MUNCIE, INDIANA
HARD TIMES AND GOOD TIMES
FROM
1925 THROUGH 1950

BY
RICHARD W. BRICKER
To Janie Salinas Bricker
I always wanted to paint but
I always wanted to
but had nothing to
say
My wife and constant
said
otherwise.

My greatest reward in life was the love and support of Janie.
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FRONT COVER: Scene from front yard at 1820 West Ninth Street circa 1930
PREFACE

One frequently hears of the importance of obtaining oral histories from our elderly population before they are gone and their first hand knowledge of past events are lost forever. Each individual has a unique and varied past compared to his other contemporaries, so every history will be different at least in many aspects. This is a written history rather than an oral history, which usually has a specific subject objective and a relatively short time frame of coverage whereas this history will cover twenty-five years. One goal of technical writing that I was involved in at NASA was conciseness and leaving out all unnecessary details. That was not my objective in this history.

I once had a boss that frequently stated that a thing worth saying was worth writing down. A favorite quote of his was “criticism is our cheapest form of entertainment” and he very frequently entertained himself lavishly. The significance of writing things down is that it makes people think which some people don’t like to do. One can outline, organize, and revise repeatedly without having to work to a schedule. Hopefully that won’t lead to embellishment and in reality may reduce it. Many people do not have the education, experience, or patience to write their history down and perhaps it is more tedious than answering questions from a skilled interviewer. What should a history covering twenty-five years encompassing the second quarter of the last century consist of? I think many areas compared to today would be of interest such as advances in science, transportation, entertainment, health care, humor, social mores, family and neighbor interactions, educational techniques, and the list goes on.

What is the difference between a personal history and an autobiography? Actually not much except the personal history should have some different goals and emphases. My objective in this history is to describe the character of Muncie in the period covered as experienced by myself and also other events of the time that are historical. By necessity it must include much autobiographical content to reach it’s non-autobiographical goals. If the goal of personal histories is to get everything that is significant then what should be omitted? What is chicken feed to one person may be gold and diamonds to another. An additional result of personal histories is that they show not only the major differences time makes but also how many things haven’t changed at all.
Chapter 1: Home Life in Hard Times

In this chapter I discuss my earliest pre-grade school and later memories pertaining to home life. On my father’s side I descended from German immigrants in Pennsylvania and Adam Bricker who I directly descended from was an Indian fighter during the Revolutionary War as verified by pension records from the military branch of the National Archives in Washington, DC. My mother’s family (Krichbaum) was also early German immigrants to Pennsylvania. Both families had come to Pennsylvania in the mid-1700s and later moved first to Ohio and then to Indiana at about the same time.

I was born at home as was usual at least in poor families in those days in Muncie, Indiana on March 29, 1925 on west Eleventh Street. At my birth my mother was 38 years old and my father was 50 years old. My mother had been previously married to Wade Wood who died from tuberculosis leaving her with Garnet, eighteen; Austin fourteen; and Don twelve, their ages when I was born. These siblings are half sister and brothers but we all responded to each other as sister and brothers and I will leave out the half designation. My mother Estella Elnora Wood married William Walter Bricker in 1923 whose wife Grace had died some time before. When I was a few months old we all moved to the country near Eaton, Indiana so that my father could farm. His main crop was rye and the year was very wet causing the rye to be attacked by a fungus resulting in ergot, which is lethal to both humans and animals thus ruining the whole crop. We were poor on the farm although we had a cow for milk and chickens for eggs and meat and a garden so things weren’t too bad food wise except with no crop my father couldn’t pay the farm rent. This farm stay became an important qualification for later employment.

After moving back to town to 1820 west Ninth Street we were extremely poor with no income for a while and as a result were on relief, a disgrace even felt by myself at that early age. Being “on relief” was something one didn’t like to admit or talk about. Weekly my father loaded me onto a little red wagon and towed me about two miles to the local agency that passed out relief food. This consisted of cheese and canned beef from Argentina, which actually tasted pretty good. I imagine we also got other staples but these are the only foods I remember. We then walked home with both me and the foodstuffs in the wagon. My sister and brothers paid some attention to me and Austin always kidded me by saying that when I was born they didn’t know whether I was going to walk or fly because of my big ears. Don had a newspaper route and sold magazines during this period and he was very interested in all aspects of aviation. Later when Don had transportation he would take me with him sometimes and occasionally it was for swimming.

All of this occurred around 1930 and the start of the hard depression. Along about this time my father got a job at a local lawn mower factory making eleven dollars per week. In those days everybody mowed with a push mower with a reel type four-bladed cutter, which did a very neat job if the blades were kept sharp. Even today the elite mowers used on golf courses for fine bladed grasses on the greens are the reel type though no longer pushed by hand. The main handle of these mowers were of good wood usually hickory or ash and the cross handle at the top for the operators hands was also of good wood. A following roller behind the cutting blades and the same width was again wood so quite a bit of wood was used in the lawn mowers construction which resulted in considerable scrap wood, chips, and sawdust. Now my father’s job was to put all of this scrap into an incinerator as it accumulated. The incinerator was called the pig and my father was called the pig feeder not a very glamorous job title. For my mother’s use my father brought home from work a traditional paddle sometimes called the “board-of-education”. My mother used the paddle on me when I had committed certain cardinal sins such as using a cussword and then lying about it. I frequently heard much cussing from my father and he didn’t care who was around when he got started. My mother abhorred this but couldn’t do a thing about it.

From the time I was very young until I was thirteen years old I had thirteen dollars saved from what source I don’t know. For a while it was kept in a small wooden bank. One time I took a small amount out of it and somehow my mother immediately knew about that. I had probably acquired some candy from an unknown source. When she interrogated me on the subject I denied all knowledge of such a dastardly act. Well she persisted until the truth came out. Several good whacks with the paddle was administered. I don’t recall that I greatly resented these punishments realizing they were well deserved.
Subsequently the money was placed in a savings account in my name and I was not greatly impressed with the earnings. I believe the interest was around three percent but it was not enough to get the principle much above the thirteen dollars in the several years it was in the bank, which was my first disappointing lesson in economics.

Back to capitol punishment. My father never raised a hand to me except on one memorable occasion. We had a married cousin that lived a few blocks away from us and we visited back and forth. One evening my parents and the couple were playing cards and though not a participant I was sitting at one corner of the card table. Out of the blue and not realizing the indelicacy of my question I asked the cousins when they were going home. Whop!! My father slapped me across the face. I don’t remember my reaction but it was an early lesson in etiquette that I never forgot. I made two attempts to evade the paddle. In one case I hid it under the couch. We had company one Sunday and being a showoff and braggart I proudly stated to my mother “ha, ha, you can’t paddle me any more, I hid the paddle under the couch”. No punishment was given for this booboo on my part.

The next episode was subtler. We had a backroom where every Monday my mother spent all day washing clothes. Now we didn’t have a hot water tap we didn’t even have a cold-water tap. All water came from an outside well and had to be heated on a little wood stove called a laundry stove in this washroom. On Sunday evenings my mother put newspaper and kindling in the stove so she could light it off first thing Monday morning. I had an inspiration and put the paddle in the stove after my mother’s Sunday night preparation thinking it would then be gone forever. No such luck, my mother saw the paddle when preparing to light the fire and I was presumed guilty. No physical punishment was given for it wasn’t saying damn or telling a lie and that was when it was normally used although there were other occasions. If I was verbally chastised it wasn’t severe since I don’t remember any such occurrence.

Some description of the clothes washing technology at that time is worthwhile. The washing machine agitator was electric powered but since this was before spin-drying had been invented the washer had an electric driven clothes wringer that could accommodate itself to thin or thick articles of clothing. There wasn’t any automatic cut-off so if someone got their hand caught in the wringer it just went right on turning pulling the whole arm between the rollers in some cases with very injuring results. There is a famous uncouth saying that “she got her ---s caught in the wringer” that stems from these early machines. There were two large tubs of water sitting on a platform by the washing machine. My mother used two rinses so the wash was wrung out and put in the first tub to soak awhile and then wrung out again and put in the second tub to soak some more. This water was all pumped from the well then carried into the house and the wash water was heated first on the laundry stove and maybe the rinse water was also heated some. The second tub probably had bluing in it, which my mother used on the white clothes before Clorox came into use. This was a lot of water to be pumped, carried in, and transferred around to the three containers and later disposed of. I would think that my father and brothers might have helped some in this task but never observed that. Finally the clothes were wrung out again and were ready to hang to dry. Usually the clothes were hung outside to dry even if it was freezing because if the sun was shining and it was windy in the cold weather the clothes would dry by sublimation. The worst case was when it was raining for then my mother had to hang all the clothes in our living room so we had to duck around and under them and the humidity was very high and in the winter water would be running down the windows. Now the clothes didn’t have to be bone dry if they were to be ironed, which included starching the white things at some point. By Monday evening she would be starting to iron the clothes to get a head start on Tuesday. Woman had it very tough in this and preceding times and the saying that a woman’s work is never done was certainly true in those days.

With respect to the outside well it was about thirty-five feet from our outhouse and there were several more such edifices up and down the alley behind the houses. The common term for diarrhea in those days was “back door trots” and the term continued to be used for some time after indoor plumbing became universal. In the summer people came from all around to get some of our well water in hot weather because the underground water was around fifty degrees F. in that part of the country. Nobody ever got sick from the water to my knowledge. Sometime in my early years the well quit producing any water due to the use by industry in the area, which dropped the water table below the thirty or so feet, which is the limit
for a manual suction pump. My father tried to drive the well deeper with a rig that pounded on top of the pipe to drive it down but to no avail. We then got city water installed, which consisted of one tap in the basement for the simple reason that the water supply line was about three feet deep and it would have to go into the basement anyway to avoid freezing so that’s where it stopped. Now the water for everything had to be carried upstairs from the basement. Later when our outhouse was tipped over for Halloween and rendered beyond repair we got an inside commode and a cold water tap in the kitchen. That was the extent of our plumbing during my mothers ownership of the house until she died in 1949 and the house was sold. We never had a phone during my time at my mother’s house. If we had to make a phone call we went to one of the neighborhood stores and paid them a nickel to use the phone and this was very infrequent.

A description of our sanitary provisions though painful is necessary if the full story is to be told. First I mentioned the outhouse and it was provided with newspaper or the traditional catalog and never with toilet paper rolls. My father called the provided materials “bung fodder”. Inside in the kitchen we had a galvanized bucket as a water supply and nearby was a tin cup for everyone to drink with and to dip water out for washing. Nearby was a stand with a washbasin on it and a community towel so one could wash up before eating or when the hands got real dirty. The face was also washed in this same basin when needed like before school for me. For the Saturday night bath we had an oblong basin maybe twelve by sixteen inches. It was a sponge bath but we didn’t call it that. Initially all water was carried in from the pump outside, then from the faucet in the basement, and then from a faucet near the washstand; such was our progress. Later in my teenage years my brother Don if he was home, and I would go to the YMCA for a good shower. As I remember the facilities were available whether you was a member or not and possibly there was a small charge. I remember going in the winter on my bicycle and riding home in cold weather and my hair would ice up as I only wore earmuffs in cold weather. The icing up was not a problem and it kept your hair from blowing around. Sometime in my early years I had occasion to swim in the YMCA pool occasionally and I took the Red Cross Junior Life Saving Course there. Bathing suits were not allowed in the pool I presume for sanitary reasons.

A little more about the house and its virtues. There was no insulation in the walls or attic and we heated initially with a wood stove in the living room and had a wood cook stove in the kitchen that provided good heat and hot water. The window frames had all dried out and shrunk so much that in the winter when the cold wind blew, the curtains were blown several inches away from the windows. On cold nights urine froze in the bedrooms before morning. Still we slept very cozily because my mother made duck-down mattresses that one sank into and thick down comforters on top. Warm up was only after the initial shock was over. On really cold nights we might hold up a blanket in front of the fire to warm it up for the beds. The bedroom doors to the living room were never kept open and the fire was burned down and then a larger log called the nightstick was put on the coals to keep a small fire alive until morning. Our wood stove was finally retired and a large coal stove installed. Periodically a ton of coal was delivered from a coal truck to a coal bin in our basement via a coal chute. There were several coal companies in Muncie at that time and their price was around six dollars a ton for Pennsylvania anthracite coal. My job was to carry coal upstairs as needed and to make sure the bucket was full and a large lump of coal was on top to be used as a night lump analogous to the night stick.

Now despite our somewhat primitive conditions my mother was a dedicated housekeeper and a terror with her vacuum cleaner that ran everybody out of the house and she used it at least weekly. The real dread was her annual spring and fall cleaning that were major projects. This was a house cleaning from top to bottom and it took several days. The carpets were all taken outside in turn and hung over the clothesline and beaten with a stiff wire rug beater that had a wooden handle. They were beaten until no more dust could be seen. We also cleaned the smoke stained wallpaper that was on all the walls. This was done with clay like material that was rubbed on the wall in a fist sized round ball and it removed the dirt. One had to work the ball over frequently to bury the picked up materials and it worked very well as the paper looked like new after completed. Of course all of the windows got washed inside and out. So we were glad when these annual cleanings were completed and we could go back to a normal routine. If she saw an infrequent roach she relentlessly pursued it moving furniture and rolling up carpet as necessary to find and kill it. My mother also liked plants and had Peonies, Tulips, Bleeding Heart, Roses, Hollyhocks,
and something called hen and chickens in the yard. In the winter there were several ferns and other plants
in an out of the way place in the kitchen. On Memorial Day that we called Flag Day we always went to
the cemetery and there were lots of other people there also.

People were killed mornings by wood or coal stove explosions in this era when thinking the fire
was out they poured kerosene on new wood kindling added to what they thought were cold ashes. The
ashes frequently hid hot coals that vaporized the kerosene and when a match was thrown in there was a
lethal explosion. Such accidents were frequently reported in the newspapers in the winter. Another com-
mon practice but lethal if not done properly was dry cleaning clothes at home using naphtha. This was a
very efficient and rapidly drying agent but when done in a room with a stove an explosion could result.
This was also a frequently reported cause of death from an explosion in the 1930s. My mother cleaned
with naphtha but usually out of doors, which was the safe way.

With reference to kerosene it was available at every little neighborhood grocery store of which
there were many in those days for ten cents per gallon and gasoline was about the same price. Most eve-
rybody called it coal oil, which was a misnomer. I frequently had to carry a can to the store to obtain some
and was careful not to get it on me, as I disliked the odor. The kerosene was dispensed from a sturdy re-
ctangular steel tank with an installed hand pump.

Our grocery bill paid weekly usually ran around six dollars. This was mainly for staples and the
small amount of meat purchased. We always had a large garden with tomatoes, peppers both mild and hot,
green beans, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, beets, turnips, parsnips, cucumbers, melons, onions, garlic,
sweet corn, popcorn, and other items I have forgotten. To carry us through the winter my mother canned
large quantities of vegetables, fruits, including picked blackberries, and black raspberries that are much
superior in flavor to red raspberries. The berries were mostly picked at my grandmother’s place in Morgan
County and included a large attack of chiggers as I sometimes helped pick the berries. She made dill and
mustard pickles and sauerkraut in large crocks. These items were all topped with a plate having a rock on
top to keep the pickles and kraut submerged in the juices. We also had a sour cherry and summer apple
tree in the back yard that produced well and a row of rhubarb. She also made lots of ketchup, tomato juice,
and chili sauce. The canned tomatoes were very good especially in the vegetable soup we had frequently.
Once on a rare occasion when we had run out of the homemade ketchup a bottle of store bought was put
on the table. My brothers absolutely refused to use it after trying it once.

We had a grape arbor in the back yard so we had canned grape juice and jelly and some wine was
made. My mother made root beer and my father made some regular beer (it was during prohibition). Occa-
sionally we might hear an explosion in the basement, which meant that a quart or pint bottle of the beer
or root beer had built up too much pressure from the carbonization. Making a little home brew or wine
was not considered a sin of any significance and I never heard of anybody being charged with bootlegging.
My mother was rather religious (northern as compared to more fanatic Hardshell Baptists) but didn’t ob-
ject to my father’s experiments such as making a very bitter dandelion wine. My grandmother was ap-
posed to drinking but yet made good beer for her adult son Mandus. I was sometimes allowed to partake
but got it mixed up with root beer and couldn’t achieve that flavor with sugar but did produce a lot of
foam. Concerning religion my mother gave me a choice at about school age of going with her to the First
Baptist Church in downtown Muncie or going to Sunday School at a United Brethren Church a half a
block down Ninth Street on Batavia Avenue. I chose the Sunday school option.

In addition to our garden my mother was an expert at acquiring the free benefits of nature. All
spring she would be sitting in the vacant fields in our neighborhood cutting out young tender dandelion
greens, a very nutritious food. These were cooked and served as other greens but best of all was a wilted
salad. This was made by pouring hot bacon grease on the greens with vinegar, crisp crumbled bacon, and
some boiled egg crumbles. It was very good and cholesterol hadn’t been invented yet to torment people.
In the fall we collected free black walnuts and hickory nuts. The walnuts had a green husk on them that
had to be removed. This contained a very tenacious dark brown stain that was only avoided by wearing
gloves; otherwise the hands would be stained dark brown for many days. After this removal the walnuts
were placed on the roof for several weeks to wash off and also cure. The nuts were kept from rolling off
with a batten lightly nailed to the roof. The hickory nuts were much less trouble. Both nutmeats were
somewhat difficult to remove from the shells and my mother spent hours at that task during the winter
month evenings. The kernels were used in cakes and candies especially chocolate fudge and other candies,
which my mother was an expert at. Other tasks my mother did in the evenings was repairing holes in
socks and mending any other items that needed it.

Other free foods were rabbits and squirrels given by neighbors or relatives more interested in
shooting than eating. These two animals were prepared by frying in lard, of course, and served with the
gravy from the skillet over lots of mashed potatoes. To this day I have never found meat as delicious as
wild rabbit. Raised rabbit may be good but that light meat just doesn’t compare with the dark brown meat
of wild rabbit. Occasionally one encountered a lead shot but we didn’t worry about things like that. Once
my brother Don ran over a snapping turtle and brought it home. My mother prepared it like the rabbit and
it was delicious. The word road kill hadn’t been invented yet besides it wasn’t dead when brought home as
it was well known in those days that cold blooded animals never die until sundown. Another free food we
had several times was mushrooms and puff balls (also a mushroom) picked by Austin and I’m not sure he
knew the good from the bad but we never got sick so maybe he knew all about what he was picking. At
my grandmother’s house in Morgan County when the conditions were just right we collected Morel mu-
shrooms, which is the top mushroom all over the world. They mostly only grow wild and infrequently and
in today’s market sell for forty or more dollars a pound. We didn’t know how exclusive we were eating
but we knew they were delicious.

Another source of free protean was our next-door neighbor Jim Phillips who was a dedicated fi-
sherman. I don’t believe he ate a lot of fish; his interest was in mass production fishing and from four
inches up was kept. His score was based on numbers caught without regard to size. When fishing on
weekends he put out several trot lines, many cane poles stuck in the bank, and some rods and reels for him
and whoever else was along. I was a participant in later years. His baits were varied as first he raised
night crawlers not only in his yard but also in our yard and his neighbors yard on the other side. This re-
quired frequent watering of all three yards and this was partly during the extreme drought years of the dust
bowl era. His other chosen baits are noteworthy. They included chicken guts, leeches, and doughy smelly
concoctions he produced. Now since the family used very little of the catch which was mostly catfish as is
suggested by the bait my mother was the recipient of many fish. Though called mud cats these were from
fairly clean rivers and were very tasty, of course, fried in lard. We didn’t use cornmeal for coating but I
think what was probably used was coating the fish with flour. My mother would savor each fish leaving
nothing on the bones.

Speaking of cornmeal the south didn’t have a monopoly on it by any means. We had cornbread
frequently especially when we had beans every Tuesday (ironing day). We had pinto beans one Tuesday
and navy beans the next. I usually put the beans on two slices of heavily buttered cornbread or bread. I
sometimes put catsup in the beans but preferred head clearing horseradish or my mother’s pickled very hot
Hungarian peppers now called hot banana peppers. We put these on sandwiches and in or on many other
foods. Another use we made of cornmeal was cornmeal mush, which was put in a glass of milk with some
sugar as a kind of dessert and fried cakes of cornmeal served with butter and molasses like pancakes. The
best was mush put in a rectangular cake pan and left to solidify overnight. The cake of cornmeal was then
dumped out in one piece and sliced very thin and then fried until the edges got brown and crispy. This
again was served with butter and molasses and was really good. The restaurant chain Bob Evans used to
serve fried mush and the Twelfth Street Café in Muncie, Indiana makes it but they don’t have it down like
the original as the overnight aging added something significant. I still get it when I’m in Muncie just for
old times sake. One thing we didn’t use cornbread for up north was putting it in turkey or chicken dressing
and we had never heard of black-eyed peas. Cabbage was our New Years Day good luck dish. We made
delicious bread dressing that in my family always had oysters in it. That was an absolute necessity and
oysters were always available in Muncie around the winter holidays. One time a store had shucked oysters
for sale for fifteen cents a pint but only one pint to a customer. Well my next-door neighbor Jim Phillips
had four sons and my brother Austin loved oysters and we made up a raiding party and descended on that
store two or three times that day and acquired seven pints each raid. I can assure you that none of them
went to waste what with dressing, oyster stew, fried oysters, scalloped oysters, and many were eaten raw.
I learned to eat raw oysters at a very young age shown by Austin his way of putting an oyster on a soda cracker, with salt and pepper and two or three drops of vinegar and putting the whole thing in your mouth. Shucked oysters are still alive and if kept cold can be safely eaten raw for two weeks after harvest and can be safely eaten cooked for a longer time. One other soup my mother made was potato soup with rich skin-ny dumplings in it. Now the dumplings were made from flour and egg yolks and were scrapped off the edge of a plate into the potato soup where they cooked in a few minutes.

We had a set routine for food at least some days. Sunday could be fried chicken with gravy and mashed potatoes, or a stewed hen with noodles and mashed potatoes, cheap stringy beef with noodles and mashed potatoes and accompanied by several vegetables that I tried to avoid not always successfully. I liked the fried chicken very well and concentrated on drumsticks and thighs along with lots of mashed potatoes and gravy. My mother always said she wanted the parts that went over the fence first and last (the neck and tail) and these parts are not even usually provided in today’s market. We always ate the gizzard, heart, and liver. On the stewed hen and beef Sundays I put a large pile of mashed potatoes (these had butter and cream in them) in my plate and then covered that with the homemade noodles (mostly egg yolk and flour) and the rich sauce the hen or beef simmered in for hours. I usually didn’t bother with the meat even though it was good. Since we always had lots of mashed potatoes left over intentionally, Monday was fried potato cake day. This was so my mother didn’t have to interrupt her busy washday any more than was required to cook the potato cakes. Sometimes we had meat loaf and my mother always put a boiled egg in it that was nice and also decorative when in your slice. During the week we had fried potatoes frequently and occasionally fried apples cooked up until they were mushy and quite good as the sugar in them caramelized and the lard combination didn’t hurt a thing.

I would trade all of the gourmet food in Paris or New York City for one of those meals again. Chickens just aren’t the same anymore as the foraging around for seeds, bugs, and worms seems to have added something to their flavor but additionally nobody knows the way to cook like I am talking about. Well it is time to mention desserts. Filling pies (chocolate, butterscotch, coconut), fruit and berry pies, hot chocolate pudding with cream, other puddings, and various cakes such as upside down pineapple cake, angel food cake, and devils food cake a dark brown chocolate cake. Various cobblers were made either from the fresh picked blackberries and raspberries or later from the canned berries. We had angel food cake frequently for a very good reason. The noodles took many egg yolks and the angel food cakes used many egg whites so it all balanced out. We also had homemade ice cream usually in the winter when we could get free ice from various containers in the back yard. If my mother had too many egg whites then she would make pineapple sherbet, which was also very good.

We had an icebox and ice was delivered when a card was put in a front window indicating how many pounds were wanted in increments of 25, 50, 75, or 100 pounds. The four-sided card had an arrow pinned in the center and you rotated the arrow to the number of pounds needed and put that side up. The ice was indented when frozen so the iceman could drive his ice pick in the right indentation to get the correct quantity. The iceman had a slick black leather garment that covered his shoulders and back and drained off the ice water without getting him wet as he carried the ice into the house over his shoulder with a pair of ice tongs. I think the leather garment had a pocket at the bottom so melt water didn’t drip on the customers floor. He put the ice in the top compartment of the ice box, collected his money and left and if it was summer all the kids around assembled behind the truck begging for ice chips to eat which he usually accommodated. My mother put newspapers around the ice to insulate it and slow up the melting which probably was ineffective in a short time once the newspaper was wet. A drain pan under the box had to be emptied every day or so.

Now a few words about where our foods other than from the garden, the woods, or the fields came from. There were many meat markets in those days and they weren’t full of pre-packaged meats. In fact none was packaged until you purchased it and then it was wrapped in butcher paper from a roll and tied with cotton string. This paper was impregnated with something such that it contained any juices from the meat. It is still sold and used for artwork sometimes. We were already green until later generations came along. In the market you could get almost any cut of meat wanted. You also could get pig or cow brains, liver, kidneys, heart (one of my favorites), and something no longer readily available; fresh side meat,
which is simply pork bellies or the bacon before it was cured. This was cooked just like bacon and was very good. The markets also had Blind Robins, which were very salty smoked herring and were on most beer joint counters.

My father used to bring one or two Blind Robins home on Saturday nights. My mother frequently got large soup bones at the meat market and these were bones that had lots of marrow in them, which I relished. These bones were used to make rich vegetable soup with our garden stocks in it either fresh or canned depending on the time of year although we had some cool weather vegetables such as carrots, cabbage, and potatoes stored in the basement all winter. Our chickens did not come from the meat market but were bought live. My mother butchered them by tying their feet to the clothesline and then cutting their head off with a sharp knife. She preferred this method to another common one, which consisted of grabbing the chicken’s head and swinging it around in a circular winding motion until the head was wrung off. Her objection to this technique was not as much humanitarian as practical. She felt her system drained the blood out of the chicken better whereas the other technique retained it. Under either system and I have watched both the chicken flopped around objecting to the assault for many seconds after its completion. The next step was scalding the carcass in very hot water to facilitate removal of all of the feathers. Then the chicken was gutted carefully saving the heart, gizzard, and liver. When we had chicken two people with me usually being one of them, always pulled the pulley bone between the two to see who got to make a wish that was supposed to come true. For Thanksgiving and Christmas we usually had a bigger bird initially a goose and in later times a turkey. These were purchased a few weeks ahead of time and fattened up in our basement with lots of corn given out by my mother or sometimes me.

At that time there were also neighborhood bakeries and sometimes my mother would send me to one two or three blocks away so I could buy cookies impregnated with peanuts or some sweet rolls for breakfast. These items were all baked on the site, and very little food was pre-packaged in those days except white bread. I didn’t like cereal very well unless I could snatch some of the cream separated by my mother for the coffee. Grocery stores were mostly scattered around the neighborhood although there were some chain stores such as the IGA store downtown. Our neighbor Everett Hensley opened a grocery store in the front part of his house and since it was just two doors away we did most of our shopping there except when we wanted special items of meat or something Hensley didn’t carry. Stores ran a weekly bill with items and price written down in a little book for each customer made for that purpose because most people paid their bill on payday which was generally weekly so they wouldn’t run out of money during the week.

We also bought two or three bushels of winter apples such as Winesaps, Golden Delicious, and or Jonathan every fall along with a gallon of non-pasteurized cider. The apples were quite cheap as we bought them right at the orchard and there were several in the area. My mother wrapped some of the apples in wax paper and stored them in lard cans in the basement for the winters use. I frequently ate four or five while reading before supper. After a few days the cider would become carbonated and it was really good then but we didn’t keep it long enough to become hard cider.

Despite the use of lard, butter, and cream for cooking I think we had a rather healthy diet because there were lots of vegetables, fruits, and nuts and many times we didn’t have much meat. I was a very light eater except when the noodles and mashed potatoes and rich gravy or sauce was served although I was also pretty tough on desserts especially hot chocolate pudding with cream that my brother Don also loved. Another redeeming feature was that we were always pretty active and not couch potatoes.

One thing I remember from early childhood was the electric cars. These looked the same back or front and were usually driven by a little old lady dressed in black with a passenger dressed similarly. The car was steered by a tiller like lever and of course they didn’t go very fast. I also occasionally saw the very early trucks that had solid rubber tires on them and the back wheels were chain driven. Some of our streets downtown were brick and a few had wooden blocks with the grain end up.

Many of the older cars of this period didn’t have an electric starter and so had to be hand cranked which kept most women out of the drivers seat for a while. These cars all had a throttle and spark timing advance-retard lever on the center of the steering wheel. When hand cranking the car the operator would pull the choke knob out some, put the throttle a little faster than idle and most importantly he would retard
the spark so that no spark plug would fire until the piston was past top dead center. If he forgot and the spark fired before top dead center the engine would kick back causing the crank to come around the other way sometimes breaking the drivers arm. It was not unusual to see men with their broken arm in a sling.

The throttle lever could be a sort of cruise control on the highway and drivers sometimes played with the spark timing on the road. A throttle and a choke control were in most cars on the dash until late in the 1960s. During my pre-school and school years I had a few health problems. One was a recurring inner ear infections (otitis media) but usually only once a year. This resulted in a very severe earache. The treatment was a hot water bottle to lay the ear on and the infection usually was allowed to run its course and was relieved almost instantly when the eardrum burst relieving the pressure and allowing the products of the infection to drain. It sounds serious to let this occur but it does not permanently harm the eardrum as I had it happen several times always in the right ear and that is my better hearing ear today. Once or twice I was taken to a doctors office and he lanced the eardrum with a sharp ice pick looking tool. One time the doctor made a house call and performed the same lancing operation, which in itself was rather painful but it relieved the pain fairly soon. Office visits and house calls were two to five dollars at that time.

Speaking of doctors when I was quite young I pestered my mother as to where babies came from especially when one was born at home next door. Her answer was always that “the doctor brings the baby in that bag he carries”. Also my mother and other people around were frequently taking aspirins. I continually begged to have one so finally my mother gave me one and told me to chew it up real good. That was the last time I begged for an aspirin. The same thing occurred with our very hot Hungarian peppers fresh from the garden and they were a very pretty orange to bright red. As my mother was wiping the dust off of some of them one time I asked for one too many times and she gave me one. It was fiery hot and cured that persistent “gimme one”.

The other frequent problem I had was stomachaches some times treated with castor oil. Once I was taken to a doctor for this malady and given a dark brown powder to mix with water and drink. The stuff had a strong licorice taste but was hard to get down even though I liked licorice candy. Occasionally I was able to miss school with a real or faked stomachaches. One time I had the croup real bad and I was given a spoonful of sugar with some kerosene in it by my mother and father with one holding me and one giving me the spoonful of the bad medicine. The sugar probably did more good than the kerosene but perhaps the kerosene was a good bacteria killer.

In those days I think most people believed that the most important thing in the world for health was to have very regular bowel movements. If my mother caught an inkling of such a problem with me out came the castor oil and I got dosed with it. I learned to keep my mouth shut about any little intestinal problems.

Some of my early haircuts were with a manual hand clipper and it pulled frequently. My mother knew where the cheapest barbers were and that is where I was sent. Haircuts were as cheap as twenty-five cents. After washing my hair it was rinsed with some vinegar in the water, which made it very soft. At Christmas a lot of candy and cookies were made and at Easter many eggs were decorated and hard-boiled eggs were pickled with beets and some vinegar that gave them a nice purple color and a very good flavor. I still make them occasionally.

One aerial tragedy occurred at Muncie when I was very young. I don’t know where around Muncie this happened but one day my father took me to an aerobatic show and Don was also there. During the only part I remember was when the low wing plane was in a maneuver the wing on one side broke completely off. My father removed me from the scene fairly quickly. Later in the day when Don came home he had some blood stained pieces of wood and fabric from the plane.
Chapter 2: Early School Years

Although the preceding comments cover much of my youth at home I will now get into schooling. My mother didn’t overlook my early learning, reading to me Mother Hubbard, and Mother Goose tales along with others that I don’t remember. Sometime either by her or in school I moved up to Rumpelstiltskin and Hansel and Gretel and I remember there were always woodsmen with axes in the tales and I liked these German, slightly spooky stories.

My mother always pushed me into schooling as early as possible so I think I was started to kindergarten at four years of age. My eventual grade school was Wilson Elementary, which later after my attendance ended, was renamed Forrest Park. It didn’t have a kindergarten so a neighbor girl and I were enrolled at Lincoln School kindergarten about a mile from the house. One parent walked us to the school for a day or two and then we were on our own. We were cautioned to never let a man pick us up in a car and that was it. Nobody ever bothered us in the two semesters we attended the school. One semester was in the morning and the other was in the afternoon. Activities were the usual, an inside sand box, coloring stuff, cut outs, and the highlight of the day a half pint of milk and two graham crackers. This was before the days of homogenized milk and I remember savoring the cream in the first couple of drinks then it was skimsville. After this repast we had to take a nap on clean carpets that were laid out. Otherwise the school part of this era was mostly uneventful.

The next step up was elementary school. The schools then had students that had started in each of the two semesters called 1a and 1b, 2a and 2b all the way up to the 6th grade. Now since I was born March 29, 1925 and the schools permitted entering at the start of the spring semester my mother talked the school officials into letting me start at that time even though I was almost two months shy of being six. Wilson Elementary was a two-story four classroom brick building about three blocks west of my home and was in the area between Eighth and Ninth Streets and had around 125 students. Now with the 1a, 1b etc. class configurations one could have twelve different grades in the school at any one time all handled by four old maid female teachers and the principal who also taught some classes. The principles name was Mr. Knotts known to all boys in the school as old man Knotts. I only remember one of the teacher’s names, which was Miss Dickover. These two adults are in the front matter class picture. Our school year was from mid-September through mid-June. I remember that at this particular time the alphabet was not taught in school. Maybe it never was but I didn’t learn it and have never become proficient with its order. Of course it has no influence on spelling or reading. Nowadays children usually have been taught the alphabet before they can talk; well before kindergarten anyway.

Back to school; I flunked the first semester. I couldn’t learn anything so it was decided that I would start over in the fall semester, as I should have done in the first place. This wasn’t all bad as it got me out from under my mothers feet so she could accomplish more of her never ending tasks. Also in the new semester I was an old hand already knowing where the drinking fountain and restrooms were while one of my neighbor playmates was wetting his pants and some other kids were crying. There were no school buses in those days for any child living in Muncie. You walked or rode a bicycle or bus in later years and in grade school went home for lunch. Our principle had a board of education and it was used on me six times in the six school years. I only remember one causative factor and it was very unfair. The teachers had to switch rooms occasionally and on one such time when the principal was replacing the teacher for a class the whole room was whispering (a cardinal sin) when old man Knotts came in. He then said for everybody to stand up that was whispering. Now out of a class of at least twenty-five only six stood up, me included. The first tragedy was that many of the girls were guilty of whispering but not one stood up. The second tragedy was that the principle marched we honest six off to his office and gave us each a good paddling. Now there was a lesson to be learned here about honesty but fortunately my mother’s teachings overrode that principles lack of principle. Our best defense would have been for everybody to stand up but children aren’t that smart. I must offer a word about those people that brag about getting a worse punishment at home than they got at school. One punishment is enough and I never got another punishment at home. Of course, I never mentioned what happened at school, once I left that place I wanted to forget it until the next day. We never had homework in grade school thank heaven.
We had an outside recess for fifteen minutes in the morning and another in the afternoon. The schoolyard had an imaginary line running north and south from the center of the back entrance and the girls were relegated to the west side and the boys to the east side and it was forbidden for the twain to intermingle. That wasn’t any problem as boys and girls at that age pretty much abhorred each other. The custodian ringing a loud hand bell terminated the recess. We were required to go outside for recess regardless of the temperature but I don’t recall going out in the rain. There were two memorable events that were observed during recess. The school at that time was surrounded by vacant fields to the south and west. One day at morning recess we saw an encampment south of the school, which included some teepees and wagons. We were told that the encampment contained both Indians and Gypsies, two elements greatly feared by children in those days mainly due to parental input. I never heard what the encampment was about but since Indians no longer used teepees I think it was some kind of a traveling hokum show. The other event was exciting and fortunately happened while we were at recess. A biplane made a forced landing in the field to the west and ended up very close to the school. Again we got no further details but it was very exciting for us anyway as airplanes were not so often seen in those days.

Memorable were one of the teachings and some memories of the principle. He stated as a fact that if you jumped out of an airplane you would be dead before hitting the ground because you wouldn’t be able to breath. He related that when he went to school the boys kept a cigar box with sawdust in it in their desk to spit their tobacco juice into. He didn’t acquire the habit and stated that he tried a cigar once and got quite sick and never took up tobacco again. One boy in my class, Bob West chewed tobacco during recess and he was very small for his age, which we blamed on the habit. I asked him how he got started and he said his father gave him little pieces of tobacco at around three years of age when he was crying and he got hooked.

Another story the principle repeated several times was about a new immigrant who had just arrived. He was running about waving his arms and shouting repeatedly “America America land of the free”. On one these excursions his waving hand hit another man in the face. This man angrily retorted “Your freedom ends where my nose begins”. I guess there was supposed to be a moral here like our freedom can only go so far and not impose on other people’s rights.

My mother had a set uniform for me to wear during all of my elementary school years. It was bib overalls and a blue cotton shirt now called a chambray shirt. The overalls were always bought too long for growth contingencies so they were folded up at the cuffs one or two rolls. Also during the summer I continued wearing the bib overalls but without a shirt. Shoes were what we called clodhoppers and they were ankle high. In early to mid-May when it had warmed up enough most of the other boys and me but none of the girls went to school barefoot. We repeated this shoe saving technique in the fall until it got too cold. During the warm weather I only wore shoes for Sunday school and when my mother took me to one of her social events or to town. I liked this freedom except I didn’t like having to wash my feet every night. I was very frugal with wash water. Occasionally I got a cut from glass and once stepped on a locus tree thorn and got a little infection but otherwise my feet were so tough that I could take a slide down our cinder alley without feeling a thing and nothing was too hot to walk on.

For subjects we had reading, English, penmanship, arithmetic, art, and music. Occasionally we had a bible study class. This was permitted in that time of free speech and when the school system was in charge of things instead of the parents and self-serving organizations. I am left-handed and the art or penmanship teacher was always trying to get me to learn to write with my right hand but it never happened. Her reason which was correct before the advent of ball point pens was that I would always be smearing my writing because of the contorted way left handed persons screw their arm around to make their writing slant to the right like everybody else. She was right and I stayed left.

We were given IQ tests in those days and sometime during the latter stages of grade school we were given an interest test. This was not a measure of skills or ability but was designed to tell one what field they were interested in. It only had four categories; namely social work, science, art, and music. My interests in order were science, art, social work, and music last. It was exactly right as I became an engineer, learned to paint when I was sixty-five and was successful enough to sell around thirty paintings. I
never acquired any significant interest in social work or music although I did do some volunteer work at a
mental health clinic in later life.

One funny school incident that I remember very well occurred on an Aprils Fools Day. When we
got to school that Monday morning all of the schoolrooms were in a big mess. Desk contents were
dumped on the floor, ink was thrown on everything, and chalk of all the colors was mashed into everything
possible. Well who did it was a mystery until behold the two Fox brothers showed up with chalk all over
their shoes and long stockings as they were wearing knickers and ink on their hands. It didn’t take the
judge long to convict especially in those school days when you were presumed guilty from the start. They
were put on probation for some time period but at least one of the boys turned out to be a successful carpenter in later years.

In school I learned to read very well, passed arithmetic, English, art, and almost always got an F in
music. I didn’t excel in grammar and some astute readers may say that’s obvious. Probably because I was
very loud I was picked for the leading part in our little school plays and was never bashful when called
upon to read or recite a poem in front of the class. One play I participated in was certainly historical and
will probably never be seen again. It was a minstrel show. It was enough of a feature that it was held at
night so the parents could attend which many did. My mother took great pains in blackening me up with a
black paste from a tin container. Being on the west side of Walnut Street we didn’t have any black stu-
dents in the school.

Music was a different thing. Every so often each student had to sing the scale. I abhorred this use-
less ritual and finally one Friday I adamantly refused to do it. The teacher equally adamant said to make
up my mind that when I came to school the following Monday I would sing that scale. Well I brooded
through the weekend and finally Sunday afternoon I started to cry. My mother then got the full story out
of me. On Monday morning she went to school with me and had a meeting with somebody. I’m sure she
wasn’t irate or impolite but I was never asked to sing the scale ever again. That was the only time my
mother interceded for me at school and it was the only time I needed her to. My mother graduated from
Middletown High School, which in those days qualified one to teach grade school. She had to write a
theses and it was entitled *Higher Education and Actual Life* and she taught for a year or so but got married
and so stopped. Anyway she wasn’t one to be intimidated by any educator.

We only missed school for two days as a result of bad weather during my entire school career.
During grade school a vicious winter storm came in on one Wednesday before noon. On my way back to
school the walk was into a strong wind and snow right in my face. By the time I got to school I had ice all
over my face from the snow that melted and then refroze but it did no harm. I think we were let out early
and at home I watched out the window behind the blowing curtains as the fairly dry snow escalated into
total whiteout conditions. The wind really blew things around and this storm definitely qualified as a bliz-
erald. I don’t know how we knew it but school was dismissed for the next two days, as the school heating
systems couldn’t keep up with the cold. The next two mornings the temperature was twenty below zero
with a beautiful blue sky. By ten am the street was full of kids with sleds enjoying the unexpected vaca-
tion. With no wind it was quite comfortable. Back then these weather events were called cold waves and
conversely a hot spell was called a heat wave. Seems more descriptive than our contemporary terminolo-
gy.

There were parent teachers meetings in those days but I don’t believe my mother went because of
the press of work even at night. Mr. Knotts drove a model T-Ford and one night while it was parked out-
side somebody let the air out of all four tires. We didn’t hear any more about the incident or who the cul-
prits might have been. Every spring we had class pictures taken with everybody in their usual seats and
the teacher and Mr. Knotts standing in the back of the room. I wore shoes and was dressed up a little more
on that day. Most of the other boys and me were very happy when school was finished that semester for
we then had three months off to do many other more interesting things.

Sometime during the early years of grade school Donald Yarger who lived on Eleventh Street a
couple of blocks away and myself got acquainted and became friends for life. We sometimes attended
Sunday school together at a nearby church. There I occasionally got exasperated with him, as during the
attendance he would grind his grimy shoes on top of my polished shoes. He wore the same shoes all of the
time, whereas I had clodhoppers on during the week and dress shoes on Sunday. I guess he wanted to make my shoes look like his.

Now I would like to talk about milk during this time period. Milk was first delivered daily in the early morning by horse drawn milk wagons. This later changed to motorized trucks. The milk was in quart size glass containers (pints were also available) with a cardboard cap coated with a wax to make them none absorbent. Milk was not homogenized and the cream rose to the top, which my mother poured off and put in a cream pitcher for coffee and cereal. If it was real cold the top portion of the milk and cream would freeze and push the cap up two or three inches above the rim. If you wanted something in addition to the standing order you put a note in the clean bottle that was put out the night before for return to the dairy. Sometimes in the thirties the dairies came out with a gimmick to better separate the cream. This consisted of a necked down section of the bottle so the portion above contained the cream. The dairy provided a metal spoon like tool with the spoon part at right angles to the handle. This was put in the milk bottle and pressed down against the necked down region of the bottle and the cream poured off. It worked fairly well but disappeared with the advent of homogenized milk.

Sometime during my elementary school years we acquired a cow that we kept in our barn like garage except when the cow was grazing across the street from our house on a large area of nice grass. During this time we had all the milk and cream we could use and I was very fond of cream and whipped cream on desserts and in our ice cream. My mother also made butter and cottage cheese from any excess cream or milk. My job during this milk and cream bonanza period was to lead the cow down the alley to a cross street and back to the field where she was staked out using an old car axle as the stake and a chain attached to the cow’s collar. When I came home from school for lunch I moved the cow to a new area for grazing. Sometime after school I brought the cow back following the same route down the alley. Now the cow went dry and became very cantankerous. The cow would run down the alley and if I couldn’t hang on she would get away from me. One evening bringing her home I decided to prevent her from getting away by wrapping the chain around my arm. Big mistake; she dragged me at least a hundred feet down the cinder alley. I didn’t receive any serious injuries but this incident didn’t enhance my love for farm animals. One other non-endearing incident happened with this staking out ritual. One summer day, barefoot as usual, I went to move the cow during the day. As I was driving the stake down I hit my big toe with the sledgehammer. It hurt very much and the ultimate result was the loss of the toenail over a period of several months.

Soon after the cow went dry my father got rid of her. We starting using oleo or margarine, which came in a one-pound block, that was the same size as a four-cube package is today. Because of dairy interests (lobbyists?) a law was passed that prohibited the manufacturers from coloring the pure white margarine. Consequently the package came with a small pouch of food coloring that when mashed into the margarine with a fork and thoroughly mixed, resulted in a color just like butter and that was often my job.

Another source of milk children had in the summer was to go to the Covall Dairy on the northeast corner of South Nichols Avenue and west Godwin Street just over the Nichol Plate Railroad tracks. Before the advent of people drinking skim milk the dairies used to give away their excesses from butter and cheese making and other cream using processes. A few neighbor kids and myself would occasionally go in the summer with a five gallon lard can and bring it back home half full so it didn’t splash out. We would put some vanilla, sugar, and ice in it which made a very nice summer drink. My mother deplored this product saying that it was only fit for hogs. She called it “Blue John” the usual term for skimmed milk in those days because of it’s bluish tint. When milk had just started to turn sour and had little curds in it, it was called “blinky”.

One thing we did during this period was to butcher a hog, which we did fifty-fifty with another relative or neighbor. This is always done in the winter for obvious reasons. The process is to kill the hog and I’m going to skip those details. Anyway everything was saved such as the brains, intestines, head, tail, and everything else in between. Now you may have heard of “eating high on the hog” and I know first hand where it comes from. For we had sliced tenderloin which is the most tender meat from a hog and is high on the hogs back, then pork chops, brains, ribs, and of course lots of cracklings, made when the lard was rendered from the fat on the intestines and elsewhere and, of course, the pig’s skin. The end product
crackling was not the mostly air packaged pigskins sold in stores today, and there is no comparison. The liver, heart, kidneys, and probably other organs not remembered were saved, as was the pig’s tail, which was very good when cooked with beans. The pigs feet were saved and the head was stripped to make head cheese sometimes called souse. We also got one pork belly and served it as fresh side meat, which is much better tasting than bacon that was developed for preservative purposes before refrigeration. Of course, quite a bit of peppery pan sausage was made.

My mother sugar cured the front shoulder and back ham. This was done with a coating of brown sugar, black pepper, and salt which was secondary to the sugar. I don’t know if her recipe included salt peter (potassium nitrate) as many of the old recipes did. This was put in a thick layer on the ham that was covered with waterproof paper and then sown up in a snug cloth covering. The ham was then hung in our barn and as it was winter the ham stayed very cool but was not allowed to freeze. We did not do any smoking of the meats, which is not at all necessary and if you ever had a chance to taste that sugar cured ham you would see why. The flavor and color of the meat cured by the two distinct techniques is as different as night and day. I only found this ham once in a small town restaurant in western Indiana in 1945 while returning to Muncie from Denver with Don. We both agreed that was a welcome greeting and treat.

Lest the reader think that we were always eating high on the hog nothing could be further from the truth. The butchered hog was a onetime thing and was great but didn’t last long. Aside from the Sunday chicken or stringy beef we ate pretty sparsely most of the time. The leftover beef was sometimes made into a dish we called slumgullian. This consisted of the stringy beef in a mixture of rice and canned tomatoes baked in an oblong cake pan and it was very substantial and good. My mother also made a dish we called halukis which was simply cabbage rolls with hamburger meat and rice inside the cabbage leaves held together with a toothpick while they slowly cooked in a juicy canned tomato mixture which the fat from the hamburger flavored quite well. We also had fried hamburgers sometimes that ended up half the size they started out because hamburger meat was pretty fat in those days. Another cabbage dish we had was corned beef and cabbage using canned corn beef that spread throughout the dish and was quite good. We ate rice sometimes with cream or milk and sugar on it as a dessert. My mother also made economical deserts from bran flakes and cocoa powder and another one from rolled oats, butter, and sugar that caramelized when baked and both of these were very good and economical to make.

One chore I had from very early on was helping in the garden as we had a large one every year while my father was able to work it. These were always on a large plot somewhere close by. He would borrow a horse and plow with me sometimes riding the horse or someone else might be hired at a very low cost hired to plow and harrow the ground. From then on it was up to us and my father had a hand pushed implement that made the furrows for planting and it also had a cultivating attachment. We planted all of the usual vegetables and lots of potatoes, which was the bane of my life. First my father cut up seed potatoes making sure that there were at least two eyes in each slice. I did some of the planting, which was bend over work as each potato slice had to be planted with the eyes up so you couldn’t just throw the potatoes into the furrow. This was to keep the new shoot from having to grow around the slice, cutting down the time for emergence of the new shoot. I didn’t care much for the next task either. After the potato bushes were fairly large they frequently became infested with large numbers of potato bugs. My job was to go along with a container of water and shake the bugs off the plant into the water where they drowned or at least could be removed from the area. Sometimes we squashed them on a hard surface under our shoes except I was usually barefoot. Other times we put Paris Green on the plants, which contains some arsenic to kill the insects. It is considered to be a lot more toxic now than it was then. It is only used in emerging countries today.

The final task with the potatoes was also very tiring. When the potatoes had matured in the fall my father would go along with a heavy tined fork and dig up the potatoes. My job was to follow with a basket and shake the dirt off the potatoes and put them in the basket. Despite these, what I thought onerous tasks; I have retained a great interest in gardening of all kinds and had a tropical plant business for several years. I also taught horticulture credit courses for eight years at San Jacinto Junior College in Pasadena, Texas. Part of this interest in tropical plants stemmed from my duty in the South Pacific during World War II.
Sometime during my grade school years we were required to get a smallpox vaccination that the city paid for as long as you went to the doctor they designated. This was the only immunization practiced at that time. Shots for this and that weren’t started until later except you might get a tetanus shot if you got a severe cut or puncture wound that had contact with the ground. The doctor specified by the school was a Doctor Laduron and he may have been the city health officer. Anyway this doctor had a Scandinavian wife that was a nurse and in the mid 1930s she disappeared and at about the same time the doctor started wearing a patch over one eye. This looked very suspicious and public and police opinion was that he had killed his wife and then put her in a barrel of lime or other caustic material and got a splash in the eye causing blindness in the eye. Despite holes dug all over Delaware County nothing was ever found or proven, but the case was fresh when my mother had to take me to Dr. Laduron’s office at his ominous residence on Liberty Street. She was less than enthusiastic but otherwise she would have to pay for the vaccination so economy prevailed. He seemed nice enough and I liked the patch. It was spring vacation time and we went to my grandmother’s in Morgan County and the vaccination got infected and gave me a few bad days.

My mother made some extra money by stretching curtains; a lost art by now or perhaps no longer needed. Anyway this was done by setting up an upright wooden framework that could be adjusted to various size curtains and the part the curtains were attached to after being washed had many extending sharp pins in a rectangular pattern. This allowed the curtains to be stretched to their correct size while they dried which also removed any wrinkles. During the later part of the 1930s and into the late 40s my mother did a lot of quilting as did my grandmother Krichbaum.

If it hasn’t become self-evident I would like to emphasize that we didn’t visit doctors every time we got a little ailment. The number of times I was taken to or was visited by a doctor could be counted on my hands. My mother never went until her cancer started. We did not spend anything on prescriptions because we never got one and the amount spent on snake oils was also minimal. For colds I was sometimes given a hot lemon drink with a little whiskey in it. My brother Don occasionally had severe attacks of kidney stones requiring at least pain medication, but he took care of those costs. I did have dental problems when young from lack of proper care and these caused me problems for many years. At a young age I had cavities in my lower six-year molars and instead of filling them they were pulled in the interest of economy I imagine. This allowed adjacent teeth to tilt causing perpetual root problems.

One thing I was pretty good at in my younger years was trading for this or that. One of the best trades I made was for a high quality small steam engine and I only parted with some item not remembered. The little engine had a brass boiler, whistle, machined flywheel, and power takeoff so it could turn little tools. Another less sage trade was a model of a Spanish galleon I had made and traded for a single shot 22-caliber rifle. The rifle had two major problems the first being that it was very inaccurate because the barrel had lost all of its rifling to lead. The second was a safety problem because the cartridge extractor was missing. This left an unfilled gap so that when the rifle was fired the trigger hand got sprayed with casing particles and some burning powder. Quite a bit later on my mother let me buy a new single shot Remington 22 caliber rifle for just under ten dollars.

One summer evening in the 1930s we had a spectacular display of the Aurora Borealis and it was the only one I ever saw in Muncie. One of our neighbor ladies thought the world was coming to an end.
Chapter 3: Playtime and Socializing

Some description of free time activities is needed. Going back to my preschool years I was involved in certain of my mother’s social activities that were memorable. My mother belonged to the First Baptist Church in Muncie and was a member of the Ladies Aid Society. They had periodic get-to-gathers and I was always dragged along as there was no such thing as babysitters to my mother; if you couldn’t take the child with you then you don’t go. My first whine after we arrived was always “when are we going home? I wanna go home”. This did no good so I pestered her by pulling on her glasses or better yet pulling on the beads around her neck. On one or two occasions I broke the string and the beads went all over the floor. This was good for a spanking when we got home. Anyway they did serve some food and that kept me quiet for a while. Sometime in this era my mother took me to a funeral in the mortuary at the Beech Grove cemetery for the son of an acquaintance of hers who had tragically drowned. Now the atmosphere in the mortuary was similar to the church socials I had been forced to attend. After tormenting my mother in the usual manner I spouted out very loudly “when are we going to eat?” There were several titters of laughter. When I irritated my mother at home she would threaten me with “I’m going to yank a knot in your tail”. Another exasperation remark was “if that don’t take the match”. She accused my father and me both of just wanting to live in a pigpen and she frequently said we are all going to the poor house.

On weekends and sometimes during the week we visited other relatives or they visited us. Sometimes we visited my Uncle Tom who subsistence farmed forty acres some thirty or so miles from Muncie (close to Pennsville) with a pair of mules. We would ride with my uncle Wally and his two daughters, Lilly and Vera. Wally was married to Uncle Tom’s sister and Uncle Tom was married to Wally’s sister. I remember watching the speedometer on these trips and it sat right on thirty-five mph for the whole trip. On the way one would still see the old zig zag split rail fences. The reason split rail fences were zigzagged was for support without requiring any fence posts or fasteners. We also saw areas full of stumps that the farmer had cut down to eventually convert that land to farming. In other words at this time land was still being cleared. Uncle Tom had always used mules for his farming even though most farmers used draft horses. He told me that when he was young he used to race another youth with a team around a section (640 acres) that was bordered with county gravel roads as were most sections in Indiana that were fairly level. The two racers would start out in opposite directions so they only had to pass once, very visible to each other, and the first one back to the starting point was, of course, the winner. He complained that his father Michael always took all of the money he made working for others.

Uncle Tom’s farm was on an old Indian campground. As he ploughed his ground walking along behind the mules pulling the plough he would turn up all kinds of Indian artifacts such as arrowheads, spearheads, tomahawks, mortars and pestles and on. Over the many years he had farmed this land he had accumulated several boxes of these wonderful artifacts. After World War II I went to visit him. I asked him if he still had the Indian stuff and he said no he had sold them. I had to know for how much and he told me ten dollars. I was disappointed that he hadn’t got much more for he should have and he needed it.

Uncle Tom didn’t believe in cars, he said if you drove down the road and looked to the right the car would go to the right and you would end up in the ditch whereas with a team of mules it didn’t matter where you looked they just kept on down the road. About tractors he said they dropped detrimental things such as oil on the ground whereas the mules dropped beneficial things on the ground. He always had a dog that could do a few tricks. The most unique one was that he would tell the dog to run around the house outside and it did every time. Uncle Tom quit shaving every October and grew a nice beard every winter to keep his face warm when outdoors. He then started shaving again in the spring.

Once annually in early September there was a Bricker-Mays family reunion, which was alternately held in Portland, Indiana at the fairgrounds and the next year at Muncie in one of the bigger parks. In my early years these had a couple of hundred or more people in attendance including a lot of bearded men. There was always a big banner strung between two trees with Bricker-Mays on it designating the picnic site. The food was fabulous because many of the attendees were farmers. There were lots of fried chicken and other meats of less interest to me and fresh tomatoes and many other vegetables and a big variety of desserts. There was a business meeting afterwards but I don’t know what was discussed as I was playing
with the many other kids by this time. We had a Bricker get together in Muncie in 2008 and six people attended it.

Sometime during my early years I embarked on a construction project to provide housing for my yellow cat. My mother didn’t like for me to let the cat in the house but I frequently got by with it but never at night. I decided that the cat needed an all weather place to stay. One evening after school a couple of other kids and me set out on an expedition to find a box for this project. We went to several grocery stores asking for a wooden box. Invariably the storeowner would ask what we wanted it for and invariably I answered, “I want to build a cathouse”. I couldn’t understand the great amount of laughter this brought on at each stop. I finally got home with a greasy box, greasy hands, and late for supper and I caught the devil. A cat abode was not built.

I also had three dogs during my childhood. The first was a puppy and it started to have fits probably from worms, something that could have been easily corrected today. My mother tried some worm treatments to no avail. On one Saturday the pup starting having fits and a policeman was called. He came and shot the poor puppy and I was devastated. The second dog I had was a non-descript hound named Spot. A car hit Spot but he only got a broken leg that after healing caused him to run partly sideways. The next dog was a part German Shepard and part Chow named Rusty and it became mean snapping at everybody that passed our house. We sent it to a country farm but it started killing chickens so we had to take it back. Then we took it to my cousin Sedam’s where it started killing sheep and soon disappeared. That was the sad story of my childhood pets, however the yellow cat did survive to old age.

In the 1930s Muncie had several scrap yards that differed from today’s automobile junkyards. Their business was buying specific scrap metals such as steel and cast iron, copper, lead, zinc, etc. I sometimes took a wagon loaded with some metal to a scrap yard on Liberty Street and got a few cents. I think the name of it was Zeigler’s Scrap Yard.

In these early years I engaged in what today would be considered unhealthy activities, some of my own doing and some due to circumstances beyond my control. In this early time period my father had acquired a quantity of lead from lead telephone line sheathing discarded by the telephone company. I remember him trying to cast a lead mallet head around a handle. The mold was made of damp clay. The clay must have been too damp for when he poured the molten lead the whole thing disintegrated with almost explosive force scattering molten lead and clay all over the washroom. After this I was given the lead to play with. Quite a lot was recovered and I had a round piece some eight inches in diameter and three fourths of an inch thick. My play with this consisted of melting the lead frequently in my mother’s cast iron skillet on what was now a gas stove in place of the previous wood stove. I would then skim off the slag and discard it. I did this so many times it was a wonder there was any lead left but it never seemed to diminish. Later I got a toy soldier mold and made toy soldiers repeatedly. Although my mother used this skillet almost every day we never seemed to have acquired any ill affects. In some school classes we were given a few drops of mercury in our hands to play with. This mainly consisted of putting a dime or other small coin in the mercury, which would amalgamate with silver in the coins, which still had silver in them in those days. This made the coin very shiny. No attempt was made to collect any of the mercury back. I don’t think schools do this anymore.

A danger in my home was the basement light. This was simply an extension cord hung on a nail in a post at the bottom of the stairs. Now the bulb wasn’t covered but the big danger was the brass socket that apparently had a short in it. To avoid getting shocked one grabbed the non-metallic switch, which was its only redeeming feature. One didn’t dare grasp the brass socket or a shock was sure to occur. How we lived for years without somebody getting electrocuted is a mystery. Many trips were made down there as that was where our fuel was kept and our lone water faucet was there until we got one in the kitchen. Also all of our canned goods were carried down and then back up as used. I got shocked several times but luckily survived. The basement was also a good place to sleep in real hot weather and during the dust bowl years we had some very hot and extended heat waves. I also used it when later on I was on shift work because it was quieter during the day. I also played with an electric train down here and had a Model T-Ford coil rigged up to make a Jacob’s ladder that was interesting to me. These items occasionally resulted in
electrical shocks. The transformer for the train didn’t have a protective cover so occasionally I touched the wrong thing. It was also used to power the Ford coil.

Another springtime event every year was the arrival of the big three ring Barnum and Bailey Circus. First we would go the railroad siding and watch the unloading of all of the animals and equipment and we might go and watch the raising of the big tents. A major event was the circus parade, which was headed up by the elephants parading followed by the other animals in cages interspersed with the clowns prancing around. Then we went to the circus with many events continuously on the three rings. Trapeze acts, animal tricks, the clowns, and the women horse riders standing on the horses as they circled the ring at a lively gallop.

As a result of the bible study classes in grade school I won a free one week trip to camp Tippecanoe two years in a row. The camp had some religious connection but it wasn’t an overbearing factor. The camp was located on a natural lake in northern Indiana and had very nice facilities. On about the first day I bought a Babe Ruth bar and thoughtlessly threw the wrapper on the ground. I was immediately accosted and told of my error and that the rule at the camp was that I had to buy the old hand the same candy bar as a penalty. I went back into the store and seeing a door on the opposite side of the room immediately exited there. The old hand made the mistake of not sticking with me. I just didn’t feel like turning loose of any of my very limited moneys. I didn’t throw any more candy wrappers on the ground.

Since this was my first trip away from home I got very homesick. At some gathering every morning they would sing Love’s Old Sweet Song and I would get choked up every time. We had many good activities like leather and beadwork but my favorites were swimming and the rowboats. They had some nice wooden round bottom rowboats and we could get our fill rowing and we took trips to an adjacent lake through a narrow channel in the water lilies. Somehow I knew early on that round bottom rowboats were superior to flat bottom boats and I really liked these boats. Not only did they look more nautical but also as I later found out they are more seaworthy. There was no such thing as life preservers in these boats or on the participants and why have them when the boat can’t sink and you have other people around to pull you out. The second year I really rowed a lot and we went further to visit a high dollar luxury motorboat factory like Chris Craft but I don’t know if it was. This was not a large operation but very interesting.

That summer was in the period of many people coming down with polio before the Salk vaccine had been developed. On Monday after getting home the previous day I had all kinds of polio symptoms. My arms and shoulders were very sore and stiff and my palms and fingers were turning yellow. I was pretty sure I was coming down with polio but didn’t tell anybody because I was sure they would verify it. Well all these symptoms disappeared in a few days and I was going to live. It was a long time before it dawned on me that the soreness was from the rowing and the yellow hands were from wear or material from the oar handles.

For entertainment my father sometimes took me on walks in the area. We would go north on Batavia Avenue to White River about a half-mile from home. We had to cross the New York Central railroad tracks also erroneously called the Big Four on the way and if we were lucky a passenger train would come whistling through at around seventy mph, the train speed limit inside the city limits. The crossing was tended by a watchman that put a guard gate down when a train was coming. This same crossing also had a set of tracks for the electric interurban. This was a very efficient transportation system with its hub in Indianapolis branching out all over the state. These single cars also ran quite fast and periodically people were killed by both them and trains at the many unguarded rural and some city crossings. The interurbans ran frequently as did the passenger trains but the interurbans were usually used for inter-state travel and they may have been cheaper. The interurban had both local and express service. We also had good bus service to almost anywhere in the state. In town we had excellent bus service that ran every fifteen minutes and cost five cents and the stop was only a half block from our house. One could get a transfer receipt from the driver, which permitted one to get on another bus downtown to go to another part of town (but not back where you came from). We also had city streetcars but these were terminated when I was quite young. My father took me on the last one to run on a Saturday night and then they ran another one on Sunday morning that was really the last one. Taxi service in the later 1930s was a flat rate fifty cents from anywhere in Muncie to anywhere else in town. By comparison to today the public transportation sys-
tem of the 1930s was far superior except for air travel. You could go almost anywhere in the country without being required to have a car or ride an airplane, but the local transportation was especially efficient compared to today. Within the state, travel was also very efficient and would in most cases beat today’s air travel time counting going to an airport an hour or two early and all the other pre-flight delays. There was no insult factor involved either (pat downs and remove shoes and go through ineffective machines). Storms hardly ever impacted surface travel and the jet stream never did and you didn’t have to make reservations unless traveling overnight by Pullman car. It is a shame that in the past seventy-five years we have gone backwards with respect to surface transportation while Europe has continually moved forward and now has high-speed trains all over and superb city and local transportation. In America we have come to rely almost solely on airplanes and automobiles neither of which is very energy efficient or relaxing.

Back to the walk as we went on to White River. This was really a stinking, filthy, open sewer as it carried all of the untreated sewage of Muncie. The standing joke was that you had to flush a toilet in Muncie before you could get a drink of water in Anderson (downstream eighteen miles). The river was so repulsive that even boys of my inclinations and lack of respect for fastidiousness avoided. My father would point out the Eighth Street sewer and then the Ninth Street sewer. The river had all kinds of floating debris on it such as condoms and floating fecal matter and the river didn’t smell good either. This should be descriptive enough of what Muncie and most other cities did to their rivers at this time and of course all of the industries dumped their toxic wastes in the river also for there were no laws against it.

Despite the filthy river a Muncie outboard motor manufacturer (Muncie had several at various times) would bring their racing engines to test on small racing boats right outside of the sewers. It was interesting to watch and also very smelly from the stirred up bottom materials. I can’t understand why they didn’t go to a local gravel pit or anywhere but that river.

Another good tour we occasionally made was to south Walnut Street. This was the location for many cigar stores that were also fronts for poker games. However we came to that region not to gamble but to visit some of the several antique stores in the area. Since it wasn’t too many years after the end of World War I these shops had many artifacts from the war. They had rifles, machine guns, bayonets, old uniforms, gas masks, and many other items of interest to little boys. The item I most liked and would have loved to have was one of the German pickle helmets (with the spike on top). We never bought anything for that would have been a foolish use of our very limited resources. On the way there or back we would go by the train station because of the frequency of passenger trains we would usually be there for one if we waited a short time. The steam locomotive whistles and bell (where the contemporary saying came from) were great, and then while the train was stopped the fireman would usually be out oiling various moving parts. When the train started up with a great hissing of steam the driver wheels would usually spin some until the applied sand got between the wheels and the rail. At this time the trains still burned coal shoveled into the firebox by the fireman. While in the station the crew would also have to take on water from a large tank by the tracks as the trains didn’t recycle any of the water for that would have required condensers and pumps and made for a too complex and cumbersome system. Because of the coal burning which was probably the cheapest bituminous coal available the trains made a lot of dense black smoke sometimes interspersed with steam.

A spectator activity my father took me to at least once was the “Holy Roller’s” tent revival held every summer on the south side of west Twelfth Street. Now this was conducted nightly by a preacher with the name Brother Bear or Baher and I think most of the participants were Kentuckians and Tennesseans from Shed Town as this fundamentalist type religion was more typical of the south and especially Appalachia. Now we didn’t go to participate but to observe from the outside as the tent sides were rolled up in the summer. The name Holy Rollers came from the fact that the participants did roll in the isles and danced and some were in a trance like condition. There was also much yelling, singing, and wailing and it was a very active scene.

An activity my father had me participate in was the obtaining of wood for our heating fuel. Now this was no little few armloads of wood operation for we needed several cords to get through the winter. My father borrowed a large wagon and a team of horses and usually two or three other adults were along which may have included one or both of my brothers. Then we set off for the woods some two or three
miles away where a farmer was allowing free cutting so he could clear and farm the land. When we got to the woods my job was to burn the brush as it accumulated. The trees were cut down with two man cross cut saws and cut to lengths that could be manhandled onto the wagon for the stove lengths would be cut later. For lunch we had some packed stuff and my father smeared thick mud on some potatoes. These were placed in the hot coals and in theory the potatoes were done when the mud was baked dry. This was a theory that was never proven in my extensive experience with mud caked potatoes. Anyway I enjoyed burning the brush.

After the load of wood was hauled home and unloaded it had to be cut up in stove lengths that would be from eighteen inches to two feet long. This latter task was by necessity saved for another day. This was a little more mechanized as one of my uncles had a single cylinder gasoline engine of not much horsepower nor was much needed. Now this was the kind that didn’t fire real frequently so the power was evened out by two large flywheels that straddled the engine. The inertia of the flywheels absorbed the intermittent impulses from the engine and was a substantial power source in itself as long as it was occasionally hammered by the engine. It also overcame surges on the power load to the engine. The load in this case was a large round saw to be used for cutting up the wood that was driven by a wide flat belt about twenty feet away from the engine. The engine was very simply cooled by a cast iron jacket around the engine cylinder open at the top that was kept supplied with water and that was my job. Drip oilers that had to be refilled every so often lubricated the engine journals and bearings. That was also my job. I remember thinking several times on these occasions and I was only seven or so that there must be a better way of living than this and my mental query was directed at more than just the present situation. Conversely this disquiet never came up at other times and I was generally pretty satisfied with things. After the cutting to length, some of the wood had to be split, as its diameter was too great for the stoves. This was a manual job using steel wedges and a sledgehammer but I was too small for any of this. I did get to carry some of the wood to it’s next to last resting place.

Now I would like to talk about playtime independent of my elders. In other words how did we ever entertain ourselves without TV, computers, cell phones, and video games? First I had lots of spare time with no homework to do and my mother couldn’t afford to send me for music, dance, or singing lessons much to my regret. Well at one time I was talked into taking guitar lessons and I chose the Hawaiian guitar as that was what Austin played but I would have preferred the Spanish guitar. The music lesson deal was that you took a one-hour lesson each week, which you paid a dollar for and at the end of fifty-two weeks you owned the guitar. I was supposed to practice for one-half hour every day. When sitting down to practice I set a clock in front of me and when that time was up I was gone. I lasted for twelve lessons and was very happy when my music career was terminated and I never got involved with such torture again. Actually in my social circle none of the other members participated in these activities either and some of their parents could have afforded it better than my mother could.

There were certain late afternoon fifteen-minute programs on the radio for children such as Buck Rogers, Little Orphan Annie, and some others. As I got more sophisticated I listened to Amos and Andy, Lum and Abner, and the Lone Ranger and at night Bob Hope and Red Skeleton. Edger Bergen and his dummy Charlie McCarthy and Jack Benny had weekend shows. Mystery Theater was another favorite of mine on Sunday night when the announcer started with “Who knows what evils lurks in the minds of man”?

I would like to describe a local entertaining phenomenon across the street from my house. The whole block to Eleventh or Twelfth Street was vacant. Nearest my house was a small hill about half a block long, which was the overburden from a gravel pit on the other side of the hill. The long abandoned pit was partially filled with junk cars that accumulated around the sides of the pit but leaving the center open with deep water. This was neighbor boys and my playground occasionally after school and on weekends. The attraction was climbing down to the water which was fairly clean looking although hard telling what all was dissolved in it. One climbed down and back up by going over and through the cars. I didn’t even consider going swimming for I knew the water was deep and I couldn’t swim a lick at that age which was around seven or eight years old. Another attraction was the car instruments such as speedometers, gas
gages and such, which all we could do with, was to look at and take apart which I did. No child drowned in this fun recreation and it all came to an end by progress.

The site became a dumping ground for all of the oily sawdust from the many factories in Muncie. Before modern adsorbents were developed sawdust was used around all of the various machine tools to soak up the cutting oils extensively used. It wasn’t long before this significant volume was filled with oily sawdust and then it wasn’t much longer before spontaneous combustion started subsurface fires all around the place. Well this was also great entertainment for all of the kids from far and wide. It was impossible to keep the fires out try as they would. One time the dump burned continuously for over a year. The firemen would stick the water hose nozzle vertically down into the upper surface and what was sometimes great was when a large quantity of water hit a large quantity of red hot sawdust and a fairly significant underground upheaval took place with steam, hot water, and burning sawdust shooting twenty feet in the air. This was before yellow tape had been invented and there was no crowd control. We could wonder around anywhere we wanted to. Much better than watching TV. Most adults complained about the bad smell but only to each other since nobody else would or could do anything about it. The fire department was doing all they could do and were on the site every time there was a flare up. Well all-good things must come to an end; the fire finally went out or more likely smothered itself with ashes and the site was covered over with soil and junk and wasn’t disturbed again until World War II.

On the south side of the gravel pit turned dump was a long low abandoned building that was reportedly previously used as a mushroom growing facility. This seemed to be borne out by the many long wooden benches with board lips around the tops as though designed to contain the growing medium. Also the building didn’t have windows consistent with the lack of light, which is not needed for growing mushrooms, which are devoid of chlorophyll. There were also some indications that concrete blocks had been manufactured in the vicinity, which made sense with the proximity of the gravel pit.

Regarding after school activities most kids were outside until supper or if that was early then after supper. Dinner was the noontime meal in my early times. We might shoot marbles for keeps and did some of that during recess at school. Yo-Yos were popular and affordable and the first ones were of wood followed by thin metal ones with holes in them that resulted in a whistling noise. In the spring we flew kites in the March winds. My kite string was many pieces tied together from my mothers savings from every wrapped package brought home. The string was wrapped longitudinally on a one foot long piece of broomstick, which had a final shape like an ear of corn tapered at the ends. It took a little stronger wind for my kite to fly and I had a significant sag in the line because of the weight of the many knots. Early on my kites were home made using newspapers and homemade paste with the two required sticks purchased or left over from a previous year. The paste was simply made from flour and water and it worked. The kite tail was made from rags torn in strips and tied together. Later on we played tackle football every night after school without any gear. Young bones were tough enough to take such impacts and the impacts were much less for lightweights.

One thing my mother impressed on me was that I shouldn’t eat in front of other children without sharing so I usually ate sweets inside. Most of the other kids families were better off financially than mine anyway. I did go outside with an apple occasionally and the first thing I would hear is “dibs, dibs” and the standing rule was that the first responder got the apple core to finish. All of the grocery stores had penny candy such as jawbreakers, bubble gum, and small versions of some of the nickel candy bars. They also had soft drinks and the main one in those days was the brand Nehi (pronounced knee high, a marketing gimmick) that came in several flavors. The cream soda was especially good. One snack the Phillips boys next door made frequently was called garbage bread by them. It consisted of a slice of bread with mustard on it and peppered. By contrast my favorite snack was called sugar bread. It was a slice of bread buttered and then covered with a thick coat of brown sugar. When real young I was a little disappointed at my grandmother Bricker’s version because she used white sugar.

In the summer we might go to Rose Park (with other kids, not parents) that was about two blocks east of my house so it was very convenient. It had a large diameter wading pool that tapered to its deepest part at the center of maybe two feet. The water was not chlorinated. The rest rooms were filthy. The park
also had the usual slides and swings and sometimes we took waxed bread wrappers with us to sit on and make the slide trip faster. The parks had activities for the kid’s especially softball during the summer.

An entertaining incident occurred one summer morning. Two doors east of us lived a fairly young couple. The woman was a fast looking blond that was frequently gossiped about. Anyway mid-morning while many of my neighbor kids and me were playing on the sidewalk nearby all of a sudden a man came flying out of a front window headfirst and he hit the ground running. Apparently the blonde’s husband had come home unexpectedly through the back door and caught them holding hands or something.

I had many solitary pursuits for I was usually busy at various things and if it was raining one had to do something inside. I had several toys that I kept in a box in the washroom (called the junk box by my mother) and eventually acquired several pot metal cars. I had some sand at the back of our lot and had built a little mountain road with the cars in various spots on the road and I left it out every night, which was a mistake. I came out one morning and all were gone never to be seen again. That was a tough lesson and at least a minor tragedy. Christmas toys popular at the time were tinker toys a set of wooden sticks and round knobs with holes in them allowing the construction of numerous items. More costly was the metal erector sets that could also be assembled into various items that was put together with nuts and screws and was more expensive and I had tinker toys only. Another popular toy later on was the Lincoln Logs that one could build log cabins and other structures with. I did have a small electric train given to me by my Uncle Mandus after his son Jack, tragically died of a ruptured appendix. I also had chemistry sets a subject I was very interested in, and a microscope made in Japan. Japanese goods were very poorly made and children did not like to receive toys made in Japan although most trinkets and some toys came from there.

In the barn like garage there was a raised portion that we used as a stage sometimes for very amateurish skits. We also tried making cigarettes out of newspapers and cotton from the old car seats in the garage. They were of course, horrible, then we tried smoking the dried Catalpa tree seedpods and that wasn’t much better so we gave up. Later a neighbor boy fed us real cigarettes and I got very nauseated one time but it wasn’t a lifetime cure for the habit.

One thing I enjoyed was fire but not to the point of arson although the next action might make that statement questionable to some. Well my mother had some boards stored by the outhouse so this was fairly early in my career. We also had a wooden tub that usually sat under the pump spout and it had a little hose at the bottom so one could get water out of it by gravity flow. Now I put the tub in my little red wagon thus making a fire truck. Well what good is a fire truck without a fire to put out so I started a fire using some of the boards my mother was saving. All of a sudden she caught me and we put that fire out real quick and I may have got the paddle I don’t remember. She wasn’t upset that I had the matches but my misuse of them. A later trick that most boys including myself learned was to put a lit match in our mouth, which almost immediately went out when the mouth was closed. The wet mucous membranes in the mouth prevented the heat from doing any damage but one frequently got a very bad taste from the combustion products.

I wanted a bicycle in the mid-thirties but my father wouldn’t hear of it. His reasons were that it was against the law to ride on the sidewalk and if I rode in the street a car might hit me. My father worked for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for a while and then because of declining health he went to work for two of his brothers who were plasterers and always had work. Besides new houses there was always repair jobs as plaster often cracked or if it got wet would sometimes fall off of the wall leaving a very unsightly area. His job was that of hod carrier and included mixing all of the plaster (called mud). This was not a job for the weak as I later found out. The hod is a torture instrument made of a v-shaped wooden half-box open at one end. Centered and securely attached to the hod was a sturdy vertical pole about four feet long and the padded V was placed on the shoulder when filled with plaster using a hoe. It had a stand to hold it upright while being filled and I believe it weighed at least seventy-five pounds or more when loaded. My father got shorter and shorter of breath and had to quit all activities. I kept waiting and hoping for him to get better but to no avail. In May of 1936 my father died at the age of 63 at Ball Memorial Hospital of heart failure as a result of Rheumatic Fever when he was young. In those days the casket was displayed at home for a day or so before the funeral. It may have been an economy measure for poor people
but in any event an adult had to be in the room with the casket twenty-four hours a day. This is what some would call a wake but my family didn’t use term and I don’t think there was any drinking, as we weren’t Irish. My father left my mother and me five acres that was located on east 29th Street. The source was from work my father had done for someone and it is unfortunate that I didn’t get more details. In the 1920s he had worked for a landscaping company and that might have been the source of the land but that is just a guess. My mother sold her half in the 1940s and I sold my half in 1951.

In the summer after my father died my mother took me with her to visit friends around Elwood and Tipton, Indiana late in the summer vacation. The friends we were visiting did not have any children and I started to get very bored. In desperation I looked on the bookshelves, which had several books. I finally picked one up and started reading, which I had never done before on my own. The book was by Horatio Alger, a famous author of boys books that guarantied success in life if one was honest, industrious, and helped old ladies across the street occasionally. Alger wrote dozens of books in the 1800s and they were still popular in my time. A lot of his stories featured homeless bootblacks and newsboys in New York City. Some typical titles were “Sink or Swim”, “Rough and Ready”, “Do or Die”, and “Dirty Dick”. Anyway I immediately became a fan and read several of the many Alger books on the shelves. I was started on a career of a lot of reading from then on. I even started reading the newspaper and a doctor’s syndicated column was a favorite, after the funnies, which had Alley Oop, Lil Abner, Popeye, the Katzenjammer Kids, and some other favorites. I always had a tussle with Austin as the funnies were in the same section as the sports page.

The menu at the first home is memorable. We had fried chicken for breakfast, dinner, and supper and for more than one day. We visited some other friends of my mothers in the country and the menu was a little more varied with corn on the cob and delicious ripe tomatoes. Well the reason for so much chicken was because everybody had their own and it was the cheapest meat available. Anyway as I loved fried chicken so the diet suited me fine. We went home after a few days, as it was almost time for school to start. When we got home I looked in our bookcase for the first time and it was full of Alger books and I was overjoyed. I would lie around reading while eating three or four Winesaps before supper. The dime stores sold an item called “big little books” that had Tarzan, Kidnapped, Treasure Island, and other popular children stories of the time. These books were approximately two and a half inches by three and a half and over two inches thick hence the name.

The Christmas season was a time that several of my friends and I went downtown for window-shopping at various stores even though we couldn’t buy anything. The best store downtown for boys was Kirk’s Sporting Goods/Toy and Hobby Shop on Main Street. They had all kinds of electric trains, model airplanes, and boats, and many other things we would loved to have but couldn’t do anything but look. Sometimes in walking to town or west of town we walked down the railroad tracks but that isn’t recommended anymore.

Our next-door neighbor Jim Phillips had some rather unusual characteristics worth describing. His ritual when returning home from work at about 4:30 pm was that first his wife was required to already have the garage door open. As he came down the alley he would blow the horn, which was a signal for his wife to start putting the supper on the table and for his four sons and one daughter to be seated. When he came in the back door there was a sink just inside the entrance where he did a very quick wash up and then sat down to eat. Jim was a strong stocky man that was not afraid of fights, a frequent curser, and with a short temper. He was very proprietary about his property and kids that ran across his yard were immediately yelled at. When we first moved to the house on Ninth Street we had sidewalks but no curbs and gutters and the street was just a pothole filled dirt and gravel mess, very dusty in the summer. The front cover shows the street in the winter with snow. Sometime in the mid-1930s curbs and gutters were constructed and these were paid for by an assessment to each property owner with the payment spread out over a period of time. The assessment was pro-rated based on the width of the lot. So then we had curbs and gutters with a terrible street. Again Jim was very proprietary about this improvement in front of his house. One time a young man backed into his curb in turning around in the street. Jim came running out cussing a blue streak at the driver. The driver got out with a steel jack handle in his hand prepared to fight. Jim ran up to him and grabbed the jack handle before the man knew what was happening and Phil-
lips beat the man several times across his bottom and sent him on his way. He was helpful to my mother and friendly to me and took me fishing on weekends in later years. He had played farm professional baseball in his youth and he and his four boys were very sports oriented listening to every sports game and the Joe Louis fights of that era on the radio. Jim was always very busy most evenings and weekends that he didn’t go fishing, in his large garage working on fishing gear or his car, which was always a Pontiac. He was a good mechanic and built many things including a grilled ironwork fence for both his and my mother’s front yard all installed on a neat footing of concrete. He also built a concrete driveway between our two houses that facilitated the coal delivery. Austin and my father helped in this project. Jim was a welder and had worked at Delco Remy later switching to Ball Brothers and I don’t think he was ever out of work during the depression.

In fact in my neighborhood very few people were out of work and none of my relatives except my father and my brother Austin were out of work. I expect that many young people were out of work and eventually the Civilian Conservation Corps came into being and several young men in my neighborhood joined. Austin did some menial work passing out handbills and playing his Hawaiian guitar in a beer joint with his pay being all the beer he could drink. I think the beer joint was named “The Happy Home” and was on Hoyt Avenue a block or so south of Twelfth Street. This social enterprise had the unofficial name “Bloody Bucket” which might imply something about the character of the place. Later Austin got a job at Owens Corning Glass feeding the raw materials into the glass furnace and he was able to buy a Model A Ford. I remember that once on our way to Indianapolis we got up to a little over sixty mph.

During my childhood various land, water, and air speed records were being broken, as we hadn’t reached our limits as now seems to be the case. Numerous long distance flights were undertaken and some didn’t succeed. Wiley Post and Will Rogers unfortunately crashed. Amelia Earhart was also lost in the Pacific Ocean in an attempt to fly around the world. Various air races were held across the country and the super event of them all was the Cleveland National Air Races held from 1929 through 1949 with the exception of the war years. This event lasted for ten days and included pylon races, acrobatics, and some cross country events. In 1929 the Woman’s Air Derby was held and included Amelia Earhart, Pancho Barnes and other famous women pilots. All of the famous pilots of that era participated in the men’s races such as James Doolittle, Wiley Post, Roscoe Turner and other famous pilots of the time. In 1949 Bill Odom lost control of his P-51 and crashed into a home, killing himself and two people inside. This pretty much stopped the air races and in 1964 they resumed in the Reno, Nevada area and were named the Reno National Championship Air Races.

New land speed records were also periodically being set at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah and similarly new speed records occurred with speedboats. It was an exciting time to be even a remote spectator of these events.
Chapter 4: Muncie in the 1930s

Muncie in the 1930s was segregated when it came to housing. Blacks could not live on the west side of town. The dividing line running north and south was Walnut Street. The schools were not segregated and I went to junior and senior high school with blacks although the numbers were very low. There didn’t seem to be much if any local dissension although the Klu Klux Klan was known to be somewhat strong in Muncie. There was a cross burning in my neighborhood one night. Since there were no blacks in that part of town it was a mystery at least to me as to why it was done. Maybe it was a training session for local Klansmen or directed against a catholic family.

As with every town there was a pecking order of residential areas. I would say the absolute bottom in Muncie was the region called Shed Town. This was the area south of Twelfth Street running from Hoyt Avenue west to the city limits. Muncie from sometime in the latter part of the 1800s on had lots of industry startups and initially several glass plants came to the area because of a short-lived gas field in the region. Major among these companies was Ball Brothers a family owned business for some ninety years located on east Twelfth Street. They were producers of the Mason fruit jar and many other glass containers, tops, and seals. At times the company had several thousand employees. Up through World War II home canning was a very popular way of storing foodstuffs before frozen foods became the norm. The early years of the depression were tough on the company’s sales but the ending of prohibition in 1933 opened up a whole new market (whiskey bottles) and the approach of the war also boosted sales. Muncie also had many other industries several that were related to automobile parts production and these generally paid better than the glass companies.

After the gas find in the area in the late 1800s not only companies but also hopeful workers moved to Muncie and as a result there was a big shortage of housing. Many of these early newcomers built sheds to live in out of cast off boxes and other materials south of Twelfth Street and that area became known as Shed Town.

Later and because of the job environment, Muncie became a Mecca for men from Kentucky and Tennessee seeking work because the south didn’t have much industry. Generally they couldn’t get work in the better paying industries so they worked in the glass industry and many of them settled in Shed Town. As with all new and strange immigrants much prejudice prevailed. The words Kentuckian and Tennessean struck unease in my thoughts when I heard them as I did many times in many adult conversations. The usual collective term for these people was “hillbilly” and country music was hillbilly music. Many jokes were made concerning them like taking the toilet seats off and using them as picture frames for the grandfather, grandmother picture. They were also accused of bragging about the fresh water spring they had in their house activated by a little lever. Another joke was that the first train station in Muncie for trains from the south was at the Ball Brothers factory. Well they did rent large houses and then move in many people and sometimes bought big older Cadillacs. Of course, the prejudices stemmed from the usual reasons, fear of job loss and they just didn’t fit. There was also some prejudice against foreign immigrants and I frequently heard the term “bohunk” a derogatory term derived from Bohemian plus Hungarian.

Now Shed Town had a bad reputation and we never got closer than the borders, which was sometimes unavoidable. The part of town I lived in was called Avondale and it was also pretty low on the pecking order. We bordered on Shed Town and had working class people mostly in the automotive industries so that put us little a bit above the Shed Town residents. We had very few Kentuckians or Tennesseans and no bohunks to my knowledge in Avondale. Even lower on the housing pecking order was a section of town called Industry. This was on the eastern side of Walnut Street and so had many blacks making it an even less desirable place to live at that time. It had reverse discrimination as I learned from my mother. Her family had lived in Industry during her first marriage for a while and my two brothers and sister lived and went to school there during that time. According to my mother blacks attacked my brothers or chased them home almost daily. Despite this Don had a little black girlfriend. He wanted to bring her home several times but our mother did not allow this. My mother said the little girl was uglier than a mud fence. Despite this partial prejudice my mother helped black neighbors and didn’t pass prejudices on to her children. She was simply a product of her time.
The top of the housing pecking order was Westwood (established in 1923), which was in the area close to the college, and it did have many beautiful homes. My sister lived on Martin Avenue just off of University Avenue and that was fairly upscale and I was there many times but still don’t know what that area was called. I mowed her yard in the summer for fifty cents and cleaned clinkers out of the furnace every Saturday in the winter. I don’t remember much about the other named areas of Muncie but I have covered the ones I am familiar with.

Muncie was heavily industrialized initially because of the short lived gas boom and later carried this impetus on to become one of the most industrialized cities in Indiana for it’s size. Besides Ball Brothers, Owens Corning had a plant in Muncie that made telephone line glass insulators and glass brick that allowed much light in but no visual path and was much in vogue at that time. Later they lost their popularity but now are again used sometimes.

The real industry in Muncie was that pertaining to automobiles. The Chevrolet transmission plant on west Eighth Street made GM transmissions, which required many precise gears, shafts, and housings. They also made crankshafts on a big drop forge and then machined them to the final product. I was sung to sleep many nights by the sweet tune of that drop forge banging away for it almost never stopped. A few blocks away was the Delco Remy plant that along with one other plant in America made all of the General Motors car and truck batteries and caused some lead poisoning situations until the problem was better understood. West of Muncie a couple of miles on highway 32 was the Warner Gear plant with up to 5,000 employees and they also made transmissions free lance. If they could underbid a Ford, GM, or other car manufacturer price from their transmission divisions, they got the work.

Besides these plants there were several others that made sundry parts involving all kinds of stamped auto, metal furniture, and other industry parts. In the metal-stamping factories most people worked on a basis called piecework i.e. not paid hourly but based on the number of pieces completed by that worker on his shift. This system engendered the maximum speed of the worker to increase his pay and anything impeding that was circumvented if possible. Metal stamping and cutting involved the need for lots of power or force. Now the worker had to insert each piece to be cut or formed between a tool and die and then activate the machine. Well of course the worker found that if he inserted the piece with one hand and activated the machine with the other just a little earlier than was possible otherwise he could increase his piece output and thus make a little more money each day. This resulted in many lost fingers or hands. The industrial engineers then came up with wristbands attached to lines that pulled the workers hands out of harms way. Well the workers circumvented that by disconnecting the machine ends of the lines but attaching them in such a way that they looked right but bypassed their function. It was common when I was young to see both men and women missing a finger or more including the whole hand and everybody knew why. I think the unions were finally able to get piecework terminated and replaced with hourly pay for all jobs. Accidents still happened but with much less frequency and the problem wasn’t completely solved until the advent of light beams. In today’s industrial environment humans are not in the loop at all for these readily automated tasks.

The elite industry was the many tool and die shops needed to support all of the major industries as well as the many sheet metal stamping factories. A tool and die maker was a highly trained machinist such that only a select few were able to achieve that skill and title. Largest of the tool and die shops was (and still exists) Delaware Tool and Die on south Walnut Street. Now tool and die makers are no longer needed, engineers sitting at computers tell the machines what to do and most of the machining is electrical in a process that I don’t understand. In addition Muncie had several foundries and of course, many supporting pattern makers a big skill on it’s own merit. We also had a steel wire factory and a nickel plate factory.

Other industry in Muncie was a locomotive shop with a roundtable. A roundtable is used to turn locomotives around and is like a bridge with tracks on it in a round pit. The bridge is on a shaft at the center that sits on a thrust bearing and so can rotate. The purpose of this rig is to run an engine onto it and then rotate the locomotive until it is lined up with another track going in the new desired direction. In the case of round house shops one set of tracks come in and several sets go out heading to different work areas in the roundhouse or outside. When the engine leaves it can be turned the 180 degrees or so to send it back.
out headed in the right direction. Since locomotives have such a large turning radius it would be very difficult to do this by switching around any other way.

Muncie had several nice parks such as Rose, Heekein, and McCulloch Park. We also had some good swimming facilities. One was Phillips Lake, which was at the site of an earlier stone quarry. Now since this was all quite deep with straight down drop offs at the sides this was overcome by making several floating pools on the deep pool. This was accomplished by building wooden pools of various depths (children versus adult pools with some diving boards and slides) and they were kept floating with water-tight drums strategically located. Now the wooden pools weren’t solid but consisted of boards attached to a sturdy framework and the boards had uniform spaces between them so any water level changes or currents had no effect on the total system. I remember it was a little disconcerting walking on the bottoms because of the space between the boards. Later Muncie had another more conventional pool called Tuheys, which is now called Tuhey Park, and I think it is in the same location. I learned to swim at this pool.

Some people chose to swim in gravel pits around the area and drowning was periodically reported as a result of this dangerous practice especially if you couldn’t swim as the sides dropped off very steeply. My only experience with gravel pits turned out badly but not for the same reason. As a teenager a friend of mine and myself rode our bicycles with our fishing gear to a gravel pit to fish for our first time without adults. We had very good luck and both of us caught beautiful strings of bluegills, a delicious pan fish. Well on the way home an older boy stopped us and said it was out of season for those fish and we would be in big trouble if we got caught with them. He had some kind of solution that if we turned the fish over to him he would solve our problem. We were both very anxious at that stage to get rid of those fish as soon as possible and we happily turned the fish over to this Good Samaritan. Of course he was a con artist as we found out later that blue gills weren’t game fish. My mother would have loved those fish. I don’t think we revealed this incident to anybody.

Muncie had a Boy Scout camp by the name of Camp Redwing, which I attended two or three times and one occasion was in the winter for a weekend campout and we stayed in a cabin that was quite loose and we were very cold. Camp Redwing was named for Princess Redwing who was supposedly an Indian maiden in love with an Indian warrior and he was killed in battle. The lyrics to the song Redwing are readily available on the Internet. Anyway the scout camp legend was that a Chief Laughing Eagle was buried astride his horse somewhere in the camp.

The scout troop I was in was sponsored by the Optimist Club and we could earn half of the cost for one week at camp by doing some work for a club member, the task and magnitude to be decided by him. My sponsor was a lawyer that had a small farm south of Muncie on highway 3. He showed me a large eight-foot high pile of brush and handed me a hatchet and my task was to turn the brush pile into kindling while sitting in the hot sun. I had a stump to sit on and a stove length piece of firewood to chop on. This went on for two or three days and then I had enough and so told the lawyer. He paid the half anyway. At Camp Redwing that summer one scout at our table was only known as Turkey. His atrocious habit was that when the first plate of bread was brought to the table he grabbed most of the stack and stuck it in his shirt and this also happened with other items sometimes but always the bread went in his shirt. I have no idea what he did with it. Was it an artifact of a hungry family during the depression? Maybe he took it all home. Sometime after the mid-point the adult head scout leader made a talk to us with what purpose I don’t know. During the talk he mentioned that he had noticed one scout picking up all the bread at his table starting the first day. Why he didn’t put a stop to it immediately is still a mystery to me but it certainly wasn’t leadership.

We could swim in the river but it was quite cold as it was continuously moving and the banks had trees that shaded much of the spring fed river. There weren’t any boats; I don’t know how we kept occupied. Since it was only seven miles home I packed up a couple of days early and walked home. Turkey provided the only memories I have of the Boy Scout summer camp other than Donald Yarger complaining that the gravy was made with buttermilk and he couldn’t stand it.

My very favorite industry was at the intersection of Hoyt Avenue and Cornbread Road. This was a large stone quarry and kids had the free run of it even on blast days. We would ride bicycles to the bottom down a fairly steep winding road, which was fun in itself. We could then pretend to
be mountain climbers ascending the vertical limestone sides. Also there were large stockpiles of crushed limestone along the inside of the quarry. These were fun to take running leaps from the top and then making a sliding landing partway down. My uncle Wally was a dynamiter at the quarry, a profession much looked up to by my associates and me. I avoided him on my visits to the quarry leery of what the consequences might be but I bragged about his job to my friends.

Some time in the 40s after my trips to the stone quarry had ended a tragedy occurred there. Couples were driving cars down to the bottom of the quarry and using the area as a lover’s lane. Some boys started putting several concrete blocks across the road partway up to cause a problem for exiting cars. The police got involved and one night a trigger-happy policeman shot a fifteen-year-old boy killing him.

Two or three blocks southwest of my home on Twelfth Street was a residence called the Pest House an apparent derogatory name but it is a short title for House of Pestilence. These were common in earlier times and were used to quarantine people voluntarily or forcefully that had selected communicable diseases such as small pox.

Another county facility was called the Poor Farm and was east of Muncie two or three miles. Here were housed the elderly that did not have any other means of support and some who did. Most elderly in those days were housed and cared for by their children but sometimes that wasn’t available. My father’s sister Kate Hall, my aunt was a cook there. Some lived there free and others who could were required to pay a monthly amount themselves or by relatives. Those who paid lived at one end of the housing portion and the ones who couldn’t pay were at the other end but there was no difference in the quality between the two. The facility stayed in operation until into the late 1970s. My uncle Wally Sanders was there from 1970 until he died in 1974. My cousin Vera one of Wally’s two daughters paid one hundred dollars per month for his residence. There were workers who also stayed at the facility including my aunt Kate and the land belonging to the poor farm was farmed providing some food and income a little different from today’s elderly care facilities. This information comes from Vera who is still alive at the age of 94 and she currently lives by herself on Ethel Avenue in Muncie. Both Pest Houses and Poor Farms were common throughout America (and other countries) into the 1900s. You see in those days people called things what they really were and didn’t hide them with euphemisms. The care was as good as could be provided for the times and that is all one can expect today.

There was also a county operated orphans home on the west side of Muncie on highway 32. This was for both orphans and children from broken or abusive homes. These children were all bussed to various schools around Muncie.

The Sanders family lived on Twelfth Street a few blocks west of Walnut Street. This was next door to my grandparent’s house and across the street from my uncle Dan and his family. A few doors away lived a widower with his seven children and he beat up some or all of the children frequently. This treatment made Wally Sanders very mad and he filed a complaint against the man a potentially dangerous thing to do. When the case come up in court at the imposing Delaware County Court House Wally went down taking his two daughters with him for educational purposes. The case was conducted by a judge similar to today. To hear the evidence against the man the judge asked Wally to tell what he knew. Wally responded with “That son of a bitch was beating them kids to death”. The judge was a little upset with Wally’s response and told him his language was inappropriate for the court. By this time Wally was really steamed up and he responded: “I don’t give a god damn, that son of a bitch was killing them kids”. This was probably Wally’s first and last time in court but anyway the man’s kids were taken away from him and placed in the orphans home previously mentioned. Wally got out without a contempt of court citation and when he got home he denied doing any of the cussing but eventually he owned up to everything. Wally and my father were the two champion cussers in the family. Their cussing was strictly traditional; there were no f-words, and no mother-words; in other words cussing without being vulgar. These men weren’t violent or angry in general, it was just second nature for them probably inherited from their fathers as I inherited from mine.

Downtown Muncie was the location for our few department stores, drug stores, at least two five and ten-cent stores, law offices, and three or four movie theatres. These hovered around Walnut Street,
which ran north and south. The city buses also congregated on a street that crossed Walnut Street so passengers knew where to catch any bus and could transfer to another bus from the one they arrived on.

My only connection with the department stores was before school started in the fall when my mother dragged me down there for more bib-overalls. Fascinating was their pneumatic system for handling transactions. Throughout the store was a network of hollow transparent tubing about three inches in diameter if not more and all seemed to lead upstairs to a central location. After your purchase your cash along with the bill was placed in a short cylinder (similar to some drive in bank systems) and then put into the tube system whence it shot off to its destination. After a short wait it came back with the bill and customer change. I guess they had a single cashier or more when needed that handled all of these transactions and so all of the money was in one location instead of being scattered throughout the store.

The five and ten cents stores and the drugstores all had soda fountains where you could buy a hot-dog and a Hires root beer for ten cents or sundaes and milk shakes again ten cents. They also had a big candy counter with bulk candy. My favorite was milk chocolate, which I usually bought some of if I had ten cents left. Another counter had small container plants where I once bought a tiny English Ivy for my mother. The elite store downtown was Ball Stores a large and so very fancy that I almost never went in.

Close to downtown was the electric power station and early on the prime movers were large reciprocating steam engines. The facility had large windows on one side through which one could watch all of the machinery in operation. Fascinating for a kid. This station was, of course, later replaced with a power plant with steam turbines in a different location.

The Rivoli Theater, which opened with vaudeville acts in 1927, was the elite movie house in town but wasn’t attended by my crowd very often, as it didn’t have our fare and no double features. There were several other theaters and I think we usually went to the Wysor which had mostly westerns, double features, and Saturday serials that ran for several weeks. Saturday morning was special for kids and some of the theaters had extensive programs and little gifts around Christmas. The parks had free movies outside during the summer every Thursday night.

Another early evening entertainment in the summer was watching the factory teams play baseball, which was switched to softball at some time in the early 1930s. Each plant had one or more teams that played in a factory league. There was a factory called Acme Lee Company, manufacturer of metal parts for stoves and refrigerators that were starting to become popular in the 1930s over on Eighth Street just a block from my house and they had a playing field as most of the factories did. One evening during play while baseball was still the game my next door neighbor Tom Phillips a couple of years older than me was standing behind first base and he got hit by a baseball missed by the first baseman. He was permanently blinded in one eye. Several times this company was on strike by the AFL-CIO workers with extensive picket lines. It was another form of mild entertainment for the neighborhood.

I would like to describe in generalities the little elements that picture the Muncie that I remember from those days that are so different from today. These are little things but their total makes a whole historical sum. First are the sounds; the factory whistles denoting shift changes; the train whistles from the fast trains coming into town and the different tune played by the numerous switch engines around the switch yards; and on Sunday morning every real church bell in town being rung by hand pulled ropes calling people to church although not all heard. And I can’t forget the ever-present drop forge on Eighth Street at the Chevrolet Transmission plant hammering away twenty-four hours a day. Since there was not any air conditioning or TV, in the summer many people were on their porches and the kids were in the streets playing until called home, the sounds were heard. Nothing today compares to the old steam-train whistles, they were the real music to me.

And now the visual impressions, in front of everyone but seen by few, because we didn’t know anything else. Most of the houses were wood frame except for the expensive homes in Westwood. Besides the cost of repainting during the depression it also was not a high priority to repaint wood frame houses in those days. Consequently in general most houses had faded, chipped, and peeling paint and there was some additional discoloration from the many coal fired stoves and furnaces. The general impression was somewhat dismal but nobody noticed because that was the norm.
Automobiles were not any better appearing and many cars had some impact damage to bumpers, fenders, and lights. Only new cars were insured and there weren’t many of those. Damage that didn’t affect the cars primary functions was ignored because it would be a waste of money to make unnecessary repairs. There wasn’t any such thing as car inspections at that time. The annual death toll in this period of far fewer cars was usually over 35,000 per year, which included some that tried to beat the seventy mph plus trains and interurbans to the many unguarded crossings. During this time period and up until the war one could buy Model-T Fords and similar vintage cars for from ten to thirty-five dollars.

One occasionally saw a car with lots of steam coming from under the hood. To protect car engines from freezing and bursting the radiator or block, most people depended on draining the water from the engine and radiator before a cold spell instead of spending money on alcohol which didn’t last long or the more expensive permanent anti-freeze. This was an unpleasant task that required the opening of a valve for the radiator and another for the engine block that were not in convenient locations and usually required lying on the ground. The process then had to be reversed the following cold morning and water added to the radiator and block and the whole procedure might have to be repeated many times every winter. As a result some people got caught with their anti-freeze down and despite numerous home remedies had a sometimes-steaming car. My brother Austin had a friend that had a car with a broken block that held no water and in cooler weather he could drive it across town without burning anything up because it took some time for the mass of a cast iron block to get hot and by that time he was at work or home. This was the good old days people talk about who weren’t there or if they were there their memory has gone bad. Now not all was bad, as I have related several places in this book but today, with all of its deficiencies, is better.
Chapter 5: Travel

When I was very small there was an old touring car in our more barn than garage. I saw my father try to crank it a couple of times to no avail and then it disappeared forever. In the early 1930s my sister got married to William White a successful mill supply salesman for eastern Indiana and they lived at 517 North Martin Avenue. His traveling was all by car and he bought a new Buick every year. According to him he never drove our highways at any speed below 90 mph and this was verified on one trip we took with him to Cincinnati, Ohio. This was legal in those days as the Indiana highway speed limit was “what was safe and prudent” and wasn’t changed until the 1940s. Of course if you did something that wasn’t safe and prudent you could get a ticket for reckless driving which was more serious. All of our highways at that time were two lane until later there was a stretch of highway 67 towards Indianapolis that was three lane resulting in many head on collisions.

Anyway my sister Garnet had access to the car almost every weekend and was a good driver. To my knowledge neither she nor her husband ever dented a fender. This is how we got out after apples, nuts, country eggs, and many other things. I remember riding in the car along rolling country roads and because of the soft springs and compliant shock absorbers the car rolled longitudinally like a motorboat in a rolling sea. The manufactures goal was for an extremely soft ride without much consideration for stability. The Buick had a straight eight engine and most of the cars except Ford were straight sixes or eights. The Fords after 1932 were V-8s producing either sixty-five or eighty-five horsepower.

Also after the marriage my mother had a little more money, which she worked dearly for. Bill White wore a fresh white shirt each day and my mother washed all of those and the rest of that families sheets, dresses, etc. which included starching and ironing everything all finished by Tuesday night of each week.

My grandmother Krichbaum lived in a hollow in Morgan County eight miles northwest of Martinsville, Indiana and one mile east of Wilbur. In the very early days there was no improved road from highway 37 to my grandmother’s home a distance of around two miles and there were only one or two other houses in the area. The trail was partly lane and partly followed a creek (branch locally) that had a solid shale bottom, as there was a lot of that stratified material in the area. Now everything was fine but if you happened to arrive during or after a big rainstorm the creek rose rapidly and one had to wait for the water to recede before proceeding.

The new house constructed by my uncle Mandus was built back into a hillside such that you could go out the backdoor on the second floor and be at ground level. This resulted in a room off the kitchen being a basement and so was excellent for food storage. Once or twice a copperhead snake invaded this room. The other underground room was my grandmother’s bedroom. The house exterior was made of smooth cobblestones and was very attractive. There was not any electricity, or running water, and the toilet was an outhouse. Lighting was by kerosene lamps and the necessary radio for my grandmother was powered by batteries. Attempts were made by my uncle to provide electrical power with a windmill (yes, we had such things even then) that charged thirty-two-volt batteries. This had only limited success partly because the wind was frequently blocked by the surrounding hills. The new house was a vast improvement over its predecessor and was still looking good in 2008.

Water for everything but drinking was supplied from a pump in the kitchen and the source was from a cistern that collected rainwater from the roof. This water sometimes had mosquito larvae (called wrigglers) in it. If I came in real thirsty and the drinking water container was empty I drank from this source. The drinking water came from a spring running out from under shale at the side and bottom of a hill several yards from the house. My uncle had made a neat collection basin out of concrete so that the water could be readily dipped out and this water was always crystal clear and quite cold.

On the few occasions that my father came with us he consistently refused to drink the spring water. His objection was that he might swallow some snake eggs that would then hatch in his stomach. Sometimes I perceived him to be a little old-fashioned as children are often inclined to do regarding their parents. He never voiced any objections to my mother and me drinking the water.
In those earlier days there was always a cow and several chickens around so we had fresh eggs most mornings cooked on a wood stove. The cow had a cow bell attached to her collar and as she roamed freely through the woods and fields it was easy to locate her at milking time from the nice sounds of the bell. Homemade bread was toasted on a wide narrow door across the front of the stove exposing the bread to the hot coals. I liked the crumbly homemade bread and loved my grandmother’s sticky buns. I would give a few dollars for a slice of that yeasty tasting bread now. Everything was made from scratch, of course.

In the 1930s everybody had access to all kinds of dangerous and loud fireworks and when very young I was terrified by firecrackers, which couldn’t be avoided, in my neighborhood. Because of this my mother took me for a week covering the Fourth of July every year. Later my phobia disappeared but we still went for a week every summer and sometimes at other times. We got there by various means such as taking the interurban or bus to Indianapolis where we would be picked up by my uncle Mandus and taken to my grandmothers on his weekly visit to take her supplies and perform any needed chores. I always enjoyed these vacations, as there was much to do even though the region was very isolated. Actually that was part of the attraction, as I seem to have always been at least in part a loner.

I would build dams in the creek using slabs of slate for the spillways. Occasionally my uncle would pan for gold in the creek and he always came up with a few flakes. For years I had a small medicine bottle filled with water and containing several gold flakes. This finally got broken and the gold was lost. It was said locally that diligent prospectors could accumulate an ounce per week, which at that time sold for $35.00 per ounce and didn’t fluctuate. That is because we were on the gold standard and the government set the price. Of course the prospector got a little less as the intermediaries had to make a little money also.

One summer when I was quite young, probably only four or five, Mandus, my two brothers, and I were walking through the woods I think looking for firewood for my grandmother’s wood stoves. I was barefoot and suddenly while we were stopped I felt something cool on my foot and instead of jumping, the natural reaction, I stood still and touched Don’s arm and pointed down to the snake. He then held me by my shoulders until the snake crawled off my foot and then put me up in a little tree while they killed the snake. It was a copperhead, which is not too lethal, but it would have been inconvenient if I had been bitten to say the least. To this day I don’t understand why I stayed still instead of jumping except maybe I was too young to react and yet I directed Don’s attention to the snake. I don’t remember having the slightest fear. There were a lot of copperhead snakes in that area and one time one was crawling up the front door screen. Now my mother was as determined to kill a snake as she was the occasional cockroach. If she saw a snake at my grandmother’s she was fast after it turning over boards and rocks until she found the snake which she promptly chopped up with a hoe whether it was poisonous or not; it was a snake.

My grandfather died in 1933 and so I don’t remember much about him. He had been a glass blower in one of the glass factories around Elwood, Indiana then with his wife had a restaurant in Middletown, Indiana. When my grandmother was asked about where she came from she said she was Pennsylvania Dutch (an archaic term for Germans).

They then moved to the forty-acre hilly place currently described. My grandfather made a little money sharpening saws and making wheel spokes, handles, and shingles on a bench he built. One sat on a sturdy wooden member that had a foot operated clamp for holding down spokes or shingles clamped down in front of you by force from your feet through a wooden linkage to the clamp. You could then pull a drawknife to you and shape the spoke or other piece of wood as required. I only remember my grandfather taking me once to a little country store probably in Wilber. There he bought me a bottle of pop, which was our soft drink term in those days.

The house had a nice fireplace built out of the same kind of rocks used on the exterior. When a little older I was the tender of the fire and even built little fires on cool summer evenings. There was a beautiful old clock on the mantle and it ran down occasionally and might be left in that condition for several days. One evening when nobody was in the room I got the bright idea of starting the clock by a little nudge of the pendulum. My grandmother was very superstitious and when she came back into the room shortly she immediately noticed the running clock. Well her belief (and all of her beliefs were very strong)
was that when a clock started up by itself somebody was going to die soon. She was so agitated that I soon admitted to starting the clock.

She liked to tell spooky stories. In her younger days they had corduroy roads across swampy areas which is made up by cutting many small logs or poles into road width lengths and placing them cross wise on the road which prevented the buggies and wagons from sinking into the mud. She told of many times seeing snakes sticking their heads up between the logs. Another favorite was that of a neighbor who threatened to kill his wife and several kids. The woman and children left for overnight and when they later returned they found axe cuts in all of the beds. My grandmother was born in 1862 and she died in 1961.

My brother Don was the adventurer and traveler in the family. At sixteen he hitchhiked to Cincinnati, Ohio. He was picked up by the police and returned to Muncie but I don’t remember by what transportation means. At eighteen with my mother’s permission he hitchhiked to Kittery, Maine to visit an uncle there. I expect the visit was not his main priority. He started out with a $1.50 and returned with a $1.75. When asked if he missed many meals he replied “no but some of them were pretty far apart”. Early in the depression he worked delivering newspapers and selling magazines. Around 1932 he hitchhiked to Chicago, Illinois and got a job with a German born dentist as his assistant. One of his duties was to give his boss a shot of morphine when asked. He decided that environment was a little dangerous so he got a job as a bellhop in one of the large hotels. Because of his outgoing personality he did quite well in tips. Don hitchhiked back and forth between Chicago and Muncie for visits. When Don left I would accompany him over to highway 32 his starting point. When Don hitchhiked he was always dressed up in a suit and tie and topcoat if it was cold and I’m sure this approach helped him get rides. I almost always cried at his departure.

Don did so well in Chicago that in 1934 at age twenty-one or two he paid all expenses for my parents and me to travel to Chicago, and to see the worlds fair, and a lot of Chicago. We went by bus and my parents sat together and I sat in another seat. Towards the end of the trip as we were crossing south Chicago I had a schoolteacher sitting next to me. The route was through the University of Chicago campus and the teacher was happily pointing out the names and functions of the various buildings. They were very attractive but I got distracted by a bunch of students playing lacrosse, which I had never seen before. All of a sudden she pinched my arm vigorously and said “pay attention you won’t get a chance to see these buildings again”. She was wrong about that but I paid attention.

In addition to the travel expenses there were living expenses for both sleeping and eating. The first thing that struck me with interest was the cabriolet type limozines with the chauffeur uncovered and the occupants under the top. The fair was fascinating and I saw so many new things. We went to a promenade area by a beautiful man made lake. Chris craft speedboats were flitting here and there and I would have loved to go in one but that was too expensive. We went to or through a lavish beer hall nearby and for the first time ever I saw women drinking beer from large mugs and smoking cigarettes. Well at that time Chicago had a very large number of European immigrants and descendents and this was just a way of life for them.

Sally Rand was a featured fan dancer at the fair and, of course, we didn’t attend any of her shows but my mother had to frequently drag me away from show windows with Rand’s various dance pose pictures on display.

My brother wanted to take us to a Chinese restaurant at the fair and, of course, we didn’t attend any of her shows but my mother had to frequently drag me away from show windows with Rand’s various dance pose pictures on display.

Next of great interest but not necessarily in the order seen was lots of sightseeing around Chicago hosted by a friend of Don’s that had a car and knew the city extremely well. The Maxwell Street Market
was the land of junk of all descriptions carried in on two wheel carts and set up in a hubbub of confusions. I remember for example a broken commode for sale.

At that time Chicago was made up of many European immigrants and their first generation descendants. German, Polish, Czechoslovakian, Irish, and Italian, to name a few had their own neighborhoods with street signs in their respective languages and newspapers the same. Of course, their native foods were also well represented in the restaurants and markets.

We went to the Fields Museum and again my mother had to pull me away from some of the very graphic little statues. Close by was the Chicago Aquarium with it’s many exhibits of marine life. We also went to a zoo and each of these great exhibits was very interesting especially to a young boy but my mother enjoyed all of this very much also. Another place we went to was the Marshal Fields Department store at that time reportedly the largest department store and biggest building in the world. The merchandise that impressed me the most was the glass and crystal displays as it covered such a large area and was very impressive.

We also went to the stockyards and that was really was an interesting operation. The beef steers were hit in the head with a sledgehammer and then hung by their two back legs and raised to an overhead track and they started their disassembly trip through the plant. It was just like an automobile assembly line in reverse as they went along they were first skinned, and then innards were removed but not discarded. On down the line the ribs and various cuts of meat were removed until nothing was left. The hog line was very similar except the hog was killed with a sharp knife that was used to cut his throat. I expect this was done for the same reason that my mother used a similar technique on the chickens. We were also shown the ham and bacon curing rooms. This was all very interesting but the one thing that stood out during the whole tour was the odor, which is, of course, understandable.

Well finally all of these interesting events came to an end and my mother and I got on a bus and went back home. I had much to talk and brag about for several days. Chicago was very noisy and the first thing I noticed after going to bed that first night was how quiet it was even with my friendly drop forge and the occasional steam train whistles from the switching yards or a fast passenger train approaching the west side of Muncie.

Since this chapter is about my early trips I will skip on to 1938. By this time Don was back home and giving my mother ten dollars a week for room and board. He was working for one of the tire stores as a salesman and making good money. He had purchased a new 1938 Terreplane Hudson car. He planned a family trip for us over the July 4th weekend. This was to include my mother, sister Garnet, a personal friend of Don’s, and myself. The trip was to be to Washington, DC some 600 miles from Muncie and we would be gone just three days. Now whether Don knew it or not this was also the time for an International Boy Scout Jamboree. Notice international not just national. Well we left after work on a Friday driving all night and eating breakfast in Gallipolis, Ohio. Garnet was appalled when I ordered a hamburger but I had never had one in a restaurant before and that’s what I got. Leaving there we got on into West Virginia and having never seen mountains before I was anxious to see some and we got them. Across the valleys the low wind blown clouds partly covered the ridges and I was happy with my first mountains. We also went along many river towns that were practically one street towns because of the steep hills on each side of the river. There were many coal tipples everywhere in West Virginia and many of them were small looking like they were probably one man or family operations. As we again got into the mountains there were many hairpin turns just one after another and all roads in those days were two lane with a very few exceptions none of which appeared on this trip. As the day progressed we crossed the beautiful Shenandoah Valley and later in the day we toured the Massanutten Caverns close to Keezletown, Virginia. This was my first cave tour and I was very impressed. From the caverns we proceeded to the Skyline Drive and on to Washington arriving around midnight. Now with no reservations and the city filled to the brim Don managed to find beds for all of us. We were out early the next Morning (Sunday) to start an intensive day of sightseeing. We saw the massive Boy Scout encampments all along the mall and in other vacant spots. Many foreign flags were flying representing the various countries in the numerous campgrounds. We toured by all of the more important monuments, why go in, the exterior is the important part. Don drove to the front entrance of the Smithsonian (parking was out of the question) and for my benefit sent me in with
the following instructions. Go in and see the Spirit of St. Louis close to the entrance and then see the replica of the Wright Brother’s first airplane (the original was in a British Museum but later came to the Smithsonian) and then come back out. I am going around the block and you need to be outside when I get back and I was on time. I’m sure these two exhibits were at the top of Don’s priority list but they also were of probably the most interest to me on the short tour. We went to Mt. Vernon and took time for the full tour. Later we went to Baltimore, Maryland and all of us were fascinated by the long streets of narrow flats with marble steps in front of each one.

From Baltimore we took the short trip to Annapolis, Maryland home of the United States Naval Academy. We went to the Navy Base and toured a navy cutter or destroyer. As My Uncle Mandus had been in the navy in World War I, I was always very interested with anything navy so enjoyed these sights. We also had a nice seafood meal on the waterfront with its saltwater smells.

We started for home that evening and got back to Muncie sometime Monday. I expect that part of the reason my brother included his friend was also to have an alternate driver. Despite a little hurry here and there it was a fabulous trip that made maximum use of a minimum amount of time and budget. At the age of twenty-five Don demonstrated his expertise at travel, which continued throughout his life.

Don also took us and one or two of his friends on other trips around Indiana such as to Brown County at the right time and to some of our state parks. Brown County had Nashville as it’s county seat and had a very small jail that reportedly was only used one night. The nearby village names such as Knawbone and Bean Blossom intrigued us. He also took us several times to my grandmother’s in Morgan County and sometimes we went through Mooresville. I usually asked where Dillenger lived but nobody in the car knew. I found out later that he hadn’t lived in town but on a farm close by. On one of the trips to my grandmothers Don got in a race with a fellow in a Ford V-8 and at around one hundred mph we beat the other car. The first thing people asked when a new car was purchased was how fast will it go? Everybody wanted a car that would go at least a hundred mph and get twenty mpg not at the same time, of course, that would be expecting too much.
Chapter 6: Junior High School

Late in the summer vacation after I got out of grade school my mother let me buy a bicycle. With my thirteen dollars from the bank and another seven dollars, which I had earned, we bought a used bike for twenty dollars. Now you could buy a new Sears’s bike for twenty-five dollars but this one was special. It had chrome plated twin headlights on the handlebars with neat battery holders attached to the frame member between the front post and the seat. It also had a taillight that even activated when the brakes were applied. A radio was also neatly installed on the handlebars but it was five dollars more so we didn’t take it. From then on until 1943 that was my primary mode of transportation for recreation, school, and running errands and it ended up being used by me after that. Well in the first week after getting the bike and while out riding with friends a rider on my right side suddenly pulled over into me and his pedal took out seven spokes in the front wheel. Now it takes an expert to install and realign a wheel after such a disaster but we didn’t have money for that so I and some other locals did it and I had a quite crooked front wheel for a long time. It didn’t have much effect on the bicycle other than a little wobble and loss of some pride in my bike. Top speed with those bikes was twenty to a maximum of thirty mph downhill. I got a little shimmy at the higher speeds. I didn’t have a chain guard for quite a while so rolled my pants up a couple of rolls summer and winter in place of wearing metal clips that I thought were too icky looking. Before school started another friend and myself decided to ride double on my bike to swim in a pond at friends of my mother close to Daleville. Now part of the way was a gravel road and riding double on gravel was a little tough. The round trip distance was twenty-two miles, which we made fine. All of our county roads at that time were constructed of gravel.

First I will describe the standard characteristics of bicycles in my youth. They were what were described as balloon tired as they had two and one-half-inch tires with a normal tire pressure of twenty to twenty-two psi. Compared to today’s high-pressure slender tires the rolling resistance was somewhat higher. Also we did not have any gear change capability. There was a three speed available later on that cost quite a bit more. On steep hills we traversed back and forth across the road to get to the top. We never stooped to pushing the bike up steep hills.

The bicycles had what was called coaster brakes in the back wheel hub. In my bike I had the New Departure brake, one of the more popular brands, which consisted of around forty parts. The basic design was that several disks were keyed to the wheel hub and in between them was another set of discs that were keyed to the center axle. One set was steel and the other was bronze and when you put force on the pedal vertically backwards the discs were squeezed together giving an efficient disc brake action. These were very complex compared to today’s caliper brakes, but they did work very well and would lock the wheel fairly easily. They were fun to take apart and reassemble that I did frequently whether they needed it or not. I would wash all the parts in kerosene or gasoline, dry them, and then regrease the parts requiring it. One other thing that I acquired was a seven-tooth rear sprocket that could be used to replace the standard ten-tooth sprocket. The fewer toothed sprocket was the equivalent of shifting up to a higher gear and so was harder to push but gave more speed. I alternated between the two sprockets for variety. Later on I also added knee action on the front fork that worked quite well. The other thing I got when I could afford it was what we called motorcycle handlebars, as they were wide and fun for a change. Sometimes we turned the standard narrow handlebars over to simulate a racing bike. The top of the line bicycle in the 1930s was the Silver King and was all polished aluminum that when new looked like silver. The ladies version was called the Silver Queen. This bicycle was quite expensive even then and one in good condition now sells for one to two thousand dollars.

This was the year for me to start Wilson Junior High School for the seventh through the ninth grade. There was always a little getting used to and acclimating when starting a new school. Now instead of staying in the same room all day we had a homeroom and then we switched rooms for every class. We also had shop classes which I liked the best and the first year we took home economics where we learned a little sewing and also some cooking which I enjoyed. One thing we made was called “bird in the nest” and was done by beating the egg white and putting it on a slice of bread and then putting the egg yolk in the center in a depression. This was then put in an oven until the white started to brown.
I think we still had some recess time and there was sports such as football and basketball which was Indiana’s game for a long time. There was a little store across the street from the school where some students hung out although I never went in it. A rumor went around that if you put an aspirin in a coke it would cause some intoxication effect so it seems kids were always looking for some mind effecting formula.

The next summer vacation when I was fourteen years old my mother suggested that I might want to ride the bicycle to my grandmother’s house some ninety miles away. I jumped at the idea and later my mother had second thoughts but didn’t renege. I was in good shape for such a trip as I rode a lot every day, not for training, but because that was my means of transportation for everything. At that time there were far less cars and trucks on the roads and streets so it is not at all comparable to the hazards encountered today. Before starting out I rode downtown to buy a tire repair kit to take with me. That’s as far as my foresight went; my mother tried to get me to take a packed lunch or cookies but I told her I wasn’t hungry never realizing that that might change. I did have a dime with me and bought two five-cent candy bars when the need arose. The route I took was down highway 32 until it ran into highway 67 and I followed it thru Indianapolis and on southwest before cutting over to the west towards my grandmothers. In the afternoon I started getting weak, as I had used up the two-candy bars energy. Sometime later after I had suffered awhile my brother Austin, my mother, and some others in the car caught up with me and I was able to get some food or candy and quickly rejuvenated. They offered to tie the bike to the car but I refused. Towards the end I took a shortcut over some hills on a gravel road and that was tough going. Anyway I got there after a total time of eight hours, which wasn’t bad for a ninety-mile trip. I’m sure the time would have been much shorter with one of today’s bikes but with what I had I did good enough. I was not exhausted after the trip and we went fishing that same evening. The road through the creek bed had been replaced by highway 142 sometime before.

Having the bicycle at my grandmothers allowed me to explore far and wide. One day I went to Martinsville and visited the Grassyfork Fisheries goldfish hatchery, which claimed to be the biggest in the world. It was large and very interesting. I could also go up to the Wilbur Trading Post so named because it was the only store around. A few miles away was a man made lake that was very scenic and full of nice sized blue gill and sunfish. I didn’t fish there except a few times with my uncle Mandus and he taught the right way to use catalpa tree worms and I haven’t found anybody to this day that has copied his technique. You had to have wooden matches called boarding house matches in those days. With the match in one hand and the caterpillar like worm in the other you turned the worm wrong side out on the matchstick. Sounds like trying to push a wet noodle through a keyhole but it actually was quite easy to do and it was very effective in catching pan fish. I expect the theory was that the soft side out was more attractive to fish and also that the flavorsome juices in the water drew the fish to the bait.

After my weeks stay I started back home and stopped for a few days to visit my cousins (two boys and seven sisters) that lived on a farm near Lawrence a few miles east of Indianapolis. Here my Uncle Walter Sedam farmed some forty acres with his sons and a perpetual hired hand (paid by room and board). Jimmy his eldest son did most of the farm work and was an all around energetic agent at anything he did. He liked and was comfortable with farm animals a trait I was greatly lacking. I remember watching him get on a cow sitting backwards and then twisting her tail so she would run and buck. On this occasion the cow ran under a low horizontal limb whopping Jimmy to the ground dazed but unfazed. Whether this was planned by the cow or an unfortunate happenstance we will never know.

Jimmy worked at a nearby large stable and during a short weekend visit in the winter he bragged about a pony there that he wanted me to ride. The plan was that Jimmy would wait down at the end of a long lane that dead ended into a highway and his brother Billy would help me get on the pony at the stable. We never had saddles on anything we rode in those days; simply a bridle for steering.

The reason for Jimmy’s location at the end of the lane was to stop the pony at that point as it always wanted to keep running on to the barn at Jimmy’s house, why I don’t know. Once on the pony it took off at full speed. Jimmy was unable to stop it at the end of the lane and the pony adroitly made a high speed left turn onto the highway and I went straight landing in the middle of the asphalt road very, very hard. I hit so hard that all of the buttons on my blue jeans popped open. I hurt all over and finally was
able to limp back to the house. No bones were broken but it was two days before I could go back to school as I was very weak and had flu like symptoms. That was another nail in the coffin of my liking for animals.

Junior High School went on and I especially enjoyed the shop classes initially in woodwork and then metalwork. I made a nice corner shelf with an intricate design cut into it with a jigsaw. I stained it and coated it with shellac the universal finish in those days. I also made a cutting board and other items. My big love came when the shop got a nine-inch swing South Bend metal lathe. To see the fat chip curling off of a bar of aluminum in the lathe was indescribably fascinating to me. Pretty soon I had a collection of South Bend Lathe Company catalogues.

I almost immediately knew that I wanted to be a machinist and never varied from that until I had an opportunity to go to college on the GI bill after World War II. The other shop course we had was foundry work, which requires a pattern of the item to be cast. With our previous wood working experience we were able to make simple patterns for various projects. The first item I made was a paring knife. First we made the knife blade and shank out of tool steel then hardened and tempered it. We then made a split pattern of wood matching the handle we wanted to end up with. Using a cope and drag and damp sand the handle was cast of aluminum around the knife shank. It is rather too complicated to describe properly in less than a thousand words but it was very good stuff for junior high school in view of the fact that these skills were the very essence of Muncie industry.

The Muncie schools were excellent in providing industrial training in trades that most students would end up in as very few young people had any possibility or expectations of going to college. To even become a four-year apprentice in the various trades was not easy so the more training the schools gave the better chance the individual had.

I remember three incidents from junior high school. Every year we had a ninth grade play that was somewhat prestigious to be in and I liked to be in plays. My lady English teacher was in charge of directing the play and asked me to be sure and come to the tryouts for the play, which almost ensured that I would get a part. The tryouts were in the early evening one-day. That day I had gone home and was wandering around the neighborhood and somewhere on Eighth Street there was an old man cutting down a tree close to a house. He had all the right tackle and knew what he was doing but needed a little assistance and asked if I would help him. Well that ran into a lengthy project and I never had the heart to tell him that I needed to leave so I missed the tryouts. My English teacher was somewhat disappointed in me and I don't remember if I explained the reason to her, which wasn't a very good one, as I should have insisted on leaving.

In my mathematics class one year I sat in a three wide desk between the very big Zeke Zimmerman and another kid who was less imposing. Anyway the teacher never gave us any work to do and we could nap or whisper at will unlike in all other classes. One day close to an upcoming weekend Zeke and his cohort were planning a robbery of a dairy on Hoyt Avenue that also happened to belong the one of Zeke’s relatives. Now this was all just a game I thought and helped with what I believed to be an innocent exercise. We drew sketches of the building and planned which window to break and climb in and this went on for a couple of days and we had a set time and place to meet which I ignored as I was sure it was just a game. The following Monday Zeke and his companion didn’t show up at school as they had been apprehended by the police and I was very shocked; they hadn’t been playing a game at all but were dead serious. I don’t know what happened to the two and didn’t ask. I don’t remember if they ever showed up in class again but I think their reappearance would have been remembered.

The other incident was somewhat disconcerting. One of my best friends Donald Yarger and I used to go to the city dump, which was on the north side of White River close to Tillotson Avenue and a frequent hangout of ours. As we were going through debris that had been thrown out by a dairy we came across dozens of small disks that were imbedded in a very few of the dairy companies Eskimo pies that also happened to be sold at the schools. Each disc was worth another Eskimo Pie. As this unusual quantity of the free discs hit the attention of the dairy owner he visited the school late one afternoon. I was working in the shop on some project and gave three of the discs to another friend to get us Eskimo pies for his younger brother and the two of us.
The dairy owner latched onto my friend and had him lead him back to me and he took my name. Donald was also caught and the next day we were told that we would have separate audiences with the principle on the following day. Now for some incomprehensible reason Donald wanted to tell a different story than the truth, why I don’t know. Anyway in our separate interviews we both told the true story but I got the impression that the principle didn’t believe me, as principles are wont to do. The principle told us that the dairy had been broken into and the disks were stolen along with other items. I don’t know if this was connected to Zekes escapade but I don’t think it was in the same year at least I didn’t connect the two at that time. Anyway that was the last I ever heard about it and I traded the remaining discs for a fountain pen.

One of the best teachers I ever had in any school was a Mr. Zedeker who taught our science class. He would pose a question and then when we couldn’t answer it he had very unique ways of providing the answer. One of his first questions was how do you define up without using your arms? Think about it; it’s not too easy to answer. The answer was very simple once you know it. Up is any direction away from the center of the earth.

The next good question was what is water made of? Today many kids would know the answer but not in that era. So of course the answer being two gases was hard for us to believe so he proved it by setting up an electrolysis apparatus. He then percolated the two gases into two separate bottles proving the ratio of two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen. Then to prove at least the characteristics of the two gases he caused the hydrogen to make a little explosion. The next question was could you make iron burn and, of course, everybody answered no. He then dipped the end of a twisted fine iron wire in sulfur, lit it with a match and immersed it in the bottle with oxygen. That wire took off like a high-powered sparkler and continued until the oxygen ran out. Particles of the wire oxide residue scattered inside the bottle and melted indentations in the bottle sides.

The next puzzler was could you make air pressure collapse a metal can and the question received the same incredulity. So Mr. Zedeker took a rectangular can and put a little water in it and put it on a Bunsen burner until the water started to boil. After letting it boil a little while so that the steam replaced most of the air in the container he screwed the cap onto the can. In a short time the can started collapsing and soon was just a shadow of its former self. Of course, as the steam condensed a vacuum was produced in the can and it collapsed under the 14.7-psi atmospheric pressure.

Well it wasn’t all work in this class. At that time one of our most popular singers was Kate Smith (God Bless America). Now we had a girl in the class that resembled Kate Smith and she was also an excellent singer they said. When Mr. Zedeker found this out he had her sing in class several times and pretty soon everybody in the class including the teacher was calling this girl Kate. This was a very enjoyable class as well as being educational.

The only paddling I got in junior high school was in art class. The teacher had left the room for a few minutes (don’t teachers know that when they leave classes unattended things happen)? In his absence we got into a serious battle across the room with crayons. We were really throwing them at each other when the teacher returned and caught the action. He bent me across a chair and really laid it on. These were not things we went home and complained to momma about, no it was all in a days work, we knew when we deserved something. Besides it added to my trophy list; very few students ever got paddled in junior high school.

I had a job in the school cafeteria for a while as a way to earn a free lunch. The job paid twenty-three cents. The food prices were three cents for this and five cents for that so the amount paid was enough to get a pretty good meal. My job at the end of the serving line was dishing out ice cream and it turned me totally against ice cream as long as I had that job. Once the semester was over my desire for that dessert rapidly returned.

Now we can talk about night activities as by this time I was allowed to stay out until 10:00 pm. Halloween we did stupid things like running down alleys and tipping over garbage cans as we went or turning over furniture on porches for trick or treat was not around then, it was all tricks. One technical trick was “pinning horns”. In those days horns all had the simple configuration of a button in the center of the steering wheel that stuck up a half-inch or so. Even with the key out of the car the horn was still po-
wered unlike today’s cars and most people never locked their cars especially at home and a lot of cars didn’t have locks or they didn’t work. Pinning the horn was accomplished by using a slightly flexible stick and putting it under the steering wheel rim on opposite sides and over the horn button and the horn blew until the owner come out cussing and removed the stick. I was too chicken to do this operation myself and merely watched others do it and then ran when it was accomplished.

Well the next saga might be interesting to some and appalling to others, who knows? One evening four or five of us decided to take a walk down west Mulberry Street. Mulberry Street was the red light district in Muncie and at one time reportedly had as many as fifty cathouses on that street but I expect the number had dwindled some although I never counted them. As we walked along the street the girls hollered out various salutations to us. Some in the group hollered back asking what they had inside. They answered, “Come back when you get older and find out”. As we sauntered on along, lo and behold, one of the boy’s fathers came walking out of one of the cathouses and, of course, they saw each other but no words were exchanged. Now this boys father was very strict with him but I never heard the outcome, however, I imagine he either got a severe beating or he never got a beating again. I don’t imagine the boy sitting with his mother at the breakfast table the next morning saying “hey mom guess where I ran across pop last night”? Anyway this first trip was also our last; it satisfied our curiosity.

Donald Yarger orchestrated another memorable nightrider event. Donald’s father worked for the Perfect Circle Company plant in New Castle, Indiana a major manufacturer of piston rings for automobiles and airplanes. Again this entailed shift work and on this occasion Donald’s father was on a shift that started late in the evening. Mr. Yarger car-pooled with another worker to save money for the forty mile round trip. The other worker lived close to Wilson Junior High School (on the way to New Castle) and so Mr. Yarger had to drive there and park his car on the street when riding with the other worker. Donald had found a set of keys to the car, which was a Chrysler and decided to take us all joy riding that night. The only part of the trip I remember was our high speed trip over the steep Nickel Plate Railroad crossing going north on South Nichols Avenue at West Godwin Avenue. I don’t know how long we were airborne but we came down very hard. I didn’t feel any after effects but Bob Pingry in the back seat swore his back was broken and he complained for several days but fully recovered. At get togethers in the 1990s he still was complaining about the hard landing. Anyway we returned the car to its parking spot and I never heard anymore about it. I don’t know if Donald did or not but I don’t think the car was damaged so he probably went free.

Sometime when were we around fifteen years old Donald asked to borrow ten dollars from me. Shortly after I loaned him the money he ran away from home but to where I don’t know. He was back in not too long a period of time probably when his (my) money ran out. I had to be very persistent with him and nag at him constantly to finally get my money back.

Other night entertainment in the summers was the medicine show quackery no longer around. This was a traveling man with a trailer that opened up on one side for entertainment and especially for the quackery practiced by the medicine man. The entertainment might be a little ventriloquism or puppets and some music and singing. The big part of the show was the commercials that were frequent and long. The whole purpose of the show was to attract people to the hokum. These medicine men had snake oils that would cure anything and if the men would come around to the back after the show the man had cures for all of the special men’s ills and inadequacies do to age. Well these were only entertaining for want of something better but they drew quite a few people and were a place to socialize. My mother and brothers never attended such things, but may have when younger. I am glad I did just to get the flavor of another piece of Americana.

Another fun place in the summer was the annual Delaware County Fair. There was a half-mile harness race track, farm exhibits of all kinds, and of most interest to kids the rides and carnival fun house. The fun house drew large crowds as they had a vertical air stream activated at the right time blowing ladies skirts above their heads (a la Marylyn Monroe). Now it happened that occasionally when the woman’s dress was blown up she didn’t have any underclothes on and that was a crowd pleaser. As we continued to watch suddenly a woman’s dress was blown up and simultaneously as one saw she had no panties on a pair landed at her feet as though blown off. That was really a crowd pleaser. Well we finally decided that it
might be a carnie trick to draw in the crowd and it worked very well. Nobody could have sent a woman on
the stage with her dress over her head and no undergarments on without having the law down on them in
an instant but this was just an unfortunate happenstance accidentally on purpose it appeared.

We also had carnivals that set up in Muncie occasionally and they were well attended despite their
massive electrical conductors running on the ground to the various rides all around to trip over. They
looked like an accident about to happen but none ever did in my experience and we didn’t even think about
such things at that time. They had various rides and games where one might win cheap prizes and freak
shows like bearded ladies and two headed babies that were all fake.

At other times I attended car and motorcycle races held at the dirt track and every year there was a
bicycle race. Consistently it was won by the same person an older boy just down the street from me on
Ninth Street. He had a three-speed bike and trained a lot. I never considered entering such an event and if
you had seen my bike at the time you would understand why. Let me explain that a little further. Every
once in awhile the crank that turns the front sprocket would break at the point where the pedal screws into
it. Now the crank was an expensive part so I would have the pedal brazed back on as for some reason
welding couldn’t be used but I think it was because the higher heat would ruin the pedal bearings. The
brazing wasn’t too healthy either as the pedal didn’t last long and so I frequently just had the pedal shaft to
use. Now this was adequate but didn’t look very good. Also for a period of time I just had half of the
handlebars. This was the result of racing my next-door neighbor June Phillips home at lunchtime one day.
He cut over into me as I was passing him and his pedal went into my front wheel causing sudden braking
throwing me over the handlebars and landing on my face on the street resulting in losing one-half of the
handlebars and requiring one stitch in my chin the only one I ever received. I also was given a tetanus
shot, as it was possible that horse residue could have been in the street. That was the reason given by the
doctor. So these things resulted in a sometimes-sad looking bicycle that I continued to ride regardless of
appearances. That included in temperatures down to zero; in ice and snow conditions; and in the pouring
rain when that occurred. Nothing is wetter than riding a bike into a driving rain. I usually didn’t miss one
day of the year of riding my bicycle to school and one time I lost my key at school and rather than going
home for another I picked up the front wheel which was locked and took the bike home that way.

One somewhat risky task I had after my father died was to thaw out our pipes in the crawl space
under the house in the area that didn’t have basement which was about one third of the house area. Pipes
in this region would freeze if it got quite cold which it did on several occasions and initially I thawed them
out with rolled up burning newspapers held in my hand under the pipes in a rather restricted space. Ac-
tually I think it would be unlikely that the newspapers would set the heavy joists on fire but modern day
safety experts would frown on the practice. We then bought a gasoline blowtorch for the job and I was a
little fearful of the blowtorch as one often saw news accounts of the blowtorches blowing up but I persisted
and survived.

One stringent rule my mother had was that when you left a room you were to turn the light out.
Our electric bill ran around a dollar-fifty per month. One of the biggest tragedies to my mother was that
on the completion of paying a bill she left money or her purse on the counter and left, very uncharacteristic
for her. The amount lost was close to fourteen dollars and that was a fortune to her in those hard times. I
hear people say I was raised poor but I didn’t realize I was poor. Well I was raised poor and I realized it
almost every day. Now I didn’t dwell on it but it was always there.

Now my next-door neighbor Jim Phillips came up with what he must have thought was a good
way to save on electric bills. He had a quick remove jumper around the meter, which was in the basement.
Somehow his wife was supposed to know when the meter reader was coming and she was to then remove
the jumper. Well something didn’t work right and the meter reader caught the meter with the jumper. The
penalty imposed by the electrical company was that the electricity would be cut off for one year and they
stood by their word. The Phillips had kerosene lamps for one year.

Back to automobile races, we had a nice quarter mile midget car racetrack somewhere on the
northeast side of Muncie and I attended some of the races. The midget cars had a great variety of engines,
which made for more interest than today’s monotonous single design. Among the engines used were air
cooled motor cycle engines and at that time Harley Davidson and Indian had an in-line four cylinder en-
gine although I don’t know that these or the two cylinder types were used. Aeronica or Cub airplane engines that were flat four-cylinder air-cooled engines were also used. The most interesting of all were the outboard motors in some of the midget cars. These really wound up to a high pitched sound and when running right which wasn’t often they beat all the other cars. Since they were two stroke engines they had oil mixed with the gasoline and in this case it was castor oil, which gives a very pleasant odor to fans of racing. There was an outboard engine factory in Muncie and I believe they participated. Now when all of the engines and cars are pretty much the same as in today’s racing world it is a better test of the driver skill whereas the old system was a better test of ingenuity and souping up skills which is more interesting to the spectators.

In Muncie we also paid very close attention to the Indianapolis 500 race held every year on or close to Memorial Day but never on Sunday. This included the time trials to select the starting order for the thirty-three participants. In this annual race there was also a large variety of engines and car designs making for more interest on most peoples part. There were straight-eights, straight-sixes, V-eight, in line four cylinder Offenhousers, a diesel engine, and later on a gas turbine engined car that almost won the race the first year and then they were out-lawed. After the race was over each year an extra came out in all neighborhoods (special edition newspaper common in this era for major happenings) listing the results, describing the accidents and deaths of which there was usually one or more which might be drivers and occasionally spectators. The races were much more dangerous in those days as gasoline was used instead of alcohol and there wasn’t any such thing as fireproof clothing nor was much attention paid to making the cars or track more crashworthy.

There were some other recreational pursuits we made during this time period. One was Wilson Hill located at the corner of highway 32 and Tillotson Avenue and now cut in two by the new street. The hill was behind the Slack family home and the Holdcroft family was the next house west and the father had a tool and die shop on the premises. The hill was fairly steep and with enough elevation to provide a good slide which it was used for in the winter. Most boys had sleds and after a snow many kids had much fun on the hill. We also made toboggans out of corrugated sheet metal by curling up one end and wiring the bent up part back to the bottom and three or four people would slide down the hill on that and often capsizing on the way down causing a lot of hilarity. We always had a large fire to occasionally warm up by and partially dry our clothes from the melted snow on them.

White River was a few hundred feet to the north and by this time was cleaned up as a sewage treatment plant for all of Muncie had been completed for a few years. A Corps of Engineer Project had straightened out the river from Tillotson Avenue west and that had been a great entertainment program during its progress with the many bulldozers and scrapers at work. If the river was frozen we would go to the other side and ice skate as the near side ran too fast to freeze. Oh no, we didn’t worry about open stretches of water here and there in the ice. On one occasion Donald Yarger and me rode our bicycles on the ice to Camp Redwing and back seven miles each way. Before starting out we put our ice skates on and used these as outriggers if we started to skid. We used the peddles as usual with the skate blade pushing on them and rode the whole trip. There was no occasion for this trip just a little adventure for two boys in which we wanted something different to do. I don’t remember any open stretches of water on the trip, which were frozen over when it got really cold so our trip may have been preceded by very cold weather.

We used to sit by the river in cold weather on the east side of Tillotson waiting for the ice to get thick enough to skate on. I have to laugh at the advice given on TV and in publications as to the various thicknesses safe for people and then vehicles to get on the ice. The thinnest is four inches for two hundred pounds of man and gear and I’m sure we were often on one-inch ice but didn’t weigh as much. Sometimes when we got on the ice we would hear and see cracks radiating away from us at high speed but that was inconsequential to us. We knew that new ice was stronger than old melting ice and I only remember one time that a boy fell through the ice and he may of gotten too close to open water. He was afraid to go home wet so dried himself around our perpetual fire.

One night we were sitting around our fire on the east side of Tillotson Avenue keeping watch on the ice strength. Now we didn’t skate at night but it was just something to do like watching grass grow. On the other side of the river was the city dump and it was on fire in one area, which was not unusual. All
of a sudden the police showed up at our location and accused us of setting the dump fire. They loaded us all up in a police car or two and took us down to the police station. I don’t remember that much of anything went on there and shortly they turned us loose, it was just police harassment. They didn’t even offer to take us back to the scene of the crime; no we were on our own. Of course we could have easily walked the two miles home but we were approached by a Good Samaritan young neighbor with a car and he took us home.

The Muncie airport was very active from the standpoint of executive airplanes, and pleasure flying, and this continued during my years in Muncie. Because of this Donald Yarger and I rode our bicycles out to the airport frequently on Sundays. The big attraction in airplanes was the two Ball Brothers bright red executive five-passenger aircraft. These were the Beechcraft model 17 “Staggerwing” so called because the top wing was inversely staggered behind the lower wing just the reverse of other biplanes. This lowered the landing speed to forty-five mph and with retractable landing gear and very clean wing struts and a large radial engine, the plane had a top speed of 201 mph and a climb rate of 1,600 feet per minute; much better performance than any other executive aircraft at the time and pretty competitive with today’s performance of piston engine four place planes. The plane had radial engines, which was rare in light planes and had several sizes available. It was faster than most military aircraft at that time and was used in many famous airplane races around the country with considerable success. Donald and I could tour the hanger and get close to these and other planes, as people weren’t so sensitive in those days about kids. Other common planes at the airport were many Piper Cubs and Aeroncas, which were two place airplanes.

One other event that took place at the Muncie Airport in the 1930s was at least two endurance flights. Now when I say endurance flights I’m talking two weeks in the air without landing. This was accomplished using a Piper Cub, which has tandem seats for two, and the pilots were Robert McDaniels and Kevin Baxter. The back seat was taken out and a lightweight sleeping platform installed in its place so the two pilots could alternate getting some rest. The supplying of fuel and food was transferred from a pickup truck driving down the sod runway; no runways at the airport were paved at that time. Since the stall speed of the cub was around 40 mph and it had a top speed of approximately sixty mph the pick up driver could have run away from the cub on pavement but the close cut sod was pretty smooth also so transfer between truck and plane was efficiently handled. A man in the bed of the pickup transferred fuel and food up by attaching the materials to a rope pulled up to the plane a few feet above and the reverse was done for sending debris down to the truck. Donald and I watched this transfer several times.

Now an air-cooled engine is not going to run for two weeks without at least checking the oil occasionally and probably adding some from time to time. This was accomplished with a supporting board walk allowing one to exit the cockpit and move forward to the engine after the pilot had ascended several thousand feet and then shut the engine off while the checks were made and oil added if needed. After completion the engine was restarted and the flight carried on. On the first occasion the Muncie team set a new record of about two weeks in the air without landing. A few weeks later a team in Ohio beat the record by a few hours. The team again set out to break the new record even though it was approaching fall and cooler weather, which can cause carburetor-icing problems the bane of small aircraft if they don’t have carburetor heaters. The flight proceeded and the plane stayed up for over twenty-one days. The flight did have carburetor icing on at least one occasion but was able to recover before having to make a forced landing. One time the pilot saw a house on fire in the early morning hours and buzzed the house until the occupants exited. On the day the flight was completed First Lady Mrs. Roosevelt, wife of the president was in Muncie by sheer coincidence and agreed to appear with the two fliers.

The other attraction that Donald and I pursued was the model airplane activity around Muncie. This was in the days before radio or wire controlled models were available so another competitive technique was used. The one that I remember had the objective of the model staying in the air the longest after a ten or fifteen second run of the engine controlled by a small mechanical timer on the model airplane. So this called for a design of the model and controls that induced an almost straight up spiraling climb to gain the maximum of altitude in the time the engine was running. The second design necessity was that the model needed to have excellent gliding characteristics so it would stay in the air for the maximum time after the engine cut off and to achieve this the models had a wide narrow wing similar to sailplanes. The
plane was launched by hand and pointed straight up as the model climbed hanging on the prop all the way up. The distance the model went was not important but the maximum length of stay time in the air was the goal. Donald and I were sometimes asked to chase down the models after their flight was over.

On one occasion when a model was launched instead of going straight up it went into a tight circle about four feet above the ground. With everybody ducking and trying to avoid being attacked the model wing hit Donald a hard wop and its flight was over. Donald had a bruised arm for several days but was very fortunate that he wasn’t hit with the propeller, as that would have caused severe lacerations at the least. The Academy of Model Aeronautics is headquartered in Muncie and has a one square mile facility with various model airplane fields on it and a model airplane museum with models going back to the Civil War. This is just east of town and is indicative of the earlier intense model plane activity around Muncie that has been carried on big time.

Twice during my junior high years I came down with the flu and had a high fever both times. On the second session my fever caused a lot of my hair to fall out but that was temporary and I had very thick hair thereafter although I don’t think the flu had anything to do with that. We didn’t go to a doctor for either case.

Finally I finished the ninth grade and was ready to enter Muncie Central High School the following fall. During the summer vacation I worked some for my plasterer uncles Elihu (called Cy) Bricker and Joe Bricker as a hod carrier and the pay was thirty-five cents an hour. Until the use of sheetrock took over sometime after the 1950s all interior house walls were plastered, usually with two rough coats and then a finish coat. These coats were put on lathe on the wall, which consisted of wooden strips or expanded steel mesh such that the plaster had something to grab hold of. Sheetrock cut down the time and expense of finishing interior walls significantly. The first thing I learned was that all hod carriers have only one title regardless of age or relationship and that title is “boy”. Boy get some mud in here; boy that mud is too wet, and so on. The job consisted of mixing the plaster in a large oblong metal tray and carrying it in the hod to the worktable in the room of the house being plastered. I previously described the tortures of that task in Chapter 3. The job had another adverse effect and that was the plaster’s caustic effect on the hands. Since the various plaster mixes were based on lime, an alkali, it was very astringent and irritating to the hands. The counter measure was to coat the hands with Vaseline as needed.

Cy and I got into a friendly argument about whether the earth was round or not. Cy’s contention was that since the bible talked about the four corners of the world (probably his only knowledge of the bible) it had to be flat. I countered with the fact that you could start out in one direction and eventually come back to where you started from the other direction. Unfazed he said you could start out in one direction at the front door of a house and when you kept walking you would come around the house and back to where you started from the other direction. These uncles were all raised by my dictatorial grandfather Michael Bricker on a farm. The only time they could go to school was when the weather was too bad to do anything on the farm and I expect the country schools were not too advanced. My father estimated his equivalent education at the third grade but he was good at arithmetic. Michael also made the boys turn over all money earned at jobs for other people to him and I think he was what would be called abusive today. When I asked my cousin Vera one time why did so many of Michael’s children moved so close to him in Muncie if he was so bad. Her reply was that it was to provide protection for his wife Rebecca but this was a tongue in cheek comment. I never saw any adverse actions at all in my limited associations at my grandparent’s home.

In 1938 or 39 during the Christmas rush I got a job with Western Union delivering telegrams and packages usually related to the holidays. This was ideal for me as deliveries were almost always made by bicycle anyway. This required me to have a social security card and number so that’s when my card was obtained. I enjoyed this job and since I knew Muncie pretty well it was right down my alley. Once in awhile I got a tip.
Chapter 7: High School Years

Muncie Central High School, at that time, was located on High Street and was a nice brick building typical of school architecture in that time period. The school had around one thousand students for the sophomore, junior, and senior classes. The large staff of teachers and administrators was very well qualified with BAs, BSs, MAs, and some PhDs from colleges and universities from all over including Harvard and one from Oxford University in England. I am amazed today at the superior educational qualifications our Muncie teachers had. Of course as students we or at least I didn’t pay any attention to such things.

The available major’s picked in the sophomore year that I remember were college prep, business, bookkeeping, secretarial, home economics, printing, general, commercial, and the trade school courses discussed later. There were eighteen clubs (none of which I belonged to) and the senior class published the school annual with a Muncie printing company doing the printing. Students also produced a weekly newspaper. The school had all of the usual sports and also golf and tennis played statewide none of which I participated in.

Again an adjustment to a new school and environment was required. As soon as possible I enrolled for the machine shop classes. This had some entrance requirements but apparently I passed them. Initially the machine shop class area was in the high school building, which later changed. The shop had lathes, milling machines, and shapers as the major tools and additionally grinders, drill presses, and a blacksmith forge. The major machine tools were all driven by an overhead belt system powered by a single large electric motor. A vertical lever was used to engage or disengage a flat belt that activated individual machines as needed. This system was common through the 1920s for machine and woodworking shops and then was replaced with machines each having it’s own electric motor.

I enjoyed the blacksmith forge very much and made a lot of twisted and curly cued ashtray stands and other items that I don’t think my mother was too enthused about. We learned to decorate the metal objects with the head of a ballpean hammer and then antique the item with black and gold paint. We also made tools like chisels and punches out of tool steel and learned how to harden them and then temper the tools to prevent the sharp edges from being too brittle and then breaking when used.

Now the Industrial Art’s program was not only shop work but included considerable classroom work that I enjoyed. We had to make drawings of the various lathe cutting tools and learn about cutting speeds for various materials sort of like ground school for aspiring pilots. This all transpired in my sophomore year. Somewhere along the line I had to take a printing course and that facility was pretty complete. We learned how to set type which was a very tedious process and then you better put the type back in it’s right place. By this time publishers were using linotype machines and everything continued to improve so that now even I can print complete documents with pictures interspersed in them and then comb bind them all at home.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor starting World War II. We had company on that Sunday night and didn’t have the radio on so the first I learned of the attack was the next morning at school. The American government developed a very efficient dictatorship during the wartime telling factories what to make and how to make it. For example we only had one jeep design; one two and a half ton truck design; weapons, planes, and tanks were the same way. No new cars were made for the public after early 1942. Tires and batteries were very hard to come by as the Japanese had captured the countries in Southeast Asia that supplied our natural rubber. Synthetic rubber was soon developed but it wasn’t made available to the general public. Housing and building construction stopped if it wasn’t in direct support of the war. All strategic materials were controlled and allocated to industry by the government on a priority basis and even Acme Lee close to my home was making clips for machine gun belts. Women were encouraged to work in various war industries and many did unlike in Germany where Hitler wanted the women to stay home and have babies. There was no such thing as an independent manufacturer for civilian goods as the company wouldn’t be able to buy most raw materials at any price. Since glass is made from non-strategic materials such as sand and soda ash and the products such as insulators and whiskey bottles were still needed the glass companies continued production. Owens Corning did some development of glass hand grenades that didn’t go anywhere. Unlike in today’s never ending wars where
the general public is not affected at all, everybody was affected in many ways during World War II. Most families had one or more near relatives in the service as we had over 10,000,000 men in uniform at the peak of our mobilization. Many houses had a rectangular banner with a blue star in the center hanging in a front window that indicated somebody from the house was in the service. A gold star meant a member of the family had died in service. With that number of men in uniform many of the better meats and other food products went to feed them. Almost everybody including service men bought war bonds and housewives saved kitchen fats and children collected scrap and newspapers and other materials. People at home knew there was a war on and knew it every day. During this time gasoline, tires, sugar, shoes, and several other items were rationed. Even chewing gum and cigarettes were in short supply for civilians along with clothing. Booze and beer also were often limited to less popular selections. The gasoline allowance was three gallons per week controlled by ration coupons and a windshield sticker. Doctors and a few other categories of drivers were allotted more gasoline. This meant that when I went on the highway with my bicycle the number of cars was even fewer than previously.

During the summer vacation after the sophomore year I rode my bicycle to my cousin Jimmy’s close to Lawrence, Indiana to work on a farm for the summer. Jimmy had gotten me a job at a six hundred acre farm that he was working at. The farm belonged to a man who owned a large chain of movie theaters in Indianapolis and, of course, he didn’t do any farming himself nor did his playboy son so a foreman ran the farm. Before hiring me the farm foreman asked Jimmy if I had any farm experience. Jimmy told him that I was raised on a farm not revealing at what age or for how long so it was a true statement. The farm crop was primarily popcorn for use in the theaters but hogs were also grown and some grain crops to provide feed. In those days most all farms had hogs and milk cows and grew a variety of crops unlike today’s specialization. There was a very nice farmhouse that the owner sometimes used on weekends and that his son used frequently for his amorous activities. There was a vegetable garden that was tended for the owner.

The work hours were from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm Monday through Saturday and the pay was nine dollars a week. I soon found out that the need for previous experience was not at all necessary. I did things like slop the hogs which meant feeding them and they got an excellent variety of grains mixed with water and were eating better than many people. We also did much fence repair work and I don’t remember much else although I’m sure there were many other menial tasks. Jimmy being much more farm savvy than me did a lot of popcorn cultivating with a tractor.

Well all-good things must come to an end. One Saturday evening after we had been paid the son asked us to pick some green beans for him. Jimmy promptly told him it was past 6:00 pm and so we weren’t going to. The son said either pick the beans or don’t come back and so we never went back. World War II had started and farm workers were not too plentiful so it was no trouble getting other work for the rest of the summer.

Jimmy’s father Walter taught Jimmy and I to drink and smoke. If we were out visiting a neighbor farmer and the farmer pulled out a half-pint of whiskey and passed it to Walter he took a swig and then passed it on to us. He also forced cigarettes on us frequently. Jimmy was a twin having a sister named Jeanette. One time we were in a drug store and Jimmy and I were curiously looking at some female birth control materials based on sponges etc. Walter saw what we were looking at and said “yeah, I had twins one time because of that stuff”. A further description of Walter is warranted. He did not have any teeth and had originally bought dentures but they bit him (didn’t fit) and he threw them away. He always wore bib overalls. One could never figure out where what little money he had come from but he always had enough for a little whiskey and cigarettes that he was never out of. He had asthma and emphysema pretty bad but lived to the age of seventy-six and bragged about having beaten the odds without giving up anything good like smoking. Walter hated President Roosevelt and often said Roosevelt would have a bayonet stuck up every plowing farmer’s ass by a soldier following him down the furrow. This was brought about by the government’s effort to help the farmers during the depression by telling them how much to grow and discarding some commodities to try and raise the price.
There was a Roosevelt Boulevard in Indianapolis along the winding Fall Creek and Walter said the reason it was named Roosevelt was because it was so crooked. None of the government's programs had the slightest effect on Walter's insignificant operation.

Of interest in the area was the massive construction of barracks and administration buildings going on at Fort Benjamin Harrison that was not too far from Laurence. This was, of course, in support of the war. I think that summer we also did a little hay work for Walter. He had a model T-Ford truck and the radiator leaked and boiled over frequently while we were on the road with hay. Walter's solution was to put a lot of black pepper in the radiator the theory being that the black pepper would stop up the holes. So then we were going down the road with a steaming radiator and a strong smell of pepper. Walter didn't condescend to participate in any work he just set everything up and left the work and related driving to Jimmy from the age of twelve on. On Saturday night each week the whole family was loaded into whatever disreputable truck Walter had at the time. Walter and my aunt Bonnie, his wife with one or two of the latest arrivals rode in the cab with no heater and the rest of us rode in the truck bed that had no sides. That would mean seven or eight of us if I was visiting would be in the back with a blanket or two if it was cold. After arriving at the nearby town we split up and Jimmy, Billy, and I would head to the nearest ice cream place and get a big sundae or milk shake. Walter's favorite comment as he jockeyed out of the parking space to go home was “backup till you hear glass breaking”.

There was a nice little creek on the farm and after getting all covered with hay dust and chaff we would head to the creek for a refreshing dip. For sleeping arrangements the three of us slept in one bed. The mattress was a large cotton sheet material bag filled with corn shucks. It was very crunchy but also the corn shucks soon flattened and had to be replaced every few days from a big source in the barn. For recreation we use to visit a lovers lane nearby. We found that traveling salesman brought their potential conquests out to the lane during lunchtime. Most salesmen had what was called a club coupe so there wasn’t much room and no back seat. On one occasion a heavyset salesman stood on the running board in action with an equally heavy set women and in the excitement of the exercise the ladies right knee kept hitting the horn button adding to the drama. We usually threw a few rocks to disturb the peace and then left the scene rapidly. That action was not brought on by moral anger or anything like that, just devilment. I finally got on my bicycle and headed the forty-five miles back home as the summer vacation was nearing an end.

One funny incident told to me recently by my cousin Bonita the eldest Sedam girl was about a happening when she was a teenager in the early 1930s. Early one summer a stranger came to Walter her father and asked if he could hire a couple of the girls to tend a little crop on the farm and he would pay the girls when the crop was harvested. It was agreeable to everybody concerned and the girls pulled weeds and hoed the soil and took real good care of everything. One day late in the summer the girls went to the plot and a big surprise met them. The crop was totally gone along with their promised pay and they never saw the marijuana man again. What did Walter know or get out of this? We’ll never know.

I had accumulated a little money and so fixed up my bicycle for the new school year. During that summer a new and very modern trade school had been set up at the corner of Kilgore Avenue and South Perkins Avenue and was called the Muncie Trade School. The trades taught there were of course machine shop followed by the building trades, auto mechanics, welding, electricity, and drafting. The machine shop was set up with all new machine tools now each having its own electric motor in a very spacious area. Because World War II had already started the trade school became a full time twenty-four hour a day seven days a week training facility but still reserved for high school students during normal school hours. Much if not all of the money for the new machines came from the government and new machines were added from time to time. Eventually a horizontal boring mill arrived that was so large that it was not a very practical teaching tool but everything else was quite welcome.

The trades teaching system was that during one or more years the class had to have a major project that the class spent part of their time on and the rest of the time was spent on learning projects. For example the building trades class built a complete modern house over a one or two year period. The auto mechanics class rebuilt a complete car and I don’t know what the other trades did. The machine shop project was the building of a complete precise shaper. A shaper is a machine tool that takes horizontal cuts on a
piece of metal firmly clamped to a worktable that is slowly fed at right angles to the reciprocating tool. This had been started by a previous class and was completed in our senior year. This taught us all of the many steps involved in building a machine tool and how each was performed.

The curriculum was that we took two classes at the downtown school one of them being shop related and the other academic and we spent a full half-day at the trade school which suited all of the shop students just fine. The machine shop teacher was Charles Rettig and he took a liking to me and I for him. He kidded me a lot about my wavy hair. In this shop in addition to the usual machine tools we had surface grinders, circular grinders, tool sharpening machines and a setup for doing case hardening. We also had a very nice well-equipped tool room and large steel cutoff saws. It was a first class setup and instead of local taxes paying for it we let the whole country contribute. Well this was going on all over the country, it was wartime and the government was spending money like it was going out of style, about the same as today accept then it was quite apparent to everybody that the expenditures were very necessary to save our country. The evening classes were made up of adults that wanted to improve their skills and get better paying jobs in our massive buildup of the tools of war.

Pretty soon the summer vacation came around and I found out that Ball Brothers was hiring high school students because of the labor shortage caused by the draft and the demands of war industries. Now even the Kentuckians and Tennesseans could get the better paying jobs and so there were many openings in the glass industry. When I first started there were four six-hour shifts, which was very soon changed to three eight-hour swing shifts. We worked the shift for twelve days then had two days off while the glass furnaces were refurbished. I never did understand why the six-hour shifts were in place unless it was to employ more people during the depression. I think the hourly pay was the same so with the eight hour shift I made around twenty eight dollars a week, pretty good for a high school kid at that time.

Now to the work. The glass industry was mass production on a large scale. The fruit jars or bottles were blown into a mold on a large spider like machine at the furnace end and then placed on a conveyor belt. This proceeded through a controlled oven several hundred feet long that slowly cooled the product so it didn’t break or crack from too rapid cooling. This conveyor-oven combination is called a lehr and its purpose is to anneal the glass. All of the operations to this point were totally mechanized and each production line of which there were many put out ten to twenty thousand jars or bottles in each eight-hour shift.

At the output end of the lehr were two men whose job was to inspect the product and put it in a cardboard box that then proceeded down a very moderately sloping track with rollers where it got lids or it proceeded through a machine that closed, labeled, and glued the box shut. It was then placed on a pallet and a forklift moved that to a storage area where it didn’t stay long. The inspection was accomplished by picking up two jars at a time (still quite warm) and rolling them on a flat metal worktable at the end of the lehr. The inspectors were looking for bubbles, inclusions, and cracks and they didn’t have much time to do it for including packing they had about four seconds per each set of two jars. Quality control was also practiced and inspectors came periodically and took some of the product to a workstation to check threads and diameters with precision tools to make sure the molds weren’t deteriorating. They might pull out a box before it got to the glue machine and check for inspector oversights.

The job I had that I remember well was screwing zinc lids on fruit jars. Fred Watson another student from my junior class and I sat in chairs across from each other and on opposite sides of the roller track. As the boxes of twelve fruit jars rolled down to us we pulled alternate boxes off the roller track to a connected worktable. Beside our work table within easy reach was a large sturdy box of zinc lids in neat rows. Our job was to pick up as close to twelve lids as possible and rapidly screw them on the twelve fruit jars. We soon found that the advice to tape our fingers with adhesive tape was an absolute necessity as the zinc lids were quite abrasive and the tape had to be replaced several times a shift. We were relieved for ten minutes every hour and had to eat or go to the bathroom in that time. If you didn’t get back on time the relief man simply got up and went to his next station and the boxes backed up towards the inspectors but very few people ever let that happen. Once the box left our hands it went through the automatic box-gluing machine and then to a warehouse or loading dock. Sometimes an inspector would shake some of the boxes to make sure we got the lids on tight enough so that there was no rattling. Loose lids could potentially damage the fruit jar during shipment.
Occasionally something would go wrong up front and there would be a vacant space on the lehr and we would get a welcome break and the old hands knew how long it would be by the length of the void on the lehr. At the end of the shift Fred and I would look at the counter at the end of the line and it would run around fourteen thousand jars for our shift all with lids screwed on by Fred and I. That meant that each of us screwed seven thousand lids on during the eight-hour shift and that went on day after day. That resulted in daydreaming about screwing the lids on and dreaming the same thing while asleep.

The rule was that if your next shift replacement didn’t show up you were expected to carry on for the next eight hours for a total of sixteen hours. That almost happened to me once but my replacement, a woman finally showed up. At the same time I was working I could see my physics teacher Mr. Rodger Lingeman a few feet away working on another production line job. Many teachers worked during the summer vacation to supplement their school income. Mr. Rettig our machine shop teacher also worked during the summer but because of his skills with machine tools I expect that he was much better paid than the glass industry people. Mr. Lingeman had an AB and MA from Indiana University. My information on these teacher qualifications is taken from the 1942 and 43 school annual the Magician. The annuals survived Hurricane Ike when I got two feet of water in my house. Fortunately they were above that level; many books weren’t.

Well finally it was time to go back to school and forget about the glass industry experience. I again went enthusiastically back to the trade school. This first senior semester I had the usual two academic classes. I think one was civics and the other was shop math taught by Dr. H. E. Fenimore who had an AB, MA, and a Ph D. He had attended Indiana University, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Pennsylvania. Now all of this wasn’t needed to teach shop math but he also taught the schools higher math classes. His enthusiasm for this lowly class was just as great as if it had been calculus or celestial mechanics. We got along superbly and if you were having a problem he would sit right down at the desk beside you as they were double width and work the problem through with you. It is the only mathematics class I ever took that I got an A in. Of course I was very interested in the subject as it pertained to feeds and speeds and indexing for cutting gears and other pertinent machine shop problems.

Early in the semester Mr. Rettig asked me if I wanted the job of running the tool room on the four to midnight shift which was for adults furthering their education in machine shop work. As previously mentioned the school ran twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. Of course, I did, any additional money was helpful. The job consisted of giving out tools in return for a round check that identified the student and it was placed were the tool was removed from. Towards the end of the shift you made a call for all tools to be turned in. Some of these were very expensive tools and measuring devices but none were ever lost or stolen to my knowledge. I also ran the large reciprocating or a band saw to cut bar stock to length for the student projects.

Most of the night students were in their thirties or so and some were very interesting. One was a barber so nice that I started going to his shop. Also there was a European immigrant and we struck up a mutual rapport. This was a tough schedule as I went to school all day ending up downtown and then had to rush out to the trade school by 4:00 pm and then work until midnight finally getting to bed about 1:00 am. I think I worked some on the weekends also and it was really starting to get me down so I had to give it up after a couple of months.

Everything else was going along well and my final semester in February was fast approaching. My mother tried to enroll in one of the machine shop classes for adults but they put her in welding classes instead. This disappointed her very much.

This was in 1943 and the army was continually complaining that the navy was getting the best men as they were getting their personnel from enlistments whereas the army primarily depended on the draft. Sometime the navy started only allowing enlistments of seventeen year olds and men over thirty eight as eighteen to thirty eight was the age subject to the draft. Apparently this still didn’t satisfy the army and so the navy was making known that by the end of February seventeen year olds would no longer be allowed to enlist. Some of us started to panic and we went down and enlisted in the navy knowing that the school had a policy of graduating students that enlisted with only one semester left. The thought was that we would learn more in the service than in the one missing semester and that was proven to be true.
The navy was still making this same announcement several months later as it was too good of a recruiting tool to give up.

Out of a graduating class of four hundred, (pictures were taken during the fall semester) thirty had a notation under their picture in the Magician stating the service they were in. Six listed V-5 and maybe some or all of them got into the program at Ball State College, which would have kept them in Muncie for a while. Now under the pictures was first listed the major and then clubs, sports and other activities. The trade school students usually only had the major as we were remote and not inclined to associate with college prep and others of that ilk. Under the prep and commercial students and some others were long lists of activities, clubs, offices held, etc. these were the get ahead people in life. Conversely only a very few of them had the V-5 listing and none of them had a service listing under their picture. In retrospect, I think this was smart on their part to wait and then get into pilots training or officer candidate programs instead of ending up as an enlisted man from the start although I don’t know how many took this route, or waited on the draft, or got exemptions.

Sometime during this period zoot suits became popular along with pegged pants. The suit had a very long jacket with pegged pants and a long watch chain that reached at least to the knee and sometimes lower. Even though it was later on considered mainly black and Mexican attire, many Muncie white youths wore them for a while. Fortunately I couldn’t afford one and I wasn’t much interested in suits anyway although I did buy a pair of pegged pants that I didn’t like. My next-door neighbor Junior Phillips bought one including the long chain and then after he joined the navy he hated the attire. Regarding Mexicans, on trips to northern Indiana one would see many encampments of Mexicans on sugar beet farms and perhaps other crop farms. Because of the war we allowed many Mexican workers in to work various crops.

Chapter 8: Boot camp and training in World War II
When I came home from school with my books my mother knew the worst. She had already said she would sign the permission papers required for my enlistment at the age of seventeen. She went to the graduation ceremony in June while I was in boot camp and was given my diploma. We were given a minor physical locally and then put on a train for Indianapolis. There we were given a more extensive physical and of twelve boys from Muncie only five were accepted. My active duty started February 6, 1943.

We then traveled to the Great Lakes Navel Training Station sixty miles north of Chicago for twelve weeks of boot camp. We arrived after midnight and the temperature was fifteen below zero and I was starting to wonder if I had made a big mistake. As we were marched (if one could call it that) to breakfast the next morning we repeatedly heard “you’ll be sorry” coming from boots that had been there a day or two longer than we had and I was already sorry. Well soon we were kept so busy that there was no time for self-pity. One time a group made the mistake of hollering that salutation to a group of marines that had just come back from serious combat in the Pacific Theatre and there might have been a massacre if some naval officers hadn’t intervened. Combat marines at the base were used to guard the brig and work parties until their next deployment. It was like an R and R for them but a little tough on the boots under their jurisdiction. The Naval History and Heritage Command states that during the Spanish American War sailors wore leggings called boots so both sailors and marines in their basic training were called boots. Now that war had been over for a while and we still wore canvas leggings that looked like boots and we had to fold our pants in them just right and so tight vertically that we could hardly bend our knees.

The boot camp we were assigned to was a large area of new barracks and large drill halls made up of many camp areas with designations like Green Bay and others I don’t remember. This was analogous to neighborhood designations in Muncie except there was no pecking order; the facilities were all exactly the same. Over one million sailors were trained at this station in World War II so it was a big setup. It was called the concentration camp of America by Walter Winchell (Jewish himself) our notorious rabble-rousing radio commentator of that era who delivered his staccato style news at an average rate of 197 words per minute.

There were also enormous drill halls where we congregated every morning for marching and inspection to the rousing John Philip Sousa marches. Before all of this fun we spent one full day getting an extensive physical, numerous shots, and finally our clothing and sleeping gear. The day started out by us standing in numbered squares with a large cardboard box in front of us on which we stuck a previously prepared label with our home address on it. We then stripped totally naked and placed all of our clothing and personal possessions in the box and it was shipped off to the address applied. From there we went through a gauntlet of doctors with stethoscopes, ear scopes, and other tools of the trade. Then corpsmen on each side of the line gave us shots and more shots. We then went still naked to sit in front of a psychiatrist at his desk to answer his questions.

I was required to give a second specimen of urine and when asked why the corpsman said I had albumin in the first sample. I heard no more so must have passed. I recently had occasion to tell this story to a kidney doctor and he asked if they didn’t run a cat scan to check for cancer; in 1943?

After this lengthy physical we went through a clothing line where we got all our skivvies, dungarees, undress blues, two pairs of shoes, and our bedding and hammock that stays with you throughout your navy career unless it wears out. It goes home with you upon discharge from the navy. We also got a ditty bag for sundries and all of our clothing was stenciled with pre-prepared stencils. Then we went back to the barracks to organize everything. We did not have lockers; all clothing was stored in our sea bag that hung from a central steel bar. All clothing was rolled up wrong side out and tied tight with two clothing stops. Wrong side out was so that the outside of the clothing was kept clean although there was no occasion for dirt in the sea bag. Sometime early on we got what was called the “flying ten”. We were paid ten dollars and then given all necessary toilet articles and the ten was taken back to pay for the articles and we were given some change and a two dollar bill.

One of the first things we had to learn was the “Great Lakes Shuffle”. This was a make work task that we had to do two or three times a day and that was steelwooling down the hard wood mid-floor in the barracks. This was done by putting a wad of steel wool under one’s shoe and shuffling it back and forth. We would be in a line and went back and forth across the floor several times at the various daily sessions.
The other thing is that we had to learn a whole new terminology for everyday things. Now the floor was the deck; the ceiling was the overhead, the wall was the bulkhead, and doors were hatches. Instead of mopping the floors we swabbed the decks. When marching here and there we sang Anchors Away and my favorite, Bell Bottom Trousers. Actually none of the navy issued trousers was bell bottomed; only civilian stores sold navy clothes with that distinction. Navy blues had a thirteen button front fly supposedly with that number in memory of the original thirteen colonies. The blues trousers had only one small pocket and so the billfold straddled the waistband and cigarettes were put in the sock above the shoe top. It has been said that the navy didn’t know the difference between a uniform and a costume but I liked the outfit. If you didn’t know another sailor’s name then he was called Mac, and mate was reserved for buddies. Sailors were sometimes called swab jockeys and marines, were called gyrenes or leathernecks.

We had calisthenics every morning before breakfast and couldn’t smoke until after breakfast and then only in a very limited area (never out of doors) and at well defined times authorized by the term “the smoking lamp is lit”. For training we marched, learned seamanship skills such as knot tying and splicing, had wooden rifles for manual of arms training, and shot twenty-two caliber rifles for a little marksmanship practice. During two of the drill hall inspections I got a one hour happy hour session for two gigs, one being that my pants weren’t folded quite right and the other for a very small spot of gravy on my pants. The happy hour consisted of calisthenics, running, and doing the duck walk with the rifle held over our head for several minutes at a time and this was repeated many times and was real torture.

As skivvies and clothes became dirty we scrubbed them down in a washroom then hung them up in a very hot room to dry. The food was lousy and no condiments of any kind were put on the table. One of the early meals that we had on a Sunday was chicken cooked until it was nothing but a stringy mess. Old hands told us it was seagull and that was very believable, as one couldn’t detect what the meat was related to. The coffee had a little milk and a little sugar in it to theoretically satisfy all tastes and in reality satisfying none. At that time the navy had some very strong traditions about food that was followed everywhere. One was that we had baked beans with slightly sweet cornbread for breakfast every Wednesday and they were usually pretty good. The left over beans were used to make the noontime soup for we had soup every noon meal. The other tradition was that we always had fish at the noon meal on Fridays. The navy fish was not too gourmet. Sunday night was cheese and lunchmeat called headcheese and horse cock derived from the usual sailor penchant for improving the American language.

When anticipating going to this training center on Lake Michigan I envisioned rowing big life-boats in the lake but never even saw the lake in the twelve weeks I was in boot camp. Shortly after our arrival an officer gave us a revealing indoctrination talk. In essence he said, “now men you have just come from a democracy but the navy is an absolute dictatorship and the sooner you realize that the better off you will be”. He went on to warn us not write to the president or any congressman to complain. I hadn’t made any plans in that direction not knowing the president’s address or who my congressman was but apparently a few more politically knowledgeable boots had.

I’m going to skip a lot of boot camp since it was pretty repetitious but two things stand out. One was that our company was made up many seventeen year olds, several sixteen or fifteen year olds and one boy who was about six foot tall that was only fourteen and got so homesick every Sunday that he sometimes cried but he made it. The company commander, Chief Petty Officer Maxwell, would sometimes threaten the underage sailors with getting them kicked out and they would immediately straighten up. Somehow he knew all of our ages. In civilian life the chief was a physical education teacher and coach at a New Orleans, Louisiana high school, an ideal background for his navy job.

To help run the company we had what were called granny knot admirals. A granny knot is a messed up square knot that won’t hold. One of the boots that was over thirty-eight years old was picked to substitute for our company commander when needed and to form the company outside. Three or four other boots were like platoon leaders. One time it came to the attention of Chief Maxwell that some among our group had referred to the older fellow as Hitler. We were chewed out and were restricted to the barracks on our own time for a week. We got another weeks restriction one time for eating candy during a mid-morning break. We bought candy bars by the box as the full size bars only cost a few cents apiece. I
think Chief Maxwell’s athletic training was against eating candy that early in the day. He might have been afraid it would spoil our appetite but the navy food had already taken care of that.

The second item worth mentioning was that one evening an officer who was on duty came in and not being satisfied with his reception asked where we were from and was told Indiana. He then stated that he was from Missouri and sailors from Indiana were no damn good by comparison. Well you can’t respond to an officer, as you would like to but we told our company commander and that officer received a reprimand from his superior. The navy’s dictatorship had limitations.

We had lots of guard duty with one at the front door of the barracks and one on the second floor and some on patrol outside and some at the battalion headquarters. It was impressed on us that the penalty for going to sleep on guard duty could be getting shot in front of a firing squad and the boots took that pretty serious. We were also told to never deface government property, as that was very serious also. We had a wooden mailbox in the entryway close to where the front door guard took up his post. One morning we got up and saw immediately that somebody had carved their initials quite large on the mailbox. Now how could a guard in the immediate vicinity allow something like this to happen? The initials matched those of the guard on the midnight to 4:00 am shift so since nobody was around to see him do it I guess he thought nobody would ever guess it was him. It reminded me of the April Fools Day caper of the Fox brothers. He was given some kind of punishment, but not put in front of a firing squad, that we all thought would happen.

Another thing that happened in boot camp to some recruits was several minor operations when a boot was unfortunate enough to have been discovered with minor discrepancies that would have been overlooked in civilian life. These included circumcision, minor hernias, tonsillectomies and so on. A few boots washed out of our company because they couldn’t take the discipline or for severe mental problems. They were given a new suit that was horrible looking and some money and sent home.

We also had one week of mess duty, which meant very long days. One advantage it had was that if in the unlikely chance we found something that was good to eat we could eat all we wanted of it. Two things I found rather good was pork chops cooked with tomatoes and stewed apricots. I really ate a lot of the stewed apricots one time and I was lucky that I didn’t suffer some dire circumstances.

For what little recreation we had time for, it was limited to going to an exchange where we could buy ice cream sundaes (gedunks), candy bars (pogey bait) very cheap, cigarettes five cents a pack, the ever needed stationary and that was about it. There were also movies in the drill hall at night that we sometimes went to. We also spent free time on Sundays going to other camps looking for boots from Muncie and once I found a Shed Town Redwein who seemed nice enough. During the total boot camp time we never went off the base and never saw a car on the base. Some time towards the end of boot camp an old hand told us “boot camp is the toughest part, if you get through it you’ve got it made”. Further advice was to keep our nose clean and we would get ahead. Before boot camp was over we were given a battery of tests such as IQ, math skills, aptitude, and others I don’t remember. I also volunteered for submarine duty but wasn’t selected I think because I told the psychiatrist in answer to his question that I was afraid of heights. In going to the doctors office I went through a large room filled with boot mental cases. It was sad and shocking to see these young people, some catatonic and others shaking uncontrollably. I can see that might come about in combat but not in boot camp, but it did happen, apparently some people just couldn’t adjust to the discipline. Earlier we also were allowed to put down our choices for follow-on schools that we might be selected for. I put machinist school first and that’s what I got.

About two weeks before the end of boot camp I came down for the last time with the inner ear infection and was put in a regional dispensary a step below the Naval Hospital. Don at that time in the paratroops had coordinated a leave to be at home at the same time as my nine-day leave was scheduled. Now if I went to the hospital I would probably be put back a week or two into another company and miss Don’s leave. When several doctors made their rounds they said I needed to go to the hospital for treatment. I pleaded with the doctors not to send me to the hospital and I was sure the ear would take care of itself soon and I broke down in tears. The doctors relented much to my happy surprise and a half-hour later the eardrum burst and I had immediate relief and went back to my unit.
I went home on time for the nine-day leave to Muncie. In transferring between train stations in Chicago six or seven of us got in one of the big cabs that had fold down seats on the back of the front seats. In about fifteen minutes we arrived at the other train station and were charged a dollar fifty each, a very high price in those days and we found out later that the stations were only a block or so apart. Not all of the gangsters worked for Al Capone.

I remember this and later train trips south of Chicago that went through Hammond and Gary, home to many steel mills. One saw mile after mile of blast furnaces and Bessemer converters at work making steel for the war effort. There was lots of smoke and dust in the air. The harbors had many ships with iron ore from Minnesota and elsewhere and other ships and trains were being loaded with pig iron and steel. In 2008 America’s steel production was 91.4 million tons down from the previous year’s 98.1 million tons and China’s was 500.5 million tons up from 494.9 million tons the previous year. These numbers are from the World Steel Association. Unionized workers with their ever-higher pay resulting from strikes was a contributing factor in our declining production and the steel mills I saw are gone.

It was a nice visit and I had a great time with Don and Austin and the rest of the family and while there my longtime friend Donald Yarger was also on leave from the navy. He was home when I got there and he was still there when I left. One new thing that was going on across the street where the dump had been was a mining operation. Cranes with big electric magnets were pulling out the old car bodies that I had played in years earlier, as scrap metal was in high demand for the war effort.

Back at camp we were put in temporary barracks until sent to the school chosen for us and there were several machinist schools around the country and one at great lakes and we desperately wanted to go anywhere but to the Great Lakes school. While awaiting orders to move on we had mess duty one day. We were to serve food at the noon meal but just before going behind the steam tables we were given a short arm inspection very close by. We were then marched immediately to the mess line and told which food to serve with no break for washing our hands. Such were the arbitrary idiosyncrasies of the navy.

Groups went by drafts called out frequently by a Master at Arms (MA) on a loud speaker. His vulgar salutation heard many times daily was “draft number so and so get your shit, shave, shine, and shampoo finished and fall out”. Finally my draft was called out still not knowing where we were going and we hoisted our sea bag and bed rolled inside the hammock on our right shoulder and ditty bag in the left hand we fell out and started a march, which was required to get anywhere. We hoped it was to the train station but it was right across a big drill field to the school barracks on the other side.

We found the school environment just about as chicken as boot camp but it had some advantages. Every two weeks we got off at noon on Saturday and didn’t have to be back until midnight Sunday night. One weekend towards the end of the course we got three days off. Usually I took a train from Chicago to Fort Wayne, Indiana and then hitchhiked from there to Muncie arriving before mid-night. On that train I would sit in the last car called the observation car and watch the speedometer at the top back. It usually hovered around ninety-two mph.

On arrival in Muncie around 11:00 pm I would get in touch with Bob Harshman and we would usually go to the speakeasy everybody called the “Blind Tiger” on the west side of Batavia Avenue at the railroad tracks. The place made their money from expensive set-ups and possibly a cover charge and one could buy bootleg whiskey outside in the back but it was terrible tasting stuff. They also had music for dancing. The place was sometimes visited by some of the V-5 students from Ball State College.

Going back I took the Monon Line train from Indianapolis to Chicago that had a single pair of tracks with a short double set at the halfway point (at Monon, Indiana the home base and name source for this predominately Indiana railroad) as a bypass. The two trains had both started out at about the same time from opposite ends. The first train there got on the bypass to wait on the other train to pass without slowing down. The train went right down the main street in Monticello and by a very pretty lake. It also went down the main street in three or four other towns, not all on this particular route. None of the cars were air conditioned except the dining car so in hot weather all the windows were open. Since these were steam trains the coal soot came in the windows making a mess of our whites that we had to wear in the summer. Food was very good and also quite expensive on trains so on one occasion the black cook took pity on a couple of us and made us some very nice real turkey sandwiches with chips.
The machinist schoolwork consisted of both machine shop experience and classroom work. Most navy ships at that time were powered by steam turbines and machinist mates and firemen were the main watch standers in the engine rooms so a lot of our classroom work concerned steam principles and practice. We still had many inspections and some unannounced while we were in school. We sometimes put our dress blues under the mattress, which was where we stored the hammock folded in half long ways. It was against the rules to do this but we did it anyway as it kept the dress blues much better than rolled up in the sea bag. Several times we came back to the barracks at lunchtime and found a large pile of clothes in the middle of the room all mixed together. In addition there were pairs of masters-at-arms patrolling the area constantly and if your pea coat wasn’t buttoned properly or your hat was a little askew they wrote you up with a ticket that resulted in one hours torture on the drill field after school hours (this was called happy hour in the navy). We called these guys the Gestapo but not within their hearing range.

One day sitting in class I could see a group of brig prisoners being marched by marines down the street away from us so all I saw was their backs. I immediately recognized Donald Yarger in the group; he may have been at the back but somehow I knew it was him. I found out how to get in touch with him and one evening he showed up with a friend. He claimed his problem stemmed from hitting an airdale (slang for navy pilot) hence the incarceration. He also brought along a fellow prisoner who had been a carnival worker before getting into the navy. Donald got him to show us how he could chew up a light bulb with impunity and also the same with burning cigarettes. Real qualifications for the navy. One noticeable characteristic of every navy prisoner was dark brown stained fingers on the hand they held their cigarette with. The navy issued the prisoners a very limited amount of Bull Durham (tobacco in a cloth bag) and cigarette papers which the prisoners smoked till almost nothing was left causing the tobacco stained fingers. At this time most men smoked and almost all sailors did. When walking down a navy base street and one happened to pass prisoners working on the grass or sweeping they would beg you to throw them cigarettes. It wasn’t safe to do so as a marine guard was bound to be around somewhere and we didn’t want to join the prisoners.

My promotion progress had been from apprentice seaman to seaman first class at the end of boot camp and to fireman at the end of the machinist’s school. The school was four months long and was over in early September and I got a few days delay reroute and two dollars per diem to get to Washington, DC with provided train tickets. As a result of my performance at the machinist school I was selected for an additional several weeks school at the Naval Gun Factory in Anacostia a suburb of Washington, DC and on the Anacostia River.

This facility was an old navy base and quite historical. The brick barracks (called a receiving ship) just inside the gate was my new home. Because the bunks were all full for the first few nights some others and I slept in the brig, which was below the first floor. They didn’t lock us in at night and it was an enjoyable experience. Instead of seeing thousands of sailors now we only saw a few hundred at most and the food served in the same building was quite good. The next amazing thing I found out was that we could walk out of the gate at any time except when we were on duty, which was once every three days besides school, of course.

The schooling I was sent there for was to learn lens coating, which is the pink purple coating of magnesium fluoride now seen on all optical surfaces to increase light transmission. We had less than ten students in the class and it was very informally conducted in a laboratory and shop. At that time some of the optical equipment on navy ships did not have the coating and our job would be to go to a base or tender (a ship full of shops that other ships came along side of for repairs and supplies) and coat the optics as needed. I was able to visit the gun factory and see the biggest machine tools in the world. That was because the government made the sixteen-inch guns for our battleships and made smaller guns for our cruisers. The reason for this was that no industrial facility in America had machine tools large enough to do this work. The lathe active section was close to one hundred feet long as the gun barrels had to be machined to a taper on the outside; the bore had to be machined on the inside; and the rifling had to be broached in the long barrel. The ride with the cutting tool was so long that the operator sat in a chair on the carriage on the long path. The shop also had enormous horizontal boring mills to make gun bases.

Well we did a lot of liberties here; just walk out the gate get on a streetcar and go to downtown Washington for excellent dining, sightseeing weekends, and good theatres where I saw Victor Borge ac-
companied by my future wife. The ratio of women to men was nine to one so I soon got acquainted with my future wife Patria Padilla at a servicemen’s dance at the YWCA. We spent a lot of time at the Smithsonian Museum, the national art galleries, and walking in the beautiful Rock Creek Park. There was no military protocol in Washington; I walked around with my hat on the back of my head with cuffs rolled up.

My time there was too soon over and I was given a train ticket to San Francisco and ten dollars total per diem with orders permitting me a delay in route so I had a few days in Muncie. The train trip from Chicago west was very interesting as we followed the Union Pacific route, through the Rocky Mountains covered with snow and then to the causeway across the Great Salt Lake. Arriving in the San Francisco area I was immediately impressed with the pleasant climate (it was now November and Muncie had been chilly) and the quaint mission towns we went through. I eventually ended up on Treasure Island, which was dredged up from San Francisco Bay for the 1939-40 Golden Gate Exposition to celebrate the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge. The large exposition buildings were used as sleeping barracks and mess halls. The ones for sleeping had one thousand camp cots set up in the vast hall and nowhere to hang anything.

When I received my instructions I was told I was assigned to sweepers. Now minesweepers were assigned tenders also so I thought I would be going to such a vessel and that a certain area was set-aside for us. Sweepers really meant that we were the ones who swept down that big hall twice a day. It turned out to be a very good assignment because we were in enclosed rooms around the sides of the big hall and had good bunks and lockers to hang our stuff up in. In addition the sailors in the big hall had to fall out every morning and stand for lengthy times while several petty officers on stands with bullhorns read out names to make up numerous work parties for various tasks. Some were hauled off in trucks and I saw two or three jump out the back of the truck every time it stopped at a stop sign. Some individuals made up their own work parties and marched them back to the big hall, done for the day. Our service men were great con artists.

The mess hall was also in one of the big halls and had four chow lines and was reputedly the biggest chow hall of any service. We got in long lines at 10:30 am and were served around 12:00 noon. The food was good and they had fresh pineapple frequently. One time they served artichoke that I had never seen before. I asked a sailor next to me how to eat it and he said just put those outer leaves in your mouth and chew them up. I soon found that was all wrong and learned to eat them right and have enjoyed artichoke ever since.

We got a Christmas leave while there and one of my sailor friends was from Los Angeles and he took us home for the holidays. He arranged a trip to RKO studios where we saw Pat O’Brien drunk and the man who played Hitler in movies dressed in a Nazi uniform. We went by bus and traveled the coastal route going and the inland route coming back and it was much colder on that trip. Everywhere it was sparsely settled along both routes especially compared to the current density. Arriving back to Treasure Island we had lost our status-sweeping job and had to fall out every morning like the rest. One day we were taken by truck to a large troop ship that I found out later was the 723 feet long SS America taken over by the government and renamed the USS West Point. This day we were stevedores and I worked some and ate my fill of fresh oranges. Later I found a place to take a nap but overslept and missed my ride back to the island so had to stay for another shift. I didn’t nap again although it got way past my bedtime.

Liberty in the city was very nice, however, I found out soon enough that they did have a strict military protocol there. On perhaps my first liberty with a couple of fellow sailors from the optical school we went to a nice restaurant and ate. After coming out I had my hat on the habitual way on the back of my head. My friends had already started across the busy street when I was grabbed by both arms and quickly placed in the back of a shore patrol paddy wagon. When my friends turned to look for me I waved goodbye to their surprised countenances. The paddy wagon proceeded down to a temporary holding brig in Chinatown where we were held until midnight and that was the punishment; staying incarcerated behind a mesh lockup until the evening was shot. We were then turned loose and left to find our own way back to Treasure Island just like the Muncie police a few years before. On another occasion a nice older lady took me to a Chinese restaurant that she said was the best in San Francisco and I believe she was right. She did the ordering and we had a superb meal. And so this was my introduction to Chinese food.
Chapter 9. Overseas Duty in the South Pacific

On January 4, 1944 we left San Francisco Bay on the USS Indianapolis for Pearl Harbor. The ship had come from Pearl with 500 or half of her total complement to pick up 1,000 sailors destined for Pearl Harbor. By the time we were past the Golden Gate Bridge sailors were at the rail and when we hit those Pacific swells more joined them but I never got seasick then or in the future. The ship cruised at twenty-seven knots (thirty one mph) and the view of the water from the mid-deck that was only a few feet above the water gave a good sensation of the speed and we got to Pearl in three days a distance of 2,100 nautical miles.

Since the ship was crowded with an extra 500 sailors we were told to sleep anywhere we could hang our hammocks or lay out our bedding on the steel deck inside or out. The navy ships in those days had hammock clews installed on all of the overheads. There were two small airplane hangers on deck for catapult planes that were not on board so I hung my hammock in one of them. That was fine until one day while taking a nap the ship started some anti-aircraft practice with the ships five-inch guns and there was one that fired just adjacent and above the hanger. It was analogous to being inside of a drum with a super sized firecracker set off on the drum skin. It woke me up.

Because the sailor passengers were displacing five hundred of the ships regular crew we also stood watches during the trip. I was fortunate in that my watches were as a lookout on the bridge wing. I remember very well cruising through the Pacific waters at thirty mph on a moonlit night and seeing the flashing white caps and the bow wave flowing swiftly and gracefully by. This was better than any cruise ship trip today and it was free. In the daytime we watched schools of flying fish gliding rapidly from one large swell top many feet to the base of the next one. The swells in the Pacific were quite large regardless of wind conditions and we did not have any serious winds on the trip. That is why this ocean was named the Pacific meaning peaceful (except in a Typhoon).

During the day we might see some whales and a vertical spout of exhaled air and water spray and vapor. A fascinating bird, the Layson Albatross was frequently seen as they followed the ship to retrieve edibles thrown overboard daily. The Albatross has a wingspan up to thirteen feet and soars for months without landing on land. Their long narrow polydihedral wings allow them to soar for hours close to the water without ever flapping their wings as they catch the updrafts from the large swells. They still stay in the air in very high winds. Anyway I found them to be the most graceful bird in flight seen anywhere. On the ground and known as Gooney Birds they are very clumsy.

The Pacific was very blue and as we approached Hawaii we could see the multi-colored volcanic peaks in the distance. The water was an azure blue and closer to shore light green with the white surf in the background. Once ashore I thought I was at the end of the world but very soon got acclimated as all sailors soon do at a new base. I was temporarily assigned to the submarine base that meant I would probably be assigned to a submarine tender.

We soon went on liberty to Honolulu and Waikiki and both places were full of service men; sailors, soldiers, marines, and coast guard. The ratio of men to women was reportedly 200 to 1. Our liberty hours were from 8:30 am to 6:00 pm and I never saw Honolulu at night in an off and on period of one year on the island paradise. The reason for so many servicemen was that this was the jumping off point for all of the Pacific Theater of War. The restaurants had very little good food and it was expensive since it had to be shipped from the mainland. One restaurant we went to and soon left before ordering, had flying cockroaches coming out of the kitchen every time a waiter went in or out. One could get delicious slices of fresh pineapple on the street from women vendors and that was about it. The Royal Hawaiian Hotel had been taken over by the navy as a submarine crew rest camp but was available to all servicemen during the day and was a good place to access Waikiki Beach. They also had beer and soft drinks and some food items. During one of our stays at Pearl Harbor we got to go to a theatre in Honolulu and see Arsenic and Old Lace with Boris Karloff, one of my favorite actors, in the lead.

Other sights I saw were Diamond Head, the famous Bishop Museum, and we were able to take a bus tour around the whole island of Oahu that was fabulous. On this tour we first went up to Pali and on the trip we saw the many mansions owned by movie stars and millionaires from the sugar and pineapple
dynasties. Approaching Pali we saw the waterfalls that run backwards. This occurs for two reasons; first it is almost continually raining at the crest of this ridge of mountains because the prevailing westerly winds sweep up the mountainside losing their moisture at the top and the strong winds blow the water from the waterfalls and rain back up resulting in the waterfalls that run backwards. The other side of the island was a verdant green from frequent rains. We got out at the Pali lookout and experienced the strong winds. Legend has it that one of the former kings was thrown off of Pali by natives dissatisfied with his rule and the wind blew him back up and so he was reinstated as king. Traveling on we saw the blowhole where the strong surf forces water back through a tunnel in the coral reef and then shooting several feet in the air. We also stopped for locally grown bananas and visited a sugar cane plantation and saw their little narrow gage trains for hauling the sugar cane in from the fields to the processing plant.

After a few weeks my ship came in, the 573 feet long USS Bushnell, a submarine tender. We left Pearl, April 27, 1944, for Majuro Atoll in the Marshall Island group. On board I was assigned to the optical shop that was air conditioned to protect the many optical instruments that we would be working on and to prevent sweat from dripping on delicate equipment. We were issued camp cots and slept in the shop and during the day our sleeping gear was stowed overhead on the many asbestos insulated pipes there. Everybody in the shop had a nickname, we had a Blackie, a Pinky, a Sammy, a Duke, and some others and I became Whitey. The officer in charge of the shop, Lieutenant Woody was a mustang, which meant he came up through the ranks and these are usually the most chicken and it was true in this case. He was a real “don’t do as I do, do as I say” officer. There were Sunday Church services held on deck every Sunday. If we asked to go Woody would respond with “what the hell was this ship, a damn Noah’s Ark”? He had to let us go as the navy authorized it. He cussed quite a bit but we weren’t allowed to because it was against navy regulations, but not for him. At night during our poker games he might come by if he was officer of the deck. We used nuts from our large supply for chips and he would ask if the nuts represented money. We always said no and then he would say, “It won’t matter if I mix all those nuts up then will it”? He never did, he was just a little mean. We heard that he had lost lots of money in the wardroom poker games.

The boatswain’s pipe (never called a whistle except by landlubbers) was heard from the quarterdeck throughout the day calling deck hands to various tasks. The pipe was frequently followed with the verbal command “clean sweep down fore and aft” or “turn to with scrapers and brushes”. The deck hands spent countless hours scraping and wire brushing rust off of the steel decks and bulkheads and then repainting first with red lead and then the standard battleship gray. These crews were driven by boatswain mates who were sometimes lacking in diplomacy regarding their handling of the deck hands. One morning a boatswain couldn’t be awakened for some time. It turns out he was beaten over the head while asleep with a nearby pipe usually on a bracket, for tightening down hatch dogs. He survived and no culprit was found but perhaps his diplomacy improved although most of these types were pretty hardheaded.

The boatswains pipe was introduced in the days of sail when it was the only signal sound that could be carried aloft to sailors on the yardarms seventy-five or a hundred feet above deck. We also had various bugle calls throughout the day such as reveille; turn to, mail call, chow down, swim call, taps, and others, as there was a call for almost everything. After the reveille call we were rudely roused to our feet by masters at arms vigorously tapping our feet with their billy clubs. We had general quarters occasionally for training purposes especially when underway. My station was in a magazine below decks loading five-inch shells onto a vertical conveyer that took the shells up to the guns. After the general quarters was over we unloaded the shells as they came down and restored them. We got behind one time and some of the shells dropped on the steel deck and that made everybody a little nervous. We also had to stand guard duty periodically, patrolling through various parts of the ship mostly below deck. This was a necessary duty to detect any incipient fire before it could get out of hand.

A brief description of what the optical shop did might be of interest. First we had a four-foot high strong back with sliding vee blocks on it that ran the full length of the optical shop. This was used to support the periscopes that were maneuvered in through a side hatch held by a crane on the top deck and with personnel and an inside overhead chain fall on a track that took over the periscope as it was moved into the shop and then onto the strong back. Here the optics was checked, as was the pressure integrity of the pe-
riscope since it was filled with dry nitrogen to keep out moisture. The outside of this stainless steel tube was also checked for scratches that sometimes resulted from hard inclusions in the bronze bearings that the periscope slid up and down through. If the barrel was scratched the bearings were replaced and we might spend twenty-four hours on the top deck sanding the barrel with a two-man clamp arrangement with emery paper in it doused with diesel oil frequently. This didn’t happen too often but it was rush rush job when it did for the subs had a patrol schedule to keep. The other work done was that all binoculars and gun sights on board the sub was totally reworked at the end of each patrol. This meant total disassembly, all paint removed, the optics re-cemented and cleaned, spray-painting and baking, reassembly, collimating the optics, and then a final critical inspection by Woody. We also had a typewriter repairman in the optical shop. We might have from two to eight subs along side at any one time. One sub came in with the captain and some of the crew injured as they got caught on the surface by a Japanese plane that strafed them. This also put several holes in the skin of the vessel all of which was repaired by the tender. We also got a destroyer in one time that got too close to the bypassed island they were guarding and the Japanese guns opened on them putting many holes in the thin skinned destroyer. Our welders and painters had them on their way in four days.

Working and sleeping in air conditioning five degrees above the equator in the South Pacific when most Americans didn’t even have it yet was a stroke of luck to say the least. Not much of a war story to tell your grandkids is it? Actually we sometimes hung our hammocks on the adjacent deck overhead or put up our cots on deck for a change, as there was usually a nice breeze. Food on the ship was pretty good as frozen food was well developed by then but there was no such thing as any fresh vegetables but we had lots of canned ones. Since we had an exclusive environment we had two or three select regular visitors for nightly card games, mostly pinochle and sometimes poker. First was the executive officer’s yeoman (secretary) who could provide certain services as needed such as lost ID cards (it happened to me) and provide us with needed forms, etc. He also kept us well informed as to what was going on above. The other type we always had present was a cook that could bring us special items from the galley such as occasional steaks and other goodies. One of our optical shop workers was an expert scrounger. For example before a sub went on patrol they were stocked with lots of good food such as canned hams, canned lobster and other goodies. This was done by a work party that came from our galley stockroom carrying the food in burlap sacks and they passed our bulkhead door to get to the submarine. Our scrounger would get in the return line and so he was able to fill one of the sacks with goodies and when he got to our area he disappeared into our shop. When our scrounger left the ship later on he had two sea bags stuffed to the brim, one with his clothing and the other with precision instruments and tools of all kinds. He was a machinist in civilian life and he figured the navy might as well help him out.

I had occasion to obtain a liquid solvent that had various uses. My predecessor had convinced Woody that he needed a quart of grain alcohol about every two weeks to clean the optics before coating. I continued this useful tradition, which included never wasting a drop of the alcohol on optics as other solvents worked just as well. I kept it locked up in our tool room in a special locker to which I had the key. To draw my two weeks ration I would go with Woody to his wardroom where he kept a five-gallon can of the grain alcohol under his berth. I imagine he was popular with at least some of the other officers. Every so often the chief in charge of the optical shop would show up with two large cups with ice and a lemon powder water mix and say “Whitey, make us a couple of Tom Collins” which I promptly did. He never overdid this practice and we had to utilize the alcohol without him sometimes. We also had denatured alcohol (pink lady) for little burners used to melt the balsam that was used to cement two matching lens surfaces together. Almost every morning a sailor from the adjacent radio repair shop would come through our shop, take the top off of one of the burners, and pour a shot of the pink stuff into his cup of coffee. We were always hearing about sailors that went blind or worse died from drinking denatured alcohol but it never seemed to bother our neighbor. I don’t think small amounts would bother somebody, as they didn’t want to make the denatured alcohol too lethal. Later on we found a still on our liberty island that had been used by the submariners when on R and R as they had access to unlimited amounts of pink lady since it was also the fuel for torpedoes. This was not safe either as the boiling point of the grain alcohol and the
denaturant were close together so both would distill together. They tried everything including straining the pink lady through a loaf of bread endways.

Arriving at Majuro Atoll we could see our liberty spot and weren’t too impressed. Actually atolls do have some attractive features such as many coconut trees and a little other tropical foliage but it was nothing like the Hawaiian Islands that I had admired greatly. An atoll is a string of coral reef islands in roughly circular form several miles across. Majuro Atoll was approximately fifteen miles across and the lagoon inside is quite deep making a very good anchorage. There are many shallow inlets between the numerous islands through which the water runs in and out fairly rapidly with the tide changes. The navy blasted a deep channel through the coral to make a deep and wide ship channel.

In a few weeks’ troop and cargo ships started coming in and anchoring. Then one morning the navy line came in like in the newsreels; battleships first, then the cruisers, followed by aircraft carriers, and then the smaller destroyers and it was a very thrilling sight. This was Task Force 58 assembling for the next Pacific attack which we found after the fact was the Marianas. During this stay of the task force I went to the USS Oklahoma to visit a sailor with the name Richard Bricker from Pennsylvania who had received a letter addressed to me from Pat. The trip was made in a double-ended motor whaleboat around twenty-five feet long. These were run by a coxswain at the tiller and an engineer who controlled the diesel engine. On the way back it got quite rough as with a long fetch and very deep water and strong winds it was much more than just a chop. When we stopped at one ship to pick up a visiting sailor the officer of the deck told us that an officer sailing a small sunfish like boat had capsized and we were to proceed towards his location to help him. This was directly into the wind at full speed and we started taking a lot of water over the bow so everybody had to start bailing with our sailor hats, which are good for that purpose. I thought the coxswain should have taken the waves at an angle as the fiction sea books I had read dictated. The coxswain hollered to the engineer to cover the spark plugs so they wouldn’t get wet. The engineer reminded him that diesels don’t have spark plugs. A submarine sailor sitting next to me was terrified and shaking violently with chill and fear. Perhaps he liked to be below the surface better than on it. I felt somewhat superior as I enjoyed this diversion immensely and had thought sub sailors were invincible. Well I know their courage has got to be very high and we lost a lot of sub sailors during the war. The officer was OK and we went back to the Bushnell at a reduced speed so the fun was over. After a few weeks we got up one morning and the lagoon was almost empty. The large task force had left and was on its way to the Marianas.

Just before Christmas in 1944 many people got bottles of Listerine from home usually filled with whiskey to the top so they wouldn’t gurgle. Don sent me a pint of good Irish whiskey (he was in the business) and it was in a loaf of unsliced bread all taped up. Austin sent me a variety pack of cheeses, salamis, and a container of anchovies that I immediately found a liking for that has persisted to the present. My mother sent cookies and some of her delicious chocolate fudge with walnuts in it. A couple of court martials resulted from the Christmas Eve celebrations that took place on board the ship but our shop stayed out of trouble.

Since we had all kinds of shops and materials on-board many of the sailors had hobbies and made various craft objects. Some were able to make a little money from their skills. We also had some outright racketeers. One example was our shipboard watchmaker an older man with a watchmaker’s shop that was housed in a lockable mesh cage located in our shop and where he also slept. His primary job was to take care of and work on, as needed the ship and submarine chronometers. This was far from a full time job so he was allowed to repair any sailor’s or officer’s watches. Now he bought all the necessary stock of parts when we were in port at Pearl Harbor on a navy chit so he didn’t have to pay anything out of his pocket. When he repaired your watch there was a charge made that went into his pocket. After payday he could outlast everybody else in the dice games and usually won all when he chose to because of his almost unlimited bank. When a sub came along side from the states just before Christmas in 1944 with a lot of fifths of bourbon on board to readily sell for fifty dollars a fifth (more racketeers) he bought two bottles. The ship had a barber shop and haircuts were free, however the word passed around was that if you didn’t tip the barber at least a quarter your next haircut would be a mess. Maybe the barbers passed this rumor around.
For onboard entertainment we had movies every night and also updates on the war in both the Pacific and European theatres. A big event every day was mail call. Outgoing mail was censored by officers assigned that task as an additional duty. Other recreation we had was swim call at 3:30 daily and we could swim off the side of the ship. A hundred yards away a motor whaleboat patrolled back and forth with a master-at-arms carrying a sub-machine gun. This was to give us protection from potential sharks although we never saw one in our nine months stay. The worse thing in the water was thousands of jellyfish and after swimming a couple of times I quit even though I had never gotten stung. The waters also had barracuda that at least sounded like a real threat as they were supposed to attack at high speed and take big chunks out of the leg or other places.

We had a floating dry dock assigned to the ship so the submarine bottoms could also be scraped of marine growth and repainted as needed. This dirty work was performed by what was called the relief crew, which were submarine sailors berthed on our ship awaiting assignment to a submarine as needed. When there was room we also had a couple of old sailing ship hulls alongside that were used for storage of various materials. These were probably old lumber schooners from the west coast or Hawaii.

Before we got the floating dry dock a propeller had to be removed from a sub alongside. This was very skillfully accomplished by attaching a crane cable to the propeller that led up to the deck crane on the tender. The attachments holding the prop on the shaft were removed but, of course, the prop did not slide off of the shaft, nothing is ever that easy. The gem of a solution was that two divers wearing long johns for protection against the jellyfish went down (it wasn’t deep) and put a small explosive charge between the prop and the adjacent sub structure that may have been protected with a steel plate. After the divers got back onboard the charge was set off and the prop swung free and was hoisted onboard the tender. I thought that was marvelous engineering as one had to use enough explosive to do the job without an amount that could damage the submarine structure, shaft, or propeller if it was repairable.

The Majuro Atoll Island we had liberty on was a couple of hundred or so yards wide and several hundred yards long and the highest elevation was twelve feet. The lagoon side had two beaches built by the Seabees by bringing in a lot of sand. There was one beach for the officers and one for the enlisted men and all swam nude for unknown reasons. Surely it was not for sanitary purposes as in the Muncie YMCA pool. It was sometimes disconcerting to be lying on the beach and have a hermit crab burrow up out of the sand and scratch at your stomach. The water was very clear and the bottom had all kinds of marine life including small octopuses that the Filipino ward men on the ship would come after, if they knew one had been caught and they seemed to have had a instant knowledge when this happened. There were sea cucumbers and other things unknown to me. One time I was playing on the beach and became friendly with a black wardroom attendant as we were looking at some of the same underwater items. We were friendly for an hour or so and either on the beach or back at the ship I was called various names for those who associate with blacks. I was flabbergasted, as I had not run into blatant racism until then. I learned that the sailors from the south were still fighting the Civil War.

On the ocean side of the island the environment was entirely different. There was a flat coral shelf extending several feet from the white coral sand and then there were beautiful underwater coral reefs running out several feet to a very deep drop off. As the large swells came ashore there was only one huge surf line about ten to twelve feet high and it broke with dramatic fury. No one got close to that breaker line because it was obvious to anyone that you would be immediately torn to pieces in the coral canyons. We did lose two sailors that were washed out to sea as they were trying to cross to an adjacent island. At low tide the coral was bare but in this case they started across in swift out flowing rushing water and they had their feet washed out from under them and were unable to recover. I got a rest camp session of several days on the island and the continuous sound of the surf was very pleasant especially at night. During the day we looked for seashells, carefully explored the coral reef, and drank some beer. Sometime during our stay at Majuro we got to go to a USO Show that had Bob Hope and I believe Francis Langford. At these events as with shipboard movies, and church or entertainment on board the ship the first two or three rows of seats were reserved for officers. Officers also always went to the head of any lines and in the navy there were lines for everything.
The ship also had a sick bay and some doctors with various specialties. Some of them saw the ship and submarine relief crews as an opportunity to experiment and improve their techniques or even come up with new ones. The worst of these experimenters were the ones who delved into dermatology. One liked to try and remove tattoos and the results were not too good leaving lots of scar tissue. Another operation was to pin the ears back for those whose ears stuck out from the head. Another involved the scrotum which if the skin was too loose could cause irritation when walking and of course this was made worse in the hot humid climate. A joke was made in our ship paper after one of these procedures by way of a riddle. The question was what did the giraffe say to the elephant while they were standing at a bar and the answer was “the highballs are on me”. A swimming event also brought some sage comments in the paper. A sailor swimming at our nude beach had his dangling worm like appendage bitten by an unknown fish that required several stitches to repair but didn’t do any permanent damage. Now one would think that immediately signs would go up and the word would be passed that henceforth bathing suits would be worn at all times on the beaches. This didn’t happen and in fact nobody including myself gave the incident a second thought regarding safety unlike todays after the fact fixing of all safety issues as soon as possible.

We got acquainted with one relief crewmember that was a cook as he could also bring us good stuff. He was finally assigned to a submarine and went on a patrol and he was a little on the heavy side when he left. He returned several weeks later and was now thin having lost some thirty pounds. We asked him what happened? He said that the patrol was in the China Sea, which is between China and Japan and was very heavily mined by the Japanese. Now our submarines were to some extent protected against pulling a mine down to the sub and setting it off (contact was required to cause the mine to explode) with cables that would prevent the mine cable connection to its anchor from catching on the protruberances on the sub such as the bow and stern planes. The problem he said was that as submarine crept along underwater one could hear the mine anchor cable dragging along the side of the sub and this went on for hours sometimes. If it stopped it would inevitably start up again and the stress caused him and some of the other sailors to lose a lot of weight.

We had two tragedies alongside while at anchor at Majuro. In one a chief Petty officer was electrocuted while working with a welding machine. The second happened on a submarine when a sailor was cleaning his dress blues below deck using carbon tetrachloride as the cleaning agent. This was used as a fire-extinguishing agent and is a very good dry cleaning agent. Unfortunately its lethality was not widely known at that time. It is rapidly absorbed through the skin and in the submarine environment the fumes were concentrated and unfortunately the sailor died. It is no longer used in fire extinguishers or as a cleaning agent.

Once during our nine months stay the ship upped anchor and moved to another spot. The sailors said it was because we had deep-sixed so much stuff that it was starting to rub against the bottom of the ship. Any junk and some good things were thrown overboard at will. We had a special entertainment one evening. Lt. Commander Eddy Peabody of Grand Old Opry played his famous banjo for us. That was his job in the navy, entertaining the sailors in the Pacific.

After nine months swinging around the anchor in this paradise we sailed back to Pearl Harbor. Incidentally once the navy got Donald Yarger overseas where he couldn’t go home he did very well as a radioman on the aircraft carrier USS Hancock and came out of the navy as a petty officer second class the same rank I achieved without going AWOL. I had occasion to visit him while the Bushnell and his ship the USS Hancock was in port for repairs. When we met on his ship he showed me the reason for the trip to Pearl that was a forty-foot diameter hole in the flight deck. What caused the hole as told by Donald was not a kamikaze but a bomb from one of the carrier’s planes. The navy plane went on a bombing mission and the pilot opened his bomb bay doors and activated the mechanism to drop the bomb. Unfortunately something didn’t work right and the 500-pound bomb dropped on the Hancock’s deck when the plane came to a stop exploding and blowing a large hole in the flight deck. This started fires on both the flight deck and the hangar deck below. Twelve officers and 196 enlisted men were killed from this accident. Donald said he was in a compartment two decks below the explosion and was thrown around but not injured.
About the same time the USS Franklin came in and was in terrible shape. She was called the ship that wouldn’t die. She was hit by two 500-pound semi-armor piecing bombs from a Japanese plane before dawn one day, setting planes, fuel, and ordinance on fire resulting in a raging inferno. As a result 736 crewmen were killed and she had a thirteen-degree list to starboard and was dead in the water. She was towed for a while and then got her own power working sailing to Pearl Harbor where I saw her and then she sailed back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard but was too badly damaged to be worth repairing. It was a morale and patriotic cruise.

We went into dry dock at Pearl and all hands had to turn to cleaning the ship bottom and sides up to the maximum draft line prior to being repainted with bottom paint. This was a twenty-four hour a day job until completed. The ship was sitting on concrete blocks about four feet high and it was really back-breaking work stooped over and trying to scrape at the same time. I chose this location after a discussion with our division chief who wanted me to go on the flimsy scaffolding that didn’t have any railings thirty feet above the concrete deck. Having acrophobia I would have probably taken a court martial rather than go up there. The officer could see that I was serious and for the second time in the navy I got my way, this time without crying. While at Pearl my buddy James Gambil and I were sent to gunnery school close to Nanakuli on the west side of Oahu. After some classroom work we were strapped into twenty-millimeter antiaircraft guns to shoot at towed sleeves and it was very enjoyable. The guns had all recoil taken up by some mechanism so we didn’t feel any recoil. The sights were advanced in that they led the gun properly if you had inputted the range and wind speed. There was a great beach nearby and we spent some time on it. All of the barracks here and at Pearl had screened windows without any glass and were very comfortable day or night. The roofs had large overhangs so no rain came in. Oahu had several microclimates and the west side of the island was quite dry with some cactus around but it wasn’t a dry hot desert climate because of the perpetual trade winds off of the Pacific.

After several weeks at Pearl Harbor we sailed to Midway Island where the sand was so white we were issued cheap plastic sunglasses before arriving. Midway was home to thousands of the Layson Albatross (called gooney birds) during their chick hatching term and all of Midway was a national bird sanctuary. Though very graceful in the air the gooneys were quite clumsy on land. They were everywhere on the island and if you got too close to the egg or chick in the nest which was just a depression in the sand the mother bird might charge you. The birds took off like an airplane by running and flapping several feet before leaving the ground to get air speed and if anything moved into their path they ran right into it and the reverse happened on landing. They took off and landed the same on water.

We had an unusual and pleasant surprise at Midway as every Friday for the noon meal we had fresh tuna and it was good. This came about because much earlier the navy had captured two or three Japanese Sampans (fishing boats) and of course rigged them out very nice for deep-sea fishing. They had navy crews on them that went out fishing for tuna for several days at a time and they kept the base and all of the docked ships in fish, mostly tuna. Now if you think I had it good it was nothing to what those guys had. They fished from fastened stern chairs and of course put up outriggers but they might as well have been fishing out of Key West or San Diego.

I had my only experience with unpleasant marine life at Midway. At our swimming beach there was a floating raft off the beach several feet as a place to swim to and sit around the edge of the raft. The raft was a wooden square platform sitting on fifty-five gallon drums for flotation so any floating item could drift under it. One time as I was unfortunately sitting on the downwind side I suddenly got excruciating stings on the backside of my calves. At the same time I noticed some floating bladder like objects drifting by. These turned out to be Portuguese-Men-of-War. The pain went away after awhile and then I found out that other sailors had been stung some on the face while swimming and that could be more serious. The treatment, which I didn’t get, was about the same as for bee stings. We kept a careful watch after that.

There was a shortage of beer and it was rationed at six cans per week handled with coupons, which soon replaced money in the poker games. One day a large Victory class cargo ship sailed in loaded with beer and that ended the rationing. In August the war was over and in a week or so we sailed to San Diego, California taking twelve days at our cruise speed of 15 to 17 knots. We had diesel engines for propulsion
whereas the ships of the line had steam turbines and were much faster. So the slogan "back alive in forty-
five" prevailed over “Golden Gate in forty-eight”. The first thing I looked for on liberty was fresh sliced
tomatoes.

After a short stay at anchor in San Diego Bay I was given a thirty-day leave. I traveled first to
Denver, Colorado to meet Don my brother, leaving San Diego at 9:30 am. The plane trip is worth recount-
ing. From San Diego we flew to Long Beach airport then Los Angeles airport. Onward we flew to San
Francisco and then to Reno, Nevada. There were other stops and the best part was flying over the Painted
Desert late in the afternoon as the sunlight greatly enhanced the colors. We flew on to Cheyenne Wyom-
ing that is a couple of hundred miles north of Denver. Flying on to Denver the plane had to go over a
range of mountains and the seat belt sign was on all the time. The stewardess warned us not to release
them at any time because the previous week an unbelted lady had flew up in the air and came down on a
seatback breaking her back. You will never hear that sort of an announcement on a commercial flight in
this day and age. The plane arrived in Denver after a twelve-hour flight from San Diego at 9:30 pm and
right on schedule. The many landings and takeoffs and time on the ground contributed to this lengthy
flight. Don met me at the airport as he had stayed in the area after his parachute accident at Lowry Field
nearby and consequent discharge from the paratroops. Don being a salesman had picked the most lucrative
field during wartime that of selling liquor. That is when Americans started drinking martinis and rum
drinks when they could only get gin and rum in place of the usual bourbon. We stayed in Denver until the
next day and then went to Colorado Springs where I toured around the Garden of the Gods on horseback as
they were very tame and rode a funicular car up the mountainside to sight see.

Don had the usual salesman’s coupe and we started out for Muncie following US highway 36 al-
most the whole way. The drive across Kansas was interesting. The wheat had been harvested and because
there was so much of it large piles of wheat was piled outside the grain elevators because all available in-
side storage was full. The little towns were five to six miles apart and the railway was parallel with the
highway so as one left a town very soon the next grain elevator would be in sight and that was the game
we played all the way across Kansas, looking for the next elevator. Don drove nonstop all the way home,
and me after almost three years in the navy and twenty years old couldn’t drive yet. Well I probably could
have but it wouldn’t have been prudent.

After a few days in Muncie visiting I went on to Washington, DC and married Pat on September
29, 1945 at the First Baptist Church. Pat was a Catholic and a priest tried to talk her out of the marriage.
We soon took a train back to Chicago and then got on a Pullman car of the Southern Pacific Railroad
headed for Los Angeles, California. We stayed overnight there and one unpleasant incident happened.
We checked into a hotel and as we started to get on an elevator the house detective (yes, most hotels had
such things then) accosted us and demanded to see our wedding license. After seeing it this American
Gestapo let us go.

Next day we got on a train for San Diego and got a rented room in a nice neighborhood for ten
dollars a week the almost universal price in those days. On November 8, 1945 I was discharged from the
navy and we headed for Chicago on the Sante Fe Railroad. At discharge in addition to my regular pay I
was given one hundred dollars and received the same amount the two subsequent months as severance pay.
We also got a little eagle lapel pin that everybody soon called the “ruptured duck” and nobody wore be-
cause there were so many of them.

This was my third trip between Chicago and the west coast and I enjoyed each one. It was a good
way to see the plains, the deserts, and the Rocky Mountains in a very relaxed way. It was a shock when
we got off the train in Chicago and the cold winds hit us after having been in sunny California. We trave-
led on to Muncie and stayed at my mother’s house. This was OK with Pat except the cold bedrooms
were a shock to her.
In a few days with the help of a relative I got a job at the Owens Corning glass factory. The rule then at least at this plant was that when a veteran applied for a job a woman was laid off and the veteran was given her job. Again it was shift work and I used my bicycle for the four-mile trip each way. The plant was still making insulators and glass brick and I had a variety of jobs for a few days. Finally I was assigned to a permanent workstation. This was between two girls at the output end of a paint-drying conveyor. Each glass brick has white sand glued around its periphery to enhance its tenacity when mortared into a wall. This production line put the adhesive on the brick and a nice coating of white sand and we were on a bonus system, which meant that the more bricks completed per shift above a standard amount resulted in a little more money. At the output end our job was to inspect each brick and pack them into a box of four. These were large bricks and each weighed sixteen pounds the same as an average bowling ball. After the first couple of shifts I was extremely sore but soon got over it. We packed several thousand per night but I don’t remember the number.

I was eligible for five years of college based on my service time. My uncle Mandus recommended Rose Polytechnic Institute in Terre Haute, Indiana so I concentrated on that. With the wartime shortage of students now being made up I could have gone to Purdue or MIT or almost anywhere in the country but I settled on Rose and have never regretted that decision.

Pat and I got on a train with our few belongings in January or February of 1946 and headed to Terre Haute. We soon found a ten-dollar a week room in Terre Haute. From a previous short trip I had found out that the entrance required one and a half years of algebra and the same for geometry. I had one year of algebra but no geometry. Somehow I was directed to Gerstmeyer Technical High School that was in a beautiful castle like building, which had been the original home of Rose. They had a special program set up for veterans that allowed you to work math courses at your own speed but you could get much help from the teacher in his spare time. You had to do all of the work and take all of the exams but at your own accelerated pace. So this I started with the geometry and took a regular algebra class in the spring term that was about to start.

About this time our landlady told us that we would have to move out as her son was out of a job and was coming to live at home and she suggested that since things were so bad that we should go back to Muncie. We soon found another place on Center Street where we got the room free in return for my firing two furnaces, the landlord’s house and his rental house next door. Because of all of the coal smoke the local newspaper had frequent articles on combating the air pollution by proper firing of furnaces. The recommended approach made sense and directed the person adding coal to the furnace to first move all of the red hot coals to the back of the furnace making a low area in the front of the fire box. The new coal was to then be put in the low area in front rather than on top of the hot coals. This caused the evolved combustible gases to then pass over the hot coals and ignite instead of going up the chimney as smoke. The articles also strongly cautioned against throwing new coal on top of a bed of hot coals as an explosion could occur. This is analogous to the throwing of kerosene on hot coals that caused many explosions.

Now I would like to describe Terre Haute as I saw it. First it was in the midst of a large number of strip mines that produced great quantities of bituminous coal. Secondly it had many railroads both east and westbound and north and southbound; it was a big rail center. Now as with most other places everybody burned coal for heating whether it was a stove or furnace. In Muncie the coal of choice was usually Pennsylvania anthracite, which produces less sooty smoke as compared to bituminous. As a result the buildings and frame houses in Terre Haute were rather dingy looking both from the many smoky steam trains and the use of the soft bituminous coal used for heating. Even the streets looked dirty. It was not unusual to see a sophisticated lady walking down the main street with two or three soot specs on her face.

My original intention was to work and do the schooling both. I went down to the unemployment office and applied for work. I was given an address to go to where there was a potential job. I went and the work was making deliveries for a tea company. The job paid fifteen dollars a week but it was taken already. At that time there was an unemployment program for veterans called the 52-20 club. What it meant was that you could draw twenty dollars a week for up to fifty-two weeks and I was given my first
twenty dollars, which was five dollars more a week than the job for the tea company. Now one had to go to the unemployment office every week to qualify for the money or get a job offer. I faithfully went every week from early February until June and was never offered another job prospect. The industry in Terre Haute was primarily based on agriculture. Consolidated Chemicals and other similar plants used corn and other grains from the mid-west to make various solvents and penicillin. Southern Comfort was there making whiskey. There was a beer brewery that made Champagne Velvet beer and with a CV on the label it was usually called Cincinnati Vinegar. It was pretty good beer and we got lots of it free during homecoming because the owner was a Rose graduate and had bought the brewery as more of a hobby than serious business.

The big business in town was Hulman and Company the producer of Clabber Girl Baking Powder and other food products. The Hulman family were the Balls of Terre Haute and in the 1940s or 50s bought the Indianapolis 500 Speedway. They also donated the 125 acres that the Rose Hulman Institute is located on providing a beautiful rolling campus. This donation was made long before the name was changed from Rose Polytechnic Institute to Rose-Hulman Institute. The campus has since been expanded to over 200 acres. The Hulman family owned the square mile across US 40 and facing the campus and had a mansion on it not visible from the highway.

I expect that other people not working in the few industries mentioned were working for railroads or on the strip mines but there weren’t any automotive or similar manufacturing plants and no glass factories in Terre Haute. The population was slightly greater than Muncie. Terre Haute is French for high ground and is on the bluffs overlooking the Wabash River. On this west side of town was a beer joint called the “Blazing Stumps” and on the large plate glass windows on the sidewalk side there were large burning stumps well painted. I never saw the inside and now wish I had. Terre Haute has two other colleges the Indiana State Teachers College (now a university), and Saint Mary of the Woods a girls school. Six Sisters of Providence led by Mother Theodore Guerin from France started Saint Mary’s in 1841. Sister Guerin was canonized in 2006 making her Indiana’s first saint.

Pat and I found a culinary delight in the midst of the smokiest dirtiest region of town. It was a restaurant for railroad workers and was in the middle of the switching yard in a very dingy two story green house and it was never closed. The menu was ideal for people who can’t decide what to order. There was no menu; the only selection was French fried chicken with French fries and biscuits at seventy-five cents per plate. I was exposed to french fried chicken once in Muncie at a black after hour’s restaurant that was famous throughout Muncie in the 30s and 40s. French fried chicken is not southern fried chicken; it is not breaded or flowered fried chicken; it is chicken fried with absolutely nothing on it but the skin, of course, in deep fat at 400 degrees F. until it turns a golden brown. Since there is nothing on the chicken to hold fat it is the healthiest way to cook fried chicken and even the skin loses its fat and becomes crackling like. Salt is added at the table to suit. The restaurant had the many rooms of the house furnished with tables and no waiters; you just sat where you wanted to. We liked it so well that we got up several times in the middle of the night and with a table knife slid a few coins out of our glass brick piggy bank and walked across the railroad tracks in the dark to the green house.

The college went on a trimester system so one could finish the four-year course in three years by going year around. There was a one-week vacation between each trimester. The GI bill paid for all tuition, books, and a slide rule, and provided each married student ninety dollars per month to live on. On the rolling landscape the school had small army buildings converted to apartments for the married students, which most of the veterans were, and the veterans far outnumbered the non-vet students. The total enrollment at that time was around 450 students and was all male with no blacks or girls. The curriculum was civil, mechanical, electrical, and chemical engineering with no advanced degrees. The school started in 1874 and is the oldest engineering school west of the Appalachian Mountains. The department heads sometimes taught and classes were kept quite small except for some of the universal subjects such as freshman chemistry taught by Dr. Strong who put the fear of god in most everybody even some of our former army officer students that had battled across Europe. The usual rule was that if a professor hadn’t shown up in fifteen minutes we were free to go. Only once was Dr. Strong not on time. At the fifteen-minute point nobody left and nobody left until the end of the hour such was the magnetism of Dr. Strong.
The school was very ethical in not trying to take advantage of the large number of students available with strategies such as building temporary classrooms and hiring more professors. The enrollment was the same before, during, and after the bonanza. All freshmen were required to wear a green cap but veterans were exempt from this tradition. Rose was a privately endowed college but had requested ROTC capability right after World War I, which is usually reserved for land grant colleges or universities. I participated and received a commission as a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers in 1949.

While awaiting the completion of the facilities on the campus we moved from the place on Center street to a rented room a couple of blocks away and had a much nicer large room. I rode my bicycle from Muncie to Terre Haute in a forty-five mile stint to my cousin’s farm by Lawrence and then the eighty-mile remainder the next day. I took money with me and stopped for a full meal both days. I slept for twelve hours after arriving in Terre Haute and was sore for a couple of days, as I hadn’t done any riding since before the war. I also added a Whizzer motor kit (five horse power) to the bicycle and now could go at speeds up to thirty mph. I commuted on it to school and also went pleasure riding occasionally on Sundays. In 1947 I bought my first car which was a really worn out 1935 Chevrolet coupe. The cost was $260.00 and I bought it directly from the president of a small bank in Terre Haute. My payments were fifty dollars a month and liability insurance wasn’t required in those days. I drove it around for a couple of weeks to learn how to drive and then went down to the license office; took the required tests and got my first drivers license at the age of twenty-two. Well that car always had something go wrong such as bad generators, starters, points, condensers, plugs and many other things too numerous to list. These parts weren’t purchased new but were acquired at a local junkyard. Now in those days the yards weren’t well organized like today with parts removed and placed on shelves and listed in a computer with part nomenclature and location. You told the junk car man the year and model of your car and the part wanted. He would then tell you where he thought you might find that car model. You then went and removed the part and returned to the man and paid him the price quoted before you went after the part.

The car didn’t have a spare tire or jack so I went to a local junkyard on a rather cold winter day to get these items. When I came out I set the items down and opened the trunk lid that had to be held up, as the latch mechanism on the lid linkage didn’t work along with many other things. With the lid held up I could see some of my school papers in the trunk just behind the seat so I tried to reach them to no avail so I crawled into the trunk carefully holding the lid up with one hand. I kept stretching further and further forward to reach the papers and slipped allowing the trunk lid to shut. Now of all things on the car that didn’t work the trunk lid lock did work and I was trapped inside. I didn’t panic as I had plenty of fresh air and figured my wife would miss me eventually and maybe they would find me. I had seen two men talking a hundred or so feet from my location so thought I could attract their attention by yelling but there was no response. Either they couldn’t hear me or they decided that anybody foolish enough to get locked in a trunk deserved to stay there. After a while I had an idea and that was that since the car was so flimsy I thought that I might be able to push the back of the seat forward and crawl upward between the seat and the shelf behind the seat. I lay on my back, put my feet against the seat back, pushed and the back of the seat readily bent forward. I then crawled up and over into the front of the car feeling very foolish as the two men was still in the same location.

Sometime later at the Christmas vacation we decided to make the 140-mile trip to Muncie. Now my tires had absolutely no tread on them and were thinner than a shadow but that didn’t faze me. Instead of waiting until the next day we started out after the last day of school with darkness rapidly approaching. Not too far down the road it started snowing very heavy and the only way I could keep on the road was to follow the taillights of a car in front of me. All of a sudden I noticed that the car I was following was in the field to my right so I was on my own. I was probably driving about thirty miles per hour from then on but I knew from my bicycle days that if you just keep plugging along you will eventually get to your destination and we did after a nightmarish trip. Along the way close to Anderson, Indiana the engine stopped as it periodically did when the weak fuel pump couldn’t keep up with engines high demand for gasoline. The solution was to put my hand over the carburetor intake; there was no air cleaner, of course. I had managed to get the car just partly off the road on the left hand side and since it was close to town there was quite a bit of traffic. As I very angrily was hand choking the engine to get it started a highway patrolman
stopped to tell me what a dangerous position I was in which at that time I really didn’t care. Anyway he helped me get the engine started and we proceeded the final eighteen miles to Muncie.

My brothers were in the tire recapping business, which was very popular at that time because it was some time after the war before new tires became readily available. They were appalled at my tires and fixed me up with something better. Also Don was a fan of something called Wynn Oil, which was supposed to rejuvenate older engines when poured through the carburetor intake with the engine running. We did that and I never saw so much smoke in my life coming out of the car everywhere. There was a cloud of smoke many feet long that finally subsided. It didn’t improve much of anything except instead of having to put in a quart of oil every 150 miles it was every 100 miles. The treatment cleaned up the rings and valves such that oil got to places it didn’t need to be and got burned up. I had already started using recycled oil that was around twenty cents a quart.

While I was in the navy Garnet had told me that my mother had mouth cancer and she was gradually getting worse. Now Don had arranged for her to be treated at the University of Chicago Medical Center so she was getting the best care available at the time and not too different from today’s technology with the exception of one major mistreatment they performed. As my mother periodically needed various treatments such as radiation and operations Don made all of the necessary 200-mile trips to Chicago with her. This cancer was very painful but either the doctors didn’t believe in morphine or it didn’t work and I think it was the former so the university doctors came up with another proposed solution. This was a partial lobotomy. Not knowing anything but what the doctors told Don and my mother they agreed to it. The result was that our mother became a total zombie with lots of pain. The next step was a total lobotomy (both sides) and this did reduce the pain but it didn’t bring our mother back. Most people think lobotomies were just used for schizophrenic and other mental problems but it was used for all kinds of chronic pain such as bad backs, arthritis, migraine headaches, and other things those people come up with. After many years it was finally concluded that lobotomies shouldn’t be used for any medical condition.

On one vacation as we headed back to Terre Haute I noticed that the engine was knocking even more than usual and it seemed to be increasing with every mile. We did make it and the next day I decided to take it back to the banker and tell him that regardless of the consequences I wasn’t going to make any more payments and the car was his. Well I didn’t make it all the way, on the downhill stretch towards the Terre Haute city limits on US 40 the knock got so loud and the engine was vibrating so severely that I knew a connecting rod was about to go. I pulled off the road on the right side and parked that perpetually tormenting car. I then hitchhiked down to the bank and went into the bank president’s office. Now this wasn’t Chase Manhattan in New York City so I wasn’t being brash. I told the president the car was his and I was not going to have anymore to do with it regardless of what he wanted to do to me. He said come along with me in my car and help me get the car back to town. So we went back to where I had left it and nobody had stolen it. He took a rope out of his trunk and pulled the car with me steering it back to the bank and that was it. A few days later I saw it back on the service station lot where I had fallen in love with it, with a for sale sign on it. I’m sure the banker made his investment back many times over as bankers still do.

Pat and I decided to do without a car as we had moved into one of the campus apartments and the bus service was good and other couples around had cars and sometimes took us to town with them. The apartment rent was thirty-five dollars a month that included all utilities. Our heat, cooking, and hot water heating was with fuel oil. In the following winter there was a severe shortage of heating oil so we started getting used motor oil that hadn’t even been strained. It would repeatedly clog up the various units and I spent much time cleaning burners. Finally we started getting clean oil. The hot water heater did not have any automatic cut-off; you just lit the unit and let it run until you decided the water was hot enough. On a couple of occasions I left the burner on so long that I got steam out of the hot water taps a very dangerous situation. What was happening was that the water being under the water line pressure of forty or so psi could get well above its sea level boiling point of 212 degrees F and so was superheated. When the pressure was released at a faucet the water flashed to steam after the room temperature line water had run out. I am still surprised that we didn’t have at least one explosion caused by somebody forgetting to turn the hot water burner off or leaving it on too long.
My navy hammock was a very popular item after I had strung it up between two trees in front of our building that had three apartments in it. We studied a lot at night but also socialized frequently outside during warm weather and so all tried to be first to the hammock, which could seat three or four people side to side. There were a couple of real nice lakes on the campus and we occasionally fished them in the summer and ice-skated on them in the winter. There was also an annual tug of war across a narrow part of the lake with seniors on one side and freshmen on the other with the losers ending up in the lake.

A neighbor student and friend of mine had joined the Royal Canadian Air Force before America got into the war. He flew the all wood British de Havilland Mosquito, with twin engines giving a total horsepower of close to 3,000 and a top speed of 380 mph. It was considered the most versatile of all British planes as it could be used as a bomber or a low altitude patrol plane threatening to any German craft in the North Sea. It was in this latter use that my friend flew the plane. In the mission of looking for German subs and patrol craft the pilot flew just a few feet above the water which also kept them below enemy radar. One time my friend was on one of these missions and unfortunately he dosed off and the plane’s propellers touched the water. He said it sounded like dumping a truckload of milk cans off of a cliff onto a concrete surface. He immediately pulled back on the stick and gained a couple of hundred feet altitude but it was too late, the airplane was shaking apart so he made a successful ditch in the sea. He was on a life raft for a few days before being picked up, surviving on concentrated food rations and water in the life raft emergency supplies. His flight suit provided protection from the cold. He went on to fly again and came out of the war in one piece. Now my friend had a nice mustache and despite threats from the seniors he persisted in keeping the mustache. Well one day the seniors ganged up on him and neatly shaved one-half of his mustache off. Sadly he couldn’t pass some of the math classes and had to drop out. I have told a little bit of his story because it deserves to be told someplace and it is a shame that I can’t remember his name. My earlier yearbook (Modulus) that would have his picture and name in them were destroyed by Hurricane Ike in 2008.

I worked some for the school and one job on weekends was lawn work cleaning up leaves and branches. One Christmas season some of us got jobs during the rush, working for the post office delivering mail on foot, of course, and it was a pleasant change. Another job I took one summer was at a local midget racetrack. The pay was getting to see the races and eating all of the hot dogs I wanted along with soft drinks. Tragically one night a driver out of his midget on the track was hit by another car and killed.

Sometime in my second year I joined a fraternity. After the meeting we would all adjourn to a strip club in the neighborhood, watch the show and drink a beer or two. That is about the only benefit I saw from being in a national fraternity. Well the hell week was also a lot of silly fun like stealing light bulbs from a movie theatre marquee after the last show was over. These were for use in the fraternity house so had a practical purpose. Some of the other things imposed on us by the initiators are not going to be put in print by me even though they weren’t illegal. During homecoming the owner of the Champagne Velvet brewery, a Rose alumni, would donate a keg of beer to each fraternity. It was against the rules to have alcoholic beverages in the fraternity houses so the beer was dispensed in the basement as our leaders didn’t consider that a part of the fraternity house.

On one of my trips to Muncie I went with Don in a rented truck to Chicago to pick up a load of used tires for the recapping business. On the way back I started to smell carbon tetrachloride for it had a distinctive odor that I was familiar with. In checking around I found a fire extinguisher attached to the truck sidewall and it was leaking. Remembering the navy incident well and repeating it to Don we stopped and put the extinguisher in the back of the truck. It probably wouldn’t have killed us as we didn’t have any skin contact and the truck had some ventilation but no use to take that chance.

One funny incident took place in the spring of my junior year, which was a very active year for tornadoes. It was a Saturday and Pat had caught a bus to town to see a movie and then shop for items we needed. I was napping on the couch in my stocking feet when I was awakened by a loud knock on the door. When I went to the door it was this very pretty nurse in shorts from a couple of apartments away and she was in a panic crying that there was a tornado coming and what to do? I went outside still in my stocking feet and sure enough there was a tornado about a mile away and it was making a lot of noise and tree parts were whirling around in it so I also took it very seriously. I had always heard that the correct defense
in such a situation was to find a ditch or better yet a culvert to crawl into. With this in mind I took her hand in mine and we went traipsing down the hill as I was going to find a low spot or maybe a culvert under the highway that was nearby. Unaware of the tornado my neighbors next door were watching us going down the hill hand in hand with me in my stocking feet and the nurse in her shorts and they got a little suspicious until the truth came out. Anyway I kept watching the tornado and it started going at right angles to us so we were in no further danger and we went back up the hill. The tornado killed two people in a park just off the highway a mile or so from our location and it closed US 40 for several days while massive trees were cleared from the roadway. Later when we were able to drive by the place the tornado had crossed, a wide swath of large trees were sheered off at their base and scattered like match sticks. For a while if it was cloudy or raining most of us cringed a little when a freight train went by the campus on the nearby tracks.

We had at least three very good field trips while I was a student. One was to a plant that manufactured gas for Terre Haute and vicinity from coal. The man in charge of our tour at the plant was a Rose graduate. The process not only made cooking and heating gas but also many other useful products. Main among them was coke that was made from a mix of anthracite and bituminous coal baked in retorts. The ovens were rectangular and several feet long and six or seven feet high and a couple of feet thick. These were heated on both sides to approximately 1,800 degrees, F. which cooked off the many volatile products in the coal that included carbon monoxide and hydrogen that was the manufactured gas. This was enriched with natural gas to bring its Btu level up to 1,000 Btu’s per cubic foot. The coke was dumped at the end of the process and quenched with water. There were many of these retorts side by side. Other by-products were coal tar, ammonia, naphthalene, benzene, and many other useful products.

Another trip was to a nearby power plant on the Wabash River. There was a coalmine under the plant and it had large stockpiles of coal in areas around the plant, which made it rather self-sufficient. The coal was pulverized and burned almost like a liquid fuel from four burners that tangentially caused a swirling mixing in the boiler. The superheated steam produced powered several steam turbines that in turn powered the generators.

We also made a trip to South Bend, Indiana to tour the Studebaker automobile manufacturing plant and traveled there in several student cars. We visited various parts of the production line and watched finished cars come off at the end of the line. Most Studebaker cars had a three-speed transmission with an overdrive in addition. In overdrive the cars had freewheeling i.e., if you took your foot off of the accelerator peddle while in overdrive the car just coasted without any engine braking. My group went straight back to Terre Haute after the tour was finished, but at least one other group decide to take a little side trip on the way back. This was to the notorious Calumet City, Illinois, which was south of Chicago and just across the Indiana line. During prohibition the cities cooperative attitude allowed speakeasies, gambling, and prostitution to thrive. Most of these enterprises were owned or controlled by organized crime elements from Chicago including Al Capone who had owned a “getaway” home in town. After prohibition ended in 1933 many of the same elements retained control and “Sin City” had its strip with Las Vegas type revues and famous talent such as Frank Sinatra and others. Into this environment went some of my fellow students and if you behaved there wouldn't be any problems. At this time bars had “B-girls” (bar-girls) whose job was to get customers to buy them drinks in return for some conversation. The drinks were usually colored with tea and did not have any alcoholic beverage in them so the profit margin was good. One of these girls attempted her practice on one of the Rose students and it apparently irritated him. He said something to the effect that if you want a drink here is one and he threw his drink in her face in a very bad diplomatic move. Almost immediately he was attacked by two bouncers that beat him up quite thoroughly and threw him out of the place. The following day when I saw this student he showed the marks of this escapade with black eyes and other bruises but no permanent damage. This was not a green cap but a veteran.

I had to take one year of electrical engineering and the department head, Professor Clarence C. Knipmeyer, taught some of the classes. He told us of two interesting events in his youth that had strong messages about electricity. The first occurred while he was a student in college. It was in winter and there wasn’t much heat in his room so he decided warm up his pillow while he left the room for a while. He
took an extension cord with a light bulb in its socket and placed the light under his pillow. After some interval he returned and found the room full of smoke. He quickly saw that the source was his pillow that had insulated the heat evolving from the light bulb. Fortunately the damage was not too bad and he learned to be careful about such things. The second incident involved a young boy that decided to climb a high-tension line tower. While up there the boy decided to urinate while standing on a steel cross arm. His stream hit one of the high-tension lines below and he was electrocuted. His shoe nails had left spot weld marks on the cross bar. In Muncie when I was a child I occasionally saw a man that was missing part of one arm and was impaired in some other ways. He had also climbed a high-tension tower when he was young and grabbed the wrong thing and was thrown off the tower possibly saving his life but crippling him for life.

A couple of my class’s foul ups are worth recounting. In the main building there was a steam engine for training purposes and one Saturday we had a lab project involving the engine with all kinds of instrumentation and a pony brake rigged up. Now we had always been cautioned that when opening a steam line from the power plant boiler that it had to be opened very slowly so as to warm up the line gradually to prevent a lot of condensate from accumulating in the line. Well whichever student was at the valve when the engine was to be started just cranked the valve wide open and almost immediately we heard a loud concussion under the floor where the steam supply lines were. On inspection we found at the point where the line made a right angle turn, a disintegrated elbow with lots of shrapnel around the immediate area and imbedded in the wooden trap door above the elbow. What was predicted to happen when done wrong happened. A slug of water had come down the line at high speed and went straight after disintegrating the elbow. Our second foul up was in the electrical laboratory. Somehow we had hooked up a Wheatstone bridge wrong and it shorted out. The next step was worse as we put it back in its case and away on the shelf without telling the professor. He knew before the class was over what had happened and he chewed us out very severely and deservedly for our dishonesty.

Two students had very interesting cars. One was a pristine 1932 Marman with a V-sixteen cylinder all aluminum engine (with steel sleeves) that the student had bought for four hundred dollars and they are now selling for around $275,000.00 or more. The second interesting car was a 1921 Dodge touring car. The student owner and I took a trip in early July looking for fireworks in nearby Illinois. As we visited several small towns the oldsters would come up and comment on how they don’t build them like that anymore; thank heaven for that! The temperature gage was on top of the exposed radiator cap at the front of the hood. One could see the approximate temperature from the front seat, as the sensing fluid was red alcohol.

In my junior year I enrolled in ROTC with some difficulty. Lieutenant Colonel Otto J. Rhode, Professor of Military Science and Tactics was a West Point graduate and had a masters degree from MIT in Civil Engineering. He didn’t feel that my navy duty qualified me for acceptance in ROTC but he finally relented. Besides eventually receiving a commission as an officer in the United States Army we got thirty dollars per month and we received two or three pairs of khakis and the pants could be worn to school thus helping out in the apparel department.

In my senior year all ROTC students had to go to Fort Belvoir, Virginia close to Mount Vernon and a short distance from Washington, DC for two weeks training. Now since there hadn’t been any encampments since the war Rose had large numbers of ROTC students that had to attend the camp to get their commissions as an officer. I went in a car with two other students and we arrived and signed in. Our commandant was the Professor of Military Science and Tactics at Texas A&M University and was a full colonel. On Monday the courses started up in earnest. We marched with full pack and steel helmets, we drilled with steel helmets, we attended classes, we went on the rifle range with steel helmets, we watched all kinds of earthmoving equipment work and we played hard. Even though we weren’t officers yet the post commander authorized us to utilize some of the officers clubs on the post and the officers swimming pool. This was for the first time and it was the last time when we got through. Now this wasn’t a bunch of kids as many of our group was veterans of World War II and they were used to lots of living it up. After a hot day in the very humid Virginia climate we were always very thirsty and headed for the smaller more
informal officer club close to our barracks. We drank much beer and stacked the bottles in tall pyramids until they crashed. There was also a dance for us one Saturday night.

We had a large contingent for the previously mentioned reasons and so were on a par to hold our own with the larger schools such as Texas A&M, the Citadel, and several other college ROTC classes represented. Tricks were played back and forth such as tipping all of the rival’s bunks over while that group was elsewhere. Another favorite was throwing a few lit cherry bombs into the rival schools barracks at midnight. We and Texas A&M had a particularly strong rivalry for some reason.

One very tragic accident occurred during the summer camp. We were exposed to demolition training mainly as spectators. On one particular day we were rushed from classrooms to the demolition range without helmets to witness what is called a deliberate crater demolition used to block tanks on narrow roads. Putting eight forty-pound metal drums of ammonium nitrate in a set pattern buried in the simulated road produced this. The drums were connected by electrical wires to detonators in each drum that had a small charge of TNT to set off the ammonium nitrate. The ammonium nitrate was ideal for this purpose for it provided a heaving effect because of its slower explosion rate compared to faster acting TNT.

After our inspection of the set up we were all marched a distance away of several hundred feet. The soil characteristics consisted of clay interspersed with a few rocks. There was no blockhouse or any type of horizontal or vertical protection from flying debris. The protection was that we were told repeatedly before the demolition that when it occurred we were to look up and move out of the way of any falling debris. We were also told not to stand under any trees of which there were a few around. Now all of this would have probably worked if everybody had followed the instructions but at least two didn’t. Anyway the countdown took place, the loud explosion occurred shaking the ground under us and much debris was thrown into the air with some of it starting to reach our area. Of all the places that we should have been wearing steel helmets this ought to have been at the top of the list. After things had cleared two people were on the ground injured by falling debris. One was a cadet that had stood under a small tree and got hit in the shoulder with a clod of clay but wasn’t seriously injured. The other was the camp commandant who I had seen before the blast talking to a group of other officers. One of my fellow students who was a corpsman during the war rushed to help and found the colonel had the front of his skull crushed in above the forehead. The corpsman used his compression bandage that we all carried in a pouch on our web belt and applied it to the crushed area knowing it probably wasn’t of much use. The corpsman accompanied the patient as he was carried in a jeep to the hospital and the patient died on the way. When we checked in all of our gear in at the end of camp the supply sergeant told my fellow student that he would have to pay for the bandage, as they weren’t considered to be an expendable item. I guess we just wore them for show. I don’t remember the outcome but I hope the student didn’t pay for the bandage. I returned to Fort Belvoir for a class in 1950 and went to the same demolition site and now there was a very elaborate bunker with reinforced concrete covered with soil on top. We drove back to school and the first day was dry and cool and such a welcome change from the humidity in Virginia. I still had a couple of trimesters of the military science classes to complete and then in April 1949 I was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers.

Sometimes during the summers we had Saturday night dances on the tennis courts. On one such occasion we heard a loud crash from the highway. We could see that a couple had turned over right at the school entrance and the highway. Most everybody ran over to the scene expecting to see some seriously injured person or persons. About the time we got there two inebriated individuals crawled out of the overturned car and they didn’t appear to have the slightest injury. We went back to the dance and attributed their good luck to the alcohol.

In July, I graduated and Don and his wife Ann attended the graduation. My mother had died at age 63 during the previous weekly break between trimesters. Over a period of time she had gone from 130 pounds down to 65 pounds. My mother had made a quilt for each of her children including myself. Each of the quilts represented the forty-eight states having the state flower, then bird, and tree, and mine had all three. Mine was being completed in the later part of the 1940s after my mother was suffering from cancer and Pat, my wife, also did some work on the quilt to help finish it.

Chapter 10: Back to Muncie
In this post-war period there was a pent up demand for everything such as housing, cars, furniture, appliances, and modernization of homes. This stemmed from the four years of war production when factories were making war goods and civilian items were not made. The pent up demand was also caused by the long depression years when most people didn’t have enough money to buy new cars or new houses so the country had a tremendous backlog of pent up needs and nothing was available for awhile. It took time to convert from war production to civilian products just as it had taken time to build up the war machine. Even good meats were not available for quite awhile. The biggest positive effect I saw around Muncie was lots of new home construction.

At graduation I had another year’s schooling eligibility on the GI Bill, but I had had enough school and I didn’t want any more. I had not found a job before graduation despite sending out many resumes so Pat and I went back to Muncie and initially took housing in some sort of housing development on the south side of Muncie. I then started making the rounds of Muncie factories looking for engineering employment. The best I found was an offer from Delco Remy to start work in the shop until an engineering job came up in their engineering department. This I took and started work and again it was shift work and on mass production assembly lines pertaining to batteries. I still had the Whizzer powered bicycle so that was my transportation to and from work. We moved from the development to an apartment on West Jackson Street.

The first job was inserting wooden separators between the individual lead sheets that go to make up each battery cell. The wooden separators were fast replaced with an inert plastic material. Soon I was put on a production line inspecting completed battery cells as they came down a conveyer. I soon found that Delco was stockpiling engineers as I ran across one worker with a master’s degree in industrial engineering and another with a BS in engineering. On the production line there were four of us at the inspection station. The work was almost semi-automatic so we could talk all of the time and still inspect properly. It was interesting to hear the other fellow’s conversation and their sometimes-humorous happenings particularly one who was a heavy drinker and had many tales to tell. One fellow had been a journeyman carpenter that meant he had gone through a rigorous training program but he preferred working on the production line at some less pay. When asked why such a choice, he said that on this job you didn’t have to think while as a carpenter you had to think all the time like how long to cut that board or what angle to make a joist, etc., so he chose a job where he never had to think.

Another fellow had high ambitions; he wanted to be a city fireman. Now it wasn’t because he wanted to chase down and put out fires or save people from burning buildings. No, it was much simpler than that; he felt that firemen had the most free time of any occupation and even on duty at the fire station they could mostly sit around doing nothing.

One scene around the plant was interesting. There was one large room with many overhead battery cables leading down to the floor level. This was the charging room where batteries were charged before shipment. The interesting thing here was that all of the workers in this area wore army surplus olive drab wool pants and shirt summer and winter. The reason was that wool is resistant to the effects of sulfuric acid, which the workers could not avoid occasionally getting on their clothing. Usually one might also see white powder on them in different spots, which was sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) that was used to neutralize any acid spills on their clothing. Another area was a mixing pit full of the lead oxide that is used to fill the lattice open area that is on each individual plate of a battery cell. How the men survived lead poisoning working in the pit mixing and moving the lead oxide to another area was a mystery to me even then.

Another potentially toxic task that went on in numerous spots along the production line was that of the lead burners. In various steps in the assembly of a battery occasionally a terminal post got broken off. The lead burners job was to melt the post back onto its proper location. This was not a soldering or welding job it was simply melting the two surfaces at the same time with an oxy-acetylene torch and moving them quickly together at precisely the right instant. This took real skill and in retrospect I wonder if any of them got lead poisoning from potentially breathing lead fumes all day. Of course, many production line workers were nearby including myself also potentially breathing the lead fumes.
Battery production was to some extent seasonal so when the new models were being produced in Detroit everybody had work and then later when the demand was less some workers were laid off temporarily. We were union without choice so it was last in first out with seniority ruling in each case. One might be off for only a week or two or it might be for a month or so. Usually when one returned it would be to a different job. One time I came back and the job was loading batteries from a stack on a pallet on a loading dock into a freight car. Now since batteries contain lots of lead that was a real back breaker. Some batteries called dry charged were shipped without the electrolyte inside but that didn’t reduce the weight significantly.

During this period of working at Delco a funny thing happened in Muncie’s limited crime culture. As reported in the Muncie paper one morning an attempted robbery had taken place the night before. Two amateur crooks decided to hold up one of the cigar stores, with the poker games in the back scenario, figuring there would be lots of money for the taking on the poker tables. They took opposite sides in the room, pulled out their guns and announced their intentions. Whether somebody made a wrong move or they were just nervous they started firing their pistols and one gunman hit the other gunman. The uninjured gunman dragged his buddy to the getaway car and took off. In the outskirts of Muncie the driver dumped his buddy out and proceeded with his getaway. I believe he was caught the next day.

In this same time period Doctor Laduron of earlier missing wife fame and his son were indicted in 1950 for the murder of two men but I don’t believe anything was proven. This was a man of lots of smoke but no visible fire. Dr. Laduran was still listed as a doctor in Muncie in 1955.

During one of these down periods I decided to look for another job. I found one from a newspaper advertisement working at a heating and plumbing company on south Walnut Street. Since mechanical engineering is involved with heat loss, insulation, and heating equipment I thought this would be good experience but I found that system design for house heating systems was not very detailed at least on south Walnut Street. Mr. Steck owned the showroom and workshop building and a warehouse and several apartments, which took in most of the block. All of the buildings had a weathered barn finish from many years of not being painted. Part of the job pertained to furnaces and part consisted of fairly simple plumbing jobs. I was also supposed to be a part time salesman for new jobs. This entailed having a car which Mr. Steck the owner of the business had a solution for. Although new cars were hard to find for some time after the war Steck had a 1947 Ford, but transportation for his employees was on a shoestring approach to say the least. As to employees, besides me there was a retired man (Claude) that condescended to do plumbing if he felt like it with an older man for his helper that occasionally got drunk on the job. That was it except Steck also did small jobs especially if it involved widows.

The car solution Steck had for me was a 1928 model A Ford coupe that was sitting in his back yard. He told Claude to pull me in the car around the block to a close by service station he had an account with. There I was to get the battery charged and I would be ready to go. When I got in the car I noticed a large hole in the roof right over the drivers seat. With a free car why should I complain, my standards weren’t too high at this point. We got the car around to the service station without incident and left it to have the battery charged. When it wouldn’t take a charge because it had been setting around dead for so long a better used battery was installed. Later I started the one block drive back to the office. On the way clouds of smoke came into the car and looking down I could see fire under the car. By this time I was back so I parked the car got a bucket of water and put the fire out. The battery had shorted out and caught the under floor materials on fire. These consisted of a wooden floor insulated with horsehair or some other fibrous material. Steck relegated this car back to its former resting place. Before proceeding with the saga of cars I want to describe central heating systems of that era.

At this time there were two types of furnace systems for those people that had been fortunate enough to move up from living room stoves and all furnaces were in the basement, which most Muncie homes had. The original system first used was the gravity furnace. This meant that all airflow was by convection; there was not any blower system to circulate the air. These systems consisted of a large plenum chamber made of galvanized sheet metal around the furnace firebox. From the top of this plenum were large pipes of the same material with one leading to each room in the house. At the base of the furnace were an equal number of pipes leading from each room called return lines. So as the air was heated
in the large plenum it rose to the rooms by convection and the cooler more dense air returned to the lower part of the furnace to replace the heated air. Each hot air line had an adjustable damper in it so the system could be balanced. In every room the supply outlet was in the floor covered by a grill and was located on the floor by an outside wall. The return line was on the floor by an inside wall. The return lines were sometimes smaller because the cooler air had less volume than the hot air lines. Joints in the lines were sealed with asbestos tape. The gravity flow systems were very comfortable because the air movement was much less than with forced air systems but they were not very efficient and are no longer installed.

The forced flow systems circulate the heated air with a squirrel cage blower and consequently the plenum and all of the pipes were much smaller and they could be placed anywhere in a house if they burned gas or oil. As a result instead of a monstrous octopus in the basement a much smaller space is required for a forced air system. If the fire was still fed by hand or a mechanical stoker the only control available was a chain linkage that could adjust the furnace intake damper from upstairs.

During this period many people were switching to natural gas that was just starting to become available to a limited few people because of the sale of the big inch pipeline from the government to the Texas East Transmission Corporation for 143 million dollars. Conversion kits for oil burning (and oil was also popular) or gas were available that were installed in the existing fire box and they worked quite well and now the home owner had a thermostat and much more even heat and no need to frequently attend to the furnace.

Some of this time Donald Yarger was helping out and he was a very good mechanic. He had started a thirty-year career with Warner Gear as a tool grinder but being on shift work he was sometimes available. During this time a Lt. Colonel visited me occasionally and his mission was to get me active in the army reserves. After several persistent visits I gave up and went down to the armory and signed up in a local reserve unit, which was the 307th Panel Bridge Company but I never attended any meetings after that.

After the war Donald Yarger became active in the Muncie VFW and eventually became the commander, a position he held for several years. Under his tenure the post had stag movies and slot machines. Since the slot machines were illegal Donald had them hidden in a large abandoned air conditioning housing at the end of the bar and this worked quite well. When the post moved out Kilgore Avenue, its present location, he come up with a different solution. This consisted of a section of wall that could be rotated around a center pivot. When the slot machines were hidden the exposed wall matched that adjacent to it with pictures and plaques on it. When rotated 180 degrees the slot machines came to the front. One weekend Donald was going out of town and he left Bob Pingry in charge. One member had given information on the slot machines to the Muncie police and he got some plain clothes officers in on the weekend as guests and they made a raid confiscating the equipment and putting Pingry in jail. Tommy Lou, Pingry’s wife, finally got hold of Donald and threatened to kill him if he didn’t get her husband out of jail immediately. Donald got Pingry out of jail and ousted the informant from the post. Later through some good political connections he got him thrown out of the VFW nation wide.

Steck decided to buy me a used car and purchased a 1935 Dodge or Chevrolet club coup I don’t remember which. Now the rear end of the car was locked up but Steck got the car to a mechanic that put in a used rear end differential from the junkyard. Now unknown to Steck the rear end housing was bent out of shape and in only a few miles of driving the rear end locked up again causing some anger in Steck as he had really gotten stung as many buyers of used cars did in those days. This car was fourteen years old and used during World War II and probably given little care so the results are not surprising. Anyway the whole rear axle and housing with differential was obtained from the junkyard and installed. That solved this problem and the car was parked in the backyard for my pickup one Sunday. Donald and I went to pick up my prize; for a fringe benefit was that I could use this jewel for personnel use also. The inside of the car was pretty ratty as with most cars of this vintage but the seats could be covered with some cheap fix. The gearshift lever was missing its knob making it an even more lethal occupant bayonet but we didn’t think about those things except when you read in the newspaper of somebody being disemboweled by the long gearshift lever in an automobile wreck.

I got in the car and started forward and immediately heard an ominous grinding crunch. Whoever parked the car had pulled right up to a large granite rock that was not visible from the drivers seat. Well
Donald and I surveyed the damage and found the only harmful effect was that the exhaust pipe was mashed flat so the gases were restricted which reduced the already low power of the engine to almost nothing. Well I didn’t care to have Steck know about this so we went to a junkyard, got the right used part and proceeded to replace the mashed pipe. Now without benefit of cutting torch or welding tools Donald managed to complete this very difficult task in a few hours. It was difficult because all of the nuts and bolts had been assaulted by heat and water for many years and were practically welded together by rust. Such was Donald’s expertise and it was all done willingly without pay because we were buddies and Donald would do anything for a buddy.

This car did all right until one winter morning I couldn’t get away from the curb in the morning because of ice all along the curb and under the wheels. I tried to no avail and finally called Steck and his solution was that I had to flag down another motorist and have him pull me out. Now that takes a lot of gull but I finally did it. I felt Steck should have came himself or sent Claude but no it was his car but my problem.

Sometime the next summer I was coming down highway 3 north of Muncie when I noticed flames and smoke under the floorboards which had lots of gaps in it. Fortunately I was approaching a county school just off the highway. I ran into the school and quickly borrowed a bucket from a custodian, filled it with water and went back and put the fire out. It wasn’t electrical in this car but holes in the exhaust pipe allowing hot gases and sparks to impinge on the wooden floorboards and set them and the horsehair insulation on fire. No further preventative action was taken on my part nor did I worry about it and it didn’t happen again; perhaps the materials were burned up that was in the path of the hot gases.

One work visit I made was to a house somewhere in the same neighborhood as the business. I noticed a rooms for rent sign as I walked to the front door. After completing my work the owner revealed his nefarious business. He suggested that he could have a girl for me from Mulberry Street in five minutes. That was his rooms for rent business and I declined his offer and left.

At this time there were many restaurants in the neighborhoods and especially close to the various factories. They had plate lunches with meat such as pork chops and a couple of vegetables and home made pies all reasonably priced. The food was usually very good and pretty close to home cooking. One I remember very well had delicious vegetable soup that was almost as good as my mothers.

Sometime during my working for Steck he proposed that I take over the business from him simply by buying the inventory, which was around ten thousand dollars and was to be inventoried at some point. I also would have to pay rent for the shop and warehouse the amount I don’t remember. I was only slightly enthused about this proposal because of my lack of experience and disdain for sales unlike my brother Don. Pat and I had moved into one of his apartments as part of my pay. I was still working some at Delco and I remember one tough tour. They put me on a line loading big truck batteries off of a conveyor and onto pallets and doing this for eight hours was tough. This would be after or before working at the plumbing and heating business. I finally had to quit and the sixty-five dollars a week when working was missed I’m sure but we still got by just the same.

One time Steck sent me across town to retrieve the plumber’s car. Now he didn’t send anybody with me so I took Pat who couldn’t drive a lick but I figured she could steer while I towed. We got to the other car and I connected the two cars with a rope leaving several feet of space between. During the trip back Pat steered good but she never used the brake. Every time I stopped she came crashing into the back of my car. Many older cars in those days had bent up bumpers, mashed fenders, and broken lights. Insurance was almost unheard of except for new cars, which were in the minority. Anyway we finally got back and I couldn’t tell the old injuries from the new.

Now I need to describe the other over twenty year old work car used by Claude and his helper. His car provided by Steck was a 1928 Chevrolet or Dodge and had lots of hard miles on it. Nobody knew how many as the speedometer had quit functioning long ago probably before Steck had bought it. Now this car needed a co-pilot and his job was to hold the gearshift lever back with his left hand to keep the car from jumping out of gear and holding the window crank with his right hand otherwise the window would immediately come down by rolling the window mechanism backwards. In the summer the co-pilot only had the left hand at work. Most all cars of this time period had three speed transmissions and the gearshift
lever stuck up from the floor so was rather long. These old cars usually had very rusty gas tanks and the loose rust would clog up the fuel line frequently. This required disconnecting the fuel line at both ends and with much huffing and puffing blowing the line clear. Claude used a different solution. Since he was a plumber and carried rolls of copper tubing and fittings in the car each time the fuel line clogged Claude just installed a new line and tied it up to the frame. Now one time I had occasion to look under this car and there were eight or nine copper lines installed.

Sometime after working for a while I decide to get my second car. One customer that we had installed a floor furnace for was a banker. Now floor furnace and banker doesn’t seem to go together but anyway he had some cars for sale. The one he recommended to me was a 1937 blue Ford with a 65 hp V-eight engine. Now he told me up front that it was continually getting an additional mix of oil and water in the crankcase as indicated by a whitish mix when looking at the dipstick and similar puddles on the ground under the car. This is a well-known sign that either the block is cracked or the head gasket is leaking. The first cause is almost impossible to fix and the second is relatively easy. Now I don’t know why I took this highly risky calculated risk but I gave or contracted to pay him a hundred and twenty five dollars and took the car home. Soon after, I took the car to the local Ford dealership service department to have it fixed or learn the worst. It turned out to be the head gasket and for thirteen dollars it was fixed. For once the car gods were on my side. The engine ran good and you could chirp the tires if you let the clutch out fast enough. I didn’t make a habit of that but it was nice to know. The car had one other minor defect; it listed to the right a few degrees. This was because the car had leaf springs and one or more on the right rear were broken but it was never enough to cause any rubbing between the tires and body and we motored on. Two features we enjoyed were a radio and a crank out windshield. This consisted of a crank on top of the dash that when turned moved the bottom of the windshield out and scooped in lots of air in the summer. The only bad feature the car had was very dim headlights. That was fixed by my going to a local junkyard and buying some used sealed beam headlights. Advertisements for used cars in those days had a notation indicating whether the car had a heater and or radio, as these were optional extras at that time. R meant the car had a radio and H meant the car had a heater and R&H meant the obvious. No notation meant a cold car with no music.

Don and his wife Ann were living in Chicago at this time as Don was setting up recapping for all of the Sears and Roebuck stores throughout the country, a very good job. Pat and I decided to visit them over one weekend going in the Ford. Don laughed at the list but took a ride in it with me. We had a great weekend and after leaving Chicago we went over to Michigan and by the time we had returned to Muncie we had traveled six hundred miles without a problem except one flat tire a not uncommon occurrence in those days. I never had any trouble with the car in the several months I had it.

Don had an almost new 1948 Studebaker pickup truck when he left a tire recapping business in Muncie with Austin to go to Chicago. He didn’t need it in Chicago and offered to rent it to me for twenty-five dollars a month to use in the soon to be my business. The pickup was a real asset to the business and it never needed new fuel lines. Well things drifted along well until in the summer of 1950 we got into the Korean War. I immediately started getting all kinds of calls for potential engineering jobs but it was too late. Supposedly in those days if you didn’t go to your reserve unit meetings, which I never did, you were dropped from the unit roster but that didn’t happen. I received orders from the army that the 307th Panel Bridge Company was called to active duty and I was included, effective September 11, 1950. Actually I was very happy for it got me away from Steck and our business arrangement without any embarrassment. Before the unit left for Camp McCoy, Wisconsin in early September, Pat and I made a weekend trip to Chicago to visit Don and Ann. We got there in the afternoon on the Friday of Labor Day Weekend. When Don got home from work, of course we had to take a trip but where to go? His first idea was to go north from Chicago and go all the way around Lake Michigan back to Chicago. Pat suggested the Black Hills of South Dakota and Don said that was too far. It was a thousand miles to Rapid City, South Dakota and that would just be the starting point for seeing the Black Hills. Then the more he looked at the map the more enthused he got and that became our trip plan. We got everything loaded and left Chicago to the west at 7:30 pm and Don drove all night and the next day (Saturday). Our first tourist stop was at the Wall Drug store, which is advertised for hundreds of miles along the highway before getting there. After getting re-
fresned we left there and went to the badlands, which was nearby. After touring the badlands we went on to Rapid City arriving at 3:30 pm twenty hours after leaving Chicago for an average speed of fifty mph for the one thousand mile distance. This was on a three-day weekend on all two-lane roads with considerable traffic. That evening we went to Deadwood and to one of the rustic frontier day’s saloon. When we left we went out of town and found a spot along a secondary road, pulled over, rolled up in blankets on the ground, and went to sleep. Out early the next morning we went to a service station where we could wash up and brush our teeth in the restroom. Then we headed several miles west to Devils tower in Wyoming. After visiting that monument we headed back to Rapid City and started our tour of the Black Hills to include Mt. Rushmore, of course.

After an extensive tour of the Black Hills we started back to Chicago in the late afternoon driving all night and arriving back in Chicago at close to 7:30 pm same as the time we had left Chicago. In the seventy-two hours we had traveled 2,350 miles and Don had driven all of it but about 350 miles that I had driven. We freshened up and then went out to a Chinese restaurant to eat and then went dancing afterwards although I don’t think too much dancing was done. Don’s Hudson car was extremely comfortable. We went back to Muncie the next day and started getting ready for the move to Camp McCoy.

So this would end my association with Muncie for I never had occasion to go back except for visits to relatives and high school reunions.
The career of my brother Don’s parachuting covering several years is told in this chapter rather than trying to keep it chronological. It centered on Muncie and is certainly historical so deserves a place in this book. Don graduated from Muncie Central High School in 1931 or 32 and avowed he had no need for college. With his determination and capabilities he would have gone had he desired.

In 1938 my brother Don made his first parachute jump at Fort Wayne, Indiana. The occasion was a so-called amateur contest for anybody wanting to jump. Don took my mother, my sister, a girl friend that was also going to jump, and me. The girl didn’t get to jump as the wind velocity got above fifteen mph the maximum allowed at that time. Don made his jump successfully and then proceeded to treat all of us to an airplane ride in a single engine plane that seated six passengers. I think my mother went along with me and as the first trip got full my sister had to wait for the second ride. The ride wasn’t very long and soon my sister was seated. Now they were having trouble getting the plane full so Don proceeded with some difficulty but lots of persistence to talk two bearded Amish men to take the ride. Don succeeded, the plane took off and before they got back a severe looking thunderstorm was rapidly approaching from the west and even Don was worried. The plane got down just as the storm hit and we headed for Muncie some seventy miles south. This first jump-started Don on a career of parachute jumping to eventually be mostly from hot air balloons.

Sometime after Don’s first parachute jump in 1938 he partnered up with an area character named One-Eyed Pat hereafter called Pat. Pat got his unique name because he only had one eye, one arm, and one leg. These elements were lost in race car accidents and Pat proved that even though mother nature gave us two of each of these body parts he could get by pretty well with just one of each. He had a hot air balloon and barnstormed the mid-west making many jumps at county fairs and various small town festivals. Pat took his artificial leg off before jumping. Now in those days the performer got paid for his jumps and might make two to three hundred dollars for a weekends work and that was how Pat made his living. He took on Don to have another jumper and to help with the equipment set up and operation for it was more complex in those days than simply taking off with a propane burner in a light man made fabric balloon.

I will describe the steps involved. First the balloon was made out of heavy canvas that was treated with materials to help prevent mildew and possibly to reduce it’s flammability although that never seemed to be a problem. The first step was to set up a gin pole that was acquired locally as it wouldn’t be convenient to haul around. A wooden power pole was generally used. The purpose of the pole was to allow the top of the balloon to be raised to its full vertical length prior to inflation. Later on collapsible steel poles were used. At the base a trench was made for the hot air source that was a wood or straw fire in the trench. The mouth of the bottom of the balloon was held open for inflation purposes and there were always many volunteers to help with this task. The parachute was not packed but was simply strung out and attached to the balloon and there was a latch release mechanism at the top with a line down to the parachutist that released the jumper when he decided the balloon was as high as it was going to go. Since there was no heat added after takeoff the balloon might go up 10,000 feet or 800 feet (these are actual numbers experienced at one time or another) depending on the initial inflation and atmospheric conditions.

The balloon had another line attached to the top of it leading down over the side of the balloon with a sandbag attached to the end of it. The purpose of this weight was that when the parachutist dropped free of the balloon it would turn over dumping out the remaining hot air. This made the balloon fall to the ground much faster cutting down the chase and retrieval time significantly. The pair still jumped from airplanes occasionally and I watched one delayed jump. A delayed drop means that the parachutist free falls for several thousand feet before opening the chute and lives despite Mr. Knott’s assertions to the contrary. The jumper usually throws out several rolls of toilet paper on the way down as a crowd pleaser. Anyway the plane was an old biplane and the jump was to be from 10,000 feet. It took the plane at least a half hour to reach that altitude. Pat made that jump and landed nearby but was not moving when several people including Don ran over to help him. He came to and what happened came to light. He was somewhat of a drinker and almost always had a half pint with him so he could celebrate on the way down. Because of the delayed drop his velocity was pretty high when he opened the chute and the bottle popped out of his hip pocket and clipped him on the back of his head knocking him out.
Don had his own interesting adventure with the balloon. On one occasion he was ready to jump and so pulled the release rope and nothing happened. He pulled again harder and yanked on it to no avail. He finally climbed up the parachute shroud lines a few feet then dropping putting a shock load on the release line. After numerous tries he finally decided he would have to come down with the balloon, which had never been done before by a parachutist strung out below the balloon at least to his and Pat’s knowledge. He was more concerned about what might happen after the landing because he thought the balloon might drag him across the ground over which he would have no control. Well the landing was soft and the balloon ran into a farm fence and stopped and then collapsed. It was very fortunate that the balloon didn’t drag Don across woods that are around many places in the country for with the balloon, unlike a parachute, was not controllable by its helpless passenger.

Don made a jump around Christmas one year dressed as Santa Claus and somehow carrying a bag of toys. The landing place was south of Minnetrista Boulevard, which I think was a golf course at that time. Anyway there was a lot of snow on the ground and Don got dragged a few feet through it but came up waving and was a big hit with the kids.

Sometime I think in 1942 Don joined the paratroops and was very gung ho about that organization and was very proud of the sharp uniforms and boots the troopers had. Since he was an old man of twenty-eight among a bunch of kids eighteen to twenty-one on average he decided he would gain a big advantage if he quit smoking which he did and never smoked again. Anyway he able to excel in the most strenuous of exercise and calisthenics which was very extensive in the paratroops. He was stationed at several locations around the country and before going overseas to Europe his unit was designated to make a large mass demonstration jump at Lowry Field just outside of Denver, Colorado. During the jump Don got tangled up with another jumper partially collapsing the chutes and both jumpers came down very hard. Don’s ankle was broken in several places and he was hospitalized for weeks. When he got out of the hospital the doctors said he would never be able to jump again and he was given a choice of going to the infantry or getting an honorable discharge and he chose the latter. He stayed in the Denver and Colorado Springs area selling liquor until after the war and then came back to Muncie and started a tire recapping business with Austin and tires were Don’s chosen profession for the rest of his life.

To supplement the limited income from the newly started business Don decided to barnstorm with a hot air balloon around the mid-west. He was no longer associated with One-Eyed-Pat and he needed a balloon. He designed one on paper; bought the necessary canvas; and hired a local lady to sew the thing up. This sounds like a recipe for disaster but it all worked out as planned with one minor blip. Don decided that instead of a parachute hanging from the balloon he would use a trapeze and jump from that with both chutes packed just like from an airplane. For safety he had a rope six or so feet long attached to the trapeze and to his webbing that would be disconnected when he was ready to jump. He got N number N5622N and a pilots license from the government and whatever else was required; got set up with an agent, and was ready to go. He made one other big change and that was to use a large kerosene adjustable burner in place of the trench and fire system. This required a tender and he needed other help so he hired a helper named Red Denney. He had a new Willys Jeep station wagon that was ideal to carry the balloon and other gear around in. This had 72 horsepower if he got the six cylinder and 11 percent less if he got the four cylinder and I don’t remember which he had but either was enough if you knew how to use the stick shift transmission efficiently which Don did. In any event he put 52,000 miles on the wagon the first year and traded in for another putting 55,000 miles the second year mostly from the barnstorming. I think on the second one he put several thousand miles on the vehicle with an extensive honeymoon trip out west with his new wife Ann. A picture of the expansion of the balloon with hot air is shown in the back. There is also a picture of Don after the liftoff.

Well his first takeoff was momentous as when the balloon was released it took off with a jerk dumping Don out of the trapeze. That left him dangling six feet or more below the trapeze and that was a crowd pleaser. Well Don was able to pull himself back up to the trapeze but he said it was something of a shock initially.

One adventure happened on a Sunday jump close to Cincinnati, Ohio. He made the jump successfully but the balloon came down and draped itself over a motel suddenly cutting out all light to the motel.
interior. This rather shocked the occupants and also made the motel owner very mad and he wouldn’t let Don and his helper retrieve the balloon. The power or telephone lines were also covered so Don went down the road and awaited the arrival of the utility crews. When they arrived he talked them into letting him and Red join them and recover the balloon and he was able with their help load it in the wagon and disappear before the manager found out what was going on.

Of interest is the fact that before an ascent within so many miles of a major airport the tower had to be called and they dictated when it was all right to ascend sandwiching it in between flights and sometimes directing air traffic away from the balloon site.

One last interesting incident was when the sandbag used to tip the balloon over after the jumper leaves the balloon, landed on the hood of a car. Don paid for the repairs. Don came home occasionally with a limp or swollen arm but he never let our mother think that the injuries came from a bad landing. In the 1950s Don made some attempts to sell the balloon but there didn’t seem to be much of a market for it and it never sold.

Now both of our days in Muncie came to an end but it was really great while it lasted. I have always had fond memories of Muncie and this book should prove why.

Later on Don moved to Atlanta, Georgia for a job with Gordy Tire Company the largest tire recapper in the country and he reluctantly gave up barnstorming. Don had obtained his pilots license on the GI bill. He talked the company into buying a Moonie Mite, a low wing very small airplane for him to use for his sales calls all over the southeastern states. Later he went into business for himself and bought a Piper Tri-Pacer then sequentially had two Mooney Mark 20s for his business and private use. The Moonies were built in Kerrville, Texas and were of wood construction including the skin. His last plane was a Meyer’s 200 series aircraft built in Tecumseh Michigan.

CONTEMPORARY THOUGHTS ON MUNCIE

Now when I visit Muncie it is obvious that much has changed. The glass factories are gone, because we no longer can fruits and vegetables and telephone line insulators are a thing of the past. But what happened to the many automotive component manufacturers such as the Chevrolet transmission plant; the Delco battery plant; the Warner Gear plant; and the many other manufacturers of car parts, electrical components, and numerous other items? I suppose it is because all of these items can be obtained elsewhere at a cheaper price. How do American manufacturers expect to sell their products in the future when they are eliminating better paying American jobs in the interest of low prices. If we become a total service, education, medical, and fast food based economy we will have lost our heritage. I have seen this country go from one that made lots of valuable things from nothing such as converting brown earth (iron ore) to steel, that steel to cars, appliances, and many other useful products and the same for other mined ores to produce copper, lead, zinc, and minerals that were made into final and beneficial products, all in the United States. Now much of that economic engine has disappeared. Is this truly progress? These comments apply across America and are not limited to or the fault of any particular location. We used to have protective tariffs but that is no longer an acceptable concept, the popular theme now is free trade, which totally ignores the work conditions for the workers in foreign countries as long as the price is right. Foreign manufacturers are not hampered by our numerous safety and labor laws and as we have seen they sometimes use toxic materials in items they make for us that we don’t allow, but the items are imported anyway.

I live in Texas, and our unemployment rate is lower than in most other parts of the country and that is because many useful products are made here out of raw materials such as crude oil and natural gas both of which were considered of no value in previous centuries. Even if we import some of the crude oil, it and natural gas are turned into many useful and necessary materials such as fuels, plastics, and other needed chemicals right here. Now Texas didn’t plan it that way, it’s just more economical to produce those things here than elsewhere and hopefully that won’t change.

To end on a more positive note let us hope that my economic philosophy is totally mistaken. Sometimes it is better to be wrong than right and I would gladly accept that.
The Senior Class of the Middletown High School request your presence at their Commencement Exercises Thursday Evening, April Twentieth Nineteen Hundred Fifty 8 o'clock Elliott Opera House.

Graduating Class and Their Theses.

STELLA KRIGBAUM - "Higher Education and Actual Life."
WILLIAM G. SHEDRON - "The Panama Canal."
CRYSTAL KELLY - "Joan of Arc."
GERTRUDE SMOLSER - "Madame Roland."
ROBERT SCHAEFFER - "Hamilton’s Financial Policy."
VIOLA RODENF - "Geographical Conditions as Influencing the Life of a People."

My Mother’s Commencement Invitation
Don’s balloon N number
MIDWAY BIRDS

Young Albatross

Young Booby
ON DECK ON THE USS BUSHNELL

Church Services

Hula Girls on Deck
Lens Coating Crew in Hawaii

Pat and Richard Wedding Picture September 29, 1945
Inflating Don’s Hot Air Balloon
RICHARD W. BRICKER, is presently an avocational writer and marine photographer. He received a BS degree in mechanical engineering from the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology at Terre Haute, Indiana in July of 1949.

He served in the South Pacific during World War II and in the North Atlantic and Germany during and after the Korean War. Bricker retired from the USAR in 1980 as a full Colonel. He spent most of his civilian career at the Johnson Space Center, performing spacecraft and commercial aircraft fire research. He was inducted into the Space Technology Hall of Fame in 1996 for his contributions to the development of fire resistant aircraft seats. He was appointed an Admiral in the Texas Navy by Governor Rick Perry in 2004 for his contributions to Texas maritime history.

Bricker is the author of *Wooden Ships from Texas: A World War I Saga* published by the Texas A&M University Press in November 1998. He later wrote *The Italian American Shipyard at Pascagoula* followed by *Pearls on Galveston Bay: The Oyster Luggers of Smith Point, Texas.* Eighteen of his marine paintings were purchased by and are on display at the Clifton Steamboat Museum, at Beaumont, Texas.

In the above picture, taken at the Texas Seaport Museum in Galveston, Texas he is seated on mooring bitts taken from the *Buccaneer x City of Beaumont* at Hastings-on-Hudson, New York in the early 1990s. This 255-foot long five-masted barkentine (one of 16 such ships) was built at Beaumont, Texas in 1918 of East Texas long-leaf pine, to haul Gulf Coast timber to Italy for World War I.
Don after Liftoff