always had my mother go in to school on the first day to register me. That first day at Allan, I realized this was not a good idea, and Mother always enjoyed telling how I ran ahead and gestured back for her to leave, otherwise pretending I didn't know her.

I do remember two skills I was learning during that time. There was a public swimming pool just a few blocks from our house, and they offered free swimming lessons every summer, so that was where I learned to swim. The other was ballroom dance classes, offered privately after school, which Mother felt was a "must" for me—for which I bless her to this day. We had lessons and then at the end of the term a dance—with long dresses! The one I remember was that Charles Trimble (who looked something like a nerd, but danced like a movie star) and I won huge red peppermint candy sticks each for the best tango.

Some time in here I got my first "record player," which played two-sided recordings which we then called "records," but which are now known as "78s." One day recently as we went into the Y for our water aerobics class, the bicyclists were playing a record which I remember as one of the first records I got—"Paper Doll" by the Mills Brothers. I discovered that I still remembered all the words—60-odd years later! I also had a Bing Crosby record of two songs from the new musical, *Oklahoma*, one being "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning." There was another one by the "new guy," Frank Sinatra—I don't remember the main side I bought it for, but I fell in love with the flip side, "Sleepy Time Gal," which in those years seemed to fit me: "Sleepy Time Gal, you turn the night into day. . . ."

I must have been a really funny kid. I know I read all the time, devouring whatever I could get my hands on—my own books and the library. A funny thing I used to do was spot when Mother was ironing, at which point I would run get a book, sit a chair opposite the ironing board and read to her to entertain her. I can still hear her laugh about that later on—she really wasn't interested in what I was reading, but I was very pleased with myself. Also, I remember from this time that my parents had joined the Book of the Month Club, so there was a monthly book coming in, and I began to read a lot of those. Mother told me later than when I picked up *Gone With The Wind* and began to read it that my Dad said, "Do you know what she's reading?" "Yes." "Well, you'd better tell her to stop." "You tell her." Upshot: no one told me, and I read away.

In school I remember that the girls had some special classes separate from the boys—for gym (which I hated—partly because we had to dress and shower naked and I was very shy—and probably still am—and partly because I was SO BAD at all the

games) and for homemaking classes (sewing, cooking) as opposed to shop and woodworking and stuff. I wonder when they stopped doing this in public schools. They have, haven't they? Mother thought I would just love sewing, as she did, and I tried—for some years, actually, but it's just not my thing. I struggled with it, of course, because all these depression years of the 30s, we were really in debt and borderline poor. The thought of buying a dress or any clothes "ready made" was out of the question. Mother and my Grandmother even made my coats! And only when Mother learned to knit (very badly, as it turned out) did I ever get to have a cardigan—perhaps why I love them so much. It was red, with a nice pattern, but Mother knit it so tight that I could hardly button it around me, so it was never a great success.

The classes I remember liking best were history (except for having to memorize dates—I couldn't retain numbers well even then). On Fridays we always had "current events" and talked about what was going on in the world—which, of course was primarily World War II. I remember one day when, after an intense discussion, our class approved of President Roosevelt's plan for Lend-Lease of weapons and materials to Great Britain. Our elated choice was that we send them "everything but men." I wonder now why I remember that, but I can honestly see right where the room was and how I ran out with a big smile, almost jumping with excitement at our "decision."

I also LOVED a class which I can't even remember the name of, but which I guess was probably called Drama or Dramatics. Mrs. Adkins taught it, and somehow it came about that I began taking private lessons from her in "Expression," which was my first public speaking, I guess, since the pageant at Pease, and became my third skill being learned. I would memorize poems and short pieces, and she would coach me in how to say them with good "expression." I can still remember some of them in part—amazing after sixty-odd years, isn't it?

There was one called "Patterns," set in some long past war when women wore long dresses. The narrator had just heard that her fiancé had been killed, and she is walking in the garden, living her sorrow. It was very dramatic, and I loved it.

"I walk down the patterned garden paths in my stiff brocaded gown with my powdered hair and jeweled fan" is how it began—and, oh, did I ever feel grand reciting it, barely holding in my terrible sorrow!

Such sorrow was soon to come a lot closer to home. We had usually through my childhood gone to my Grandparents' farm outside New Boston for Christmas (except of course those years when they lived in Austin). My cousin Frances and her parents were always there, as they lived nearby. Sometimes even Uncle Dick, Paul, and Richard were there—I remember one year when Uncle Dick teased Richard that he would only get sticks in his stocking. Richard was so much older than the rest of us that they could carry on like that—they only came until Uncle Dick remarried. When we went up there, we would always go over, maybe for just a day, maybe for a night and day to my Mother's family on their farms near Naples.

During the war, though, that was out of the question because of gas rationing, so even though we had a "C ration card"—the best—we stayed in Austin. I remember in those days there was very little development to the south of our house and along a creek which ran through there, so we would go along the creek and cut down a cedar tree for our Christmas tree. So one Sunday, December 7, 1941, we had gotten our tree and settled

down to decorate it. Someone said to turn on the radio and get some Christmas music, so we turned on our big radio console and there heard the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. It was stunning news, of course, though I really couldn't imagine what it meant at 11.

My cousin Richard had been drafted very early and was in training in the Army Air Corps. I remember when he and some of his friends came by our house one weekend when they had some leave time—all in their uniforms—and, oh, was I dazzled! The draft was now to be expanded considerably. Many were volunteering, but my Dad decided that he would just wait till he was called: "They will tell me when they need me." All life began to be focused on the news and on that phenomenon which Wallace and I worked on some years later—how you get people to the point where they are ready to kill others, which you do by building hatred—and fear. There was certainly enough to fear and hate in those days, and conscientious objectors were much more rare and perhaps less sophisticated in understanding than in these later odd wars. The unannounced bombing of Pearl Harbor and the excesses of Hitler's Germany were easy targets for the country's support of the war, and the country was certainly full of support. Patriotism was strong, and, in fact, I in later years have never quite been able to become a complete pacifist because of having lived through those years of my early adolescence.

My school experience was also about to change drastically. Up to the time my class was in the second half of the 9th grade (9B), the first half of the 10th grade (10A) was located in junior high. but, suddenly in the middle of the year (42-43), we were told that we were going to high school at mid year. So, I entered Austin High School just before I turned 13—in no way ready socially for high school.

I remember very little of the first semester, but I know by the end of the year, I tried out for and was chosen for the two organizations which defined much of my high school experience—the Debate Squad and the Red Jackets, a marching squad and service organization which was very central to high school life. We marched during the half (along with the band) at all football games, and did other service jobs as called upon. We had uniforms of a maroon jacket (issued), white blouse and skirt, maroon tie, and white socks and shoes. This last item was quite tricky, as we had shoe rationing by then, and one could only buy so many shoes a year. This meant a precious coupon had to be spent on white oxfords, which you certainly didn't wear anywhere else but with the uniform.

Rationing was an interesting experience, one that became so expected as not to be a terrible burden. Things were rationed which were needed for the war effort—either because they were sent overseas to the fighting troops or because they were needed to make something for the war. Soap, for example, was not rationed, but it was made from something which also made ammunition, so we were all carefully taught not to throw away the end of a soap bar, but to get it wet and soft and press it into the next bar—all to make it go farther. There was no such thing available for years as chocolate. I remember once in my senior year going into a drug store which had Milky Way bars and marveling, because I hadn't seen one in years.

Meat was also rationed, and one of the things we and many others did was to raise chickens in our back yard. My Dad built a wire fence and a building for the chickens to roost in at the back of our garage. We bought our first batch of chickens just out of the eggs, and Dad made a warm place for them in the laundry room, using a light bulb for the

heat and covering it with a fringe of soft cloth to simulate the mother hen's feathers. We were so fascinated with them while they were small that we would all go out after supper every evening and watch them. Luckily for my being able to eat them later, they weren't nearly so cute as they got bigger—but Mother never made me be present at the killing and picking feathers.

The other organization I got into, the Debate Squad was the pride and joy of a speech teacher, Mr. Winfrey. It consisted of 12 boys and 6 girls, and it rather became a way of life. We partied together, and I mostly always dated boys from the Squad. We also worked very hard, both for independent tournaments and for the annual district and then state competitions. There were all sorts of rumors and eyebrow raising about Mr. Winfrey. One rumor, probably true, was that he selected some of the people because their families were prominent—like my later date, Bobby Lee, whose father was the Postmaster of Austin or Mark Smith, whose father was Lt. Governor of Texas—or because they were popular in school—like my partner Pat McElroy, perennial class favorite and later Queen of Austin High (and even later a Powers model and Cover Girl in New York.) Then there were those of us whose only claim to fame was public speaking ability—like me. The other rumor I only heard much later, which was that Mr. Winfrey had twice as many boys because he liked boys better and even “came on” to some of them. At that time I had no notion of that, though.

Austin High also had social clubs, called Literary Societies, but sometime before I went to High School, they had been kicked out, then to operate unofficially on the edge of the school—though they had all their dances (usually two a year) in the school gym—so I don't know how that worked. They were a major factor in the school, though, and I and others in my class, having been sprung on the high school as a surprise, were not “pledged” to any of the clubs. There were also a large number of activity clubs in school, but the social clubs were truly central. Their dances and the school ones let me use my dance lessons to good advantage. It was expected that the girls wore long formal dresses and that the boys always sent a flower corsage to wear with it. Though I was only 13 or 14, most of the boys were already 16 and could drive. So it all felt very grown up. There was usually a professional photographer at each dance, so I have a few pictures of me and my dates from those years.

Besides the debate squad folks, I had another good friend named Jackie Swindler. Her father was an officer in the army stationed near Austin, and Jackie came to high school without “connections,” so she and I were both “Independents,” that is, not in the high school social clubs, which probably contributed to our friendship. She had an older sister, and, I guess through her Dad, we were asked to entertain some young English RAF trainees who had been sent to this country for their training. So we had several “dates” where we showed them around Austin and tried to help their loneliness. I'm sure they had no idea Jackie and I were quite as young as we were, but they were pretty young, too. That was SO exciting—I had never met a true foreigner in my life—very different from the lives of our young family! One of them got his Mother to send me a gift of “Twelve Sepia-toned Prints of Beautiful Britain.” I loved it, and, in fact, framed four of them later to hang in my law office. But the main thing was just to listen to those gorgeous English accents—just like the English movies. I'm sure our southern/Texan accents sounded just as unusual to them as theirs did to us.

My cousin Richard was a bomber pilot in the European sector, and when he was coming home on leave, the Waters invited me down to spend some time while he was home. His uniform, of course, was so dramatic, and I remember his singing a song, "Please Mr. Truman, may we go home? We have taken Naples; we have conquered Rome." Then there was something about conquering "the Nazi race." Richard had a girl that he dated every night he was home, and I remember going with him to florists to buy her a different orchid every night. Romance! Also, one night Uncle Dick, Alla Dees, Paul and I went to a club they belonged to—I think the Houston Club or something similar. I had never been to such a place before, and I was so impressed. The thing I remember most vividly was that every time I took a sip of water, they filled it—fascinating! When I raved about this at home, it did not go over with my Dad, who muttered about our not living in those high circles. I knew to shut up about it then. Richard later was sent to the China-Burma-India theater and was shot down—I don't remember the details of how he finally got out.

Then, I can't remember exactly what year, my Dad's draft notice arrived. Somehow he could, and did, opt for the Navy. So a fateful morning came when we went down to the City Hall very early and saw all the men off on a bus to take them to San Diego for their basic training of six weeks. The State Comptroller's Office, where my Dad had worked, had the policy of giving the wives of the service men jobs in their office. This was especially important for men with families, of course, as the Navy did not pay very much, and the salary was needed, really, to make ends meet. I remember that my Dad did get \$30 a month for me as a dependent, and my parents gave me that each month as my allowance, from which I was to buy everything I needed. They thought it was a good way to teach me how to manage money, and I think they were right. (It got kind of funny later, though, as even when my Dad got out of the Navy, they decided to continue that pattern. However, from time to time one or the other of them would come to me and give me more money, always telling me not to tell the other one. So, like a good obedient girl, I happily took the money and didn't tell.)

Most of the wives really just marked time and did the simplest kind of work in the state offices, but that bored my mother. Remember, she had always wanted to work in an office, but was not allowed to do so by her mother because "nice girls didn't work in offices." So she really worked, and they delightedly taught her to work all these very complicated financial machines that they had—they were as big as a kitchen table top and very impressive, I thought. I was proud of her for that, and it really changed her life, as will appear later on.

My mother was so upset when my Dad left that when she got home from her first day at work, she had started menstruating, though she was not due for weeks. I remember when she got home, sitting on the bed watching her sob. It was so scary, of course, because it was life or death.

I guess she was always a pretty nervous person. As soon as my Dad left, she made me come into her bedroom and sleep with her instead of sleeping in my own room. Only years later did I realize how weird that really was. Even more, we had been robbed once in the house before my Dad left, and one night she woke up to see a flashlight from the then-vacant lot next door. She woke me up and had me get up and go into the living room to see if I could see the person. I guess I made noise going and scared him away, so

there was no more flashlight. But, honestly, would you send your early teen daughter to check out a burglar while you huddled in bed?

When my father's six weeks were up, we had cleaned the house and gotten his favorite foods ready and were waiting for him to call us any minute. We saw the mail man deliver the mail to the box out at the street, and I used some of my happy energy to run out to get it. I handed it to Mother, and we saw there was a letter from Daddy. She opened it, and it said that all leaves were cancelled, and they were shipping out to sea at once—they didn't know where to. That was one of the worst days I ever lived.

In those days, they were not allowed to tell anyone back home where they were, so even when we did begin to get letters from him, we had no idea where he was, and the Pacific war was at its height. All letters home were read by censors, who cut out any parts of them that might reveal something about their location or the war in general. We only found out that he was on Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii, when he was able to smuggle out a letter with a returning friend, who mailed it in this country and thus avoided the people who read every letter and cut out any offending information. The Navy was, quite intelligently, using his financial gifts and had him in the bookkeeping office, or, I think they called it, Storekeeping. He even eventually got an extra job for which he was paid doing bookkeeping work for the Ship's Store, where he also was able to get first pick at the things that came in for them to sell. And it was thus Mother and I both got beautiful new watches. She also got an engagement diamond, which she had never had. He wrote the sweetest letter with it, saying something like, "I've always missed being with you at our most important times—when Jean was born and now when you get your diamond.

(By the way, this diamond was later remounted into the large gold dinner ring that looks something like a flower. The carat diamond which I now wear was one he bought her later when he was long back and they had more money.)

He ended up spending the entire war in Pearl Harbor, though one time he was on orders to ship out—somehow those orders got cancelled. I think he got his boss to say that he was so good at the job in the bookkeeping department that they needed to keep him. Whatever it was, we were grateful.

In many ways Hawaii was wasted on him—you know he HATED even the smell of pineapple. He was always a picky eater, so he survived the passage over by volunteering in the kitchen, so he could at least get milk, which he loved. During the nearly two years he was gone he lost down to about 175 pounds, I think it was—and he was 6'2" tall.

One year while he was gone, Mother and I did spend Christmas in east Texas with my grandparents. We rode up on the train, spending the night in a sleeper. That was pretty exciting!

Just before my senior year in high school, I was rushed and pledged one of the social clubs—the Margaret Preston Literary Society, or, more familiarly, "Maggie P's." Two members of the Debate Squad were in this club—Pat McElroy, my debate partner in my junior year, and Marilyn Baker, who was in my class. At this same time I was dating Bobby Lee, who was President of his club, and thus invited to EVERY dance of every club. So for my senior year, I went to a dance frequently every Friday and Saturday

night—all of which required new formals, AND required Bobby to get me a corsage. I can't imagine, looking back on it, how we managed all that, but we did.

My debate squad friends Pat McElroy and Marilyn Baker decided that I needed to be kissed. They didn't count Sonny Struhall behind the hedge during Kick the Can. They looked over the people I dated and decided that Bobby Lee was the best bet to do a good job of introducing me to the joys of kissing. This must sound really strange in the time my descendants will read this—how the world has changed!

Anyway, they talked me into it, so on my next date with Bobby, I “let him kiss me.” I also did for our next two dates, and then I just decided it wasn't what it was cracked up to be. I told Pat and Marilyn that I wasn't going to do that any more. They said I couldn't stop now that I had started, and I said, oh yes, I could, and I did. Poor Bobby probably never knew what had happened, but about that time a song came out with lyrics which he always claimed made it “our song.” It went like this: “Kiss me once and kiss me twice and kiss me once again. It's been a long, long time.” I think it was written for servicemen gone in the war, but it fit just fine for us.

He was actually a very nice young man and by the time we had dated for some time, he realized, I am sure, just how ignorant I was of the “facts of life.” I know years before my two Stidham cousins had told me one summer that parents couldn't have a baby unless they “showed each other.” I cried and told them firmly my parents would never do such a thing. Well, I wasn't far beyond that place even by my senior year in high school! Bobby loaned me a book to read, which I read with a beating heart and carefully hid from my Mother. It was called *Sane Sex Life and Sane Sex Living* and was a very good factual account. That was literally the first time I knew how men were constructed and how intercourse took place and how babies were made. Isn't that amazing? And perhaps the nicest part was that Bobby never tried to follow through on my reading of those facts. I call that really nice.

The most significant thing for my life that happened in high school was my first ongoing connection with a church. I had seldom gone to church; my folks felt they had been forced to go too much, and they wanted to “leave me free.” It has seemed to me since that what they left me was ignorant. In our culture, if you don't get religious introduction at home or church, you don't get it—we really have, it seems to me, not just separation of church and state, but suppression of church. I have notes from occasional teachers in Sunday Schools saying things like, “I didn't get to know you this year.” So I guess I was sometimes enrolled, but it never kept up, and of course my folks didn't go to church.

My church life in high school came from two places. Bobby Lee's family went to the Episcopal Church at the University, All Saints, and they took me with them lots of Sundays while I was dating Bobby. My Father's family was Methodist, and Mother's had been Church of Christ—not the United Church of Christ, which is quite liberal, but a conservative southern-based church—a break-away from the Disciples of Christ, which is also liberal. Mother swore that in her area the Church of Christ was less conservative than the Southern Baptist, but in Wallace's part of Texas, it was more conservative.

At any rate, somehow that got translated in Austin into the Central Christian Church, which is a Disciples church. They had a wonderful, warm pastor, John Barclay, and an excellent high school youth group. Several of my friends, particularly in the

Debate Squad were in that church, and I went with them to youth group for a year or so—even once to a week-end camp. Their youth group leader was excellent (and came into our lives later in quite a significant way.) From that experience I also went to church there some, particularly in my senior year. I was there one Sunday in the early spring with my friend Liz from debate squad when Dr. Barclay preached an altar call—to join the church and declare your belief in God and Jesus. After his sermon, we were singing, “Jesus Calls Us” (#549, 550 in our hymnal, but not to either of those tunes). I felt this strong desire to go to the front and turned to Liz, saying “I feel like going down there. “Well, go on, silly,” says Liz, and to that sage advice I “joined the church.”

I went down to the front, along with several others—it was a very good sermon! Dr. Barclay asked each of us in turn several questions. “Do you believe Jesus Christ was the son of God?” and “Do you accept him as your personal savior?” and maybe something else about following him. Honestly, I had no idea what the questions meant, but I knew the right answer was “Yes,” and I said it. He then extended to us “the right hand of Christian fellowship” (he shook our hand) and welcomed us into the church, inviting the church members to join his welcome.

When I got home, I told Mother, who seemed pretty shocked, and I know she later told Daddy (who was home by then.) To complete this part of the story, they had evening classes in the faith, but by then I was in the play (see later paragraphs) and had rehearsals every night, so I couldn’t go. The classes were followed by a special service of baptism on Easter Sunday afternoon. The Disciples have baptism by immersion; there is a small pool up behind the pulpit and altar. You put on a white robe over underwear (having taken an extra pair after your get wet) and get immersed. My Dad didn’t come to the service, but Mother, Bobby Lee and another of my friends (I can’t remember who) did come. I think it was very foreign to Bobby; Mother said he was very quiet during it.

I think what I did was very sincere, but as I came to understand it later, it really had no roots. I was truly ignorant of Christianity and the Bible and what it all meant. As I got busy with the new experiences of college, I just fell away and quit going to church, unless I occasionally visited somewhere with friends. Nonetheless, I believe it was good that I had received that sacrament and gone through that somewhat mystical experience.

As I have indicated, a wonderful thing happened in, I think it was January, 1946—my Dad was released from the Navy. He was released at a base near Houston, and Mother and I went down the night before and stayed with the Waters. Then we got up to go to the ceremony, and Mother got lost, so we missed it. We drove into the base and Mother said, in a tight voice, “There he is.” She had seen him walking across the grounds—I hadn’t even recognized him, but she had. He drove on the way back, and she sat glued to his side with one of his arms around her all the way home. I thought that was really great.

For many reasons, it was good that he came home when he did, as in February I was 16 and could now learn to drive. My Mother was the world’s most nervous, worst teacher I can imagine, but he was great. I remember out on a little used road near the lake his quietly telling me how many tons the car weighed and what a weapon it was when it was hurtling through the air at its possible speeds—teaching me how important it was to be careful. He was a great and gentle teacher—he really should have done that for a living, I think.

I had decided to stay over an extra semester and not graduate from high school at midterm, largely so that I could enter the Interscholastic Debate Tournaments, which were held locally, then in District for those who won, and then in a state tournament. This was a very big deal, and I wanted to experience it. I had entered the Declamation Tournament for a couple of years and done pretty well, but the debate was a bigger deal. To keep from graduating, I saved my last English class.

Well, Mr. Winfrey took me in to see the Principal one day with some devastating news. That last English class was needed for college entrance, but was not a requirement for graduation. I had therefore been ruled ineligible for the debate tournament. This was a terrible blow.

The only thing that made it bearable was that a friend of mine talked me into trying out for the play that spring, though it was rather late in their casting process. Well, try out I did, and I got the lead in the Red Dragon play, a melodrama called *Double Door*. There are some pictures of me in the long black dress I wore as Victoria Van Bret, a horrible woman. The glory of it was that I was alone on stage as the last scene, where I played with my pearls and went crazy, muttering, at the end, “The pearls, my pearls, MINE!” Curtain. Oh, I loved it!

During that spring I had rehearsals most every week night, and my folks got tired of driving me and then picking me up—so they just sent me off in the car by myself—no license at all. As I think back on it, I wouldn’t have done that, but it worked out o.k. I never got caught.

One funny thing about the performance. My folks were there one night watching, and they overheard someone in the audience say about me that I didn’t have to act that much to play the part—that I was that mean! I wonder what brought that on?

My Dad had wanted to take some time off after he got out before he went back to work, but we always assumed he would go back to the Comptroller’s Office. Mother had quit when he got back, and both Dad and I assumed she was delighted to be able to quit. Then one night at supper, my Dad simply announced that he wasn’t going back to the office. He was going out to Manor, a little town outside Austin to work for/with his friend Ed Acklin who owned a Chevrolet dealership and general store. We were shocked, but Mother always claimed that she was delighted—that she had always hoped he would just make some major decision without talking to her about it. Hmmm. I wonder if that was true—anyway, it probably made his transition more pleasant.

Another shock was coming. In April I think it was, a friend called Mother and offered her the job as bookkeeper for the Attorney General of Texas. Both Dad and I laughed when she told us, and then she said she was going to do it. The things she had learned during her time in the Comptroller’s Office made her quite qualified, and, I guess she had always wanted to work in an office! I forget how many years she worked in that job—until she retired after we lived in Colorado. By that time computers were coming in, and she always claimed she could never have made that transition. I’ve always remembered that they hired three people to replace her when she retired—but it was really time—she was a nervous wreck by the time she retired.

One great Debate Squad memory that I have is when we all went to a tournament in west Texas. It must have been my last year, as gas rationing would have prevented it before then. I loved it because I was chosen the best girl debater in the tournament, and

my friend John Wild was the best boy debater. This was really funny, as neither of us was a favorite of Mr. Winfrey, which added spice to the win somehow.

Another memory I have was from chemistry class. I had been sick for some time during the class and had missed the end of the year when we had to identify “unknowns,” chemicals on each “group.” I had done well the first semester, but a poor grade was threatened by my missing so much. Mrs. Weisser, the chemistry teacher, was known to be hard, but she gave me a real break. She said I could come in after school one day, and she would give me an unknown of each group. If I could correctly identify them within—I forget, 2 or 3 hours alone in the lab, then she would give me an A for semester—otherwise, ugh. I remember drawing a deep breath as I started in—and I got them all right!

It was the custom for girl graduates to give some kind of party to celebrate their graduation. Again, not having a lot of money to spare, nor a very big house, we had to figure out how to do that. What our Mothers came up with was that Nancy Price (whose mother’s maiden name was Lucy Clift!) and I had one together down at the Y down town. I still remember the invitations: “Hey, we’re finally going to graduate, and our Mothers want to celebrate. Just a coke party, nothing fancy, at the Y, 10 to 12 for Jean and Nancy,” with date and signatures added, of course.

I had a big surprise on my graduation night when I was announced as Salutatorian. I honestly had had no idea that I was anything like that close to the top of my class. Unfortunately, unlike when my Aunt Frances was Salutatorian of Texarkana High School, I did NOT get a lifetime scholarship to the University of Texas—or any scholarship at all, for that matter. I probably shouldn’t complain, though, because the tuition was just \$50 a semester!

My Dad told me I could go anywhere I wanted to, but I knew that he was just wanting to feel good about it and that we really couldn’t afford for me to go off. That was fine with me, though, as I loved “The University,” as we all called it in Austin. I had loved it from the time I was in the “Knothole Gang,” as they called it. If a football game wasn’t sold out, they let school kids in for—I think it was 50 Cents—to sit in the end zone. I remember one year standing and watching our players run off the field after they lost to TCU, with tears streaming down my cheeks because we had lost.

I had learned typing and shorthand in school, and our neighbor, Pat Dooley, got me a job at Stecks, an office supply store, doing typing by the hour. It was pretty awful, as we just had to sit at the typewriter and could only get up to go to the bathroom and get a drink of water a few times a day—no wasting time! One of my memories was that on a lunch hour while I worked there, we heard that we had dropped a huge bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. We didn’t know what it meant, but we knew it sounded important.

That wasn’t the worst job I ever had, though. I can’t remember how, but through some friend’s mother, she and I got by-the-hour jobs in telephone sales of bottle of vanilla! It should probably have made me more tolerant of telephone sales people, but it didn’t. We just sat in this room in an apartment house and phoned from lists they gave us and read off this prepared speech. Anyway, I was earning some money, but not an easy way. I also earned money baby sitting with young children of friends of my parents.