**Pink and Pat**

Pink and Pat Happ had been vacationing in Europe and cut short the trip the minute they heard about the "accident" and came right home. They were my special friends, slightly older than my parents and without children of their own. Pink was Jewish and Pat Irish which seemed to me to be the sorriest excuse to keep two kind, loving people from having their own children. I was the next best thing.

Pink and his brother Lee grew up in Macon Georgia around the turn of the century, and in 1913 they went into business together manufacturing overalls. World War I turned the Lee Overall Company into a colossus overnight and Pink became wealthy by any man's standards. In 1921, Pink sold out his half interest to his brother, bought ten percent of the shares in the Coca-Cola Company of Atlanta, married Marian (Pat) O'Donnell against the advice of both families, and moved away.

And that's what they did - moved away. Again and again, traveling here and there and abroad. Renting a succession of houses in various cities throughout the world. You can't honestly call him a coupon clipper when you consider how enormously wealthy he was, but that's sort of what he was albeit on a rather grand scale.

They came to Los Angeles in the mid-thirties and renewed their acquaintance with Mom and Pop who had arrived in town several years before. Soon, they were best of friends to the point of being virtual members of the family. Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving and any number of other occasions found them in our fold unless they were on one of their frequent trips. During World War II when nobody could travel much - owning ten percent of the Coca-Cola Company entitled you to a C gas-rationing sticker like everyone else - Pink and I would take walks in the afternoon while Pat and Mom folded bandages at the Veteran's Hospital.

Pop was gone a good deal of the war, working as a "dollar-a-year-man" in Washington making training films for the Navy, so Pink and I sort of adopted each other. Only it was better. I've searched my mind carefully, looking to see if I'm inventing a situation which didn't exist, but I can find nothing to suggest that Lamar or Weezie in any way rivalled me in Pink's affection. So far as I am able to remember, he was mine to the virtual exclusion of the others, nor were there children of other families who entered the picture.

In many respects, Pink was like a big kid himself, delighted in most of the things which garnered my attention. He took me to a War Bond drive at the corner of La Cienega and Third Street where a tent had been hastily erected to house souvenirs of the Pacific war such as a Japanese 2-man sub, the sheared wing of a fighter plane emblazoned with a red meatball insignia, a blood-drenched Japanese flag with kanji characters adorning the tatters, and most importantly, an honest-to-god, whirling, squeaking, clanking, and hissing Link Trainer used to teach budding airmen how to fly on instruments. You got ten minutes in it for every War Bond you bought - they were $18.75 for a $25.00 bond - and Pink set out to finance the entire war effort on my behalf. Finally such a hue and cry arose from others waiting in line that my early flying career came to an end, but not before I had decided what I was going to be when I grew up.

For most of the war years, Pink and Pat lived in an apartment building on Wilshire Boulevard near Comstock Avenue, the intersection marking the western boundary of the Los Angeles Country Club. It was an easy walk from our house, and though I was cautioned about disturbing them too much, I usually dropped in after school unless I had choir practice or piano lesson.

In literal fact, the neighborhood was weird. Actors Van Johnson and Keenan Wynn lived several houses down form us, and both drove motorcycles. Van Johnson crashed his, tearing his face up and nearly dying in the effort. The upshot was that Keenan Wynn's wife left Keenan and son Ned (my age) and went to the aid and comfort of Van Johnson. I can't promise you that this is true, but I seem to remember it.

Marlene Dietrich lived across the street and was apparently a true original. Pop, who was air raid warden for the area was terrified to go near her house even when her lights blazed during a black-out. He was afraid of what might be going on on the other side of the door. He finally screwed up his courage on the night that the I-111 shelled Ellwood Beach and rang her doorbell. As it turned out, debauchery wasn't the order of the evening and she was perfectly happy to turn off her outside lights. She said she hadn't realized that there was much point in doing so since we were nearly ten miles from the ocean and she didn't think they'd send planes all this far to bomb Holmby Hills. The truth be known, she was dead right.

I have to tell you the story of I-17. It was a Japanese fleet submarine that surfaced on the evening of February 23, 1942 and fired twelve 5-inch shells into the palisades at Ellwood Beach north of Santa Barbara. No one was hurt, no damage done, but it scared hell out of people all up and down the west coast. The yellow peril was about to invade. Mom took us to the basement and made us hide under old clothing. We were not to move or talk in case Jap marauders were already in the neighborhood.

Invasion had nothing to do with it. Destruction of strategic materials or property had nothing to do with it. Scaring women, politicians, and children had nothing to do with it. The Captain of the I-17, a non-descript man named Kozo Nishino whose peacetime experience was as a merchant mariner, had this thing about Ellwood Beach.

In 1939, as Captain of a small tanker, Kozo had come ashore to view the storage facilities at Ellwood where he was to take on a load of crude oil. Dressed in his best white uniform, Ito climbed the wooden stairs to the main depot (now the far reach of the 13th green of Santa Barbara's Sandpiper Golf Course),only to stumble and fall into a tar ooze which characterizes the area. His hosts laughed as seemed appropriate under the circumstances, but Ito was not amused. He had lost face but he was unable to avenge the afront until 1942. He got revenge, but on May 23rd 1943 we got even. The I-17 was caught on the surface by a section of F-6Fs out of Bougainnville, and sent her to the bottom. I thought you'd like to know how the only Japanese attack on the mainland came about.

Pink loved to play gin rummy for tiddly-winks chips, and he let me win fairly often, accompanying defeat with a loud wail. Sometimes we'd take a checker board down to Holmby Park where old people lawn-bowled in their immaculate white outfits, contrasting so sharply with the carpet smooth green which was off-limits to little boys. Alternately we played that you had to jump, but most fun was when you didn't because Pink would make moves which allowed me to jump four or five men at a time and crown a king in the process.

Pink had the look and manner of a patrician, erect and elegant, with long wavy hair usually reserved for symphony conductors, parted near the middle, and for as long as I can remember, gleaming silver. Fastidious in his attire, he made some slight concessions for our outings by wearing a scarf instead of a tie, and during fall and winter, a sweater under his coat. He was courtly and attentive, whoever his company, and occasionally he told jokes which I didn't get. One of his favorite lines as we'd head off for adventure was, "they're off cried the monkey as he backed into the lawn mower." It wasn't until years later that it dawned on me what he was talking about.

Pat was a little dithery, in fact there was something of the Gracie Allen in her though more refined. She had this way of fixing you with her total attention, while you told her something about as exciting as dishwater, and when you came to the end, exclaim "Oh, Gawd!" as if you had produced a miracle of the first order.

She was big on pictures and kept scrapbooks on everything from friends (me for instance) to places she had been or wanted to go. When it rained, we would sit on the couch and pore through pages and pages of pictures and clippings and notes and we'd giggle at pictures of a skinny girl in an ancient bathing suit that used to be her when she was young.

When we were all at St. Malo, my evenings belonged to Pat. It was generally cool at night and we would have a roaring fire in the living room. My contribution was the driftwood which made wonderful snaps and pops and colors to liven up the stodgier oak or eucalyptus. Pat's favorite chair was overstuffed - I think she was the only one besides me who used it - and I would nestle in her lap while she told me about her girlhood days. To be brutally frank, I wasn't a bit interested in what she had to say except that I loved the softness and smell of her and the magic quality of her voice. I knew she loved me and sometimes I pretended I was asleep when I wasn't so she would carry me to bed.

Pink was daytime fare. He knew things not Mom nor Pop nor Lamar knew. He knew that the orange crate and driftwood conglomeration on the beach in front of the house was a B-24 bomber, loaded out to do damage to the enemy whoever it may have been. He knew that it had a super-secret Norden bombsight, packed sixteen fifty-calibre machine guns, reposed nearly a ton of bombs to bring law and order to our part of the universe, and could in the dead of night transport us to the furthest limits of the planet to assign peace and justice. Such was our B-24.

Sandcastles were our specialty. Pink started me on my career as drip-castle king of the world. When the tide was high early in the morning, he and I would go out and prepare the ramparts. We would make a foundation slightly below the high tide line so that we could dig a deep moat from which to get the wet sand to make the drippings. Pink taught me how to do it, explaining the intricacies of the Gothic arch. What you do is scoop up wet sand with your hands and point them downward in a supplicant position, letting it dribble controllably through your extended fingers in a directed stream. The result, when you become adept, has a keloid texture, lumpy at the base, but filigreed as the line becomes more delicate. Expertly done, you can make wonderfully light and airy structures of arches which, while not rivalling the cathedral at Bath, relegate Coke-cup sand castles to the mediocrity to which they belong.

Also, there were shells. Pink knew about shells, and better still, he knew where they came from and which ones were exciting and which weren't. I had a thing for puka shells - shells with a hole drilled clear through by a predator which allowed you to make a necklace with no further effort on your part. Pink had nothing against pukas, but our early morning shell hunts focussed on alien shells, and he had an uncanny eye. Sand dollars were a favorite of his and he would give me a dime for an unbroken one. "Supply and demand," he told me when I questioned the disparity. "It's the basis of the market economy." I was satisfied and made certain I kept the supply side charged.

Beaches are living entities, and they change. During the late forties, St. Malo's beach was broad and sandy with just enough rocks to keep me occupied skipping them off waves. Driver for the local operation was a sand bar which had built up over a number of years, giving us an outer and inner break. The first or outer line welled up at low tide, producing rollers five to eight feet on the front edge, perfect for board surfing. The second break, a hundred yards from the shore, consisted of crashers, waves in which the front curled well in front of the stem and tumbled precipitously down. These were body-surfing waves requiring guts, anticipation, and luck.

Roddy Stover and I caught the same wave once and I took the skin off my nose and thought severely about what I had done wrong. Roddy buried his head into the sand and snapped his neck. He was stunned, but he was able to reach shallow water. There, his strength and coordination let go and I dragged him above the tide line. It never occurred to me that I could have hurt him. I didn't, but I have been concerned about the possibility ever since.

Pink took charge as soon as he got there, issuing orders and reassuring Roddy that all would be well. The ambulance came and he was transferred gently to a stretcher and borne away. After the ambulance departed, Pink led the way to the Stover's house and explained the situation. Mrs. Stover screamed and ran around in circles and would have gone all the way to the hospital on foot had not Pink offered a plan that took into account her younger son, Hank, who was temporarily unaccounted for, and the fact that Roddy was going to be busy with the doctors. I went looking for Hank at the slough and when we returned fifteen minutes later, Pink had fetched his car and Mrs. Stover was considerably more composed.

Mrs. Keith (I was supposed to call her Aunt Frankie, but she wasn't and I tried not to as often as possible) came over to help out, and Pink ushered them into the car and drove them to the hospital, explaining to me that it would be better if I didn't go. He'd take me there as soon as Roddy could have visitors.

Pink could also be a stern disciplinarian when the need arose, but he kept it between us. I visited Pink and Pat at the Smoke Tree Ranch in Palm Springs where they stayed one winter and spent the first two days horseback riding and swimming. By the third day I was ready for new adventure, but Smoke Tree wasn't really organized for little people. By early afternoon, Pink was worn out by my constant activity and suggested that I take a nap. He took a nap, but I waited until the coast was clear and sneaked out to explore the territory.

Once away from the main compound, things became pretty rustic with scrub trees, sagebrush, and rocks to capture the imagination and provide entertainment. I had gone perhaps a half mile from civilization when I spied a healthy tree stand on the other side of a barbed wire fence. As I got closer I saw that there was a building among the trees, and closer still, I realized that it was a school building. "Abandoned," I told myself and hurled a rock in its direction. A satisfying crash of breaking glass greeted the effort. Another rock, another crash, and so it went for a good five minutes with an easy seventy percent return on investment.

This kind of recreation could have gone on all afternoon, had not the roar of a Jeep interrupted me. I followed its progress in the cloud of dust it raised on the dirt perimeter road and realized with a start it was heading in my direction. It hove into view and tracked straight for me so I waved. The two occupants didn't wave back but continued their advance. As they drew near I could sensed by the set of their jaws that they were not happy. And they weren't.

In point of fact, they were madder than hornets and returning to the bungalow in the back of the bucking and snorting 4-wheeler was about as unpleasant a time as I ever experienced. Pink took me into custody and listened to the men catalog my transgressions. "It'll be all right now," I told myself, but it wasn't. Pink sent me to my room and then went back to the men. After a while the Jeep started up and drove off, but Pink didn't come.

The afternoon wore on and I could hear Pink and Pat talking in their bedroom and twice the phone rang, but still no one came. At last I heard footsteps and the door to my bedroom opened. Pink came in and closed the door softly. I started to say something, but he waved me off.

"That was a terrible thing to do," he began, and he told me of the enormity of my actions. Far from abandoned, the old school building was now used as a club house for retarded children. A teacher had been inside preparing projects when the fusillade began. She bolted and called for help. Luckily, none of the children was there, but considerable damage had been done and the session had to be cancelled for the day.

We discussed various punishments that might be appropriate, and decided that not only would I go there the next day to clean up the mess, but remain there to help with the children and their projects for the rest of my stay. When I arrived at the school, the windows had been replaced, but clean-up took all morning. The teacher eyed me warily, but kept her peace. After the last class for the week, as I was leaving, she shook my hand and thanked me for being a good helper. She even managed a smile.

As far as Pink and Pat were concerned, the incident was closed, and word of it never reached Mom and Pop. Instead, Pink bought himself a baseball glove and suggested we play catch. He wasn't very good at it, but it expanded the ways in which we could be friends.

But sometimes it wasn't so easy for Pink to be my friend and champion. It seems I was perpetually in some kind of trouble or another; a broken window, something spilled in the living room, torn trousers - something to evoke Mom's or Pop's concept of tribulations. They were family matters, and Pink could only watch from a distance and offer solace after the fact.

Then there was the "baby sitter and the front window caper," in which a baseball made junk of a perfectly good foot-square pane of glass. Weezie, Lamar, the baby sitter, and I had been tossing a ball in the front yard when Lamar decided to "burn one in". It was not all the baby sitter's fault because she wore glasses and was not very coordinated, but the throw was imminently catchable. She missed with obvious consequences, but it was no big deal as my record stood at at least a dozen panes. What the heck, the putty rarely had time to dry, and two-weeks allowance paid for the materials. The scoldings had become half-hearted over the years, and Mom had removed anything of value from the line of fire. No big deal.

Except when Mom and Pop got home, Lamar, Weezie, and the baby sitter concocted the story that I had thrown the ball with no one there to catch it. I denied it, of course, without divulging what had really happened. It was a matter of honor. You didn't rat on anyone else, you kept things to yourself. It was honorable, all right, but things took a turn for the worse. Windows were one thing, lying quite another. The conspirators were in too deep to recant and I was adamant in my denials. It was too much for Pop who was at his wits end what to do with me. It never entered his mind that I could be telling the truth, and while Mom might have had a twinge of doubt, she wasn't about to get in the middle of this one. In the parlance, the shit had hit the fan.

Pink stood by for as long as he could, but after the third day of my being confined to my room, he jumped in, erasing more than a decade of the warmest personal friendships that any of them knew. Pink was ostracized, and Pat with him. In the end, it was Hattie who wrung a confession from Lamar which so mortified Pop that he and Mom and Lamar went away on a trip to New York. When they returned, the issue of the window had blown over, but Pink and Pat's visits were rarer, and seldom did they stay for more than an hour or two.

It was about then that Pat started having her problems. ‘Nervousness’ they called it, and when she got nervous enough, skilled and famous doctors - the finest money could buy - took this gentle wonderful lady and hooked her up to a wall socket with a rheostat in between, and zapped her until her overloaded senses agreed not to be nervous for a while. Eventually, there wasn't enough of her brain to be much of anything, much less nervous.

Lamar died, followed shortly by Pop and Pat tried to be helpful in those unsettled days, but it seemed to do her more damage than it did Mom good. Out of the blue, Pink developed a cancer and went downhill rapidly, lying in a stupor for less than a week before succumbing to a malady few of us had a chance to learn to pronounce in the rapidity of its advance. There was a reconciliation between Mom and Pat, but in Pink's case it was more like an amnesty in anticipation of his death.

It seemed to me that one day he was tanned and vigorous, and then overnight he became wan and depleted. He suddenly (so far as I knew) was in tremendous pain, and with his medication, he was unable to focus his thoughts. I wasn't there at the end, but I don't think I would have contributed anything and I'm positive he never missed me. I look back at what I've written I think, "how lacking in depth and detail this seems," but in all honesty, that's the way it was. He went so suddenly and I found I had no desire to remember him in death.

That's when St. Anthony came onto the scene. Almost immediately, Pat started losing things - little things mostly like the car keys or a book of stamps. Her priest told her to make an offering to St. Anthony who was the patron saint of all kinds of things it seems, so she did and felt better for it. Things got worse like the time she got a registered letter from the Coca-Cola Company wondering about a dividend check which had been outstanding for over a year. Mom went through her drawers and found not only that check, but several more besides. It was enough to have financed the Korean War which was in progress at the time.

This is one hell of a digression, but I have to finish the story. Mom became Pat's conservator, and it was decided that the best thing was to put her in a nice nursing home in Pasadena where she would be looked after day and night. Unfortunately, she was farther gone than that and she wandered off one day, naked as a jay bird, and stood in the middle of a major intersection until the police arrived. She hadn't the slightest clue where she was or was supposed to be, but luckily she remembered Mom's name. She had to be placed under tighter security which was a shame except that by then she was too far gone to know about it. Soon after, she went to bed and just didn't wake up. It was a blessing, because the very next week, the Catholic Church disappeared St. Anthony along with a few other relics in the name of ecumenism, despite the fact that he had been responsible for the donation of five percent of Coca-Cola.