

1.

PREFACE: NEW YEAR'S DAY, 2009, PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA: Dedicated to Craig, Laura and (in alphabetical order): Alana (born 6 days after I started writing this), Benjamin, Cole, Kaila and Malia. I have always had a bad memory for dates – birthdays, anniversaries, etc. I once received a “Happy Birthday” call from my life insurance agent, who wished me a “Happy 40th Birthday”. I told him he was wrong. It was my 41st. He replied, “Guess who can't subtract?” He was right. I was 40. Most of the dates I have taken out of old photo albums or from information found on the internet. If not exact, at least they are close.

PS: Apologies for the often weird indentation, strange paragraph starts, location of page numbers, etc. I fought with Microsoft Word to do it my way. Unfortunately Microsoft word wanted to do it in its own weird style. It won.

PRINCIPLE CAST MEMBERS

DOROTHY MARGARET BRETT (my mother). She was born in Cleveland, Ohio to Dr. John Henry Brett and Jeannette Adele Brett (maiden name, “Baker”) on June 27th, 1912 or 13. She had a brother, John Donald Brett, who was about 3 years older. He also became a doctor in Cleveland. Until the Great Depression, I believe they were quite wealthy. For some years they had two African-American servants, John and Fanny, who also traveled with them in the summers to Maple Springs, NY, where they lived in “Brettwood”, a lovely cottage on the shore of Chautauqua Lake. Mom talked of a horse, “Jerry”, she kept there and loved to ride. And Laura tells me that, according to my father, Mom later had taken a horse with her to Sweet Briar College to board and ride. Was it the same horse? I don't know. But, apparently, because of the Depression, soon she could no longer afford to keep the horse at Sweet Briar.

I know little about her childhood. She graduated from Sweet Brier in 1933, having majored in French. She played Lacrosse and was a member of the Drama Club and the Glee Club. She then spent a year abroad studying at the Sorbonne in Paris, France. There, she lived with a French family, dated a Prince (“Armand” something or other) and loved every minute in Paris. A few years before her death, she was able to return to Paris with Dad and to meet some members of the French family with whom she had stayed during her year there. How she met my father, I do not know. But I suspect it had something to do with the fact that her brother, John Donald, and my Dad both were in the same class of '32 at Dartmouth College.

2.

Mom and Dad were married in Cleveland on May 27, 1938. While living in Hudson, Ohio in 1970, Mom had a stroke. After therapy, she was able to limp along and speak quite well. But she never really recovered. Dad said that her Hudson friends slowly stopped coming by the house to visit Mom. So he decided to retire earlier than planned, and, in 1973, he moved, with Mom, to Vero Beach, Florida. Soon after, during a time Branca, Laura, Craig and I were visiting them at Christmas, Mom fell and broke her hip. Her condition, mental and physical, deteriorated until her death on May 16, 1975.

Dr. JOHN DONALD BRETT, my mother's brother, was about 3 years older than Mom. He lived most of his life in Cleveland. I remember him as a dashing, handsome, moustached man, who looked a bit like Clark Gable. During WWII he was a doctor with either the Army or Air Force. My grandmother had a framed photo of Uncle John in military uniform escorting Eleanor Roosevelt at some diplomatic function. He attended Dartmouth College in the same class as my father, and, later, married my Aunt Helen. They had two girls, Connie, a very athletic and attractive blond, and Judy, an older, mentally retarded daughter, who had been born with the umbilical cord cutting off her oxygen supply. As children, my brother and I often spent time with Connie and Judy, either at the home of Grandma Brett in Kent, Ohio, or at the cottage at Lake Chautauqua. Both my mother and Uncle John would take their families to "Brettwood" during the summer months, usually at different times, however. There was not really sufficient room for both families to be together there for long periods. And, frankly, my Aunt Helen and my mother simply did not like each other. I remember Uncle John as a sort of a "big kid". He taught us to water ski using his Chris Craft speed boat, which he loved. One 4th of July, when we were all together, he bought a huge collection of fireworks and almost burned down the boat dock while setting them off—to the delight of all of us children. Politically, he was very conservative. I remember him actually saying that if John Kennedy ever was elected President, the Pope would build a tunnel to the White House (now that would be an amazing feat of engineering!). Uncle John was always very kind to my brother and me. After he died of lung cancer, about the time I was in college, our families never really kept in touch. He was the glue that held us together. In 2005, I did exchange one letter with my cousin Connie, who was living alone near a lake in Bumpass, Virginia. Both her marriages had ended in divorce. She told me that Judy was in .

3.

failing health, living in an assisted living facility nearby. I gathered that Connie visited her regularly. Later I sent Connie a Christmas card, but never received a reply.

JOHN GILBERT PRENTISS, was born in Cleveland, Ohio on November 11, 1909 to Alice May Prentiss (Phinney) and Frederick Leroy Prentiss. The family home, which I often visited as a child, was at 2973 Euclid Heights Boulevard, Cleveland Heights. Dad attended a private Cleveland preparatory school, University School, where he played on their 1927 football team. He went on to Dartmouth College in NewHampshire, Class of '32, where he played freshman football, received a BA

degree majoring in Economics, and was business manager for the "Jack-O-Lantern" monthly publication. He was a member of Delta Tau Delta fraternity. And after graduation, at some point, Dad joined the Ohio National Guard, Troop B, 107th Cavalry. Apparently, instead of using sabers, they trained to fire weapons from horses. About this time he was working for Picard, Mather Co. in Cleveland and, later, with Youngstown Sheet & Tube. In 1940 he began working for B.W. Rogers Co. in Akron, Ohio. By 1961 he had become a Vice-President of the company. His job was Manufacturers' Representative/ Sales Engineer, a specialist in high pressure hydraulic and pneumatic industrial equipment. He joined the University Club of Akron and also the American Society of Metals. Mom and Dad married on May 27th, 1938. By the time I was born in October of 1941, they were living in Indianapolis, Indiana. I suspect Dad was involved in some sort of training program there. I remember seeing a photo of a picturesque Tudor-style gate house they were renting on the land of an old estate. Mom told of preparing picnic lunches to take to the Indianapolis 500 Auto Race, where Dad was entertaining some clients. At any rate, a few months after my birth, they moved to Kent, Ohio. Fortunately Dad loved to drive, since his work often took him throughout the state. In spite of that, I remember he was almost always home by dinner time. He must have been very successful at his job, since he made a good living.

After my mother died in 1975, a couple of years later, Dad married Eleanor, a widow from Michigan whom he met at Vero Beach. After their marriage, we visited them a few times in Florida and also at a summer house they rented in Blowing Rock, North Carolina in the Blue Ridge Mountains. And our family became good friends with the family of Jill Prewitt, daughter of Eleanor...a friendship that continued long after the .

4.

deaths of our parents. Ellie died suddenly in 1985. Dad stayed on in Florida, still fishing and golfing with friends until his death on February 10, 1988...a death related to emphysema. Both my parents, like so many of their generation, were incessant smokers --“LSMFT, Lucky Strikes Means Fine Tobacco!” said all the ads in magazines, on TV and radio. That was their brand. (I suspect my childhood bouts of asthma had much to do with having been raised in a smoke-filled world.)

BENJAMIN F. PRENTISS, Dad’s older brother, lived in Gates Mills, Ohio in a house next to the Chagrin River and directly opposite the Hunt Club. I believe he was born in 1902 in Cleveland. He married Anne Marie Morarity. Though he was a businessman, his real love was the farm that he and Dad had inherited in Monroeville, Ohio, near Sandusky, Ohio. The day to day farm operations were handled by a tenant farmer and his family (the “Wilhelms”–or“Wilheits)?

One of their sons, years later, bought the farm from Dad and Uncle Ben. Also Uncle Ben loved to go deer hunting in Maine, having first stocked up on supplies at L.L. Bean. In those days L.L. Bean was still a hunting and fishing headquarters instead of the high-fashion clothing operation it has now become. Aunt Anne loved antiques, and decorated their house in Early American (as a child, I soon learned just how uncomfortable it can be to sit on Early American). My cousin, Mary, went to Laurel School in Cleveland, as did my other cousin, Connie. Mary later married Robert Ryder. They now live in Kimberling City, near Table Rock Lake in southern Missouri. Mary and I have always been good friends, sharing memories of “the old days” and family history. Branca and I and our Shih Tsu, “JuJu”, visit with Mary and Bob and their Shih Tsu, named “Bailey” in honor of our distant relative from the Phinney (Grandma Prentiss’) side of the family, the famous P. T. Barnum, founder of Barnum & Bailey Circus.

FREDERICK LEROY PRENTISS, my grandfather on Dad’s side. He was born about 1872 somewhere in New York. His mother was from England, his father from New York. He married Alice May Phinney. I remember him mostly from Sunday visits to their house in Cleveland. He was a thin, tall, dignified retired gentleman, a former editor of Iron Age Magazine, National Metalworking Weekly. He died July 11, 1952. Frederick’s father (my great grandfather) was Edwin Prentiss, who died at the age of 95 from a fall down

5.

the stairs. His wife, my great grandmother, was Catherine Louisa Clarke, who lived to be over 100. Apparently she is the lady who wrote the Clarke family history (attached to this paper). Her daughter was my Aunt Kitty, who lived in Monroeville, Ohio. Some on-line "Prentiss Family" histories claim an Irish connection with the Prentiss family. But as Craig Prentiss has pointed out, there is no mention of an Irish connection in the Clarke family history. There is Scottish blood in the Prentiss line, however, through the Gilbert family line. Mercy Gilbert was a grandmother...but no Irish in either the Clarke or Prentiss lines.

ALICE MAY PHINNEY, daughter of Ava Barnum (the circus family connection apparently) and Benjamin Phinney. She was born in Ohio in 1875 and by 1880 was living in Rockport, Cuyahoga County, Ohio. I remember her as a sweet natured, tiny little woman. Since she was diabetic, she needed regular insulin injections, which she gave to herself. Yet I also remember her as always eager to visit a local candy store with me and my brother. Her dining room always was full of flowers and green plants.

Dr. JOHN HENRY BRETT, Jr. was dead before I was born. His mother was Charlotte Rowell. His father, John Henry Brett, born in England in 1821, came to America, and died about 1897. Hanging in our Columbia, Mo. kitchen are two unremarkable small color prints. But they are set inside wooden frames that were brought from England by John Henry Brett, Sr. I also remember being told that he (Brett, Sr.) was a great reader of Shakespeare. His son, Dr. Brett, married Jeannette Adele Baker on June 10, 1908. Their children were my mother, Dorothy Margaret, and her brother, John Donald. Specific information about my grandparents on this side of the family is scarce. I know that Grandpa Brett was a very successful doctor, with, according to my mother, a special gift for diagnostics. I remember seeing some photos and 8mm black & white film footage of my mother as a young girl, along with her whole family, riding camels in Egypt near some pyramids. Grandfather Brett had gone to Egypt because he needed ready access to corpses for some type of research project. And it seems Egypt had a more readily available supply of dead bodies than Cleveland. In our living room desk in Columbia, behind glass doors at the top, we have a silver trophy .

6.

cup won by Grandpa Brett in a speed boat race at Chautauqua Lake, NY. He had one of the earliest and fastest Chris Crafts (or at least that style of boat) on the lake. From photos I recall, he appeared to be a rather rotund gentleman with pince-nez glasses a la Teddy Roosevelt. But some thought he resembled Franklin. There was an oft-told family story that, one day, a patient consulting with Dr. Brett in his office, remarked, "Dr. Brett, you look just like our dear President Roosevelt (Franklin)!" He was so infuriated, he ordered the woman to leave his office. Though he still had enough money to send his children to excellent colleges, in 1929 he apparently lost significant amounts of his money. My mother told me that much of this loss came because friends had convinced his to invest in a new "Coke" type soft drink called "Cherry (Cherri?) Cola". The product failed along with other investments. No more servants. He died in 1973, four years before I was born.

THE AUNTS Grandpa Brett had three spinster sisters, who lived together in Cleveland: Elizabeth ("Betty"), Jeannette ("Jenny") and Charlotte ("Tasche"). All had been teachers in the Cleveland public schools. Tasche had been a principal. I have only dim memories of Betty and Jenny, two old women who died when I was very young. But Tasche lived until I was a teenager. Eventually, she moved into a nursing home in Painsville, Ohio, where Mom and I often visited her. She would spend Christmas and Thanksgiving holidays either with us in Hudson, or with my Uncle John's family in Cleveland. Tasche was a bright, witty woman, always interested in her nephews' and nieces' activities. She was very devout as well. And, often, in her letters to me, she would include the latest edition of "Unity Magazine", a publication of the Unity Church. I still remember her favorite 121st psalm that she quoted: "I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord..." She was especially upset that Uncle John's family eventually made the decision to put my cousin, Judy, into a special school in Philadelphia for educating retarded children. Tasche missed seeing Judy.

Grandpa Prentiss had a spinster sister, Katherine ("Aunt Kitty"), who lived in Monroeville, Ohio in a Victorian house with a big garden outside. In the garden was an old fashion hand water pump that I loved to play with. As I remember, there .

7.

was a river nearby as well. The house was what would now be considered a mini Victorian museum: old whale oil lamps (though they had been converted to electricity); windows covered with heavy drapes, keeping out the sun; a “melodian” – a popular Victorian instrument that was a cross between an organ and a piano; and the Victorian objet d’art sitting on a side table was a meteor from space. Whenever we went to visit the farm in Monroeville, we would visit Aunt Kitty. When I was about 10 and living in Kent, I recall Dad reading a Cleveland newspaper and suddenly coming upon a story about Aunt Kitty. She was cited as being the oldest licensed driver in the state of Ohio. He rushed to the phone, called his brother Ben, and both of them headed to Monroeville to confiscate her car keys. Apparently she had been legally blind for years! She was indignant, protesting, “But I only drive to church and back!”

JEANNETTE ADELE BRETT (maiden name, “Baker”) Ironically, though Grandma Brett spent more time with me by far than any other grandparent, I don’t even know the year of her birth. Greg and I spent hundreds of hours with her, both at her bungalow in Kent, Ohio, and at “Brettwood” at Lake Chautauqua. Also, along with Mom, we visited her some winters that she spent in Lake Worth, Florida. We adored her. Yet so much of her early life remains a mystery. I believe she grew up on a farm in Ohio. What happened to her parents? I have no idea. Apparently, she was raised by step-parents. Her close friend, Carrie Dawes (married name) was her step-sister. They both lived in Kent, along with several other women that Grandma Brett and Mom referred to as “cousins and nieces”, . But I doubt many really were blood relatives. Unfortunately, as a child, I made no attempt to straighten out the “reality” of these relationships. I simply remember Grandma Brett having many female friends and relatives in the Kent area. And, according to my mother, Grandma Brett had kept a dark secret from her husband---she had never gone to college. Indeed, I do not know if she ever finished high school. However, in spite of this, she was one of the wisest and best-read women I have known. Always, she was reading novels, magazines, newspapers, listening to news on radio (and, later, on television), attending lectures, being involved in clubs and civic organizations. And I know she did go to nursing school before working as a nurse in the Cleveland hospitals. I assume that is where she met her husband, Dr. John Brett. They were married June 10, 1908. From a photo we have in Columbia, I know that, as a young woman,

8.

she was a stunning beauty. I recall visiting her sometime in the early 50's in a hospital in Cleveland, where she was dying from some form of cancer. And I must have been about 12 when her funeral was held in Kent. I recall some woman led me to the open casket where Grandma lay. The woman said, "Doesn't she look nice?" I clearly remember thinking, "No, she looks dead." The body laid out had nothing of the spirit and vitality of the Grandma I loved. And I thought the woman that believed she looked "nice" was a nut case. However, over the years, whenever I have attended an open-casket funeral, without fail, there is someone standing by the casket making insipid comments about how "nice" or "good" the corpse looks (which is why I do not care for open-casket funerals).

Grandma Brett's step-sister, Carrie Dawes (Aunt Carrie) and her husband, Peter Dawes (Uncle Pete – apparently a relative of the creator of the Dawes Plan after WWII) lived in one of the nicest houses in Kent, a real mansion compared to most. Their daughter, Gretchen Dawes, was a beauty. She married an ex-fighter pilot, Jack Dalton after the war. Jack was Catholic, which caused some family consternation. Gretchen and Jack eventually had several children – Peter, Luke...they were working their way through the Gospels. Gretchen was a close friend and confidant of my mother. Aunt Carrie was a straight-forward, outgoing and friendly mid-west lady like Grandma Brett. Uncle Pete was a wealthy Cleveland businessman. Yet to me, as a kid, he looked like a professional prize fighter. Though he was rather short, he was stocky and muscular with a tough-looking face and a gravel voice. Yet he was liked and respected by the whole family. And, for all his financial success, he also was friends with guys like "Stony", who worked at the local hardware store. When Branca & I were married, Uncle Pete and Aunt Carrie invited us to a dinner party at their home, a delicious meal with Brazilian and American flags at each place setting. There were many guests we did not know. One man, obviously thinking to impress Uncle Peter, offered the following comment:

"It must be difficult to be so successful a businessman in Cleveland, where you have to deal with all those Jews. In my experience, all they talk about is money." Dead silence at the table. Then Uncle Pete looks him in the eye and says, "You are right. The Jews do want to discuss costs, interest, all of the financial details right away. And you know what? In 50 years of doing business with Jews, never once did I ever get cheated or lose a cent. On the other hand, it is the Protestants and Catholics who think it too crude to start off talking about money. Always, we must first have a polite

9.

chit-chat about sports, or family or something . And every time I have been screwed on a business deal, always it has been by one of those Protestants or Catholics who were too refined to bring up the subject of money right from the start. As far as I am concerned, I always prefer to do business with Jews”.

....long silence at the table. The idiot who brought up the subject spent the rest of the meal staring at his plate.

JOHN GREGORY PRENTISS, my brother, born November 19, 1944. Many of these memories we share. To this day his favorite place is Chautauqua Lake. We grew up together in Kent, Ohio and later, in Hudson. But, once we were in Hudson, Greg was in one school and I was in another –except for one year when he was a freshman and I a senior at Western Reserve Academy. Some summers when I was away, taking theater courses at Chautauqua with the Cleveland Playhouse, he was in Canada or other places with my parents. By the time I went to Amherst. Greg and I rarely saw each other except, perhaps, during Christmas breaks, when we were both back in Hudson. Just this past year of 2008, as I was looking at some old photo slides, I was surprised to learn that Greg, too, had gone on a WRA tour to Europe. So involved in our own lives, we tended to “tune out” each other’s.

Greg went to Dartmouth College, but transferred to Amherst after I had graduated. And later, he received an MFA from New York University Film School. In the 70’s, we saw each other from time to time in New York City when we both lived there. Eventually Greg moved to Los Angeles and started out quite successfully, writing a popular film, “The Culpepper Cattle Company”. Variety Magazine cited him as one of the top young upcoming film writers. Later he collaborated on some films, but eventually left California, went to law school, and became a prosecutor in Washington State, where he lives with his best friends, several feral cats he has adopted and cared for over many years. Probably 20 years ago, Greg visited us once in Columbia. And, around 1985, when I was visiting Los Angeles to see some classes at Tony Barr’s Film School, Greg showed me around the city and took me on a memorable tour of Burbank Film Studios. Over the past 20 years our principal contact has been by telephone a couple of times a month. However we share many of the same memories of early family events, holidays, and simply growing up together.

10.

THE BEGINNING

I was born October 21st, 1941 at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana. I remember nothing of Indiana. But not long after my birth, my parents moved to

Kent, Ohio. Our first house was on Vine Street, appropriately named. It was a street on the south-west side of Kent in an area with

fields of grape vines. Since we moved away from Vine Street around the time my brother was born in 1944, my memories are those of a child of less than 3 years old. But, in fact, I do have a few clear memories: 1). My mother and I having cocoa parties in the kitchen, with cups of fresh, hot cocoa and cookies. 2). Me crying on some neighbor's porch on a warm evening. I was at a birthday party with other children and the host's mother was projecting 8mm movies onto a screen that had been set up on the porch. I missed my mother and cried until she came to pick me up. 3). Taking walks with my father and passing a neighbor's house. At one end of his driveway, as a decoration, he had placed some old rubber tires on their sides, filled the center areas with cement, and then covered the wet cement with many multi-colored marbles. These may not have been the most sophisticated of lawn decorations. But those tires with the sparkling marbles fascinated me. End of Vine Street memories.

134 NORTH WILLOW STREET, KENT, OHIO

About the time my brother was born in November of 1944, we moved into this house. One of my first memories was sitting in the living room, watching a very fat woman named "Mrs Lyle" feeding Greg a bottle. She had been hired to assist Mom when she returned from the hospital with Greg. Anyway, Mrs. Lyle regularly would begin to nod off as she fed Greg the bottle. And I would scream, "Wake up, Mrs. Lyle! You are falling asleep!" I remember every detail of our house. Between it and the house on the north-east corner of Willow and Main Street, there was a field, perhaps half an acre, where, every year, old Mr. Evans would first till the field and then plant corn and vegetables. In front of our house, there was a small terrace. And there was a fenced-in backyard, partly wire fence, partly white wooden pickets. Once when Dad was painting the wooden section, I fell down and ended up sitting right in the paint can. I remember

11,

him saying, "You have the whole back yard to fall, and you manage to sit right in my paint!?" Dad loved tools. His idea of a great Christmas present from Mom was a drill press or buzz saw for the basement. One Christmas morning, my brother and I, having mysteriously been banned from the basement for the past several weeks, were led down the basement stairs to discover a huge table with Lionel trains running through towns and mountain tunnels and over bridges---all constructed by Dad. Another year he used a "kit" to build me a rowboat, ("The Popeye", named after the cartoon Popeye the Sailor Man) to use at Lake Chautauqua. I inherited none of

his building and repairing skills. One day Dad asked me to hand him a soldering iron. I managed to burn my hand by picking it up from the wrong end.

He seemed amazed I could do something so stupid. Certainly it foreshadowed my disastrous Industrial Arts class at Western Reserve.

While the other boys were

making lovely tables, shelves or other impressive projects, I barely managed to pass the class by finally building a simple bird house. Years later in Missouri, a plumber begged me, "Please Mr. Prentiss, in the future if there is a problem, just call me. When you try to fix it yourself, you just add \$75.00 to your bill!"

Dogs and cats were forbidden because of my allergies. On the other hand I had a succession of parakeets, white mice, snakes, and even an injured pigeon, "Stinky", that we nursed back to health. The allergies were a real problem. For years I had to make a monthly trip to Dr. Painter for an allergy shot. Once, I remember crying and crawling under a table in his examining room to escape the shot, while he and my Mother tried to coax me back out. Then I would often have a fever in reaction to the allergy shot. So Doctor Painter would come to the house and give me an injection of penicillin for the fever. And, after swimming at Lake Chautauqua, like clock-work, my brother and I would get ear infections. Of course they were treated with more penicillin. (By now, I suppose my body is filled with organisms that have evolved a total resistance to penicillin). In his office, Dr. Painter always smoked a cigarette as he sat at his desk talking with Mom or writing out a prescription. He was the one who forbade dogs or cats in the house. And he was none too happy the day he made a house call just at the moment my parakeet escaped from his cage and flew into the room. In spite of his obsession with shots, Dr. Painter apparently knew what he was doing when it came to allergies. .

12.

Decades later, Charles Pierson, a friend of mine, who also had allergies treated by Dr. Painter, told me a story. Charles, by then a lawyer in Arizona, was working on a legal case that required extensive research on allergy specialists in the 1940's. And he discovered that Dr. Painter in Kent, Ohio was, indeed, considered one of the top experts in the country. But back to Willow Street: I remember many Christmases with the tree decorated and friends and family visiting. I remember my favorite tree decoration – the plastic parrot that to this day sits on our Christmas trees. I remember

the “sunroom”, a small room just off the living room that was filled with windows and sunlight. On certain nights, there, next to the radio, I would lie on the carpet and listen to “Amos & Andy”, “Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy”, “Archie Andrews”, “The Shadow”. And on Saturday mornings, I would lie in bed next to the other radio upstairs and listen to “Grand Central Station” and “The Buster Brown Show- with Froggy The Gremlin & Smiling Ed”. (Note: “The Buster Brown Show” later moved to television. But poor old “Smiling Ed” was banned from the airways. It seems that one morning he thought the show had ended and that he was off the air.

So he made the mistake of proclaiming into an open microphone, “That should take care of the little bastards for another week!” Goodby Smiling Ed!)

For a time I slept in a bedroom upstairs with some machine called a “terpazone” – a gizmo to add medicated mist to the air to help my allergies/asthma. One morning I awoke to find smoke filling the room. Dad rushed in and threw the burning machine out the window into the yard below. Somehow it had caught on fire. And I remember Mom in the kitchen. She was an excellent cook, making every kind of delicious food. For simple family meals, we ate in a breakfast “nook” next to the kitchen. When company came, we moved to the dining room. The large table had a centerpiece with candle holders set amidst two crystal vases full of ivy. I had a pet garter snake, “Squirmy,” that I would take out of his little cage and let play in the ivy growing in the centerpiece. Unfortunately, one day my mother had a visitor who was admiring the centerpiece-- that is, until she saw a snake curled up in the ivy and started screaming.

Often I played with friends in our back yard, trying to dig a hole to China, playing “Lone Ranger and Tonto” with cap guns, and, later, practicing target shooting with my Daisy BB gun. On summer evenings, I would get

13.

my baseball mitt, and Dad and I would play catch. Truth was that I was never much of an athlete. But I fantasized that someday I would play major league baseball with the Cleveland Indians team.

GROWING UP IN KENT

Looking back, I had an ideal Norman Rockwell, SATURDAY EVENING POST cover childhood. I attended Depeyster School in Kent from kindergarten until almost the end of seventh grade, when we moved to Hudson. Before kindergarten, I had been sent to Mrs. Lusson's Nursery School. I hated it and cried a lot until I was "withdrawn". But I loved Depeyster...the teachers, my classmates, the school events. The annual Halloween party was my favorite. I remember dressing as a witch, playing "musical chairs" for prizes, bobbing for apples. For many years my mother, costumed as a Gypsy fortune teller, would sit in a booth and read the palms of my classmates. She must have been good at it because several told me, "Your mother can really see the future and she told me all about myself"!

I had many friends in my class. Recently I discovered a class photo that must have been taken in 6th or 7th grade, and I was surprised how many names I can still remember. There was Pat Peters, who was better at softball than I was. When we were older, she became my magic assistant for a magic show in Cleveland. I chopped off her hand in the "Disecto" machine and then restored it. (Every Saturday morning, Stuart Cramer, a professional magician, invited one child-magician to perform a trick on his TV magic show. I had applied and was accepted.). Others in the class---- red headed Janet McGarry, who won every spelling contest; Jimmy Ryan, a friendly Irish boy whose father gained some notoriety as an alcoholic; Ronald Gritton, a mean boy who like to make Jimmy cry by teasing him about his drunken father, until a group of us threatened to beat Ronald up if he teased Jimmy again. I also remember that Ronald once stole a vial of "holy water" that Jimmy had brought to school after a Catholic Church service. Ronald flushed the "holy water" down the toilet, secretly replaced it with tap water, and gave it back to Jimmy. There was pretty, blond Doris Hendricks, whom we all envied because she had her own horse to ride on her farm. And yearly, when all our class was lined up to receive smallpox vaccinations, we all wanted to be near Doris. Like clockwork, as she was

14.

about to receive her shot, she would go into a dead faint, collapsing on the floor. We loved to watch. And yearly, just before the vaccination, we all had to watch the same film about Dr. Jenner discovering the smallpox vaccine. We all knew it by heart – the milkmaids that Dr. Jenner discovered somehow never got smallpox, the superstitious, angry villagers carrying torches and pitchforks to threaten the good doctor, etc. As boring as the film got, we delighted in the fact we soon would be able to watch Doris do her famous fainting spell.

There was Alice Bubnow, a “D.P” or “Displaced Person” whose family fled from the Ukraine after WWII. Since she was still learning English, she had been placed in our fifth grade class even though she was older than the rest of us. She had already developed large breasts, which delighted the boys and annoyed the other girls. About his time the Cold War was heating up. So, in addition to the regular fire drills, they added atomic bomb alerts. Our kind, but rather pompous school Principal, Thomas O. Griffiths (white hair, bow tie and toothy grin), would walk out of his office and blow on a whistle. Immediately all students were expected to dive under their desks, heads facing away from the windows. Of course it was impossible to really cover yourself beneath a small classroom desk. . We all ended up with our rear ends facing the windows and were sure that, if Russia ever really did attack, we were certain to get our butts blown off. I also remember Principal Griffiths becoming apoplectic one day when he walked into our seventh grade classroom. It was a “free period” for study, so the regular teacher had left the room. During this time, someone had discovered a cabinet full of old National Geographic magazines. And all of us were having a contest to see who could find the most photos of naked men and women in various African tribes.

Mrs. Keller, my first grade teacher, became a good friend over the years. She remembered asking my mother when I was in her first grade class, if, perhaps, I was not somewhat retarded? It seems I did poorly at reading assignments. Truth was I was bored silly with the “Dick and Jane and Spot, the Dog” reading texts. My parents and grandmother were reading me all sorts of interesting books like “Treasure Island”, and I was exploring the Saturday Evening Post, with stories about Captain Horatio Hornblower. So I simply “tuned out” from our boring classroom text. I was a fat boy, as was my brother. One of our favorite events was the Friday night arrival of a bakery truck, delivering a chocolate cake, which we devoured. In addition, Mom and Grandma Brett were always baking cookies and .

15.

pastries. The result? By the time I reached puberty, though I had not yet grown tall, I weighed around 200 lbs. By eighth grade, I was a fat little boy, often with a crew cut and bow tie. One day a friend of my Mother's commented, "He looks just like a little banker!" And, about the same time, my Uncle John, the doctor, made grim remarks about how, if I ever needed my appendix removed, it would be dangerous to have to cut through all my fat. So I went on a diet – or rather, my idea of a diet. I virtually stopped eating and managed to end up catching pneumonia. Of course this added to the weight loss. I can still remember laying in my "sick bed" in Hudson (the same bed we now sleep on in Columbia), and having the . distinct sensation that I was floating somewhere on the ceiling, looking down upon my body stretched out upon the bed. Anyway, with illness, diet, plus a sudden spurt of growth, I was no longer "the fat kid".

KENT, OHIO

Though I do not know the exact population in the 1940's it was a large town, divided by a bridge over the Cuyahoga River in the center of the downtown area. Along the river, there was a constantly used railroad, a train station, a railroad roundhouse, a large flour mill and a huge old "opera house", probably dating from the vaudeville days. There was a large dairy store, offering not only home delivery of bottles of milk, but a vast selection of home-made ice creams. Thompson's Drug Store was the prescription drug center, but also had a soda fountain supplying free cookies with its milkshakes and sodas. There was a large Five & Dime Store and a movie house at the top of the hill on Main Street. On Saturday mornings there was a special "kids; matinee" featuring cartoons, Movie Tone News, continuing serials such as "Buck Rogers In Space", plus a double feature—usually a Western starring Roy Rogers or Gene Autry, or the Cisco Kid. .

.
. .

Our house was on the east side of town, only a few blocks from Kent State University. In those days in the winter I used to go sledding on the hills at Kent State near where, a decade later, National Guard troops shot the students protesting the Vietnam War. I remember a bookstore by the college, and, right next to it, the barbershop where I would get my hair cut. On a nearby corner was a restaurant called The Captain Brady, where we

16.

sometimes ate Sunday dinner. The walls were covered with large mural paintings of the early history of the Kent area. Captain Brady had apparently saved himself from slaughter by the Indians by diving under water in the Cuyahoga River and then breathing through a hollow reed until the Indians gave up searching for him.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Our school was only about three blocks from my house. As a child, the walk seemed long. Around 1990, when I revisited Kent, I realized just how close the school really was. And when I saw my old house again, I was struck by just how small it appeared compared to my childhood memory of a very large house.

About a block north from our house on Willow Street lived my friend Charles “Chip” Pierson. Both of his parents were high school teachers. Since his father was also a basketball referee, I ended up being taken to too many hot, smelly gyms to watch him officiate at basketball games... probably why I have never enjoyed basketball. Chip later graduated from Harvard Law, practiced as a lawyer in Arizona, and died a premature death from prostate cancer. Another block to the north, and I would cross the road to reach the home of David Dix. His father was the publisher of the local paper, The Courier Tribune. David would later become publisher. Chip, David and I loved to explore the big woods and swamp just behind David’s house. Sometimes we would discover abandoned hobo camps, with their burned-out camp fires, in the part of the woods nearest to the railroad tracks. Always we feared attack by the “Mays Kids”, a probably mythical group of children who supposedly lived near the sand quarry where we sometimes played. They were rumored to like to beat up other kids. Chip, David and I often were invited by parents to spend “overnights” at each others houses. We would lie in bed in the dark and try to scare each other with ghost stories.

I was a chronic thumb sucker. My Grandmother made me tiny little blankets edged with silk. I would rub the silk with the fingers of my right hand, while sucking my left thumb. I only stopped when my grade school softball team became suspicious that I still was sucking my thumb. Incidentally, many years later, I was playing the role of “Brabantio”, father of “Desdemona” in a Yale Drama production of OTHELLO. On opening night, onstage, I suddenly realized I was fondling

17.

the silk lining of my costume between the fingers of my right hand just as I had done with Grandma's tiny blankets. I was so shocked by the memory flashback that I completely forgot my lines for several long seconds.

My childhood in Kent was a period of great post-war optimism and economic growth. But the African-Americans, then known as Negroes, were largely excluded from mainstream America. Segregation ruled in most areas until the civil rights movement of the 1960's. In Kent, all black students went to the appropriately named South School. I recall asking some adult why black

students did not go to the same schools as the white students. The reply was, "Well, they would throw stones at white children". In about sixth grade, our rather incompetent football team finally played a game against the South School team. For whatever reason, either they were older than we were or they just has a better selection of big males, compared to our Depeyster Team they seemed gigantic. And they took the game VERY seriously. It was a slaughter. It seemed that on every play the white boys would be knocked to the ground, while the other team scored. (I was a left-guard). Eventually, in our huddle, our quarterback suggested, "Maybe if we try to make friends with them, they won't hit us so hard". So next time we lined up for a play, we tried introducing ourselves to the opposing lineman. No luck. "Bam"—soon we were rolling on the ground again. Our coach (an ex-submariner we secretly called "Bonehead" because he was bald) was furious we had played so badly. But we were relieved we had survived the game alive.