

Nicholas Johnson: Stops Along the Way
[141122]

Contents

Introduction [1]

Chapter One In the Beginning: From Nothing to America, 14 Billion B.C.-1850 [5]

Chapter Two Johnson, Tarnström, Bockwoldt, Watke: Sweden and Germany, 1850-1900 [7]

Chapter Three Mother and Dad From Farm to College: Kansas and Iowa, 1900-1934 [11]

Chapter Four Little Nicky Johnson: Iowa City, 1934-1941 [16]

Chapter Five The Melrose Neighborhood: Iowa City, 1941 [25]

Chapter Six The War Years: Iowa City, 1941-1945 [31]

Chapter Seven High School: Iowa City, 1945-1952 [37]

Chapter Eight Young Law Man: Iowa City, 1945-1952 [53]

Introduction: The Last Seventeen

December 7, 1941, was a huge mile marker along the timeline of our nation's, and the world's, history: the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii that triggered America's entry into World War II. It was less significant for young children in the Midwest, far from any field of battle, whose parents maintained their children's emotional sense of security, as mine did.

On the other hand, December 14, 2013, was of no known significance whatsoever in the history of our country, let alone the world. It was, however, a major mile marker along the timeline of *my* history.

My life seems to have evolved so far through five stages lasting seventeen years each, give or take, and allowing for some overlaps. As I begin this effort to recall the last 80 years, I have started down the road through what will inevitably prove to be the first days of "the last seventeen" – if, indeed, there will prove to be a last full seventeen.

My memory is that Rudyard Kipling's poem, "If," came to my attention around my fourteenth year. Two of its concluding lines have prodded me ever since:

If you can fill the unforgiving minute

With sixty seconds' worth of distance run

Accomplishment, efficiency, goals, time management, productivity have driven me – with both their gifts and their costs. In many ways, I envy those who have chosen a different path.

Dad also drove himself, though for more justifiable reasons than I ever had: his quest, in a world filled with a wilderness of ignorance, to become one of the first humans ever to understand “stuttering,” and in ways that would enable him to relieve some of the emotional and social pain it caused him and others. He used to say, “My friends say I should get a ‘hobby.’ I don’t know what they’re talking about. My work *is* my hobby.”

These comments may give more meaning to December 14, 2013.

So what happened that day? It was the day I finished grading, and submitting grades, for the last students I would ever teach at the University of Iowa College of Law – the activity that was the core of my professional and social life for what had become not one, but *two*, of those seventeen year periods.

Much of this Introduction draws from something I wrote that day.

The day before, through a series of fortuitous but unscheduled meetings, a former dean was alone in his office and willing to talk about my potential final retirement; the associate dean I needed to inform was alone in the faculty lounge kitchen long enough for me to tell him; and the current dean paused long enough in the cafeteria for me to share the news with her – all in the space of an hour or so.

The following morning I awoke to “the last seventeen.”

The primary reason, and audience, for the memories that now rest on the pages that follow is to make them available to any children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, or members of future generations who reach an age when they are curious about their ancestors. Aside from family members, however, any others will only be looking through these pages because they may contain content in some ways relevant to earlier life in Iowa, World War II, the University of Iowa, or other subjects of their research – not because of the person cast as the central character.

President Lincoln was modest enough about his Gettysburg Address to believe that “the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here.” By that standard, the world will certainly little care, note, nor long remember what I have written here.

As an introduction, what follows is a very brief map, an overview, an “executive summary” of sorts, of those series of seventeen years – though the chapters will often cover briefer, different periods.

Born in 1934, the first seventeen years (1934-1951/52) involved growing up in Iowa City, with my parents and sister, Kate; attending and graduating from the University of Iowa’s University Elementary and High School (“UHigh”).

The next seventeen (1952-1969/73) was an almost entirely accidental and unpredictable upward trajectory. It involved the University of Texas (undergraduate and law school), marriage and first child (daughter Julie), law clerkships with a U.S. Court of Appeals judge (John R. Brown) and Supreme Court justice (Hugo Black). This was followed by a job offer and teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, Law School (Boalt Hall), the birth of my first son (Sherman) and an associate position at a major law firm (Covington & Burling) in Washington, D.C., which led to my first (U.S. Maritime Administrator; during which son Gregory was born) and second (Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission) presidential appointments – and my “15 minutes of fame.” [Andy Warhol, 1968, "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15_minutes_of_fame.]

The third seventeen (1969-1980/86) was as dramatic a series of disappointments as the previous seventeen had been an upward trajectory of exciting experiences. It began with my childhood sweetheart's desire to end our marriage of 17 years, and the ultimate divorce in 1972. The seven-year FCC term ended in December of 1973, followed by, in 1974, (1) an unsuccessful congressional Democratic primary race in Iowa, (2) a book contract dispute that ended with no book, and (3) a national media business (lectures, columns, radio commentaries) that gradually declined over the next ten years along with my celebrity. (4) The National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, which I chaired, gradually lost funding over the next five years, as did the “media reform” movement generally; major foundations and other funders – as well as members of Congress and the FCC – ultimately need the fix provided by ever-newer social challenges.

In personal and family terms, there was the overlapping seventeen from the 1972 divorce to the 1989 beginning of the relationship with my second and current wife, Mary Vasey, and our marriage in 1991. Not only was it seventeen years, it also offered the opportunity to play a seventeen-year-old, a single man in his forties experiencing what he had missed during his teenage years – during years when women were seemingly anxious to demonstrate that they could be just as liberated as men. The year 1989 also marked the death of my mother, Edna Bockwoldt Johnson, and my return, with Mary, to the Iowa City home in which I had grown up from 1941 through 1952.

The fourth seventeen (1980-1996), overlapping with the third, involved my return to Iowa (and Iowa City) by way of Madison, Wisconsin (with my son, Gregory, who was 17 in 1981). It started with teaching at the University of Wisconsin in the spring of 1980, followed by the beginning of what would prove to be *two* “seventeens” of teaching at the University of Iowa College of Law.

The 1980 to 1996 (when my son Alexander turned 17) overlapping years involved a variety of activities. There were a few years teaching in the University of Iowa's Department of Communications Studies as well as the College of Law; the final winding down of the lecture, column, and radio commentaries business. There were two seasons hosting a TV program run on a number of public broadcasting stations (“New Tech Times”); service on the Iowa City Broadband and Telecommunications Commission, international travel, and involvement with the local Democratic Party.

The fifth seventeen (1997-2014) has been primarily focused on teaching cyberlaw at the University of Iowa College of Law, life with Mary in Iowa City, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, the maintenance of a Web site and creation of regular blog essays (FromDC2Iowa).

Regarding the accuracy of what is on these pages, all I can represent is that there has been no known, deliberate and intentional effort to misrepresent anything. The content comes from my memories. However, that different individuals viewing the same events, as honest and skilled observers, often describe them quite differently is the subject of everything from games to jury trials. Similarly, one can believe one has a memory of an experience that never occurred, or that may be, in fact, a “memory” based on a story once told rather than the experience. These are my memories, nothing more.

If my use of north-south-east-west descriptions (or other detail) mystifies, distracts, or irritates you, permit me to explain. This book does not pretend to be a great literary work. The detail represents an effort to create in the mind of the reader, to the extent words and a few pictures can, an orientation to persons and places the reader never visited. This should be especially helpful for those who *are* familiar with, say, the interior of the family house, the Melrose neighborhood, or other persons or places mentioned – especially if visiting in person.

One final note: These memories are not something I either intend, or succeed in creating, as complete. The intention is to avoid subjecting the reader to anything that might appear to be insensitive, mean-spirited, or embarrassing for another. And there are intentional omissions regarding the experiences and identities of friendships, relationships, and partners from my third seventeen years unless they have agreed to being included.

Here, then, are some of my “stops along the way.”

Chapter One

In the Beginning: From Nothing to America, 14 Billion B.C.-1834

My story begins some 14 billion years ago – yours, too, if you are equally willing to suspend disbelief.

I am but “star stuff” rearranged – the hydrogen and oxygen combination we call “water,” and a diversity and sufficient number of minerals and other items now cataloged on the Periodic Table of the Elements to form the basis for a rather thorough semester in a college chemistry course. An even greater modesty compels the additional confession that most of what appears to be “me” is in fact some 100 trillion microbes and bacteria – distant relatives all -- for whom I provide a bed and breakfast service they seem to find acceptable.

The software (technically “wetware”) that runs the human cells in this cooperative housing project is a string of DNA that varies only slightly from that of a mouse, fish, bird, or earthworm.

That it all began with one “Big Bang” is not an intuitively satisfying explanation. The idea that everything came out of nothing bears more relation to a children’s fairy tale, or element of religious faith, than what we normally think of as even scientific theory, let alone fact. The belief of an indigenous people that the Earth is held up on the back of a turtle, supported in turn by another turtle – and, when pressed by the obvious next question, respond that it is “turtles all the way down” – seems more poetic and just as likely. Nonetheless, the notion that the history of everything began with the first, and never-equalled, wondrous fireworks display coming out of nothing, the “Big Bang,” seems to be the best that today’s over-educated scientific minds are able to offer.

As Senator Everett Dirksen might have said, “A billion (years) here, a billion there, pretty soon you’re talking real time.” So it was with the billions of years it took for “the dust to settle,” so to speak; that is, for the dust to coalesce into astronomical objects such as stars and planets – the Milky Way, and ultimately our star (the Sun), and its planet we call Earth. It took more billions of years before a single cell of stuff resembling “life” emerged, and still more time before single cells were able to reproduce.

We got a couple of lucky breaks that made the difference between life and death. The first is that the Earth found itself at exactly the right distance from the Sun; slightly further away and we would freeze; slightly closer and getting out of the kitchen would provide little relief. Earth would be too hot for humans to survive anywhere. The other lucky break was the Earth’s switch to an oxygen-based atmosphere and the life that made possible about a billion years ago. Evolution, plus a few hundred-million years, and the Earth was supporting plankton, fish, insects, amphibians, trees, reptiles, dinosaurs, mammals, birds, flowers (more or less in that order) -- ultimately our more immediate ancestors, and then us (*homo sapiens*, 200,000 to 500,000 years ago).

The human history thereafter is but a flash on the timeline of the universe. If you compress the time from the Big Bang until now into a calendar of 12 months, our species’ evolution all occurred after 11:00 p.m. on December 31st. By that time our ancestors were using stone tools;

by 11:45, fire; there were early seafarers at 11:58; cave painting at 11:59. Everything else came during the last minute of that year: agriculture; the first cities; early legal codes; use of bronze and iron; invention of the alphabet and compass; Roman Empire; birth of Christ; the zero and decimals; Mayan civilization; Sung Dynasty; European Renaissance; and the other developments of the last 1000 years more or less familiar to us.

Migrations out of Africa made their way through what is now the Middle East further east to Central Asia, and west to what is now Europe. My ancestors ended up in Northern Europe, in areas that later took on the names Germany and Scandinavia (Sweden).

I mention this early history of the Universe and the humans who came to inhabit the Earth to put in perspective a sense of humility genuinely felt. Those who oppose almost all that governments can do on behalf of their people have come to say in recent years, "I built that." They seem to be saying, "Anything and everything I have is the result of my efforts alone."

For starters, humankind's grandiose sense of comparative superiority to all other species is wildly off the mark. We can respect each plant and animal species for at least some abilities that exceed our own. Face it, we can't even keep the squirrels out of our bird feeders.

From my perspective, there are far more individuals and circumstances for which I give thanks and credit than for my own efforts – even including where the Earth settled into an orbit, and its oxygen atmosphere.

In terms of other humans' contributions, just think about it. We begin life benefiting from the accomplishments of those who preceded us during the past 100,000 years. Those are very substantial shoulders on which to stand. To those unknown individuals must be added those we knew and can name: family members, friends, teachers, mentors, and those from whom we have learned during what may have only been a brief encounter.

It may have been "my life," but it was not my creation; I certainly don't believe that "I built that."

Chapter Two

Johnson, Tarnström, Bockwoldt, and Watke: Sweden and Germany, 1850-1900

In Chapter One I acknowledge my generalized debt to all that has happened since the Big Bang, the evolution of single cells into dinosaurs and the first of our species, and the civilizing contributions of the 100 billion persons who have lived on Earth during the past 50,000 years. [<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fact-or-fiction-living-outnumber-dead/>].

In this chapter, we begin taking names. But do not fear what follows. There will be no need for the kind of map of characters one needs to navigate the 160 persons who populate Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Various members of the family did some pre-Internet digging that did not go back very far. My daughter, Julie, is the primary post-Internet researcher and the source of most of the family's current genealogical information.

First, some of the basics. They will only take a minute.

My father, Wendell Andrew Leroy Johnson (b. 1906, m. 1929, d. 1965) was the youngest of six children; my mother, Edna Bockwoldt Johnson (b. 1905, m. 1929, d. 1989) was the middle child of three sisters.

There are but five principals in addition to my parents: my mother's parents, Mox Bockwoldt (b. 1875, m. 1901, d. 1956) and Bertha Watke Bockwoldt (b. 1883, m. 1901, d. 1931); my father's parents, Andrew Johnson (b. 1860, m. 1892, d. 1942) and Mary Helen Tarnström Johnson (b. 1866, m. 1892, d. 1925); and Bertha Watke's mother, Emma Kohlmorgan Watke (b. 1860, m. 1883, d. 1941), who lived with us during the first six years of my life.

The wives of both my grandfathers died before I was born. I only met Andrew Johnson on one occasion I can recall, and that before I was six years old. Therefore, Mox Bockwoldt, whom we called "Pop," and Emma Kohlmorgan Watke (who died when I was six), were the only "grownups" from prior generations with whom I had contact.

My personal interactions with them will have to await the next chapter. Meanwhile, here is some context: the times in which they lived, and the stories about them told to me.

During the 19th Century the population of the United States grew from five or six million in 1800 to 23 million in 1850, and 76 million by 1900. By 1930 (the last census before the year of my birth, 1934), there were 123 million persons living here. The most recent census, in 2010, put the number of Americans at nearly 310 million.

In 1850 two-thirds of all Americans were farmers. (Prior to that the percentages were even higher.) By 1916 their percentage declined to 32 percent; by 1933 to 25 percent; and today it is little more than one percent. [<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/20/us/farm-population-lowest-since-1850-s.html>]

During that 1850 to 1930 period, when the U.S. population exploded five-fold, from 23 to 123 million persons, 25 million of that increase were immigrants from Europe. Five million came

from Germany, and most of them, like Mox Bockwoldt, settled somewhere in the Midwest.
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_immigration_to_the_United_States]

Why mention population data?

To understand my grandparents and great grandparents lives requires at least a minimal understanding of the times during which they lived – and how they differed from the America in which we live. Theirs was a much less populated and simpler America than the one we know.

Iowa's first non-Native American settlers started arriving as recently as 1830. The area became a state in 1846. Before the railroads came in the 1850s and 1860s, the Mormons pulled their own carts by hand from Iowa to Utah, arriving in the early 1850s. Horses and oxen provided farmers' transportation to markets along dirt roads (muddy after a rainstorm) and the "horsepower" to pull plows and wagons. There were no electricity, water, or sewer systems.

My parents, grandparents, and great grandparents grew up on farms; most never left them. This was not, then, uncommon. They were farmers during a time when a quarter to a third of all Americans were farmers. (Both Mox and Andrew were cattlemen.) There will be a little more about agriculture in the next chapters. I mention this now because in the 21st Century few of us are likely to know many farmers -- and certainly none engaged in the kind of mixed-agriculture, small family farms that my grandparents and great grandparents knew.

Moreover, they were immigrants. That was also not then uncommon. In 1900 over 123,000 of Iowa's 2.2 million residents were, like Mox Bockwoldt, born in Germany.

No American who is not of 100 percent Native American heritage can claim to be a pure American. The rest of us are hyphenated descendants of immigrants – in my case Swedish-Americans and German-Americans. Some immigrants were invaders; others came in peace. All too many were involved in driving the original Americans from their homes, killing many in the process.

Moreover, my people arrived in the 19th Century; none could claim membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution. They were part of the waves of immigration that brought to our shores those who helped build 20th Century America. They arrived with little or nothing, and no alternative but a life of very hard work if they were to survive and raise families. It was a time of strong ethnic ties – where they lived, went to school and church, shopped, and how they voted. There could be an inter-ethnic distance, unfamiliarity, suspicion, prejudice, even hatred and hostility – especially toward whatever immigrant group happened to be the last to arrive.

As a third generation immigrant and first generation raised off the farm, their history and mine has played a role in shaping who I am.

Many of these immigrants did well financially and as community members. Neither Andrew or Mox joined the robber barons and others in the 1% of their day, but my guess is that they would have been in the top 10% to 25%. Andrew, who was a Kansas cowboy of sorts, riding horseback, driving his cattle across Kansas to the Kansas City stockyards, was reportedly the first in his county to purchase an automobile, and a collection of books. That collection included a multi-

volume *History of the World* (if I recall the title correctly) that Dad read from as a child and kept in our home.

There are only two other stories recall regarding Andrew. One involves his driving. When his eyesight had declined to the extent that he drove his car into a ditch in his late seventies or early eighties, the family insisted he give up driving. He rejected the suggestion with the assertion that, "I can still see large moving objects."

The other involves his death in a doctor's office, where he was waiting to see the doctor for what would otherwise have been his last routine physical exam.

Although there is no record of precisely when Andrew reached America, it was probably very close to the time that Mox arrived, in 1890. Andrew and Mary Tarnström were married in 1892. I'm guessing they would have met, and married, in the U.S. And their first child, Lennard Frances, my uncle "L.F.," was born in Kansas in 1893.

My mother is the source of most of what is known about Mox's 19th and early 20th Century life.

Mox was born in Berg auf Fehmarn, the main town on a little, 70-square mile island in the Baltic Sea off the northern coast of Germany. Settled in the early Middle Ages by a Slavic tribe, it long retained confusing simultaneous and alternating ties to both Denmark and Germany, until sometime after until the Second Schleswig War of 1864 when it unambiguously became a part of Germany.

The Bockwoldt family name first appeared in Fehmarn records sometime between 1450 and 1500. Mox's parents, Johannes Bockwoldt and Dorris Wenndorf Bockwoldt, were born in 1835 and 1840, respectively – which means, if both were born on Fehmarn, that Mox is actually the son of German-speaking Danish subjects. It also means that Mox, an only child, spent his childhood with parents in their forties and fifties rather than their twenties.

The story is that his grandfather was a ship's captain who died at sea during a storm off the coast of Fehmarn. The story did not indicate whether the ship was used for transportation or fishing, but two of Mox's relatives, Lottie and Ria, were fish mongers in Burg. (I don't know their last names, or relationship to Mox.) Mother, a skilled photographer, took and framed a large photo of one of them at work, during a trip she and Dad made to the island. The picture still hangs in our living room.

Mox's father, among other things, wove and sold the heavy ropes used on the local ships. The weaving began by tying the starting end of the fibers at one end of the barn. The weaver walked backwards, toward the open barn door, carefully weaving the fibers – like a mother weaving braids on her school-bound daughter – until reaching the desired length of the rope.

When Mox left the island for America in 1890 and his father asked why he wanted to leave, Mox replied, "I don't want to spend the rest of my life walking backwards." When he later returned for a visit (his U.S. passport record indicates 1914), very well dressed and groomed, the story is that his father greeted him with his boyhood name and said, "Well, Mattie, I see that you haven't been walking backwards."

Mox recalled as a boy walking with his father to the local beer garden on Sundays, where they would simply sit for a long afternoon. His father would bring the cigar that lasted many weeks, order one glass of beer, and young Max would watch as the rings slowly accumulated on the side of the glass. Once the beer sipping was finished, the cigar was put out and saved, they finally left and walked home.

Little is known, at least by me, of his life in America from 1890, when he arrived, until 1901 when he was in Davenport, Iowa, studied at a “business college,” and married Bertha Watke. Since he left Germany at age 15 he could not have had much more than the U.S. equivalent of a junior high school education, and we don’t know how much additional education he received in Davenport – only that he certainly put whatever it was to very good use in business.

Sometime between 1901 and 1905 Mox and Bertha settled in Galva, Iowa, ultimately building and living in what Mother referred to as “the home place,” a mile or so north and west of “downtown Galva.” How and when he was able to acquire farmland is unknown, only that much of it was north of the home place, and that he succeeded in his lifetime goal of being able to leave an acreage to each of his three girls. I have a foggy memory that he began by selling meat out of a cart he pulled along Galva’s dirt roads – though that sounds both a little too romantic, and an unlikely business plan for someone whose customers are equally involved in a mixed agriculture that includes livestock.

When a farmer’s livestock died, because they needed to be hauled away, they could be purchased cheaply. South of the home place Mox built one of the very few rendering plants around northwest Iowa. He brought the animals here and essentially cooked them into animal feed – and possibly gelatin from the hoofs – and sold the products for a profit.

Because my mother and father enter the story in 1905 and 1906 respectively, we’ll save the rest of the story of the first third of the 20th Century for the next chapter.

Chapter Three Mother and Dad From Farm to College: Kansas and Iowa, 1900-1934

At the turn of the century, Andrew and Mary had been married since 1892, were living on a Kansas farm, and had given birth to five children: "L.F.," 1893; Myrtle, 1894; Wilbert, 1897; Marion, 1898; and Edna, 1900.

Mox, 15 years younger than Andrew, had arrived in America in 1890, and made it to Davenport, Iowa, by 1900 -- having taken the scenic route across the Atlantic Ocean by ship and the Eastern United States by land to Davenport, Iowa. Bertha Watke, the only one of the four grandparents born in the United States, had taken the much shorter route to Davenport from Denison, Iowa. The following year they were married there, and soon moved to Galva, Iowa.

Dad was the sixth, youngest, and last, child of Andrew and Mary, born in 1906. Mother was the second of three girls born to Mox and Bertha: Josephine ("Auntie Joe"), born 1902; Mother, 1905; and Doris Bertha, 1910 (taking the names of Mox's mother and wife).

There are few stories I recall of their lives from 1905 and 1906 through their high school years. I imagine that their homes, surroundings, and tasks growing up on farms were more similar to those of Iowa's first settlers in the middle of the 19th Century than our lives during the second half of the 20th. We know both Andrew and Mox were raising and marketing cattle and relying on horses to pull plows and wagons. They probably grew hay and oats for horses, and maybe corn for the cattle, using animal manure for fertilizer. Andrew may have contributed to Kansas' production of wheat.

Mother and Dad's morning chores as young children might have included gathering eggs from the hen house, or carrying food scraps out to the pigs ("slopping the hogs"). As they grew older and stronger, they might have walked behind a horse-drawn plow, milked the dairy cows, or walked a cornfield at harvest, throwing the ears of corn against the bank board of the wagon.

Mother told the story of wanting to go wading or swimming in the nearby Maple River, but being forbidden to do so -- presumably because of her parents' fear of her drowning. Once of college age, and home on holiday, she walked to the River with anticipation of the long-postponed dip -- only to discover, once there, that she no longer *wanted* to swim in the Maple River.

There are a couple stories involving Dad.

Apparently, he showed more early enthusiasm for reading than farming. He was fond of the little books of sometimes serious, classical, radical, or even humorous content published by Emanuel Haldeman-Julius through Appeal to Reason, a socialist publishing house that began in 1919 in Girard, Kansas. [<http://www.haldeman-julius.org>] The firm sold copies of their 2300 titles of 3-1/2 by 5-inch, quarter-inch-thick paperbound books for five cents. There was once a collection of 100 or more of them in our attic. They were just the right size for the back pockets on his coveralls, and provided a diversion from farm work in general. When it came to plowing, however, the results were more serious, in some ways similar to those today who try to walk

while looking down, texting on a smart phone. It became very difficult for him to plow straight furrows.

Mother tells a story that suggests he at least learned something of the ways of a cattleman while growing up. When she went with him to visit the family farm, he fetched a horse, threw his hat on the ground, rode a couple hundred yards away from her, turned, drove the horse to a fast gallop (bareback as I recall the story), and as he flew by her reached over, picked up his hat from the ground, put it on his head, slowed the horse, and returned to where she stood. He might have some trouble speaking, she thought, but this fellow sure knows how to ride.

Although baseball was "invented" in 1839, the first World Series did not occur until 1903. During the 1910s grand, new stadiums were built, as baseball became the country's most popular sport and the World Series its most popular event. Dad's passion, like that of many boys his age, was to become a major league baseball player, preferably a pitcher. When he was not reading, one of his most popular activities was throwing rocks at fence posts – something he continued when I was a boy when we were where it was safe to do so.

In addition to these stories, there is a remarkable autobiography written in his early twenties: *Because I Stutter* (1930). There is no reason to repeat its contents here, as the book is currently available online, at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~cyberlaw/wj/bis/wjbis.html>. It won him not only a master's degree, but the distinctions of (a) authoring one of the first books about stuttering from a stutterer's perspective, and (b) becoming a commercially published writer at a very young age. Clearly, it is the most important go-to source for information about his childhood and teenage years.

Following early morning chores, Mother and Dad would have walked to school along dirt or gravel roads, often snow-covered in the winter. Apparently, both must have had above-average intelligence and enjoyed learning in school, as they both went on to earn college degrees. (Even as late as "1940, more than half of the U.S. population had completed no more than an eighth grade education. Only 6 percent of males and 4 percent of females had completed 4 years of college." [http://nces.ed.gov/naal/lit_history.asp#attainment])

It is neither necessary nor the purpose of this collection of family stories and experiences to provide a detailed history of the 20th Century. However, at least a random sampling of events and dates may be useful for a variety of reasons. The news, events, inventions, and fads of their times undoubtedly helped shape Mother and Dad's experiences, sense of "normal," aspirations, expectations, and beliefs – as much as they do for all of us. Try to imagine one's reaction upon seeing for the first time a vehicle that could propel itself without the need for horses – let alone riding in one; or hearing music and voices coming from a new wooden box in one's home.

Here are some examples from About Education's "1900s Timeline," <http://history1900s.about.com/od/timelines/tp/1900timeline.htm>.

Would you have guessed these inventions and products arrived earlier or later than the beginning of the *last* century: Kodak's "Brownie" box camera (1903), silent movies ("The Great Train Robbery," 1903), New York City subway (1904), Kellogg's Corn Flakes (1906), electric

washing machines (1907), the Model T Ford (1908; one million from a moving assembly line by 1915), plastic (1909), oreo cookies (1912), parachutes (1912), crossword puzzles (1913), traffic lights (1914), self-service grocery stores (1916), the polygraph ("lie detector," 1921), insulin (1922), sliced bread ("the greatest thing since," 1928), bubble gum (1928), penicillin (1928), and car radios (1929).

Radio was huge in the 1920s. From the time of KDKA-AM's broadcast in 1920 until 1930 about 60 percent of American homes acquired radio receivers.

Events more commonly thought of as "history" might include: the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901, the first year of his second term. This launched Teddy Roosevelt's presidency (1901-1909), one of the most transformative of the Century – with the introduction the following year of his namesake, the "Teddy Bear," an early ancestor of the one I would have 35 years later. By 1904 Teddy Roosevelt started digging the Panama Canal, which was opened in 1914.

The Wright brothers took flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903, the year before the New York City subway opened. Less than a quarter-century later Charles Lindbergh completed his solo flight across the Atlantic.

Einstein's theory of relativity and Freud's theory of sexuality date from 1905.

1906 was the year of the San Francisco earthquake.

Why mention that Jack Johnson was the first African-American to win the world heavyweight boxing title in 1908? Dad's nickname, "Jack," undoubtedly came from the fact that he (like Mary Vasey's father, Wayne) was a boxer.

Robert Peary reached the North Pole in 1909, the year before Halley's Comet nearly reached Planet Earth and the Boy Scouts began.

1912 is best remembered for the Titanic – its last voyage, not the movie.

Of course, perhaps the most significant event during these years was World War I, 1914-1918. America joined the effort in April of 1917; the armistice was signed in November of 1918, and the Versailles Treaty in June of 1919. Ultimately, with its deadly trench warfare and the Germans' poison gas, an estimated 10 million soldiers and millions more civilians had been killed and some 20 million wounded.

Of less consequence during those years, 1915 saw the launch of both transcontinental phone service and Babe Ruth's first home run. The world's first communist country, Russia, was spawned by the revolution of 1917.

1920 was a big year. The League of Nations came together. Constitutional amendments were ratified prohibiting "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors" (18th

Amendment; “prohibition”), and declaring that “the right . . . to vote shall not be denied . . . on account of sex” (19th Amendment; “women’s right to vote”).

The *Reader’s Digest* began publication in 1922; Henry Luce’s *Time Magazine* in 1923 – along with the introduction of the Charleston dance.

J. Edgar Hoover began his 48-years as Director of the FBI in 1924, launching his fight against America’s most notorious criminals, five years before Al Capone gunned down seven men from a rival Chicago gang in the St. Valentine’s Day massacre.

Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was published in 1925, the same year that William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow squared off in a debate over evolution in the famous Scopes (Monkey) Trial – a year before the much less controversial publication of A.A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh*.

1929 is not best remembered for the launch of the motion picture industry’s Academy Awards, but rather for the momentous Stock Market Crash in October and the Great Depression which followed throughout the 1930s.

Most important to my family history is May 31st of that year, when my mother and dad were married in Galva, Iowa. That is also the year he finished working on his master’s degree and manuscript for *Because I Stutter*.

He writes in that book that he began his third year as an undergraduate in 1926. [p. 93] Aside from that, I know little of my parents’ life, times, and studies during their college years. Dad wrote for some student magazine. Mother studied dance and poetry among other things, and told of her awe when taking canoe lessons in what was then one of the nation’s largest indoor swimming pools.

Nor do I know much about the five years that followed. Mother was teaching school, perhaps in West Branch. Dad was probably working on his Ph.D. and other research, perhaps paid for teaching or as someone’s assistant.

Having spent some time in President Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration, I was aware of his practice of naming people and things with names that would have the initials LBJ – his wife, Lady Bird Johnson, his daughters Linda Bird Johnson, Luci Baines Johnson, and even his dog, Little Beagle Johnson – not to mention Johnson City (actually named for his uncle, James Polk Johnson, not the President).

On my return to my home town of Iowa City, it occurred to me that I could have a postal address that included, “Nicholas Johnson, Johnson Street, Johnson County, Iowa.” (Johnson County was named for Colonel Richard Mentor Johnson, who served in the War of 1812 and as vice president during President Van Buren’s administration – no relative of mine.) Thankfully, that whiff of an idea soon evaporated.

It is unknown whether similar notions motivated my father when he and Mother chose to live in an apartment at 216 South Johnson Street in Iowa City. However, he did marry a woman with his

sister's name (Edna), who came from a town (Galva, Iowa) with the familiar name (Galva, Kansas) of a neighboring town to McPherson. So it is at least possible, though he did not choose to burden me with any of his surfeit of names (Wendell and Andrew and Leroy) besides Johnson.

Of course, the biggest event in my life, aside from the Big Bang, was not my name or address. It was my birth in the then-new University of Iowa Hospital on September 23, 1934.

Chapter Four Little Nicky Johnson: Iowa City, 1934-1941

This chapter was supposed to be the beginning of *my story*, that is, a recollection of events, rather than others' *stories about* events. By that standard, it should probably begin around 1938 rather than 1934.

My sister, Katy (now "Kate," but then "Katherine Louise," "Katy Lou," or sometimes "Lady Koo"), was born in 1938, at the same hospital in which I was first spotted. The memory of her birth, perhaps a true recollection, perhaps heavily augmented by the stories of others, is that Mother was in a room near what would have been the west end of the third floor. It is now "Boyd Tower," amidst a multi-billion-dollar complex of buildings called "University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics," but in 1938 was the entirety of, simply, "the hospital."

It was the first glimpse of the organic glob said to be "your sister," and the daughter of what were obviously two very happy parents. There was no time to sort through initial reactions – excitement, happiness, confusion, perhaps a trifle concern that two would now occupy the center of the universe. I ran out the door and east down the hall toward the elevator, stepping briefly inside each room, shouting, "I've got a new baby sister."

So began her life.

There is every reason to believe mine began with equivalent parental happiness – even if there was no out-of-control young town crier running down the hallway announcing the fact. Married in 1929, my parents had wisely waited to have their first child for the five years since their marriage, the stock market crash, and the beginning of the Great Depression that followed. By the winter of 1933-1934 President Roosevelt had been elected and his New Deal programs would have held out some hope, if not reassurance that, to quote Roosevelt's campaign song, "Happy Days Are Here Again."

My earliest name was "Little Nicky Johnson." It later became "Nick," and then "Nicholas." I never had a middle name or initial. My parents told me years later it would be fine with them if I wanted to pick one, go to the courthouse, and officially change my name. So I was often officially "Nicholas (NMI) Johnson" (for "no middle initial"). At least it was not as bad as the guy with two initials, "R. B. Jones," known as "Ronly Bonly Jones" on his driver's license.

Mother's sister Josephine, Aunti Joe, told how three groups of friends responded to news of her European trip: (a) "bon voyage, have a great time," (b) "so, you're going to Europe," and (c) "Ah, Josie, you're going to the old country." Similarly, I have no problem with those who've known me long enough to still refer to me as "Nicky" – friends of my parents, a cousin or two, and my sister-in-law-for-life, Andi Chapman Day and her husband, Joe.

My parents may not have prepared themselves for all that Little Nicky Johnson, my preferred name at the time, would bring into their lives. But they were up on the child rearing literature of their day. According to Mother, her regime during pregnancy included, among other things, a contest with of sorts with a pregnant friend of hers to see who could eat the most servings of diverse vegetables every day. She aimed for nine. Dad and his Swedish ancestors are probably

responsible for was ultimately my six-foot-four physique. But Mother is the one responsible for my good health at birth and most of the years thereafter.

Weighing in well over 12 pounds, large for those days, Mother must have sometimes wondered if I was really worth the effort. She was fond of President Jimmy Carter. Knowing Carter claimed to have been “born again,” I once asked her what she thought of that process. She replied that, given what she went through at my first birth, she had no interest in my being born again. She said giving birth was like having your upper lip pulled over your forehead and down the back of your head.

In the movie, “Oh God,” God is played by George Burns. When asked by John Denver’s character if he’d made any mistakes, God replies, only that he made the avocado seed too big. With a world population of one billion persons in 1800 headed to nine billion in 2040, he might have mentioned one more. He should have required men, rather than women, to undergo the birthing process.

Following that sunny fall day, Sunday, September 23, where did we go when it was time to leave the hospital? There’s no record (and obviously no memory). Best guess is that it was not my parents’ former apartment at 126 South Johnson Street. More likely, it was the slightly more spacious, lovely little 19th Century brick house on the east side of town at 1716 B Street, on the corner of Court Street, where a crib and highchair all my own were waiting, along with a substantial quantity of cloth diapers.

There’s a winter photo somewhere of a young boy, perhaps three years old, in a very heavy snow suit in the yard there, and another of him sitting in a highchair with cake frosting on his face, perhaps a birthday.

The latter may have been the inspiration for Mother’s rhyme,

*Little Nicky
Fat and tricky,
Got his face and hands
All sticky.*

My association with the University of Iowa began about this time. The Iowa Child Welfare Research Station operated from 1917 to 1974 at 9 East Market Street.

[<http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/ictcs/icwrs.html>] It was one of, if not the, first in the world to study so-called normal children, their physical, psychological, and intellectual development. In 1921 it created the nation’s first free-standing preschool.

I entered its “two-year-old group” in 1936, and stayed until old enough for kindergarten. When my first wife, Karen Chapman, and I were studying at the University of Texas, she was an education major. One of her courses required a book that opened with a picture of a very much younger version of her husband.

My recollections include the cold, metal calipers used to measure my growth, getting in and out of snowsuits and boots in the winter, and standing alongside our wading pool, swinging a broom in the water to splash my colleagues. Although the building and wading pool are gone, the bas-relief sculpture at the head of the pool was still there when last I looked.

It would have been about 1937 that we moved to the house at 414 Brown Street, a much larger brick home from the mid-19th Century, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and said to be a stop on the “underground railway” sheltering slaves from the South on their passage north. The house sat atop a grassy slope on the north side of an all-brick Brown Street – an odd choice of materials and extensive labor cost for street building, possibly the consequence of some mid-19th-Century version of today’s “crony capitalism.”

I didn’t wander too far from home in those days, but such exploration as was permitted never resulted in the discovery of any humans under what I judged to be at least 80, like the two old ladies who lived across the street. Then one day I came upon a young girl my age who lived around the corner, north on Linn Street: Patty Peck. There is a photo somewhere of us sitting on the steps of her home, but I have no recollection of ever entering it, any play we engaged in during those years, or when she moved – though she returns again in a later chapter.

Dad would drive me to the Iowa Child Welfare Station in the morning on his way to work. Another passenger on those trips was Kurt Lewin, an internationally renowned psychologist whose illustrious career included association with that institution from 1935 to 1944.

[http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Kurt_Lewin.aspx] Of course, none of that was known to me at the time. He was just another grownup and friend of Dad’s.

Aside from my “creative writing” recollections reproduced below, others would include the oldest woman I had ever seen, my mother’s grandmother, Emma Kohlmorgan Watke, sitting the rocking chair now in our upstairs hallway. There is a little cloud of a memory that she was the reason we were able to get an allowance of flour from some Depression-era government program. My only recollected exchange with her must have followed some rather serious misbehavior on my part. Whatever it was, Judge Watke’s judgment was to bang, not her gavel on the bench, but a large, empty metal dishpan on my head.

Mother told a story she said was apocryphal; it may have been a true story inspired by some comparable behavior of mine. A mother, seeing her young boy had disappeared, asked someone to, “Please, go see what Johnny is doing, and tell him to stop it.” Another story caught me in a bit of a misrepresentation. Asked why I had not come in when called, “I replied, I didn’t hear Mrs. Dickey come to the door and call me” – which Mother considered far too much detail from someone denying he had heard the command.

There are memories of sitting by one of the living room windows, looking east, watching the falling rain, wishing it would stop, so I could go out and play. One glorious day Mother permitted me to go outdoors while it was raining and just stand there, excited to experience yet another natural wonder. She said it was “a warm rain.” Although asked during every subsequent rain, she never ruled another to be sufficiently warm to permit my experiencing the phenomenon again.

Indoors we had a radio, a phonograph, and a kaleidoscope – a handheld device through which one could look at pictures of the wonders of the world in three dimensions, as each eye focused on a slightly different photo. There were probably toy trucks and other objects for the imagination to manipulate. Dad got someone to cut and sand a collection of wooden blocks for me to play with – for a price that was well beyond what he had expected, as well as his ability to pay. There were no piles of gifts on birthdays or Christmas, but always something, possibly handmade. If the Florida orange growers and we were lucky, there might even be the excitement of “a Florida orange” in a Christmas stocking. Having a sense of being loved and cared for, and what I judged to be “enough,” there was no yearning for “more” or reflection on whether or not we were poor.

In fact, the only disappointment in that department was that Santa never brought me the fire truck for which I longed, the kind that one could sit inside and drive with foot pedals.

In those days before vaccinations for childhood diseases, we developed immunity by enduring the diseases, such as chicken pox, measles, mumps, and whooping cough. The public health officials would come to our house to post a “Quarantined” sign on the door, and I would spend the requisite days in bed, comforted by the sugar “pills” from our doctor’s bag during his visits to our home, and enjoying the meals of milk toast, but otherwise bored. Even when healthy, there were the mandatory, boring afternoons “naps” in my bedroom – probably more for Mother’s benefit than my own.

There was a large wooden chest outside my bedroom where it was my responsibility to put away all toys each evening. That was followed by bedtime stories read aloud from books such as, *The Little Engine That Could*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and *The Story About Ping* – while my Teddy Bear, other stuffed animals and I slowly drifted off to sleep. Mother told me of one very disappointing moment for her, when she had put me on her lap, and prepared to read to me, and I simply jumped down. There’s no memory of why I got down, or record of why the disappointment stayed with her.

Dad would also make up rhymes and stories. Here are two I remember:

*Nicky is terribly sick with “No”
He hasn’t said “Yes” for ages,
The doctor says
That people with “No”
Are usually kept in cages*

One of our favorite rituals was his looking between my toes for the fuzz that would gather each day from my socks – a fuzz which he named “whiffy.”

*We always look
‘Tween’ Nicky’s toes
Before he goes to bed,
‘Cause if we looked*

*Elsewhere instead,
We'd never find the whiffy*

Sixty years after we moved into the Brown Street house, I enrolled in a creative writing class. From that very brief experience came my first and last effort at creative writing: "Lawn Mowing," June 30, 1998. Because mowing our Brown Street lawn was my first exposure to child labor, and the piece was supposed to wander a bit anyway, excerpts from it are probably as good a commentary about my third through sixth year as would be any newly created description of those years. (It contains some variations of stories from Chapter Three; there are some minor edits throughout; and some paragraph breaks and bracketed dates have been added.)

The rough grain of the aged wooden handles cut into my soft little hands. The lawn mower may have been twenty years old. Maybe it was left to weather outdoors. Past experience with the pain of slivers would normally have made me cautious, but not this day.

Rusty wires held the handle insecurely to the structure of metal wheels, rotating blades, and cutting edge. But the blades had been sufficiently sharpened, or oiled, that a five-year-old could experience the thrill of operating this piece of adult machinery.

My father, mother, new baby sister and I shared the house at 414 Brown Street in Iowa City with Mary and Paul Engle during the years when Paul (I addressed and referred to my parents' friends by their first names) had just begun the Iowa Writers Workshop program. (For years thereafter, I continued to refer to box elder bugs as "box Engle" bugs, believing them for some reason named after my friend Paul.)

The Brown Street house is an apartment complex now [1998], a student warren called "Gaslight Village." But in the 1930s, when we lived there, it was still a stately brick home on a hill, one of the first homes in Iowa City, now registered as a "national historic" something or other. In fact, a part of its attraction to a young boy was the story that it had secret passageways where slaves were hidden by abolitionists in the mid-1800s. I searched the house as a boy, but found neither secret passages nor any evidence of the railroad tracks in the basement I assumed would have been necessary for this station on the "underground railroad."

There were only three or four homes on that city block, with lawns accordingly wide. Ours was perhaps one hundred feet long as well, flowing down to the all-brick street, where a hitching post, a black pole with a ring, awaited any visitor who might wish to tie up his or her horse before ascending the steps. The hitching post was not a mere ornament, the result of some yuppie shopper's effort to buy nostalgia. It was used by the man who brought us the ice that cooled our "ice box" (the non-electric predecessor to today's "refrigerator" -- which, for years, we continued to refer to as "the ice box"). And one day a neighbor from the farm behind us (Iowa City was then a much smaller urban oasis surrounded by rolling farm fields than it is today) came running through our backyard and onto the front lawn, chasing a horse engaged in its own escape from slavery. (My father's father came to visit us once from Kansas, and -- because I heard he was a cowboy -- I rather hoped he would arrive on horseback. He drove.)

Until my first mowing day, the front lawn was just my playground. Because forbidden to cross the streets, but liked being outdoors, I spent a lot of time there. It supported two large elm trees, with their deep-furrowed bark -- probably there 100 years before any runaway slaves. I loved those trees.

My father told the story of a Kansas neighbor who, when asked if he believed in baptism, replied, "Why sure, I've seen it done." Had I known of baptism, and the Druids, the elms would have provided my baptism into the Druid religion. And when the dreaded Dutch elm disease wiped them out it was as if most of my own family had been wiped out by a medieval black death. The elms provided my source of "locust shells," carefully picked from the bark and stored in fruit jars which, at my insistence, my parents dutifully carried to our next home and stored in its garage. (We moved to the west side of town, 508 Melrose Court, in 1941; 48 years later I would return from Washington to that house, where Mary and I still live.)

The Brown Street lawn also gave me a place to lie on my back and wonder whether it was the swaying branches and leaves that caused the breeze, for why else would air move? I was equally curious as to how high the clouds might be.

Jim, a graduate student of my father's, added an explanation of thunder to my accumulating understanding of natural phenomena.

One evening I was sitting on the floor of the front porch, taking in as much as a five-year-old could of Jim's academic discussion with Dad. The screened-in front porch faced south and ran the length of the house. It had a three-person swing, attached to chains suspended from hooks in the porch ceiling, that caused a relaxing, rhythmic squeaking sound as he and Dad talked and kept the swing in motion.

It was a stormy night. The washday-clean smell in the air, when the rain just begins to tip-toe through the dust, had long since passed. Now the sound of heavy rain hitting the metal porch roof drowned out the squeaky rhythm of the swing, and with it any other sensory input, whether of smell or sight on this black night. Suddenly there was a flash of lightning and the rumbling, rolling crash of thunder. I jumped.

"What was that?" I asked.

"That's just potatoes rolling on the roof," Jim said.

"Oh, OK," I responded, and filed away this new knowledge along with my theories about wind and clouds.

The lawn was also a place to lie on my stomach and watch the industrious ants. I still like to watch ants, and feel somewhat protective of them, as of all animal life. (Some of this may come from my Native American teacher [1974], Senawakowak. One day I pointed out to him a mosquito on his forehead he might wish to swat. "They have to live, too," he told me.) In fact, I now [1998] have a small portion of my lawn I do not mow, my own little protected wildlife area, where the ants can play and prosper without the noise and physical threat of a lawn mower.

This is surprising in a way, because ants provided my first bee sting. How can this be (so to speak)?

I loved my ants, and wanted to do something nice for them. So one evening before bed I sneaked into the kitchen, got a chair, climbed up into the cupboard, and carefully removed the china sugar bowl and its spoon. I had observed that ants carried little bits of things in their mouths -- although sometimes far larger than themselves -- like grass, insects, and pieces of dirt. Since I liked sugar, and little pieces of sugar seemed to be just about the right size for an ant's mouth, I provided my ants the nicest gift I could think of for them: three teaspoons of sugar crystals around the entryway to their home.

They had already gone to bed, so the next morning I awoke early to see if the ants appreciated my thoughtfulness. Much to my disappointment, I found that the morning dew had transformed the sugar to syrup. Almost simultaneously, and to my much greater disappointment, I discovered bees' love of syrup, and their mean-spirited willingness to sting little boys. Mother removed the stinger, applied a paste of baking soda and water to the wound, soothed my broken heart, dried my tears, and explained that ants probably would not eat sugar anyway. But I still both like ants and am cautious around stinging creatures.

There was no threat to the ants this first time I had permission to mow the lawn. If I did not know every clump of grass, I at least knew every clump that held an anthill and protected their homes even then.

I was mowing! The metallic whir of the blades on the cutting edge, the spray of grass bits, the smell, the thrill of this initiation ceremony into adulthood -- or so I thought. I can do this! Just like the grownups.

Honesty pulls from me the confession that the memory is dim. The memory is that I mowed the entire front yard. Is it likely such an accomplishment would have been mine? Perhaps my father was mowing the yard, and I only pushed the mower down the hill, following which he finished the task.

Would we have had a "lawn boy"? Highly unlikely. This was the Great Depression. Money was scarce. Hobos would stop at our back door asking for food. Mother would usually give them something, even though it often meant we would have less to eat at our next meal.

Would Mother have been mowing the yard? Probably not. She was a teacher, and a poet, and a dancer. But she was also a worker. She would get down on her hands and knees to clean the kitchen floor. She could build cabinets. She certainly could have mowed the lawn. But I have no memories of her doing so.

Dad could have mowed the lawn, too. He was a big, athletic man.

Mother told me the first time she visited his folks on their Kansas farm Dad got on a horse, threw his hat on the ground, rode a couple hundred yards away, then came galloping toward her, swung down the side of the horse, picked up his hat, put it on his head and circled back to her. (I

never saw my father on a horse; but I have seen the farm, and where he rode, and the vision is clear.)

Growing up in Kansas, he rather preferred what Kansas Senator Bob Dole once said was a Vice President's job description: "indoor work with no heavy lifting." Dad's brothers told me that on their Kansas farm he used to walk behind the horse-drawn plow reading the little Haldeman-Julius paperback shirt-pocket books. It didn't make for very straight rows, but it did create a desire in this lanky, stuttering farm boy to get out of that field and into the one he ultimately chose -- or chose him -- speech pathology.

Growing up, he was a boxer, and a pitcher. He wanted to play in the big leagues, and might have made it if he had not crushed his hand in a printing press -- a rather dramatic way to change careers from ballplayer to writer I always thought.

I don't remember there being many tools around the house. A hammer, saw, pliers, and screwdriver -- that was about it. I found the resources a little limited when I wanted to build an entry for the Soap Box Derby. Mother must have, too. Maybe she had her own secret stash of tools.

So I don't think Dad spent a lot of time with the lawn mower, either. Maybe I did mow that enormous lawn all by myself. Maybe most of the enormity was in the eye of the child.

Or maybe Bruce did it.

Exploring our house one day, I discovered it had an attic. Moreover, it contained evidence that someone was living in a corner: a mattress on the attic floor, a couple shirts, a stack of books. How could someone be living in my house and I not know it? I don't remember having much contact with Bruce, though I do remember seeing him. After we moved, in 1941, someone told us he had gone to fight World War II. Later my mother told me she learned he had been killed in the Pacific. I was very sad. He had been a part, however remote, of my early life and now had contributed my first knowledge of death and the war that was to dominate my elementary school years.

Maybe Bruce mowed the lawn, and he let me push the mower one day.

Our next house, on Melrose Court, came with a new lawn mower. It lived in the garage, with my locust shells. It had rubber grips over the metal handles, and hard rubber tires on the wheels. But it made a similar metallic whirring sound when you pushed it, and threw the little bits of grass you could feel stick to your bare legs, and made that sweet summer smell of newly cut grass -- a smell which, in high school, I came to associate with mid-August football practice.

I have a friend named Mason Williams who wrote a book about all the cars he owned. He called it his "auto-biography" -- the story of his life in automobiles. This is not going to be my "lawn mower-biography," but mowing the lawn is an ongoing activity [1998] that has played a role in my life.

* * *

Whoever it was who first introduced me to the lawn mower, whatever may have been the circumstances, and the quality of my first effort, I am grateful. There's no satisfaction, no beauty, quite like that of a freshly mowed and sidewalk-trimmed yard -- especially the next morning when you rise early and go out to admire it, and check on the ants, and don't get stung because you've learned not to make them gifts of sugar.

By the summer of 1939 I had “graduated” from the Iowa Child Welfare Station’s preschool and moved into the University Elementary School system – initially to kindergarten, and first grade the following year.

Chapter Five The Melrose Neighborhood: Iowa City, 1941

It was the summer of 1941. Grandma Emma Watke had died in April of that year, less than a month before what would have been her 81st birthday. I was six years old; Katy turned three in July. It was time for a move, a move to a home my parents would own, a home where each of their children could have their own bedroom.

There was no way I could then have known this would be my last Iowa City move. From the summer of 1941 through the summer of 1952, and the fall of 1989 until now, 508 Melrose Court has been my family home. (Katy lived there until 1956, Mother and Dad until his death in 1965, and Mother until her death in 1989.) Don't tell me "you can't go home again." There is a comfort and nostalgia in returning to one's boyhood home and its memories. It is a privilege experienced by few.

Much of Iowa City's first expansion to the west side of the Iowa River occurred during the 1920s – the University's hospital, football stadium, Field House, and Quadrangle dormitory where Dad lived as a student. Previously there were a few scattered residences on the west side amidst the farmland. A map from the 1850s shows a house overlooking the River on the Myrtle Street hill, about three blocks from ours.

One day in the 1990s, three women in a car stopped in front of our house. It turned out that one of them had been born in our home, and welcomed my offer of a tour. She lived in San Francisco, and kindly later sent me a picture of her mother and her, at age three, sitting on the front porch steps about 1915. Her father had built our home, probably a little before that time. There were two very tall pine trees in our front yard when we arrived (one remains), similar to some in what later became Brookland Park across the street. Her father may have planted them.

When built, it would have been more of a "farm house" than the homes in the Melrose neighborhood today – for a variety of reasons: it was built from the architectural plans for a farm house, most of the land to the south and west of the house was still farm land, when built the owner held much of the surrounding land, and in the back lot was what still amounted to a kind of mini-farm.

Sears, Roebuck was in the homebuilding business, offering building plans to farmers for models of "Sears homes," and possibly the pre-cut lumber to build them as well. Ours is a Sears home, basically 30 by 30 feet in the basement, first floor, second floor and attic. The main entrance was by way of the front porch, and an entryway where coats and muddy boots could be left. (It's not obvious whether those porches, a pantry to the west of the kitchen, and the three-sided "sleeping porch" above it were the result of that plan, modifications to it, or added later. Today there are no front porch steps, and the entrance is by way of a kitchen porch.)

Folks needed to be much more self-sufficient during the years when our home was built. There were hardware stores, places where work clothing was purchased, and small grocery stores, but none of our mega "supermarkets." There was no city water or sewer system, no electricity, no phones.

(I don't know when telephones were first installed in Iowa City's homes. What I do recall is that our phone number in the Brown Street house was 3201, and that our number and those of our neighbors were assigned in numerical order down the street. Thus, it must have been at some time before the mid-1930s. As a footnote to this history of AT&T's "Northwestern Bell," as more phone lines, switching stations, ultimately area codes, and other electronic evolution occurred, our number was simply expanded from 3201, to 7-3201, to 337-3201, to today's landline number for the Melrose Court home: 319-337-3201.)

That the additional lot behind the house to the north was still a fruit orchard and vegetable garden when we arrived was not the evidence of prior residents' hobbies. It had once been a necessity – and would soon serve a similar purpose for us when confronted with the food rationing during World War II. Indeed, President Roosevelt urged Americans to create "Victory Gardens," literally "V" shaped, at their homes – which Mother dutifully did.

Also behind the house were about a dozen varieties of apple trees, along with a large, hand-operated cider press Dad bought. The edible apples were eaten raw and in pies or as applesauce. The cut-up, less-than-perfect apples became cider.

Nor was this just a source of food in the summer. One of Mother's many skills, no doubt learned on the Galva home place, was how to can food in the late summer – with glass Mason quart jars and lids sterilized in steaming, boiling water, adding to the heat and humidity of a summer kitchen. Soon, the shelves in the basement "fruit room" held hundreds of jars of tomatoes, applesauce, smaller containers of preserves, and other food she relied on to feed us throughout the winter.

There is still evidence of where a backyard pump once stood to bring water from a well. There is a cistern -- a large underground concrete structure to hold and save the rainwater runoff from the roof of the house. Recently cleaned, we now use it, and an electric pump, to supply a source of water for our garden during dry, summer days.

Old maps describe areas in the neighborhood as "Myrtle Orchard," and there is still an "Orchard Street" not far from home. It's likely apple trees were common around many Iowa homes during the late 19th and early 20th Century.

We had animals as well – and not just cats and dogs. In the far northeast corner of the lot we raised bantam chickens. One of my many jobs was to feed them and gather their eggs. Just north of the front porch we had rabbit hutches – removed once my parents were informed that these cute creatures were not going to serve as *my* food. One of Katy's pets was the sometimes-ferocious "Blimp" the goose.

Mother and Dad also provided a variety of equipment for us to play with. I believe the "play house" was already in the back yard when we arrived. With a floor measuring about six-by-six feet, it had walls, a roof, a screen door, and screens on the "windows" on all three sides. It held up for a number of years after Katy had left town, but ultimately was beyond renovation and removed. Years later, Gregory parked his "small house" (140 square feet, counting the "upstairs

bedroom”) in the yard to the east of the front porch, and when the City complained, to the yard west of the garage.

There was a Mr. Vandenburg who lived just across Brookland Place to the east, and worked as the watchman for children crossing the Rock Island railroad tracks on their way to Roosevelt School. He had a large woodworking shop in his backyard. Dad paid him to build a gym set for Katy and me on the east side of the back yard. From a crossbar, held in place by a tree on one end and a large pole on the other, hung a swing, a large rope for climbing, and gymnastics rings to test and build our strength.

My suspicion is that either Dad or Mr. Vandenburg must have provided at least a little assistance to my efforts, along with that of my playmates, to put a tree house in the biggest apple tree in the backyard.

Mother built us a tether tennis rig on the southwest lawn: a tall pole, with a rope tied at the top, and a net holding a tennis ball at the end of the rope. Two players stood opposite each other, one endeavoring to wrap the rope around the pole clockwise, and the other counterclockwise. As with other attractions, it lasted as long as it held our interest and was then replaced – in this case, with horseshoes and the stakes around which we tried to place them. The southeast lawn, where my one time baseball pitching father and I played catch, also held an archery set for a while.

Dad would also buy large quantities of meat (perhaps it was purchased directly from a local farmer), and have it frozen and stored in a commercial, refrigerated locker facility on Gilbert Street, just south of Highway 6, before he and Mother bought a large freezer for the basement.

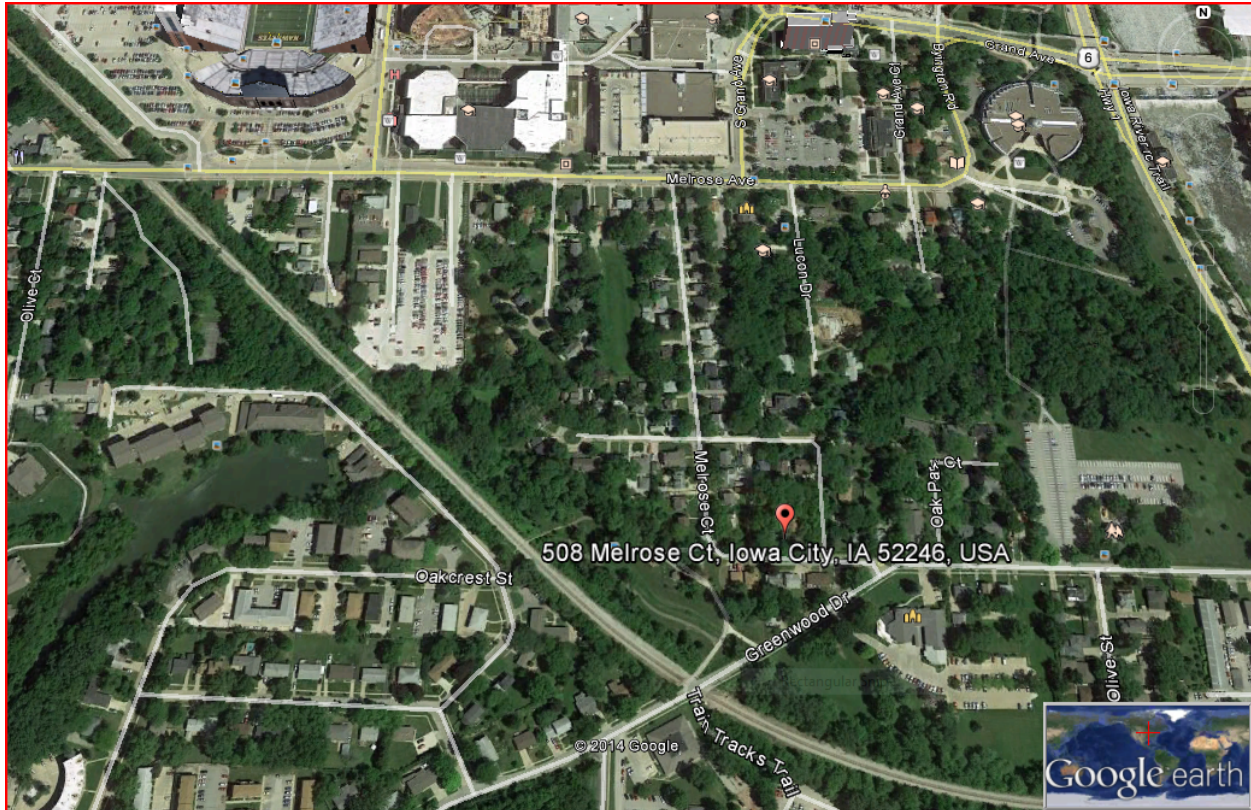
Nor had all vestiges of the agricultural life vanished from the neighborhood. The fourth house to the east of us had a barn out back. There are still a couple of barns in the neighborhood along Melrose Avenue. Less than a block east from our house, where a Mennonite Church now stands, was Mr. Witt’s horse barn, riding stable, and pasture (where the church now profits from parking cars during football games).

Before there was a Melrose Court, Myrtle came west up the hill from Riverside Drive and made a left onto a stretch of road then called Myrtle and now called Greenwood Drive. When we moved in, Greenwood was a dirt road. After it crossed the railroad tracks there was a farm on the right, and mostly more farmland beyond to the south and west. (The farmland that is now University Heights was then valued at \$100 or so an acre.) Directly across Melrose Court from our house was undeveloped land where three houses now stand.

This photo is an aerial view of the Melrose neighborhood as portrayed on Google Earth in 2014. So it is not at all representative of what it looked like in 1941. However, it is still useful -- kind of like the maps that help orient one to the territory through which Winnie the Pooh roamed. It can help give a reader a sense of the similar area through which Kate, our playmates, and I roamed as we pleased.

Not only were there no “helicopter parents” back then, there were not even any helicopters – and certainly none regularly flying low over our house, as the UIHC AirCare helicopter has been

doing since 1979 (one of the first 15 in the nation). We were probably more thoroughly monitored than we realized, but our parents were reasonably secure in their expectation that, like dairy cattle, we would return safely in the evening from the pastures and forests where we played our made-up games, explored, and thrilled to our adventures and discoveries.



Here are some highlights in that photo.

The dot above the words "Iowa City" is the location of our home. The triangular area under the words "508 Melrose Ct" is Brookland Park (created 1924, now developed, but not then), with the stream running parallel to the railroad tracks, northwest to southeast. South of the numbers "52246" is the Mennonite Church (formerly Mr. Witt's horse barn).

The house with the barn in the back yard was located just north of the letters "USA." North of there was where we played war, while the real one was raging in Europe and the Pacific.

The bottom of the southwest triangle made by the railroad track, where the houses are, was then all farmland. Just north of those houses is "Melrose Lake," something we were only occasionally successful in reaching when we set off in search of it. In winter it was our ice skating rink.

The bridge in the upper right is the Burlington Street bridge, going over the Iowa River. Melrose Avenue is the east-west road about a quarter of the way south from the top edge of the picture. The round structure near the Burlington Street Bridge is the 1986 College of Law. In the 1940s it

was a private lot and home, with Melrose Avenue extending northeast to what was then a five-way intersection.

North of Melrose Avenue, from west to east, are the football stadium, the currently southern-most hospital buildings, and the Field House.

My incomplete memory of neighbors involves friends of my parents, playmates, and some of my newspaper customers – as augmented by a study required by the neighborhood’s successful bid for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Because these individuals will continue to come in and out of this book from time to time, they are mentioned here – a similar, but thankfully much shorter, preliminary list than one needs to navigate *War and Peace*.

There is no available detailed list of my *Des Moines Register* readers, and it would make little contribution to this book if there were. It’s safe to assume about half of those mentioned would have been subscribers. The company delivered a morning *Register* by truck to the counter of virtually every small town café in the state -- probably more a consequence of the owners’ pride and financial loss than additional profit. The paper was accurately self-described in that then-private owned, statewide newspaper’s masthead as “the newspaper all Iowa depends upon” – and the recipient of more Pulitzer prizes than any newspaper in America other than the *New York Times*.

Let’s start on the south and west side of Melrose Court, starting across the street from our house and walking around the bend in Melrose Court where it borders on Brookland Park, and heads north toward Melrose Avenue.

In the first house, on the south side of the bend, lived Roy and Irene Alt, and their daughter Chloe – who became a playmate of Katy’s. Irene was literally a farm wife before they moved to Iowa City, and Mother had grown up with farm wives, and even brought a bit of that with her from Galva. So they had that in common as well as their role as mothers. It was only a short stroll across the street to each other’s homes, and they often gathered for coffee.

Around the bend to the west lived Vern Miller and his wife, and across the street the Firestones, and north of them “the Dove sisters.” Those homes contained no potential playmates of whom we were aware.

Just north of the Miller’s were Irving and Martha Weber and their only child, Willis. “Willie Weber” became one of my more regular playmates and friend for life. He and his parents figure in many of the stories to come.

North of the Weber’s was the Erbe family home, and across the street from them a single woman university professor’s house – neither of which held children.

At the corner of Melrose Court and Brookland Park Drive, to the southeast and southwest, were duplexes. Vern Dow lived in the southern-most unit on the west side, and Jack and Janet Nelson in the northern-most unit of the duplex on the east side. Jack Swank lived in the single-unit home on the northeast corner. So far as I know I never met any of their parents; Jack Swank, and Jack

and Janet Nelson were sufficiently older that they were seldom, if ever, a part of our activities. Jack Neuzil was their age, and occasionally showed up, but no one knew for sure where he lived.

Immediately to the east of Jack Swank's house was Buddy Means, son of the owners of Means' Grocery, and Bob Fry – both also somewhat older than my usual playmates. On the north-south Brookland Place, where it joins Brookland Park Drive, lived a Professor Meyers (though that's a guess at the spelling), with a harp in the living room, and whose older son George would later sell me his World War II surplus Air Force shortwave radio receiver, a BC-348.

At the other end of Brookland Park Drive, west of Melrose Court, there was a house where lived a child more our age, a son of the Bradbury family.

The house on the northwest corner of Brookland Park Drive and Melrose Court belonged to the University's swim coach, Dave Armbruster. North of it was the home of the Hollands – Betty and Bill, and their three children, Jerry, Patty, and Annie. Annie was Katy's age, Patty closer to my age, and Jerry was the oldest, but still joined in occasionally. (I can still recall the excitement, and relief, Katy and I felt, standing under the locust tree on the southwest lawn when they came, all smiles, to welcome us to the neighborhood the day we moved in.) Betty was, it seemed to me, perhaps Mother's closest neighborhood friend.

East on Myrtle, at the house with the barn, a Wendell Turnipseed would come to visit in the summers, and on the west side of Melrose Court, near the intersection with Melrose Avenue, was an Eddie Alspach, who occasionally joined in. Jaime Andrews, who lived on Melrose Circle, parallel and one block to the west of Melrose Court was an occasional playmate, and classmate at University Elementary School before he went to City High. He became a member of the University of Iowa engineering faculty; his younger brother, Arthur, a championship tennis player, and his older brother, Mitchell, a professional, classical pianist.

Hopefully, this cast of characters, mapping and description of the territory is neither too detailed nor too sketchy to give the reader a sense of my Melrose neighborhood from the summer of 1941 through December 6th of that year.

What happened the following day would significantly alter the five years that followed.

Chapter Six The War Years: Iowa City, 1941-1945

It was a sunny Sunday morning in December, 1941 – winter, but a slightly warmer one than usual. The sun, low in the southern sky, bathed me in the warmth and light coming through the living room windows, as I lay on the maroon rug in my pajamas, head as near to the radio's speaker as possible. My hearing loss was then serious enough that my parents weighed whether to send me to a state school for the deaf.

Our old Brown Street AM radio, encased in a piece of dark furniture about three feet tall, was now in my bedroom, immediately above where I lay. With our new house came a new, much fancier radio from Sears, a Sears Silvertone, against the wall in the southeast corner of the living room. It was also a piece of furniture, but of blond wood, at least four feet tall and almost as wide, with a hinged lid.

Under that lid, it held a radio that received shortwave stations from other countries as well as AM local stations, and at night, the Red and Blue networks' 50,000-watt, clear channel affiliates across the country. It also held an electric phonograph one did not need to hand crank. Its most amazing feature, something I had not formerly known even existed, was its ability to handle a stack of 78-rpm phonograph records that would automatically play, one at a time, as the arm would swing itself in to play, and then get out of the way as the next record dropped.

Because my parents read the *Des Moines Register* and serious magazines, listened to the radio news, and talked among themselves and friends about what was going on in Washington and around the world, so did I.

That sunny morning, December 7th, the news coming from the radio was more serious than other days. America had been bombed. We were at war. The significance of this was so far beyond my experience and understanding that there is no recollection of anxiety or fear at that moment.

My father, who had entered the living room without my noticing, also heard the news. Probably fearing I might need consoling, he went into the adjoining room we called "the study," picked up a globe of the world, came back and sat beside me. He pointed to Iowa on the globe, and then slowly rotated it with one hand while his finger traced a path to Hawaii.

December 7th was many things – almost all of them multiple orders of magnitude more significant than its impact on a seven-year-old boy in the nation's heartland. But it was also the first day of a very changed life during my grade school years. Having survived the Great Depression, I was now about to experience the world at war.

All manufacturing was shifted to the war effort. There would be no more new automobiles. Our 1939 Plymouth was going to have to last until the war ended. But no matter, gasoline was rationed, so no one was driving very far anyway. It seemed like everything was either rationed or had simply disappeared from the stores, including essentials such as bubblegum -- along with food products, women's silk stockings, and rubber tires. Everyone had an allotment of the various ration coupons that had to accompany every purchase. Recently some were found in the attic.

These days we try to pay for wars with tax cuts for the wealthy, putting the trillion-dollar costs on the nation's credit card, and leaving the debt to our children and grandchildren. There is little or no sacrifice – except by the one percent or fewer Americans sent into combat. Following the attack of 9/11 President Bush told Americans that what they should do is to “go shopping” – with their own credit cards.

America's cost of World War II did involve some debt. But it also involved a large measure of pay-as-you-go, with tax rates for the wealthy multiples of what they are now. The government sold “war bonds” to the people; invest \$18.75, and in – was it ten years? – it would be worth \$25.00. For those too young or poor to scrape together that much money, they purchased and affixed ten-cent savings *stamps* in booklets. It was a part of our routine as third graders.

The sacrifices by those who went to war were far greater – at a minimum disruption of families and careers, and at a maximum, death. Yet many young men voluntarily dropped whatever they were doing at that stage of their life, moved to volunteer as their patriotic duty. The numbers vary somewhat from one source to another, but of America's 135 million citizens in 1942, roughly 17 million (over 12 percent; obviously a higher percentage of those over 18) went to war. Of those, 39 percent enlisted; 61 percent came as draftees. Of that number, 407,000 never came back; 671,000 came back wounded.

Dad, 36 in April of 1942, was at the upper range of those drafted, may have been exempt from the draft because of his stuttering, or because he was married with children. For whatever reason, I went through, and came out of, the World War II years with two parents. Mother volunteered as a nurse's aide in the University Hospital, releasing medical personnel for the war. In addition to our victory garden, we saved bacon and other fat and took it to the redemption center – apparently useful as an element in building bombs. Recycling was in full bloom – scrap metal, tin cans, even the tinfoil carefully peeled off the paper backing on gum wrappers and other objects. Newspapers were stacked and left at the curb, where other cub scouts and I gathered and threw them onto the truck on which we rode.

The continental United States was not a target for bombs as explosives, but it was certainly a target for a bombardment of propaganda. Every form of media was full of patriotic appeals and efforts to dehumanize German and Japanese military personnel – posters, newspaper stories, comic books, the newsreels in theaters, themes of radio programs, theater productions, movies, and song lyrics. Celebrities played a major role in maintaining morale.

The Melrose neighborhood kids my age continued to play hide-and-seek and kick the can under the streetlight at the intersection of Melrose Court and Brookland Park Drive. To them we soon added our own form of war games, alternating roles as enemy and allied soldiers armed with wooden guns.

A comic book brought to my attention the possibility of climbing palm trees on Pacific islands with one's feet inside a loop of vine. Lacking both palms and vines, I turned to the telephone and power pole on the southeast corner of our lot, and perhaps the most universally useful childhood commodity: clothesline. Following a little solitary practice, I demonstrated for my playmates my

newly acquired military skill at climbing almost to the top while they watched with great respect and awe.

Our most direct contact with the real war involved the presence of the U.S. Navy Pre-Flight Training School during the spring of 1942, one block up Melrose Court at the Field House. Like everything else in our lives, it arrived unannounced. We never *knew about* things ahead of time, we simply stumbled upon and discovered them. Whoever among us discovered this one, the exciting news of this latest delight and diversion spread quickly.

There were six new venues to explore. Across Grand Avenue, west from the Field House, was a new structure (still standing). We discovered there, at the south end of the ground floor, the office of Captain David C. Hanrahan, who appeared to be in charge of the operation. Fortunately for us, he looked kindly upon little boys – perhaps in hopes of recruiting us for the Navy in another ten years or so. Among other things, he enabled our understanding, such as it was, of the progress of the war in Europe, as the front line he added to a wall map of Europe moved from West to East over time.

In the front hallway of the Field House, small solid models of planes, painted black, hung from the ceiling – presumably to aid the cadets in their identification of allied and axis planes from the silhouettes.

On the northwest corner of Grand and Melrose Avenues, where a high-rise parking lot now stands, was an asphalt surface formerly used for tennis courts. At the far west end was a wooden mock-up of a ship's bridge. We were told that when cadets claimed to be too ill to participate in athletic training and drills they would be required to stand out in the sun, with semaphore flags, responding to the semaphore-flag messages coming from an instructor on the bridge.

My memory is that we were all given our own set of semaphore flags, practiced dutifully with them, and were sometimes permitted to stand on that bridge as instructors.

Between the “ship” and the football stadium, an area where newly-constructed UIHC buildings now stand, was the Iowa Hawkeyes' baseball field. To the north and west from the football and baseball fields was the cadets' “obstacle course.” This held a special appeal for us. It involved running, jumping, climbing a twelve-foot wooden wall, mud pits traversed with swinging ropes or hand-over-hand, and other wondrous adventures.

Putting these schools at universities was a perfect fit. In addition to the University of Iowa, the Navy also had pre-flight schools at St. Mary's College, and the Universities of Georgia and North Carolina. Many of those who would otherwise have been college students had gone to war. A variety of athletic fields, plus partially empty dormitories, cafeterias, and classrooms were ideal for cadets at such a school.

Cadets were to receive three months of rigorous physical training, and some basic knowledge of aerial navigation and communications. From Iowa City they went elsewhere for basic flight schools, advanced flight training, and assignment to the Pacific Fleet.

The cadets' team was called the Seahawks – as a nod to the University of Iowa Hawkeyes team.

Have you ever wondered about the relationship between football and the military – the national anthem, marching bands, low flying fighter planes over the stadium, and players and game resembling gladiators of old? You were not wrong. Football was a major part of the cadets' training precisely because the admirals believed it was an ideal preparation for war.

If such a correlation exists in fact, the Seahawks were probably a major reason why we won the war in the Pacific. In three football seasons, playing college teams, they won 26 games and lost five – finishing second in the final Associated Press poll, and as the service academy national champion.

Among those who returned from war, many went on to positions of leadership in government, politics, and business. Among them, from the Iowa cadets, was a 20-year-old high school junior from Ohio, John Glenn, who arrived in Iowa City in May of 1942. Twenty years later he would be the first astronaut to orbit the Earth as part of NASA's Project Mercury; and 22 years after that accomplishment 25-years of service as a United States Senator.

He played a major role for one of our number, nominating Jerry Holland – who had occasionally accompanied the cadets on their twenty-mile hikes -- for the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis. Jerry went on to become a two-star admiral and captain of one of the Navy's nuclear-powered submarines.

By 1945 the Pre-Flight Training School packed up and left town, making room for those who returned from war as college students, with tuition paid by the GI-Bill. Those graduates produced one of our nation's greatest periods of economic growth, middle-class families, and some of the least "income inequality" we've ever enjoyed – all while paying some of the highest progressive tax rates of the last 100 years.

These were also my first years of elementary school.

The Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, and the University Elementary and High School started about the same time (1917 and 1916 respectively). In 1925 the latter moved into a new building at the corner of North Capitol and Davenport Streets, where it stayed until the program was closed in 1974.

The building, now called "North Hall," houses the School of Social Work for which my wife's father, Wayne Vasey, served as director from 1948 through 1954. Built into a hill on the banks of the Iowa River, the top two floors were the elementary school classrooms, entered from the east (the "front door") at the top of the hill; the next two floors down were high school classrooms and gymnasium (with an entrance from the south), and the bottom floor contained space for the cafeteria, shop classes, band practice, and athletic locker rooms – with an additional entrance.

On entering, the first office in the hall to the right was that of Miss Chennell, the school nurse. Every morning, at least in kindergarten and first grade, she would use a tongue depressor to look for sore throats, and examine our hands, palms down and then up. Kindergarten was on down

that hall, last room on the right, where we left our winter coats and boots, kept the little rugs we used for the mandatory naps, played with blocks, and had treats of juice and a cookie. Outdoors was a ten-by-ten-foot sandbox, and playground.

First grade was across the hall, with desks, and a poster across the front of the room with an alphabet in the capital and small letters we were learning to print.

Second grade, upstairs and down the hall on the right, had a Native American theme, with an actual tepee of buffalo hide spread over the conical tree limbs of support. That was the year Joe Howe and I engaged each other in a quest to find the longest words we were able to spell – ultimately “electroencephalography” – actually something that one of Dad’s friends, John Knott, was experimenting with, including on me.

Third grade, across the hall, we studied the pioneers. One module involved exploration of food preservation alternatives to refrigeration. We learned how to make dried apple, with apple rings strung on a line where we left them to dry in a storage room. , as an example of early food preservation. My desk was on the south side of the room, where the beehive was located and I could watch them come and go through a glass tube connected to the outside.

Fourth grade, down the hall to the east, was as I recall the year for studying South America. One consequence of the hearing loss mentioned earlier was the tendency to speak with a relatively loud voice. One day the teacher said, “Nicky, can’t you speak a little lower?” In response, I got out of my desk, sat on the floor, and asked politely, “Is this better?”

Around the corner, before reaching the fifth grade classroom was the room of a woman who encouraged reading. She had many books in her office – as well as a very large clock on her wall. She read to us sometimes. She showed us children’s books we might like to read. Maybe she was the one who got me started on the *Dr. Doolittle* books.

I have no memories of what fifth grade was about.

Meanwhile, back home we discovered an irregular wall of large rocks and mortar, about six by eight feet, that protruded out from the rest of the regular wall on the south side of the southwest basement room (now finished off with overhead lights, sofa and double bed as a guest bedroom). Why were those rocks there, we wondered? What might be behind them? It was our real-life mystery story, to which we brought hammer and pick as well as our very active imaginations.

Ultimately, we created a rough-hewn space large enough for little boys to crawl through, and lowered a little wooden ladder into a vault about six-by-six by eight feet tall. Alas, the mystery remained, as we found no more than Geraldo Rivera found in the newly discovered vault of Al Capone in Chicago. It was entirely empty.

With World War II and University Elementary School having opened my eyes to the world beyond Iowa City’s Melrose neighborhood, and having discovered that China was on the opposite side of Planet Earth, my friends responded to the suggestion we should pay a visit to the Chinese the most direct way we could envision. The digging began near where the garden is

today, in the back lot near the alley. It continued until we had created a hole about four-by-four feet wide and eight feet deep.

It ended about the time, while digging at the bottom of the hole, that Katy dropped a brick on my head. She and I carried on a good natured discussion of the matter ever after, with Katy unwavering in her that's-my-story-and-I'm-sticking-to-it position that it was an accident (as I'm relatively confident it was).

World War II and adventuresome digging behind me, I was soon to be dealing with junior high and high school.

Chapter Seven High School: Iowa City, 1945-1952

Very little about my life has to do with me. I really believe that. The first chapter explains my good fortune in being born on the right planet at the right time at just the right distance from the Sun. My earliest years were blessed with the DNA from my ancestors, the parents I chose, and the year they chose to get me started.

Similarly, the most significant things about my pre-school, primary, and secondary education were not of my doing. They were the qualities of the extraordinary institutions in which I found myself, with no effort on my part.

To give the reader some sense of what this means in the context of high school, we will begin at the end, and then return to additional details.

What do I mean by “the end”?

As mentioned earlier, University Elementary and High School began in 1916, and moved to the building I attended in 1925. Nearly a half-century later the University of Iowa administrators decided to shut it down – a decision I continue to believe was a classic bureaucratic disastrous mistake.

That’s what I mean by “the end.”

Prior to its closing, I was asked to provide one of, if not the, last commencement addresses for the U-High graduating class of 1972 – twenty years after the graduation of our Class of 1952, of which more later.

My descriptions, memories, and feelings about the school are closer to contemporaneous than now, forty-plus years later. Therefore, this chapter begins at “the end,” with slightly edited excerpts from a transcript of that talk, “The Last Commencement Address: The U-High Idea,” June 1, 1972, before turning to some more recollections – notwithstanding its inclusion of details mentioned in earlier chapters.

The University in general, and the University Schools in particular, have been with me nearly the whole of my life in one way or another. My mother and father were graduates of the University. My father, Wendell Johnson, spent his entire professional life here. My mother is still living here. My sister, Katy--who is also here this evening--is also a graduate of this school.

I was literally born on the University of Iowa campus, in the University Hospitals. And by the age of two I was already enrolled in the University's pre-school, the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station. So that next to my parents, I suspect that there has probably been no greater influence on my life than the University Schools.

The hundreds who have gathered -- at the wake, at the last lettermen's banquet, at this commencement -- is a very moving experience for me. And I suspect of all the speaking

invitations I've received over the last few years this is probably the one of which I'm the proudest.

This morning at Mother's house a neighbor, Betty Holland, stopped by. She's a wonderful person who has been doing that for about thirty years. She saw me agonizing over whatever it was I was going to say this evening, and she said, "Well, you know, I'd think by now, Nick, you'd have hundreds of speeches that you could. use." And I said, "Well, I do, Betty, but somehow none of them seems quite appropriate for this occasion."

So what I've done today, basically, is to spend the whole day being nervous. I don't think I could ever put together twenty or thirty minutes of remarks that would be appropriate for an occasion of this kind.

And while I was sitting there being nervous this afternoon, Tommy Smothers called me and tracked me down at Mother's house. He was about to leave for France to watch and film his brother, Dicky, in the auto races at Le Monde, and he wanted to know what I was doing. I said I was writing a commencement address for my high school. And he said, "Well, you know, I really think you owe them the opportunity, the option, to back out." And I said, "Why, Tommy, why is that?"

And he then reminded me of my record, in terms of association with public performances. He went through it all.

The time he came to Washington to talk to me, and then went back to Hollywood and found out his show had been canceled.

And then the last time I went on Dick Cavett's show, and the rumor's now going around that it's going to be canceled.

The last time I was on the Merv Griffin show, a couple weeks later CBS canceled his contract and put him into syndication.

And Tommy reminded me it was about that point I got out of the television business entirely and went into the theater, the Broadway theater.

I became the technical advisor to a Broadway play called "The Selling of the President." It's a delightful musical, I thought, a version of Joe McGinniss' famous book. And it's about the impact of television commercials on politics. Well, I say it "was" a Broadway play. Actually, it opened on Broadway, but the next morning it closed.

So, in any event, after this experience, I've finally given up show business entirely, and I've decided what I'm going to do is that I'm going to become a professional high school commencement speaker. But you're entitled to know, I suspect, that this is actually the first high school commencement speech I've ever given. And so you'll understand the apprehension and anxiety with which I undertake it.

I've always felt a great deal of affection for the U-High show, and I'm pleased and flattered to be invited back here to do my act. But I'm a little concerned that I may wake up tomorrow morning to read in the paper that somebody's closed the school.

Exactly twenty years ago my class at U-High was in your place, and had some mixed feelings about leaving then as I'm sure you do now.

We embodied our energy in a musical extravaganza that we presented as a farewell. I guess Joe Howe was probably the principal author and producer of this production. He's now a law professor in Ohio, and he stopped by my office the other day and we were reminiscing about this. And finally Dick DeGowin, who's now on the medical faculty across the river, discovered that he had a copy of this, which he sent to me, and I read it.

Like "The Selling of the President," our musical -- which was called "Real George" (which was apparently the expression of the time) -- also closed the next day. But it was not for lack of content.

That class of mine -- and I suspect yours was very similar -- that class of mine was very hard to keep up with for me. For sixteen years, actually from the time of pre-school until I finally got out of U-High, I was struggling to keep up with them. One fellow, whose name was Howard Berg, was so smart, he used to play with toys in elementary school that I would later read in Scientific American hadn't even been invented until ten years later.

And it was in that spirit that this show was put together. It took a look at the future. And as I reread that script I discovered that we had predicted in 1952 the following:

- *travel to the moon,*
- *rampant inflation,*
- *a renewed interest in clairvoyance and astrology,*
- *electronic music,*
- *parodies of TV commercials,*
- *teaching machines,*
- *and even resistance by the United States Senate to a growing investment in militarism-- including an investigation of a new weapons system, very much like the ABM, that had cost the American people twenty-eight billion dollars.*
- *But perhaps of greatest relevance to our gathering here this evening is that we also predicted that in exactly twenty years there would be a very important gathering of U-High alumni;*
- *and, furthermore, that on that occasion someone would be coming back from Washington.*

And so, here we are.

And here I am.

Well, Iowa City has been preparing this last month to accept the passing of one of its great institutions. For generations people gathered there to improve themselves and to become educated and informed. But times change. And now, as you know, Forrest Allen has decided to close his barber shop. Well, Iowa City won't be the same without that great educational institution, but somehow we'll all get by.

I called Forrest the other day, but he was out, and I talked to his wife. What's happening is that Forrest Allen is playing more golf, and I'm growing more hair.

No, I think we have to keep some sense of humor about what's happened to U-High, because if we didn't laugh we'd cry.

How do you measure, how do you describe, an institution like the University Schools?

It's really not much at all in terms of money -- at least not the kinds of money I've been accustomed to administering the last few years.

The total budget for all of the fifty-seven years of the school's existence -- based on a doctoral dissertation I looked at -- I project to be about six million dollars. Six million dollars for the whole fifty-seven years is approximately twenty percent of the FCC's budget for one year.

And the FCC's budget is one one-hundredth of one percent of the federal budget. We spent less on the University Schools throughout all those years, in fifty-seven years, than what was spent on the single set of video tapes that we know as "Sesame Street."

Nor is the school much in terms of land and buildings. We have now returned this evening -- fifty-seven years later -- to a spot just across the yard from where the school was originally. And then in the 1920's it moved down the street to where you all went to school. We still don't have an auditorium. We have to gather at Macbride Hall for our last commencement.

No, I think an institution like U-High is very difficult to program on a computer or enter on a balance sheet, because basically it's an idea -- an idea and the people who shared that idea and participated in it.

It began with Dr. Ernest Horn, who came here from Teachers' College at Columbia University, to establish the school in 1916.

I can't begin to name all the administrators and teachers who supported the idea in the years since. I'll just mention some of those who were here during my years at the school, and some who spent the longest terms at the school and would be known to you.

Dr. Virgil Hancher was the president of the University during most of the time I remember. His daughter, Mary Sue, incidentally, was in our class, and he was our commencement speaker.

Dr. Peterson was Dean of the College of Education during most of that time.

Dr. Vernon Van Dyke's term as director almost exactly paralleled my own from 1941 to 1952.

Dr. Herbert Spitzer was the grade school principal that I remember best. I suppose that's because he was eleven feet tall then.

And the high school principals, who we seemed to drive through the school with a little greater regularity than we managed in elementary school, were Drs. Murray Martin, Myron Olson, John McAdam and Dwight Davis. They were people who also shared the idea of U-High, and who were responsible for it in many ways that none of us really knew about or understood or appreciated, but just as fully as the faculty with which we spent our time.

Grade school teachers are something like surrogate mothers and deserve a special place in our educational hall of fame. They are the ones who either get us off to a good start or mess up our education forever, and most of us here must be forever grateful for our luck, and for their love and skill, that made it possible for us to enjoy U-High after we got to high school at all.

Many of the high school teachers who helped me along the way were there relatively short terms, and probably are known to few of you; as I suspect there were teachers who helped you a lot who were there a short time.

But some of those who were around longer had a positive and lasting effect on whole families, and are probably known to you and perhaps even your parents: giants like Drs. Louis Alley, M. F. Carpenter, John Haefner, Camile Le Bois, Vernon Price -- many more.

During one period of about twenty years there were some two hundred Ph.D.'s who were on the staff at U-High. I have no idea how many student teachers have passed through the school. But about the time my class was getting out of there we had about as many student teachers as we had students.

And we shouldn't forget ourselves, I suppose, the alumni of U-High, a group that now numbers about twenty-five hundred, including you as of this evening.

Because the only way to think in terms of the impact of an institution like this is in terms of the people whose lives it has affected, and the ripples it produces throughout the rest of society. The effect of U-High is felt whenever one of its former staff members goes elsewhere and begins training professors, who teach teachers who teach students. Because in that way his or her influence ultimately spreads a thousand times beyond what it was in terms of a handful of students who were privileged actually to be in their classroom for a semester or so. There are hundreds of former U-High staff, students, and student teachers, who are today university presidents and deans of schools of education, professors and teachers and officials of educational institutions and associations -- officials of one kind or another.

The effect of U-High has been felt not only through people, but also in terms of the teaching materials and new teaching methods and texts that have been evolved here.

Indeed, I think it's somewhat ironic that U-High really began at the behest of the President of the University, Walter Jessup, because of the difficulty he was running into in trying to do some educational experimenting in the public schools. They wouldn't let him do it the way he wanted to do it. And his reaction was very much like that of Howard Hughes. You'll recall Howard Hughes was once staying in a hotel out in Las Vegas and he didn't like the service, so he just bought the hotel. Well, that's kind of what President Jessup did, as Emil Trot recalls it, who was one of U-High's first students. He said, "If that's the way you fellows are going to be, all right, I'll just start my own school." And he did.

Because what President Jessup realized, as I think almost anybody knows who has ever had to deal with large bureaucratic institutions--whether it's the military, or school systems, corporations, government agencies, whatever it is --a television network--is that it's not really a place where genuine creativity and intellectual activity can take place. People who are hired to do a job, to carry out a mission which they do not control, may be superb at what it is they've been hired to do, but they simply don't have the time, the talent or the temperament to expend a lot of effort in challenging the basic assumptions of their own institution.

- *The concept of speed reading, which enjoyed a boom nationally in the late 1950's and early 60's, was first tried out on us by Dr. Jim Stroud in the 1940's. I doubt that the testing of such a radical experiment would have been approved by any school board in the nation at that time.*
- *It was the staff of U-High that developed comprehensive curriculum guides in the late 1930's and 1940's that could not be developed within the public school system within the state of Iowa, and guides which were still valued by teachers in and out of the state some thirty years later.*
- *The concept of interdisciplinary team teaching was evolving in the 1920's and 1930's at U-High, some twenty years before it became widespread throughout the schools of the nation.*
- *The work of Dr. Ralph Ojeman in giving junior high school students an awareness of basic psychology was carried out at U-High in the 1940's.*
- *Iowa has pioneered in the field of testing and many of those tests were tested first at U-High. This is now one of Iowa City's major industries, as you may know.*

The list goes on and on and on:

- *foreign language teaching in grade school,*
- *techniques in music instruction,*
- *research in physical education (I saw the other day that Lou Alley had written an article or speech about techniques of physical education in the year 2000 -- so we're still looking ahead in that field),*

- *new curricula for teaching the sciences,*
- *innovation in teaching spelling to grade school pupils was done by Ernest Horn here,*
- *English in high school (Dr. Carpenter's great efforts),*
- *and new approaches to mathematics by Dr. Price and others.*

And so on and so on. The accepted methods of teaching today all had to begin at some time, and in some place; as often as not, when you track it back, it turns out that the place was U-High and the time was about twenty years before the ideas were believed to be safe enough to try in the public schools.

The trouble with U-High was that it was all done naturally and relatively quietly. U-High has never had an Office of Public Information, it never hired a public relations firm, and, to my knowledge, no principal ever called a press conference. And it was that natural sense of concern and commitment, of excitement and adventure about life and about education, that was naturally passed on by the permanent staff of U-High to us, to the student teachers and to the junior staff.

*Kozol describes, in a book called *Death at an Early Age*, how some public schools, almost sadistically, drive any creativity and curiosity and sense of individual worth and development out of their wards.*

My wife, Karen, who attended the University Schools with me for nine years, has told me similar stories over the years about things she has witnessed in public schools where she has taught when we lived in Virginia, California, Texas, and the District of Columbia.

My own experience is limited to that of a parent; but I must say it has often left me in a state of despair about the quality of education offered my own children by public schools that often brag of their national superiority.

I don't mean to suggest that there aren't good public school teachers. Of course there are. There are a great many who are competent, who are concerned -- many more than are ever recognized, thanked, or adequately compensated. But I think they all feel the oppression of a bureaucratic system of which they are a part, and none can really feel that he or she is a part of an exciting adventure at the frontiers of educational innovation. Whatever the public schools may be, they are not that.

Even if one is willing to concede that no justification can be offered for providing an elitist education to a privileged few Iowa boys and girls who attend the schools as students, it seems to me that teachers -- at some point in their career, and for however short a time -- ought to have been exposed to such a faculty and student body.

Somewhere, in the seventy-billion-dollar, barnacle-encrusted, bureaucratic industry that goes by the name of "Education," somewhere in amongst the concrete buildings and the computers and the layers of administrators, somebody better be watching to make sure that the torch of learning

has not gone out entirely.

If that is not to be the University of Iowa, so be it. We certainly have lots of company. Lab schools are closed all over the land. It's a respectable position.

But as anybody knows who has tried to keep a campfire going all night without a match, you can start it up again by blowing on one red hot coal, but once you are left with nothing but ashes you're just going to be blowing dirt into your face and into the darkness.

I don't for a moment think that a lab school can single-handedly reform public education, but it can help.

The fundamental problem, of course, as you will soon discover, is that there is a basic conflict between the values of genuine education that you have been taught at University High School, and the values of the corporate state into which you are now -- or in a few years -- going to move.

- *School is where you learn about freedom and democratic or popular control. It's the last time you'll hear it mentioned, let alone practiced.*
- *Learning gives you a sense of your unique, individual worth. But your value to the economy -- as a consumer and an employee -- is not as an individual, but as a predictable piece in a mass merchandised economy (as a consumer), and as a reliable machine in an industrial state (as an employee).*
- *As your education progresses, you are given more and more choice and control over selecting your own activities and goals. This is called maturity. Once you graduate, however, you are expected merely to execute predefined goals under the close direction of others. You have virtually no control or choice over what you produce, how you produce it, or what it's used for.*
- *Teachers encourage you to challenge assumptions, to ask basic questions. Employers, you will find, fire you when you do. Paul Goodman has described your dilemma under the descriptive title, *Growing Up Absurd*. If you haven't read it, you might enjoy it.*

Two alternatives are basically available, neither of which do I find very acceptable.

One is to simply drop out. John Prine has a delightful little song in which he puts that bit of advice with the line, "Blow up your TV" -- which always delighted me for a starter -- "Blow up your TV/Throw away your paper/ Move to the country/ And build you a home." Well, that's not really bad advice, but it's not really going to solve the problem either, because for most of us, at least, it's not very practical.

Now another solution is to try to modify the educational system, and, as Kozol and my wife will tell you, that now appears to be the most widely accepted solution. If we could only train young

people in school to really like Barbie dolls, motel decor, neon signs along suburban highway shopping centers, television programs, Detroit cars, hair spray, and Coca Cola, then they won't be so frustrated when they get out.

I saw a film the other day about how they do it in South Africa. It's very similar to our system. It's the way in which they sustain apartheid there. Essential to the state of society upon which the life and economy of that nation is based, is the enforced ignorance of its blacks. They are simply not permitted to see the swimming pools, and tennis courts and schools that their labor, and misery, support.

No, I don't really think that the answer lies in seeing to it that no one in our society--students or student teachers--ever get a glimpse of what a subculture of truly dedicated free minds and educational researchers might look like. I don't think keeping people from that vision is going to solve the problem.

I think they should be given that spark, that vision, that dream, against which to measure their daily lives. John Gardner, whose two books, Excellence and Self Renewal, may very well be among the most important of the Twentieth Century, has said that a nation that does not value excellence in its plumbers as well as its philosophers will find that neither its pipes nor its theories hold water.

No, I believe it is work that must change, not quality education.

The work place is today, as it was in the time when Brandeis described it, the place where we have the greatest abridgment of citizens' rights.

Workers and consumers, you and I, simply must be permitted to exercise greater control over the products, as well as the means, of production. And gradually, in some places in this country and others, that principle is being extended. Because a democracy simply cannot survive when it forces mature people to spend their lives dying in their jobs. We cannot give people the right to grow, and question, exercise discretion, and control their activities for only the twelve years of their lives that they are in school -- and that only if they are lucky.

A citizen cannot be repressed and treated as a machine subject to authoritarian control eight hours a day all year long and then suddenly perform as a mature person of judgment for eight minutes every four years when he or she enters the voting booth.

Well, that's the challenge that confronts you, I think: to put the U-High idea into practice, to live your life in ways that argue more eloquently than words or buildings that those who preceded you as staff and as students were right to have invested in U-High what they have.

And, I'm sure, that you will do.

Like any American teenager, there was more to my life than school. But school was not only a major part of my life, in many ways it shaped the rest of life as well. To explain why, it is useful

to try to articulate and summarize the elements that contributed to U-High's unique nature and environment.

Here are some.

(1) What the commencement address referred to as "the U-High idea" is the school's role as a university college of education's educational research and teacher-training institution. That the students received a good education was significant, and a source of some pride, but it was not the school's sole mission.

(2) By definition the "teachers" were actually college professors with advanced degrees – as were many of the students' parents.

(3) However, roughly half the student body was students from Iowa City's surrounding farms. This was an unintended consequence – albeit one benefitting everyone – of the local townships' frugality. State law required townships (political units within Iowa's 99 counties) to provide children 12 years of education. Most, including those in Johnson County, did not have high schools, and simply contracted out the last four-to-six years. Iowa City's public high school, then "City High," charged more than U-High (\$25).

It was one of my first introductions to the fallacy of the advertiser's slogan, "You get what you pay for." All of U-High's students were getting far more than they were paying for – including the benefit of working, and developing friendships, with children from a diversity of backgrounds. Because public high schools' students normally come from contiguous suburban families with similar socio-economic backgrounds, their students may miss this benefit.

Much is made of the future professional careers of members of the Class of 1952 – lawyers and judges, dentists and doctors, ministers and college professors. What I find a greater U-High achievement are those who went on to leadership positions in agriculture, business, politics, law enforcement, and their local communities, as well as personal financial success.

(4) Class sizes were relatively small by today's standards. When I was a school board member, my research led me to conclude that high schools of 600-to-800 students are the ideal size. When they get beyond that, personal contact with teachers tends to decline, while drug use, teen pregnancy, bullying, fights, vandalism and dropout rates tend to increase.

Our graduating class was about 40 students. If that was typical, it would mean that ninth through twelfth grade would have had 160 students, including seventh and eighth ("junior high") would bring the number to 240, and kindergarten through twelfth 520 – far below today's 2500-student high schools.

Some educators urge that students' learning is improved with "smaller class sizes." If true, that was a benefit for us.

Even more significant was the impact of small size on our extra-curricular activities. To "play all the parts" is an expression of general applicability that originally came from theatrical

productions where it was literally true. One of the disadvantages of mega-high schools is that students' opportunities to participate in activities are often limited to those who show early signs of a potential for semi-professional performance. It's true for football and other athletic teams, orchestra and choir, or theater and dance. In smaller schools, almost all students not only have the *opportunity* to participate in any activity they may choose, they may even find themselves drafted to "play all the parts" simply because more warm bodies are required for a given activity.

My musical activities included tuba and drums in an orchestra, marching band, pep band, and swing (dance) band – notwithstanding a lack of talent. Athletic participation included "lettering" in football, basketball, and track (the shot put, given my inability to run any distance in reasonable time) – all of the sports we had. We competed statewide in speech and debate – extemporaneous, dramatic, and declamation. My memory is that we won state championships in debate, three years running, in both state organizations' – with the assistance of the University of Iowa's debate coach. I acted in a couple of school plays, was president of the high school Hi-Y chapter (of which more later), Lettermen's Club, and pursued an early political career as the only junior ever elected school student council president. Re-elected the following year, I also served a term as president of a statewide organization of student councils.

(5) Although unaware of it at the time, as I reflect back on these experiences, I detect a philosophy of children's self-discovery on the part of both my teachers and my parents.

Ralph Nader tells the story of coming home after school to his father's daily question, "What happened in school today, Ralph? Did they teach you what to believe, or did they teach you how to think?"

At U-High, and earlier in its elementary school, we were not only permitted, we were enabled and encouraged, to think things through for ourselves, rather than being told what to write down, memorize, and repeat on exams.

In Dr. John Price's geometry class, it was literally true. We had no textbook. He began by putting a dot on the blackboard, and asking us to describe and define a "point," and then a "line." So it went for the semester until, at the end, we had each created a notebook for ourselves that was our own rough equivalent of what the ancient Greek mathematician, Euclid, wrote in 300 B.C. and titled *The Elements*.

This experience enabled me to do well on Dr. Price's geometry exam – as well as, years later in law school – notwithstanding an inability to memorize and recall content. I began the exam by recreating, rather than recalling, each of the theorems I would need to apply later in the hour, before working my way through the questions.

At home, as I've only now come to see, the process was similar. There is no recollection of Dad or Mother ever giving a hint as to what church I should join, if any, or what career I should follow. They left more breadcrumbs along some paths than others, but there were no blazes on trees or signs at those spots where Robert Frost's "two roads diverged in a yellow wood." It was always my choice whether "I took the one less traveled by" or not.

There are many more anecdotes to share from these years, of course, but the most important things to say about U-High during the high school years are those five qualities.

As just mentioned, once more conscious of my classmates' and playmates' religious orientation, and following a discussion of such matters with my parents, they suggested visits to local churches following which one might emerge as attractive.

The Hollands were members of St. Patrick Catholic Church; Willie Weber and his folks went to Dr. Dunnington's Methodist Church. Others went elsewhere. The schedule of visits took some time. The Catholics spoke Latin and essentially forbid members to visit elsewhere. By contrast, the Unitarians not only spoke English, they gave extra points rather than excommunication to members who visited other churches and studied the world's religions. Evans Worthley was the Unitarian minister, and he spoke to me, literally and figuratively. So I joined, and stayed, even as I have continued my reading and exploration of the world's religions – Christianity, Muslim, Judaism, Native American, Catholicism, Mormon, protestant sects, Buddhism, Tao, Jain, Zen, and others.

When describing the geography of the Melrose neighborhood, mention was made of a farm, just across the tracks, going southwest on what is now Greenwood. The owner's name may have been O'Brien.

One of our first encounters was the basis for a story Mother used to tell, regarding the value of check stubs as documents of history. Two of hers made the point.

As mentioned earlier, Katy and I had many pets over the years, including dogs as well as cats. Mother had a check stub indicating her payment of \$3.00 for a young dog. One dated six weeks later was for \$25.00 – compensation to Mr. O'Brien for a significant chicken kill occasioned by our dear, sweet puppy dog.

The only other business we did with Mr. O'Brien involved the purchase of my first automobile, a two-door, 1928 Model A Ford, also for \$25.00. The roof had been cut off, the "wheel" part of the steering wheel had fallen off, leaving four spokes by which to steer, the tires would soon be bald (though they could be replaced with used ones for 50-cents each), and the wiper portion of the windshield wipers left only metal to scrape the glass – a defect easily resolved by standing while driving during rain storms.

There is a country song about a comparable vehicle with the refrain, "But there ain't nothing wrong with the radio." Alas, mine had no radio. But painted red, yellow and blue, it made a vehicle to be envied by Iowa City's teenagers.

The combination of limitless curiosity and freedom led me to and through a number of interests.

One classmate, Tom Kent, was the son of the University's photographer, Fred Kent. Tom went on to a distinguished career as a medical pathologist, and bird watcher. A local park is named for his father. We always felt welcome to drop in on any of the offices of our classmates' parents. Fred Kent was in the Chemistry Building, one block south of U-High on North Capitol Street.

One afternoon when about a half-dozen of us paid him a visit, he showed us how to make pinhole cameras – sealed cardboard boxes about four-by-four-by-six inches with, literally a pinhole in the front to serve as a lens. You had to be in total darkness when inserting, and later removing, a piece of film from inside this “camera.” Exposure times required minutes rather than fractions of a second. But if one carefully followed his directions, once developed, the film could be used to make prints.

This experience, plus cameras that are more modern, and a war surplus military manual on photography, ultimately led to a home darkroom, with an enlarger, a little red light that would not spoil the film, and pans of chemicals. It was located in the furnace room in the basement.

A fascination with clouds led to my purchase of a twenty-five-cent paperback book that helped me distinguish cirrus, cumulus, cumulonimbus, and stratus from each other. Now that we are offered opportunities to store our computer documents in “the cloud” I feel as if I have, indeed, “looked at clouds from both sides now.”

As mentioned earlier, once the family acquired a beautiful piece of furniture from Sears that contained an AM and shortwave radio and record player, the old three-foot AM radio sat next to my bed, on the linoleum floor covering that pictured the mainland’s 48 states. At night, as the clear channel stations identified themselves on the hour and half hour, turning up and down the dial, I wrote down those stations’ call letters, location, and frequency.

Soon, I had quite a list: WSM, 650, Nashville; WLW, 700, Cincinnati; WOR, 710, New York; WGN, 720, Chicago; WSB, 750, Atlanta; WJR, 760, Detroit; WABC, 770, New York; WBBM, 780, Chicago; KGO, 810, San Francisco; WCCO, 830, Minneapolis; KOA, 850, Denver; WWL, 870, New Orleans; WCBS, 880, New York; WLS, 890, Chicago; KDKA, 1020, Pittsburgh; KYW, 1060, Philadelphia; KRLD, 1080, Dallas; WBAL, 1090, Baltimore; KMOX, 1120 kHz, St. Louis; KSL, 1160, Salt Lake; WOAI, 1200, San Antonio; KSTP, 1500, St. Paul – and, of course, Iowa’s KXEL, 1540, Waterloo, and WHO, 1040, Des Moines. These were my windows on the wider world beyond Iowa City and, along with the shortwave stations on the BC-348, an incentive to visit those places someday.

Another, related, hobby was writing postcard requests for free catalogs. At one point, they filled a large four-by-four-by-four cardboard box in the attic. One day a sales representative for hearing aids appeared at the door. Mother answered. He wanted to speak with Nicholas Johnson who had requested information about their products. Mother made me talk to him. That was pretty much the end of my efforts to increase my sense of importance by means of an increased quantity of daily mail.

But I had already been hooked by the catalog that came from Allied Radio in Chicago.

About the time the war surplus BC-348 radio receiver entered my life, I sent away for the Allied Radio \$13.75 “Ten-in-One” kit. [page 121 of <http://www.alliedcatalogs.com/catalogs/1947-112/>.] When it arrived, I eagerly opened it, awestruck by the possibilities offered by its three tubes, resistors, condensers, transformer, headphones and microphone. As I read through the 12-

page manual I dreamed of putting together the radio receiver, Morse code key and oscillator, burglar alarm, timer, amplifier, photo-cell relay, and electronic switch it promised.

But what most firmly grasped my imagination was the “phono-oscillator.” I had formerly never heard of such a thing – and probably most readers haven’t either. It provided a fix for a technology from an earlier age: a phonograph without an amplifier. By building and attaching such a device to a phonograph, adding a short length of antenna, and tuning it to a frequency with no stations, it would “broadcast” to a radio receiver, where the music would be amplified, and come out of the radio’s speaker.

It was obviously some kind of a low-power transmitter. It was the warning that caught my eye and immediately inspired the desire to ignore it. There was a maximum permitted antenna length on the phono-oscillator of four or five feet.

Willie Weber and I immediately went uptown, found and purchased a 500-foot length of braided copper wire, and started stringing it around the roof of our house and into the trees – unaware, as we were, that this would ground out some of the very little power of the phono-oscillator.

The toughest test we could think of involved transmitting on the frequency of the University’s 5000-watt AM radio station, WSUI, on 910 kHz. Willie, who was old enough to drive, drove his family’s car across the street and onto our gravel driveway, turned on the radio, and reported that he could clearly hear my Morse code transmission over the WSUI programming across the 30-feet of distance from his car to my radio shack in the sleeping porch. The obvious next test involved my continuous transmission while Willie drove the car a couple miles away, to the place off of Mormon Trek Boulevard where WSUI had its three transmitting antenna towers.

It wasn’t long before he was back, sliding to a stop on the gravel, jumping out of the car, running upstairs to announce that my signal was clear all the way to WSUI’s towers.

Thus, my first encounter with the Federal Communications Commission came at a very early age. For the next day at school, Howard Berg reported to our group that he had seen an FCC truck driving around town. As soon as I got home that day, I began a task that took me into the night: converting our phono-oscillator into a legal radio receiver.

Twenty years later, President Johnson appointed me to a position as commissioner at the FCC. Twenty years after that, I passed my extra class amateur radio license exam, and began transmitting around the world legally from a 60-foot tower behind the house.

Willie and I had other adventures. One summer’s evening, before the Coralville Reservoir dam was built to control the Iowa River’s flow, the dam under the Burlington Street bridge was nearly dry. We decided to see if we could walk across. We could. It would have been life-threatening foolishness when the River was high, but not that evening. We were cautious around the River. College students would take a shortcut, walking across the iced-over River in the winter. We never tried that, either.

We were equally careful when playing along the railroad. Parents told us of the dangers, their advice made sense, so we followed it. When we walked along the tracks we would stay out of the space between the rails. When trains came by, we'd lie behind the bank going into Brookland Park, where we could still get a close-up view with no risk. If a train was going slow enough, we might grab a ladder on a box car and ride a ways, but we never went far and didn't try to jump on the fast ones.

The railroad had a sidetrack, since removed. The cars left there were safe to inspect; and sometimes bananas were found in the refrigerator cars with open doors.

Like many youth, we would put pennies on the track, wait for a train, and then search for our flattened coins. There was some debate regarding the possible derailment of trains. Some thought a 50-cent piece on the track might cause a train wreck; others argued the locomotives were heavy enough to flatten one. Fortunately, neither hypothesis was ever put to the test, as no one had even seen, let alone possessed, a 50-cent piece.

Willie's father was a successful business person, championship swimmer, and the local historian in his later years. There is still an Irving Weber walkway near the Field House swimming pool to honor him. He owned a local dairy, down what was then College Street, by the River. He was also the creator of the marketing effort called "Quality Checked," for an association of dairies. Willie and I were never able to score ice cream from his dairy, but Willie knew where they kept the mixed nuts that went into some of the ice cream. We would occasionally go by in the evening and scoop up a couple handfuls to put in our jacket pockets.

One of our greatest adventures was possible because of Iowa's 19th Century history. The state's 99 counties, each roughly 20 to 25 miles square, with a "county seat" in the center, and the towns laid out about seven miles apart, were a reflection of the transportation system at the time: horseback riding, horse-drawn carriages and wagons, making their way along unpaved roads. Distances were short enough that everyone could make it to their county seat and back home again on Saturdays, and to a neighboring town for church on Sundays.

Willie and I were unaware of that history, but we *had* discovered that if we rode our bicycles along any road leaving Iowa City we would come to a town in seven to ten miles – Tiffin, North Liberty, Solon, West Branch, Hills, Frytown, or Cosgrove. So far, so good.

But one mid-afternoon we headed west on Melrose Avenue, as it became the graveled IWW Road (now County Road F46). It was slow going with balloon tires and no gears on rough gravel, and after what must have been ten miles we'd seen no towns nor source of water. Willie would have been willing to turn around, but I, already of the compulsive persuasion, insisted that we had a commitment to our ride-until-you-come-to-a-town program. By the time we reached Williamsburg, near the center of Iowa County, to the west, the sun was beginning to set. Having met our self-imposed goal for the trip, we turned around and peddled back home. We arrived about 10:30 that night, to discover Irving and Martha Weber, and my mother and dad, in our front yard, relieved to find their sons still lived. There was no punishment that I recall.

Here's another bike ride story that requires a little introduction.

The YMCA, noted for its athletic facilities and hotels, sponsored an organization for high schools called "Hi-Y." My social studies teacher, J.R. Skretting, encouraged my participation. I became president of our local chapter, and ultimately national president of the organization, following a convention of chapters. I ran against Ray Farabee, who later attended the University of Texas, where he was elected student body president as an undergraduate, and subsequently earned a law degree, and went on to serve 13 years in the Texas State Senate.

When I was 14, there was a Hi-Y regional, summer camp gathering in Milwaukee. I thought it would be fun to use it as a reason for a long bike ride – the 250 miles or so from Iowa City to Milwaukee. The day before departure I rode out to Lake Macbride to spend the night, see if there was anything more needed for the trip, and whether my loosely-packed clothes and gear could be securely tied to the bike. That test passed, I headed off the next morning, anticipating a three-day ride. Dr. Skretting was a Beloit College graduate (as was my first mother-in-law, Evie Chapman), and he arranged for my lodging at a fraternity house. I made 125 miles the first day, about 40 miles more than planned, and arrived in Milwaukee ahead of time.

I had a room in the Milwaukee Y, but during the day I hung out in a park across the street with some men we would today describe as homeless. George was especially helpful, assuming I was one of them and in need of some guidance regarding life on the streets. He never asked why I was there, or whether I was a run-away. He suggested that the cheapest, best food for breakfast was a bowl of oatmeal with a melted pat of butter. "It will really stick to your ribs," he said.

"What were your parents thinking?" you ask. Years later, they confessed that after they heard of the plan they snuck off to drive the route to Milwaukee and back, considered it safe for biking, and concluded that anyone who could bike to Williamsburg and back years earlier could probably make it safely to Milwaukee.

It was a different age.

Chapter Eight Young Law Man: Iowa City, 1945-1952

What were the forces or circumstances that gently pushed or pulled me in the direction of “the law”? Grandpa Mox was in the Iowa Legislature. But neither he, nor any other family member, ancestor, or even family friend or neighbor known to me, was trained as a lawyer.

There were after-school 15-minute radio programs, such as “The Lone Ranger and Tonto,” “Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy,” “Sky King,” and “Captain Midnight,” with leading characters, like Batman in the comic books, who endeavored to take on the forces of evil. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories were a part of my reading. Dad gave me a couple of law-related books: a *Life of Lincoln* by his law partner, William Herndon, and Judge Learned Hand’s *Spirit of Liberty*, which I read – like all the others he passed along – simply because he’d given them to me.

As with my selection of a church, there were certainly no parental suggestions, of which I was aware, that I should aspire to pursue any particular profession – doctor, lawyer, minister, or even speech pathologist.

Whatever the source of an early interest in law enforcement, it ultimately proved to be significant. It led to the creation of the Johnson County Junior Bureau of Investigation. When I was 10 years old I wrote J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI Director, and asked if we could be an affiliate of his agency. He kindly responded that while an affiliation would not be possible, he would be pleased to share a number of booklets about the FBI, which he sent with the letter.

My initial focus was on the classification of fingerprints. Indeed, it was the subject of what I refer to as my first “book.” The local postmaster, police chief Ollie White, and Johnson County Sheriff gave us their old “wanted posters,” with the pictures of criminals along with their fingerprints – which our group used to train ourselves in classification techniques for the fingerprints’ loops, whorls and arches.

The Police Department was in a City Hall that no longer exists. This was scarcely analogous to Joni Mitchell’s lament in “Big Yellow Taxi” that “they paved paradise and put up a parking lot,” but where City Hall stood now is, in fact, a parking lot for a bank. While it still stood, our little gang visited the Police Department and asked an officer to fingerprint us. Although a somewhat unusual request of police officers by small boys, it was granted.

Across the street from the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station of my early youth, was a former dwelling that housed a University of Iowa unit bearing a title that I believe included the words “public affairs.” Therein dwelled a Richard Holcomb, experienced in a wide variety of police matters and quite prepared to share his knowledge with young boys who might be headed toward a career in law enforcement. One of his responsibilities was to put on an annual Iowa Peace Officers Short Course, attended by, as the name suggests, representatives of the state’s sheriffs, police chiefs, and related officials. Following the course, which he permitted us to attend, there was an exam. My memory is that our junior bureau of investigation members received the highest grades – but I would be reluctant to make that assertion under oath.

There was a neighbor on Brookland Park Drive whom I believe was a former FBI agent. In any event, he showed us how to make plaster casts of boot and shoe tracks in the earth.

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One high school summer I got a job as part of a mowing crew for the University of Iowa. We all had push mowers, sweated profusely, and tanned rapidly without our shirts -- as skin cancer had not yet been invented. The crew leader rewarded our efforts with gallons of root beer from the A&W Root Beer stand. There was considerable prestige associated with the job, as the seventy-five-cents-an-hour wage made it one of the best-paid jobs in the county.

A more significant job, in terms of my path to “the law,” occurred one summer when I may have been 12 or 13. I became a one-man cleaning crew and night watchman at the Iowa-Illinois Gas and Electric office on Washington Street, near the Englert Theater. The company kept a meeting room in the basement that local groups could use. But they needed someone upstairs to keep an eye on things, and clean up. The local manager had an office with a rug that I would vacuum, and the other floors were mopped, waxed, and polished. I took my responsibilities very seriously, and was rewarded with the manager’s comment that I was the best cleaning person they’d ever had.

But there were hours of down time as well. And always mindful of Kipling’s advice to “fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,” I decided to fill my unforgiving minutes by reading *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*. Steffens was one of the first of what we today call “investigative reporters” and were then dubbed by President Teddy Roosevelt as “muckrakers” around the turn of the last century. I have no recollection of how this book, which played a major role in shaping my career, came to my attention.

In the *Autobiography* Steffen tells, among other things, of his challenge to America’s cities. He claimed he could uncover corruption in any and all of them, and the book provides some examples of his success. Many community spokespersons would respond to the challenge with shock and outrage; surely no one in *their* town was corrupt. He mentioned that among his sources for rumors worth investigating were taxi drivers and waitresses.

Intrigued, I started interviewing any Iowa City taxi drivers and waitresses willing to talk to a young boy. Although I thought it highly improbable that Steffens’ experience could be duplicated in my little college town of Iowa City, it was nonetheless worth my time and curiosity to find out.

Mind you, all I gathered were rumors, not “findings of fact” from a court decision. Two involved kickbacks to city officials: one for the purchase of trucks, and the other for the irritating parking meters that dotted the formerly-free downtown parking spaces.

But the one that most attracted me was the rumor that the City Council was considering putting a public swimming pool on land outside of town; land owned, I was told, by one of the Council members.

As it happened, the mother of one of my young colleagues, Dick DeGowin, was president of the local League of Women Voters. So I consulted with her regarding the possibility of changing the Council's mind. She explained how one could gather signatures on petitions, and that each member of the Council represented a geographic area called a ward. Dick and I set off, going door-to-door through that Council member's ward, gathering signatures on our petition asking the Council to put the swimming pool in the City Park.

At the next Council meeting, I walked forward, petition in hand, and placed it before the councilman who owned the land outside of the city. I explained that, while grownups would be able to drive to it, we kids would find it too far to walk or bike, and that it needed to be in the park.

The pool was ultimately built in the City Park.

The irony was that, because of my stopped up ears and hearing loss, Dr. Dean M. Lierle, head of the Ear, Nose, and Throat Department at the University Hospital, forbid me to go swimming. So that probably qualifies this effort as my first *pro bono* public interest advocacy.

My first law case occurred a year or so later.

Grandpa Mox, an elected member of the Iowa Legislature, had given me an autographed copy of the (then one volume) *1939 Code of Iowa*. As I've told the story, because it had come from my grandfather, I took it to bed with me and ultimately read through it from beginning to end – with the exception of the portion setting forth a detailed building code. I found it sufficiently interesting that I saved up my paper route money and bought a paperback copy of the *Municipal Code of Iowa City* – which I also thoroughly perused.

Willie Weber and I were fond of making up silly words, a vocabulary that included “snortingham” – a variant of “magnetron” spelled backwards. For a while, until our fathers and we grew bored, Willie and I affectionately named and referred to our fathers as snortingham.

That use of snortingham having eroded, we decided to go into stores and ask clerks whether they had any magnetrons in stock. Of course, none did, and we found the exchange with them entertaining and quiteamusing.

Willie was old enough to drive. One day, driving downtown, just as this magnetron amusement was also losing its charm, we spied a World War II war surplus store, and decided to try our little routine one last time. Finding no parking place, we pulled in the alley alongside the store and walked in the side door.

As you may well have guessed by now, it turned out that snortingham spelled backwards was the name of a central component used in World War II radar, and the store did, indeed, have a magnetron. We flushed, thanked the salesman, explained that we'd have to think about it, come back later, and hurried back into the alley – where we found, under Willie's windshield wiper, a ticket. We had been charged with illegally parking in the alley, and informed that we'd either

have to pay a \$10 fine or go to court. Since both of us together had never amassed as much as \$10, paying the fine was not an option.

I recalled having seen something in the *Municipal Code of Iowa City* regarding parking in alleys, and started researching the subject. The prohibition contained an exception. Apparently it is *not* illegal to park in an Iowa City alley if one is “loading” or “unloading” – which immediately suggested to me the original legal doctrine of “constructive loading.”

As I explained it to the judge, the ordinance did not prohibit all alley parking; only parking in an alley while, say, walking around town, or going to a movie. Anyone parking in an alley alongside the store in which they were shopping was engaged in “constructive loading” – that is to say, if they found what they were shopping for, bought it, and returned to their car, they would then be “loading” the item into their vehicle.

The judge looked down at me, ruled that we would not have to pay the fine, but that we “should never do that again.”

Once out of the courtroom, and the judge’s hearing, I turned to Willie and asked, “Did you catch the lack of logic in the judge’s ruling?”

“No,” he replied. “What do you mean?”

“Well,” I said, “he ruled that although we were not guilty, we should not do it again. If my legal argument regarding constructive loading was good law, there is no reason why we should not do it again. And if it was not, he should have made us pay the fine.”

The possibility that he was somewhat bemused by our efforts at legal arguments, and looked kindly on youthful first time offenders never occurred to me at that time.

Chapter Nine I Didn't Build That

Lest there remains any ambiguity at this point that in writing about my own life there is an implied suggestion all the good that's come my way is of my own doing, it's about to be put to rest before we reach the college years.

That's not to say modesty rejects *all* credit. Fact is, I have never believed the old expression, "It's not what you know, it's whom you know." In my experience, although there are variations depending on the job, most potential employers are looking for employees with intellectual ability, social and time management skills, sense of responsibility, ability to work in teams, and a willingness to continue putting in the effort until the job is finished. This is especially true of executives and politicians who rely on their assistants to make them look good, aides who are brighter, more creative, and better writers than they are.

Even as a law professor hiring research assistants I found that law students who grew up doing farm chores, or who had prior military experience, seemed to be more responsible and reliable than those who grew up in the most privileged homes.

Of course, among *that* pool of those who are "the best and the brightest" (say, the top 100 out of the 200 applicants for my FCC legal assistant position), when the odds of any given individual being chosen are slim, then yes, their contacts and networking can make a difference. But unless a young person is guaranteed an executive position in a family business, and sometimes even then, most will discover "it's what you know, not whom you know," that gets them the interview, the job, and the ability to keep that job and earn promotions.

During President Obama's otherwise little-noticed campaign speech in Roanoke, Virginia, July 13, 2012, he said, "If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. . . . Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business -- you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen. The Internet didn't get invented on its own. Government research created the Internet so that all the companies could make money off the Internet. The point is, is that when we succeed, we succeed because of our individual initiative but also because we do things together. There are some things, just like fighting fires, we don't do on our own."

The President was simply talking about the importance of people receiving a hand up, governmental programs and other group action that makes new businesses and individual success possible – such as education and infrastructure. But the Republicans lifted his words, "you didn't build that," out of context and turned it into their campaign mantra, "We Built It," in support of their "less government" theme.

It's easy to acknowledge that I "didn't build that." A lifetime of education, experience, and willingness to work hard, yes; but at every stop along the way there have been individuals who played a major role in constructing whatever got built.

If one is fortunate, through the high school years that support comes primarily from parents, grandparents, and teachers. For example, my social studies teacher, Dr. Dick Skretting, was

responsible for the start that culminated in my national presidency of Hi-Y. The prior chapter explains the role of my father, grandfather Mox Bockwoldt, Richard Holcomb, Laura DeGowin, and others in an early interest in law, politics, and government.

But years after one leaves home for college, or a job elsewhere, and looks back on those years, if they are honest they soon come to realize, like Blanche DuBois in *Streetcar Named Desire*, that they “have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”

Perhaps the most significant example of this, and also the first, involved a man named Dr. William G. Wolfe in Austin, Texas.

Chapter Ten Family and College: Texas, 1952-1959

My ear, nose and throat doctor, Dr. Lierle, had been after Dad for years to move me to a warmer, drier climate to ease the hearing loss associated with clogged Eustachian tubes. So in 1952, after graduating from University High School, that fall Karen Chapman and I were married and began looking for a university for the two of us. Among warmer, drier universities in the south, the choice soon settled on the University of Texas in Austin.

Neither of us had ever been to Austin, nor lived for significant times anywhere away from home. Dad kindly gave a call to Dr. William G. "Bill" Wolfe, one of Dad's former graduate students at the University of Iowa, who was then a professor at the University of Texas.

He picked us up at the Austin airport, and soon took me to the University's student union and instructions on how to speak Texan. "I'd like a cup of coffee," I said to the waitperson. "What?" she asked. Repetition did not work. Finally, Bill ordered for me. "Oh," she said, "y'all wan' caw-feh? OK." I recall all the tables had cruets of vinegar for the collard greens, along with the salt and peppershakers.

Bill really took us under his wing, almost adopting us into his family, with wife Bobbie, and only son Billy. They had us to their house, and took us out to dinner from time to time at a wonderful steak place south of town on Congress Avenue.

But the substantive things he did for us were even more impressive. He found us a garage apartment at 603-E 19-1/2 Street, owned by a Mr. Treadwell who owned the large house next door at 1909 Red River. Treadwell had also divided that house into apartments, where we ultimately lived rent-free as the managers of his properties. (Those structures were replaced by the LBJ Library, where some of my papers made the trip back "home" when the Library was dedicated in 1971.) Bill found jobs for us, Karen as a nutritionist at Breckenridge Hospital, and me in the trade book department of the University Co-op. He found us a four-door Model A Ford – a big step up from my first Model A – once we had amassed \$75 in a year's savings. He arranged for me to receive seemingly every scholarship the University had to offer – as I've sometimes said, including those designated for descendants of left-handed generals in the Civil War (or, as they say in Texas, "the war between the states").

This insight came to me early. Perhaps it was Abraham Lincoln's saying, "I will prepare myself and my chance will come," that motivated my evaluation of the many invitations UT offered: a football scholarship, the debate team, a leading position in the young democrats (including support for my running for a position in the Texas Legislature), writing for *The Daily Texan*, and others. For whatever reason, I decided to devote the next four years (ultimately six, with a law degree) exclusively to learning stuff – saving for later those other activities. I, like Lincoln, would "prepare myself."

Finding the very best professors, regardless of how tough they graded, was the goal. Bill had some suggestions and, when he did not, he knew whom to talk to in each department to find out.

For example, rather than teaching assistants, my small section English professor was the chair of the department.

Actually, he was the one who helped me get access to the Library. The University of Iowa was, I believe, one of the early adopters of an “open stacks” system. Prior to that, and at the University of Texas, one obtained books by going to the desk, filling out and signing a request card, handing it to a runner at the desk, and then waiting for him or her to return to the desk with the book. Experience with the ease of wandering through the stacks at Iowa made that an unacceptable procedure. But only graduate students and faculty were permitted behind the desk at Texas. Thus, it took a granted waiver for access to a study desk, deep within the total silence of the stacks, where many productive hours passed.

Current Possible Future Chapters

Chapter Eleven Young Professional: California and Washington, 1960-1973

Chapter Twelve The Years Between: From D.C. to Iowa, 1974-1989

Chapter Thirteen Back Home: Iowa, 1990-2014

Additional Material Possibly Part of Conclusion (as tie back to earlier material) Maybe First Part When Discussing TPFL

From "Lawn Mowing," June 30, 1998 (the bulk of its excerpts were used in Chapter Four; the following are the consecutive paragraphs just before the last paragraph):

* * *

There came a time in my life when, as chair of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, I had to raise a considerable amount of money for the organization. Just as Willie Sutton replied to the question, "Why do you rob banks?" with the line, "Because that's where the money is," I found myself hanging out with liberal and radical millionaires because that's where our money was. It inspired me to think about the ways in which one could live like a millionaire without having any money.

Many of them were vegetarians, walked and rode bicycles, and wore old clothes. All those things I was already doing.

They traveled widely -- something I could not afford to pay for. But I could do it by travelling the public lecture circuit. I couldn't pick when I would go, but it was likely I would, sooner or later, hit most of the resort areas they favored.

Finally, they had someone else to worry about all the details of running their half-million-dollar homes. That one had me stumped. They not only had a roof over their heads, and a roofer to fix any leaks, they didn't even have to spend time talking to the roofer. A staff person did that for them. Had I the skill to fix my own roof, I couldn't even afford a small house, not on the \$5000 a year I was paying myself at the NCCB. How could I solve this problem?

And then it came to me: live in an apartment. Let the owner and the manager worry about the roof, the furnace, cleaning the swimming pool -- and mowing the yard.

And so it was that I came to retire from lawn mowing for nearly 15 years.

Now, back in the house the family moved into in 1941, I am mowing lawns once again. I have a power mower, called "Lawn Boy," although I am my own lawn boy. (Mary, when asked if she has a dish washer, says, "Sure. And his name is Nick.") Ever since I drove my uncle Chet's little Ford tractor around his Ida County farm, the first vehicle I ever drove, I always wanted a Ford tractor. Still do. But I never really wanted one of those riding mowers. They remind me of golf carts. Mark Twain said golf is "a good walk spoiled." With a cart it's not even a spoiled walk. When I watch a 300-pound guy hanging over the seat on one of those riding mowers the vision I see is a man on a tricycle about eight sizes too small, a circus act. If you're not even strong enough to push a power mower you probably ought not be getting out of the house at all.

But my neighbor, a cultured guy who used to run the art museum, expressed quite clearly to me his distaste for the sound of the power mowers in the neighborhood.

Moreover, the pollution from them is supposed to be far worse than that from automobiles -- like the difference between the tobacco-filtered smoke in the lungs of the smoker and unfiltered smoke in the lungs of the bystander. And power mowers are ecologically unsound, a kind of unnecessary use of petroleum resources.

So Mary and I went off in search of a push mower. Today's push mowers are of similar design to the one I first operated over a half-century ago. But there the similarity ends. The sponge rubber cover on the handles of the new ones slowly shapes to your palms. The watch-like precision of the construction produces a metallic whirring sound that seems to have passed through a muffler. The mower we chose is all black, a stealth mower, with enough adjustments to satisfy the most demanding macho man.

And it cost more than both of my first two cars combined. (Lest the reader think I have gone totally profligate in my old age I should probably explain that the first car cost \$25 and the second \$75.)

I like mowing. In a world, and a life, of uncertainty and unfinished tasks, there's a kind of finality, a finished quality, to mowing a yard. You pick up all the sticks and other objects first and then debate whether to use a grass catcher and add to the compost pile, or leave the clippings to fertilize the lawn.

There are many other choices. You can mow in one direction, or in both directions. (I would never mow in circles.) You can finish a logical section, or mow across the sidewalk to the front porch, doing two lawns at once. You can be compulsive or free form.

However you do it, you can see where you've mowed. You know when you're done -- at least for this week.

I have come to like memorials, reminders of those who were dear to us and are no longer. As my mother was dying of liver cancer I told her that I had planted in my garden the seeds for a giant pumpkin, one of which was beginning to form. It was called "Edna," I told her, in her honor.

"I'm not sure how much of an honor that really is," she said, eyes twinkling until the last, "except, perhaps, for the pumpkin."

Although there's a bit of debate about it, and Mary's mother denies it, Mary remembers that her late father liked to edge his sidewalks. So I do that, too. I call it the Wayne Vasey Memorial Edging, since we have an Edna Johnson Memorial Flower Garden in the front yard (no pumpkins). I have not yet come up with any better way to honor Wayne, and the memory of this Johnny Appleseed of schools of social work. Like my father, he, too, was a boxer, a story teller, a delightful personality -- and, in fact, a friend of my father's. Though I rather suspect that he might have about as much enthusiasm for the honor of an edged sidewalk as my mother had for the pumpkin.

* * *