



THE INCREDIBLE LIFE OF CHICKI DOWNS

By Marian L. ("Chicki") "The Bra Lady" Downs

As Told To Dona Bakker

"THE INCREDIBLE LIFE OF CHICKI DOWNS"

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Marian L. Downs and Dona Bakker

FOREWORD

Chicki's garment fittings were more than just laying bricks. She was building a cathedral as she loved and cared for the whole person. She was an outspoken, self-confident woman who never hesitated to say things as she saw them. She had the good in each person at heart. All the people who she has blessed over the years, while building her cathedral, are the fruits of her labors, her legacy. Only God knows all the good she did for her clients, all the people she lovingly trained, those of us who loved her and worked with her, and the companies which have manufactured our garments over the years.

A verse in the book of Wisdom reads, "They that trust in Him shall understand the truth; and they that are faithful in love shall rest in Him, for grace and peace is to His elect."

We miss the grand, old lady, but we know she's not really missing us. She is enjoying her well-deserved reward with the Lord she loved so much. I am sure she was welcomed into Heaven with the words, "Come, blessed of my Father."

Love and prayers,

Jean Vistica

INTRODUCTION

It was an absolute joy working with Chicki Downs on her life story. I had known this amazing woman for several years before coming to love and respect her while interviewing her for her book. As the details of her incredible life unfolded, the sense of urgency grew in me to see this project to completion so that her wisdom and life lessons would not be forever lost. After all, she was 90 years old when we began our journey together down Memory Lane.

There was so much more to Chicki Downs than selling custom-fitted bras and teaching proper breast health. Her desire to serve began at a young age in Sunday school. In her 35 years as a Girl Scout leader, 109 of her girls, including her own daughter, became Curve Bar Scouts under her leadership. Recognition as a Curve Bar Scouts was equal to that of an Eagle Scout for the boys. The positive influence Chicki had on these young, impressionable souls will live on for generations.

I can honestly say I have never met a more positive and inspiring woman. A few years ago when Chicki broke her arm, instead of complaining about the pain or the fact that she would have to hire someone to temporarily run her business, she said to me, "This is wonderful! Now I have time to work on my book." She always found the good in every situation, because she was convinced that God had everything under His control.

We moved slowly on the book, but not because of health issues or lapses in memory. No, it was because Chicki was much too busy living her life to spend time writing about it. She was still working, attending conventions, traveling the country, giving motivational speeches, attending Sunday church and mid-week Bible studies, as well as competing in a Wii bowling league. Every time we talked, she had a new story to tell of how God had providentially orchestrated some event or situation, always bringing her new people to bless.

Chicki's entire life was a miracle. She escaped death many times, beginning on that cold, January morning when she was born. From an early age she was assured by her grandfather that Jesus would always have His hand on her life. This wise and insightful counsel continued to motivate Chicki to make the best of every situation. She vowed to finish well by doing whatever God asked of her until he called her Home. And that she did!

Dona Bakker

Chapter 1

For over 40 years I told everyone "These bras are the best thing since popcorn." And then I would prove it to them. "Watch," I would say, as I jumped up and down; "I don't bounce!"

I was 49 ½ years old when I began my new career as The Bra Lady. There was nothing special about that, except that I continued working until I was 94 years old, fitting and selling quality bras to an ever expanding clientele (no pun intended). And, by the way, I may not jump as high, but I still don't bounce.

I have had an extraordinary life. Through the bra business, I have traveled to the four corners of the world and made a good living. But nothing compares to the lifelong friendships I have developed and the opportunities I have been given to help women feel good about themselves.

My life was far from boring before I became The Bra Lady. As I reflect on the past, I realize every experience, every miracle, and every blessing led me to who I am today.

It's been said if we look back, find out where we came from, and the kind of people who lived before us, that is what makes us who we are because we're all part of what came before.

My mother's family, the De Temples, were Huguenots and were driven out of Alsace Lorraine in northern France. When they landed in the United States, they took a horse and dragged their possessions behind them across New York and settled 30 miles outside Buffalo in a little town called Darien.

My grandfather Peter De Temple moved to North Tonawanda, New York where my mother and her two brothers, Charlie and Bill, and sister, Laura, were born. Grandfather De Temple carved merry-go-round animals for a living all of his life. These animals were shipped all over the country. There is a museum in North Tonawanda where some of the animals he created are on display. I understand some of the animals are currently part of the merry-go-round in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

Uncle Bill and Uncle Charlie were both world famous bicycle racers. They won many valuable prizes including diamonds. The Haviland china I used during my married life was one of their prizes. I have since handed it down to my daughter.

Mother was referred to by her family as "nature's last attempt," having been born long after her two brothers had left home and when her sister was 15. Growing up alone, Mother's best friends were the Sunday funnies and comic books.

After six months of piano lessons at the age of 10, my mother's musical talents became apparent. She was not distracted by siblings or neighborhood friends, so music became her life. Her two brothers were both skilled musicians, but my mother was a natural. She could play anything and could change the key with ease in the middle of a song. Starting in the fifth grade, my mother accompanied the first, second, and third grade classes in her school on the piano.

Mother and the piano became the centerpiece of our home, where everyone came to listen and sing along. Music was the only thing that could draw my mother out of herself.

Throughout her life, Mother played the piano at church and at women's organizations such as the Eastern Star. She even accompanied well-known opera singers. As a teenager living in North Tonawanda, she played the piano at the theater during the silent movies. Her sister's three daughters would sit in the front row watching the screen and yelling out to my mother, "Indians, Aunt Ruth, Indians," and my mother would play "Indian" music. Then they'd say, "Oh, he's dying" and she'd play "dying" music. This went on through the entire movie and my mother never missed a beat.

During her early adult years my mother worked as a proofreader for the local newspaper. She was excellent in grammar and spelling. She taught piano lessons until she was well into her 80s, and she only had a high school education.

My father's great-grandfather, Rev. Louis David Emile Wallon, was born in Friedrichsdorf, Prussia to a schoolmaster, Louis Wallon, and Susan Louisa Pivat, the eldest daughter of a prominent family. Rev. Wallon's Christian upbringing took a turn in 1851 towards what was a fulfilling career in the New German Methodist Church beginning in 1851.

Rev. Wallon migrated to the U.S. and settled in New York City. He built a church on Third Avenue and 14th Street and became the first German American Methodist Bishop. He was also a poet and musician who wrote many of the hymns that were well-known to the German Methodist congregations. During the last two years of his life, he devoted his efforts to the Bethany Deaconess Home and Hospital, where he served on the Board of Directors and was their President for many years.

The Wallon family had nine children, one of whom was my grandmother Lydia.

Phillipp Bommer was born in 1827 in Germany, near Munich and was trained as a shoemaker. He migrated to the U.S. It is family lore that Phillipp met Elisabetha Zimmermann on the ship coming over to America.

In 1849, Phillipp settled in Buffalo, New York and married Elisabetha in 1853. They lived behind the shoe shop on Genesee Street and had 14 children. The ninth child was my grandfather, Ferdinand John Bommer. Phillipp created shoes all of his life and everyone in our family has beautiful feet. We always wore good shoes and have no bunions or corns, even into our senior years.

I am most like my father, Ferdinand Jesse Bommer, Jr., who was independent and outgoing with a passion to explore. He was the oldest of three boys. My grandfather had big plans for his sons to follow him in the real estate and insurance business. The middle son, Harold, died from a damaged heart at age 29. He was running for a street car in Toronto, Canada and just fell over and died of a heart attack right there on the street. His heart had been weakened by a near drowning. When he was a little boy, he was caught in the undertow of Lake Erie and his brother Raymond rescued him.

Uncle Raymond joined the family business, but soon found himself unable to get out from under his father's controlling thumb. Raymond, however, stayed in the business until his father's death.

My father Ferd, which is what everyone called him, refused to be dictated to and went his own way. He met my mother in Darien when they were both teenagers. After my Grandfather De Temple died, my mother and grandmother moved to Buffalo so my father came to Buffalo as well. He then married my mother, Ruth Edna DeTemple Bommer, on September 13, 1917.

As my Grandfather Bommer told me from the day I was born, January 21, 1919, Jesus has had His hand on me. We were in the middle of the worst flu pandemic the world had ever seen, or has seen since. Nearly 50,000,000 people lost their lives to the flu between the spring of 1918 and the summer of 1919, 675,000 in the United States alone, which was ten times the number of souls lost in World War I. The flu broke out the same year the war ended and, by the time it had run its course, it had affected nearly 700,000,000 people worldwide.

(https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influenza_pandemic_of_1918)

Infants and the elderly were the most vulnerable to contract the flu. Patients at Lafayette General Hospital in Buffalo, New York where I was born were no exception. Funerals were being held in a makeshift chapel in the room next to where I lay in my mother's arms. The bodies of the deceased could not be released from the hospital for fear of further contamination.

My parents were going to name me Mary Lydia Bommer, but they didn't think Mary flowed well with Lydia, so they changed it to Marian Lydia. I was named after my grandmother Lydia.

Dad nicknamed me Hinky after the French ditty, "Hinky Dinky Parlez Vous," made popular during World War I. Everyone said I looked just like my mother, but that's where the resemblance ended. It was evident early on that I am my father through and through. Unlike me, my mother was very shy and reserved.

On the day I was born, Dad started working for Jewett Refrigerator Corporation, which manufactured refrigerator doors, as well as airplane propellers for war planes. This would be his career for the next 30 years. With only a high school education, he worked his way up from laborer to President of the company. He went to school at night to learn how to design the doors. Being ambidextrous became an asset, as he could work more quickly than most of his coworkers. He could write with his right hand and draw with his left. It was fascinating to watch him write, switching the pencil back and forth between his two hands.

I always felt much closer to my father than my mother, but the bond I had with my Grandfather Bommer was special. He was the only grandparent I can remember, as my mother's father died when she was only 16. My only recollection of my mother's mother was seeing her lifeless body in a coffin in our home at her funeral when I was only 3 or 4 years old. I vaguely remember my Grandmother Bommer as she died when I was 7.

I was Grandfather Bommer's first granddaughter and, after raising three boys, he had reserved a soft spot in his heart just for me. His domineering manner was never exhibited towards me. Grandfather Bommer's religious roots ran deep and he introduced me to Jesus at a very young age. My parents were both Christians, but being around Grandfather Bommer was like reading the Bible. He lived what he believed and everything he taught me has sustained me throughout all of my life's challenges.

Shortly after his wife's death, when I was 7, Grandfather Bommer would take me with him on Saturdays, as he drove all over town collecting premiums on the insurance policies – a quarter here, fifty cents there, a dollar here. Initially he took me along because he loved spending time with me. I soon became an asset to his business. This strong, proud man would never admit to anyone, but he could get lost just going around the block. I had a wonderful sense of direction, especially for a little kid. Once he realized the strength of the radar system in my head, he took me along every week on his entire route. I could tell him what the next street was before even seeing the sign. With my help, he was able to collect from all of his clients in a timely manner, and no one ever knew his weakness.

Chapter 2

I wasn't quite 2 ½ years old when Dorothy Evelyn Bommer came along so, of course, I don't remember not having a sister. After Mother and I dodged the deadly flu, she decided she would never have another baby in a hospital. Ironically, Dorothy was born in the apartment where we lived at the time, but I turned out to be the healthier child. Dorothy's health issues began at 7 months of age when she contracted diphtheria and spent two weeks in the hospital. It was so contagious not even our mother was allowed to visit her. This was very difficult on Mother because Dad was away, installing new refrigerators in all the Statler Hotel rooms.

Dorothy and I both had our tonsils removed when we were very young which, at the time, was a common surgical procedure performed in the doctor's office. We went together to Dr. Deegan's office and were both placed under general anesthesia for the operation. Two hours following the surgery, I was up and ready to go home. Dorothy never took her head off the pillow for two weeks. She was always the sickly one and faced difficult health issues all of her life. I was the active one; nothing could keep me down.

Dorothy and I always got along well for siblings so close in age. I was a little taller because I was older, but as we grew, Dorothy caught up with me. Mother was always a little bit taller than either of us.

When Dorothy was 2 and I was 4, we lived in a flat in North Tonawanda, New York, between the White Steam Laundry and the Post Office. The merry-go-round factory where Grandfather DeTemple worked was across the street.

I was always a handful. One day while playing out in front of our house, two little neighbor girls came along. After some little girl small talk and a few giggles, one of the girls said, "You know, we're having sketti for supper tonight. Would you like to come home to our house and have sketti?"

Well, I loved "sketti," so I went home with them, but I didn't tell anyone. When my mother went outside to call me in for supper, I was gone. Everyone scoured the neighborhood, frantically calling my name, but I was nowhere to be found. The drivers from the White Steam Laundry drove their horse-drawn trucks up and down every street, hoping to see me walking home. The policemen and firemen joined in the hunt.

We lived about six blocks from the Erie Barge Canal which was cause for great concern. It was around 6:30 in the evening and there was talk of dredging the Canal to find the remains of the lost little girl. As everyone in the neighborhood searched and prayed, I suddenly appeared, walking gleefully down the street with the two little girls. We were holding hands and swinging our arms, spaghetti sauce on our faces, oblivious to the drama that had unfolded since my departure from the front yard. When I saw Mother, I exclaimed, "Oh, Mama, they had sketti. It was good sketti. And you know how they ate it? They put their heads way down by the plate and they just shoved it up into their mouths."

My mother's sense of relief quickly turned to anger, but at the same time she was trying not to laugh. Part of her wanted to smack me, I am sure, but one thing she realized that day was that her number one daughter was destined for adventure, and she had no idea how accurate she was.

We moved for a short while to Tonawanda, New York, into a two-story house on Benton Street. The furnace which heated our entire two-story house was in the center of the living room floor. I went to school around the corner. One day when I was in the first grade we were at home and heard the sound of sirens in the distance. As we listened, the piercing noise grew closer. As the sirens became louder and louder, my mother took me upstairs so we could look out the

window and see what was going on. She stood me on the toilet seat in the bathroom so I could watch as my school burned to the ground. I remember the huge flames rising into the sky, a sight that is forever stamped in my memory.

After the school burned down, I went to another school which was near the Erie Barge Canal. From where we lived, I had to walk through a lumber and tar yard. I remember the piles of wood and the strong smell of tar. Though it was tempting to stay in the lumberyard all day and climb the stacks of wood, we were never late for school for fear of the ridicule and embarrassment which tardiness would bring. So I walked through the lumberyard as quickly as I could. One day when I was still in the first grade, I dawdled a bit too long in the lumberyard and was late for class. To prolong the trouble that awaited me, I sat and sobbed on the curb in the coat room until the teacher had to come and coax me to my seat.

The best times in school I can remember were in fourth and fifth grades, because I adored my teachers. My fourth grade teacher, Ms. Bickle, was my favorite because she read to us. I was not a very good reader, but I loved listening to the stories. She read books like "Toby Tyler" and "Heidi." About six weeks into the school year, Ms. Bickle became principal of the school. Doris Eminger, who lived across the street from us and whom we had known for years, became our teacher. Luckily she read to us, too. Several years later I went back to visit and my cousin took me to a retirement home to see Ms. Eminger. She was in her 90s at the time. Amazingly, she remembered me.

Neither Dorothy nor I were as musically talented as our mother, but we did take piano and violin lessons. Mother hoped we would at least learn to appreciate music, which we eventually did. I never liked practicing. I would much rather spend my day outside exploring anything new.

The walk to school was long and boring, but when I went on walks with my dad, we were in no hurry, and the things we saw always sparked interesting conversation. The high speed trolley that went from Buffalo to Niagara Falls ran right by the Erie Barge Canal and was so loud when it passed that we couldn't hear ourselves talking. On one of our walks, we heard a screeching noise on the tracks that told us something was horribly wrong. The trolley had somehow jumped the track. As we approached the scene, we saw bodies strewn everywhere, some with severed limbs. To protect me from the gruesome sight, my dad quickly whisked me away. My memory of the scene is sketchy, but what I did see has remained with me since that awful day.

In the middle of my second grade year, my parents bought a house on Mang Avenue in Kenmore, New York. It was a lovely residential village in Tonawanda Township. I went all through school in Kenmore, beginning at Delaware Avenue Elementary School, which was about a four-block walk from our house. We were convinced that Buffalo, New York had the worst winter weather, with its piercing cold wind and blustering snow storms. Our eyes were the only thing exposed as we bundled up for the long, chilly walk to school.

I can recall going down to the mercantile on Delaware Avenue and looking at all the merchandise they carried. I also visited the florist shop that was owned by my parents' best friends. They had two children close to our age and the four of us would play hide-and-go-seek in their hot house. I remember the fresh smell of the dirt and the fragrant flowers and what fun we had there. Maybe that's why I have always loved gardening, which was something my father and I also enjoyed doing together. I have been blessed with green thumbs. I said that to my firstborn granddaughter once and she took hold of my thumbs and exclaimed, "Grandma, they're not green, they're pink."

Once while gardening with my father, he was standing at the fence in the side yard visiting with the man next door. They were talking about a "crazy man named Lindbergh" who was flying an airplane all the way over the Atlantic Ocean. The two men debated whether or not Mr. Lindbergh would make it across the Atlantic. And, of course, it was on the front page of the newspaper, the "crazy" Mr. Lindbergh did actually fly across the Atlantic, and what a reception he received when he landed in a field in Paris, France on May 21, 1927!

The bank was two blocks from our house in Kenmore and upstairs from the bank was a beauty shop. Dorothy was blessed with "Shirley Temple" curls, but "Buster Brown" was the only hairdo that worked for my straight, stringy locks. So one day my mother took me in for a permanent wave. The beautician took sticks and wrapped my hair around them and then steamed it. The permanent solution smelled so awful it made me nauseous and my eyes burned. On rare occasions my mother would let me have a manicure and I was allowed to choose my color of polish. I chose mauve, purplish-red and to this day that is the only color polish I have ever worn. I love purple. Maybe it's because my middle name is Lydia. In the Bible, Lydia was known as the seller of exquisite garments with expensive, purple dye. All throughout my life, whenever I hoped for something special to happen, I would wear something purple. Seems every time I did, I was successful. I guess it really is my color.

As young girls living in Kenmore, Dorothy and I had two dogs. Trixie was the first, a brown Daschund that had been run over by a bus and was permanently injured. She had to sit with her rear legs up in the air off to the side. Trixie would let Dorothy and me dress her in doll clothes. We only had her for about a year and a half, but she provided us many incredible memories.

We also had a Boston Bull Terrier we named Cleopatra. "Cleo" slept in the kitchen underneath the stove, which had legs that provided just enough room for her bed. We would be sitting in the living room or the sun room and one of us would say "I think I'll go to the store" and Cleo would be at the door before we could get there. She loved to go everywhere with us. We had Cleo for about 16 years. In fact, she was still around after I was married.

Even without television we were never bored. We always had our creative minds and the neighborhood was our playground. We played kick the can and hopscotch and I loved doing cartwheels in the yard. We made doll houses out of orange crates, painted each room and built our own miniature furniture. Five doors down from our house lived a dressmaker who had the best garbage. On garbage collection day Dorothy and I dug through her can, collecting the remnants of material swatches she had thrown away. We used them to decorate our doll houses and make doll clothes. The woman had children our age and knew what we were doing. As long as we didn't make a mess, she was fine with it. All the children in the neighborhood came to our garage with their doll houses and we would play together for hours. I never sat idle, and am still on the move.

There was a field next to our house where all the kids in the neighborhood would gather. We would dig a hole for a charcoal fire and roast potatoes which we called "spuds." In the summer we picnicked on the field, and in the winter, after it flooded and froze, we skated on it.

At age 9 I began babysitting for money. I remember watching twin girls who lived next to the field. I would watch them at our house. We had a brick fireplace with a mantle and bookcases on each side. Those little girls, still in diapers, would climb up on a chair and walk the length of that book case and back. They were like little wind-up dolls, always running in opposite directions.

Whenever I babysat at someone else's house, I loved thumbing through their magazines, looking at the fashions of the Roaring Twenties. The models were gorgeous in their flapper style

dressess. My mother had one of those dresses that she wore to the Ziegfeld Follies in New York when she went with my father on one of his business trips. In high-heels my mother was actually taller than my dad.

Before leaving on one of those business trips, Dad told me and my sister if we stopped biting our fingernails, he would bring us each a parasol from New York. That was enough incentive for us and we immediately stopped biting our nails. Dorothy and I couldn't wait to show our friends the beautiful, brightly colored, floral printed parasols our Dad brought us from New York City.

Chapter 3

I can't remember ever not going to church. As a family we attended the Kenmore Methodist Church which was across the street from the junior and senior high schools. We were all very active in the church. My mother played the piano and my father formed the Newsteader Sunday school class for younger, married couples. Sometimes he taught the class and at other times others would teach.

Every Sunday, before the minister gave his sermon, all the children gathered in the front of the church while someone would give them a little sermon. Then I would take the children out of the church and downstairs to the auditorium. Sometimes I had 40 or 50 kids from 2 to 9 years old. I was only 11 or 12 at the time, but I knew how to run children. I had been babysitting for nearly three years and I was a natural.

As I paraded these children down the stairs, my mother felt sorry for me. She thought I was crazy to volunteer to do this, so she would accompany the little 2 and 3 year olds. By the time she arrived in the auditorium with the wee ones, I had all the older kids lined up on the platform and giving them instructions.

"Now this is what we're going to do today. I'm going to read you a story and we're gonna sing some songs and if ya don't behave, I'm gonna tell your folks." And they believed me, so they behaved perfectly. My mother would ask me, "How did you dare do that?" I definitely did not take after her. She never understood me, especially my connection with younger children. I earned their respect and they always responded positively to my redirection. As a teenager I also taught vacation Bible school where I had as many as 30 kids in my class.

When I was 10 years old, I joined the Girl Scouts which met at my church. I stayed in Girl Scouts until I was 17. I attended Girl Scout camp for two weeks every summer and always had a wonderful time. I worked my way up through the ranks and became a Curved Bar Scout which, from 1940 to 1963, was the equivalent of the Eagle Scout for the Boy Scouts. The highest honor was changed in 1963 to First Class Scout. I enjoyed every aspect of scouting, from the badge work to the camping and hiking and camaraderie with the other Scouts. I knew that if I ever had a daughter I would want her to be a Girl Scout and experience the same excitement and adventure.

Chapter 4

When I was about 15 and Dorothy was 13, Dad took us on a two-week vacation to Fern Cottage, a lovely resort in Orillia, Ontario, Canada. It had a lake where we fished and rowed. I think Dad chose this spot because of the golf course. For us city folk, spending time in the great outdoors was a special adventure.

There was an island in the middle of the lake which was an Indian burial site. In the evenings we went across the lake to a large building where they served all our dinners. It was a nice vacation for mother since she didn't have to cook. She wasn't a very good cook, so it was a treat for all of us. After dinner we gathered at a small house which had been turned into a dance hall, complete with juke box and dance floor. My parents loved to dance.

We all had such a grand time, we returned the following year for vacation. I especially remember that second trip when we traveled to the resort after dark. It was a long drive, about 80 miles north of Toronto, Canada, and we needed to find a place along the way to spend the night. We had seen some lovely motels along the way and Father said "No, no, I want to wait until we get above Toronto." Well as it turned out, there weren't any nice motels north of Toronto. We ended up in a room the size of a chicken coop. It was rainy and windy and the boughs of the trees beat on the roof all night long. We slept little that night and Mother was extremely upset with Dad for not stopping when there were nice motels.

We were fortunate our dad had a good job. Here we were, going on vacation during the Great Depression, when most people were struggling just to feed their families.

Once Dorothy and I were old enough to stay home alone, Dad would take Mother out dancing nearly every Saturday night. As soon as they had driven away, Dorothy and I would sneak downstairs and turn on the radio. We didn't have television in those days and we were only allowed to listen to certain programs. The "Lux Radio Theater" was the longest running anthology series on radio, featuring many famous stars. It was one full hour of entertainment, performed in front of a live audience, a wonderful theater program with a good storyline. There were other hour-long series on the radio, just like we have on TV today. Dorothy and I would sit in one chair together with the lights off so we could see the driveway. As soon as we saw the lights of Dad's car, we'd quickly turn off the radio, sneak upstairs, and pretend we were sleeping. Dorothy and I enjoyed the radio shows, but we also liked getting away with being a bit rebellious.

Later I talked my dad into buying me my own radio. My Philco kept me company for hours. I never have liked being alone, and even today I always have the television on.

Our neighbors across the street, the Jameses, ran a dance school. They had two daughters about our age. For many years Dorothy and I attended the James' dance school and became quite proficient in all the dance steps. One night the Jameses held a dance at their school. I was thrilled when a 17 year old boy asked me to dance. I was only 12 or 13.

My father and Mr. James were both German, about the same size physically, around 5' 5" with medium build. Whenever they were together they acted like little kids. They would save up tin cans for months and buy giant firecrackers. Then they would have me and Dorothy, my mother, Mrs. James, and their two girls sit on the curb while these two grown men went into the middle of the street and lit the firecrackers which they placed underneath a row of tin cans. The challenge was to see who could blow their tin can the highest. Everything was a contest with them. I suppose if they were alive today, they'd be watching every sporting event on television and betting against each other.

My father loved people, another trait I shared with him. He was a likeable character and all of our friends adored him. Our house was where everyone in the neighborhood wanted to hang out. My parents made it fun. Dad would play card games and share his wonderful sense of humor with us all. We had an upright piano on the sun porch where my mother would play and we would all stand around her singing all the popular tunes.

Our parents and several of the neighbors would play bridge on the weekends at different houses. One evening when Dorothy and I were in high school, my mother and father had a couple over to play bridge. The woman's name was Ernestine, but I can't recall her husband's name. They had no children, but, nonetheless, Ernestine was an expert in raising children, or so she thought. She never hesitated to tell everyone else how to do it. Dorothy and I were getting ready for a formal dance at school. We came downstairs in our party dresses and our dates were there to pick us up. Ernestine turned and looked at Dorothy and me and asked, "Where are your gloves? You're certainly not going to a dance without your gloves on."

I looked at Dorothy and exclaimed, "Oh, we forgot our gloves." I grabbed Dorothy by the arm and we went back upstairs. We came back downstairs, each wearing a pair of oversized, sheepskin gloves. My mother was mortified. Sometimes my sense of humor was just too much for her. Ernestine was indignant. She remarked, "Well, I never!" My dad and Ernestine's husband were visibly amused, but tried to suppress their laughter to appease the women.

I attended Kenmore Junior High and Kenmore High School. I was never involved in sports in school. I loved geography and history and yearned to travel someday to all the places I had read about.

As I said, Mother was a terrible cook. Her mother was so old when she gave birth for the last time, whatever Mother learned about cooking was by trial and error, mostly error. She did learn to sew and made most of our clothes as we grew up. I was too busy to sit down and let Mother teach me to sew. It was in Miss Cook's seventh and eighth grade home economics class that I learned to cook and quickly developed a love of sewing. I made my own eighth grade graduation dress. It was a pretty, long organdy dress with red dots on it, form fitting with a flared, circular skirt from my knees down, with ruffles across the front all the way around the neckline. I made a lot of other clothes and enjoyed making them. Miss Cook would be really proud of me. Here I am, in my 90s, and I'm still tying the threads at the end of a seam just as she taught me to do.

During my junior year of high school, I can't remember why, but I wasn't happy at school. Grandfather Bommer knew I was not my usual, bubbly self, and that upset him because I was always his favorite and he wanted only the best for me. He suggested I attend Houghton Academy, which is down in the southern part of New York State, south of Rochester and north of Jamestown. It is a combination college and academy.

Since it was Grandfather Bommer's idea, of course my parents felt it was a good decision to change schools. As I said, my dad was one of the lucky ones. He had a job during the Depression and did well financially so he could afford the tuition.

I spent my entire junior year at Houghton Academy and it turned out to be the best thing for me and for my future. It was there that I developed a deep relationship with the Lord. Houghton was a Wesleyan Methodist College. Some referred to them as "holy rollers." And here I was a member of the United Methodist Church, where there was never a mention of the Holy Ghost.

Upon my arrival at Houghton, there was a revival meeting every night for two weeks. I wrote to my mother and said, "They're all crazy. They yell out in the sermon 'Praise the Lord,

Hallelujah.' They talk when the preacher's preaching." I was aghast at their behavior, but before the two weeks were up, I found myself kneeling at the altar and giving my life to God.

I remember that day as if it just happened. There was a full moon and I had to walk up a steep hill back to my dorm. I felt 18 stories tall. My grandfather had been praying for me since the day I was born and it was because of him that I was attending this school.

There were six students residing in our dorm. My roommate, Florence, was from Rahway, New Jersey. She was very different, 18 years old and did not know anything about life. She thought cows lifted their leg on a tree like a dog to relieve themselves. Oh how she made me laugh. If I told her something new, she would say, "No, that's not true, you're kidding me." She wouldn't believe what I told her. I may have been a city girl, but she had never been in the country before in her life. She became so homesick it was pitiful.

Florence eventually settled into the school and before long she met a really nice farm boy. One night she came into the dorm crying hysterically. I asked, "What's wrong?" She said "Roy kissed me and now I'm pregnant." I said, "Did he only kiss you?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Then you're not pregnant." She said "Are you sure?" I replied, "Yes, I'm sure." She was so naive.

The entire experience of my junior year was refreshing for me. It was good for me to get away. I loved being there. The most beautiful, sweetest smelling wild flowers grew in the woods behind the school. I loved hiking those hills, to sit down in the sunshine and see God's beauty all around. I would bring some of the flowers back to brighten my room.

Just before my senior year in high school, I became very ill. It was believed I was on the verge of tuberculosis. I spent the next nine months in bed. I was not allowed to go to school until my fever was normal for seven consecutive days, which took nearly ten months. I resumed my senior year at Kenmore High school and graduated at age 19 with my sister and approximately 400 other students in 1938.

Upon my return to Kenmore High School I was a much happier person than when I had left to attend Houghton Academy. I had a crush on my math teacher when I was a senior. Now that I look back, he probably wasn't that much older than I was. I also had a male friend who gave me rides to school in his convertible. I don't think we were romantically associated since I can't even remember his name. I do remember he wasn't very tall, but he did have the most dashing, wavy, blond hair. It was nice not to have to walk the mile to school in the rain or a freezing cold, 12-foot high tunnel of snow.

I do remember the boy who took me to the senior prom. Dick Biggy. Several years later he was killed getting off a boat in Iwo Jima in the Philippines, leaving behind his wife who was pregnant with their first child. I can still see Dick Biggy walking through the field, coming to my house to take me to the prom, carrying a box with the corsage he bought for me.

When I was 16 I met one of my dearest friends, Carmelita (Carma for short), who was my Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Raymond's housekeeper. Carma also helped take care of their three little children. Carma introduced me to her friends who were all close to her age or older. It didn't matter to any of them that I was nearly three years younger. We all hit it off and became a tightly knit group.

One of the boys in the group, Carl Draper, liked me very much. Even though he was five years my senior, we became very good friends and dated each other off and on for about five years. We would go to movies or out with the crowd. There were usually 8 or 10 of us. I was honored that they accepted me into the group, since I was so much younger. I'm guessing it was because I was so active and enthusiastic that they were drawn to me. Every once in a while Carl dated Carma, but most of the time he went with me.

When I was 20, going on 21, Carl and I decided we wouldn't date for a whole year to see if we really wanted to be married and spend the rest of our lives together. You know the old saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Well, that's where our romance ended, because that was the year I met, went steady with, became engaged to, and married Barney Downs. Once I met Barney, it was clear to me that Carl and I were not meant to be with each other. Our fun was over and it was time to move on. Interestingly, Barney was the same age as Carl. I guess I can say I always went for older men.

Carma is still alive, living in Dayton, Ohio. Carl passed away several years ago. Three weeks before he died, I went to Buffalo to visit my cousin Shirley and she took me to see him. We had a nice visit, fondly reminiscing about old times. It was a blessing that the Lord allowed us this reunion shortly before he died.

Chapter 5

You've probably heard the term "whirlwind romance." Ours started with a double date, but I was with the other guy. My friend Harriet was with Barney and I was with a boy named John.

We went to a dance at the Statler Hotel where Ted Fio Rito and his orchestra were playing. At one point during the evening we switched partners and Barney and I danced the Strauss Waltz set of six songs. As we flowed across the dance floor, it felt so natural, as if we were meant to be together. John and I gave Harriet and Barney a ride home and Barney said to me, "I'm going to kiss Harriet goodnight, so I might as well kiss you, too!" And he did, right in front of John and Harriet.

Barney's parents were visiting him from South Dakota, so he didn't call me right away. It took two weeks and I had just about given up on him. As soon as his parents left, he called Harriet for my phone number.

Our first official date was a movie on a Monday night. I can even remember the movie - "Only Forever" starring Mary Martin and Bing Crosby. Tuesday night he came to my house and asked if I would watch him play baseball in the public field at the end of my street. Our house was only four doors down from the ball field. That was our second date. During the game Barney caught a fly ball and fell and broke his arm, so he was in a cast for our entire courtship, which lasted two months.

On Labor Day, 1940, Barney (Byron Enoch Downs, Jr.) asked me to marry him. We didn't understand the process, figuring we could just drive down to Pennsylvania and get married. When we arrived in Pennsylvania, we were told we couldn't get married because we had not had our blood tests. We returned home, still single, but we didn't give up on our plan. We had our blood tests, obtained our license, and went hunting for a furnished apartment.

On Saturday, September 21, we decided we would be married on Saturday, the 28th in Kenmore. The next night at about 10 o'clock, after arriving home from a date with Barney, I told my mother, "I'm getting married next Saturday at 4 o'clock. I'm wondering if you'd like to come to my wedding." Well, of course, she was hysterical. She just couldn't believe that Barney and I were getting married.

In the meantime, my dad had accepted a job with the Sanitary Refrigerator Door Company in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and my folks were preparing for the move. Barney and I had talked it over and we decided that either we would get married or forget it, since I would have been forced to move with my family. We were convinced that long-distance romances never worked.

My father was in Fond du Lac training for his new job and my mother was in the middle of packing for the move. Now she had the added stress of planning a wedding.

My mother called my grandfather and told him, "Marian wants to get married on Saturday at 4 o'clock and I don't know what to do." He said, "Get in the car and come right over." By the time we got to my grandfather's house, he had the whole family there and they all stayed up until 2 a.m. planning my wedding. One aunt said she'd handle the reception. The other aunt said she'd be in charge of the church, and mother was to go out and buy us the clothes we needed for the wedding. The one aunt that was taking care of the church made all the arrangements for the wedding.

When my sweet grandfather realized that Barney couldn't afford to buy me an engagement ring, he gave Barney my grandmother's diamonds and took him to the jewelry store to have it set in a ring for me. I still wear that ring today.

During the planning for my wedding, my mother asked, "Do you realize you're gonna have to look at this man across the breakfast table for the rest of your life?" I said, "Yes, Mother. I know. I will be happy doing that." She shook her head and said, "Well, I don't know if I even wanted to do that with your father."

The day I met Barney I knew this was the man with whom I was to spend my life. And what a glorious life we had together. When he proposed, my Irish beau said to me, "If you don't come down the aisle in a green dress, I won't marry you." He was only kidding, of course, but I wore a green dress nonetheless, and a green hat and green shoes, along with a white fur bunny jacket my mother bought me, accentuated with long, white opera gloves. I only weighed 97 lbs. on my wedding day and was still shorter than either of my parents. Dorothy, my maid of honor, wore a maroon dress and hat with a white bunny jacket and white gloves. Barney brought me a gardenia corsage to match my wedding flowers. As we finished dressing for the wedding, Dorothy and I put on our gloves and laughed as we remembered Ernestine and the sheepskin gloves.

My father came home just in time to give me away. He kept saying "Are you sure you want to do this? You don't even know this guy. You've only gone with him a short period of time." I said, "Yes, Dad, I know this is the man I want to marry." So at 4 p.m. we proceeded down the aisle. There was my handsome groom, with his intoxicating smile and, by the way, he had his cast removed from his arm just in time for our wedding.

Following the wedding, everyone gathered at our house for a reception. Aunt Charlotte played the organ at the wedding and Aunt Rose prepared all the food and decorations for the reception. It was fabulous. This took the pressure off of my mother, since we only gave them five days' notice that we were getting married. Grandfather Bommer had a very large family, seven or eight siblings, but I really only knew two of his sisters, and his brother. All three of them came to our wedding.

Barney and I were anxious to slip away from the reception before anybody could chase us. So we called a cab, snuck upstairs above the breakfast nook, and I dropped our belongings over the porch. We climbed down and crept around the bushes. Our taxi pulled up, we got in the car and went to our hotel without anyone even knowing we had left. We had rented a furnished apartment on Riley Street in Buffalo, but we didn't move in until after our honeymoon – our one-day honeymoon in a downtown Buffalo hotel. The Lord gave us a big, picturesque, full moon so we would never forget our first night as husband and wife.

Barney was born in Indiana but, as a little boy moved to South Dakota. Times were difficult for them. It was during the dust bowl and his father worked hard, long hours to support his family and keep food on the table. People were moving from town to town, trying to find work and a better location. Barney's father became a cattle buyer in Mitchell, known as the corn palace city of South Dakota.

According to his mother, Barney was a very patient, quiet little boy and he used to sit at her feet and run the tread pedal on her sewing machine. She was diabetic and her legs were very weak, which made it difficult to run the machine. Without Barney's help, she would not have been able to sew for her family. She described him as a small, sweet boy, never rambunctious. She gave birth to 12 children and only two of the 12 survived, Barney and his older sister.

When Barney was old enough, he worked for his father and many times would spend 12 hours a day on a horse. When he graduated from high school, he went to the South Dakota School of Mines in Rapid City for a year and then was offered a position with the Coast and Geodetic Survey. He took the position and worked in 27 states over the next year and a half. He went from town to town measuring sea levels.

While in New England, Barney petitioned to attend the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. He was accepted and spent the next year at the Academy. He loved studying there and was highly proficient in math. He was always good with numbers. Unfortunately for Barney, he had a difficult time learning Spanish, which was one of the requirements for graduation, so he flunked out at the end of the year.

When Barney left the Coast Guard Academy, he traveled to New York and was hired as an usher in Radio City Music Hall, where he worked for eleven months. He could tell you anything you wanted to know about Radio City Music Hall, including how many seats there were and which seats had the best view of the stage.

Barney then became a salesman for Remington Rand, marketing record keeping programs to companies. This job suited his personality and he stayed with them for the next 18 years. He was trained in Washington, D.C. and started his career there. A few months later a man named Al Sears in the home office, who liked Barney very much, invited him to come to Buffalo, New York to work in the home office in the systems division as his assistant. The programs developed by Remington Rand helped companies to manage their record keeping and saved them money in the process. He enjoyed the work and did it well. He was Al Sears' administrative assistant. This is where I entered Barney's life, and oh what a life we had together.

Our first home on Riley Street was directly around the corner from a YWCA where I taught knitting to women in their 60s. The Red Cross donated wool and we knitted sweaters for children overseas. I could knit a sweater with my eyes closed, but I didn't know how to iron a shirt. I spent two days standing at the window of the laundry on the corner, watching the women iron. I told these women my challenge and they taught me the right way to iron a shirt, and once I knew what I was doing, I did it well. I could be the good wife and keep my husband's shirts washed and ironed.

Chapter 6

The first of October, 1940, my folks moved to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and took Dorothy with them. Barney and I stayed in New York, but we were not alone. Many relatives were there to help us. Dad was assistant vice president and then he eventually became president of the refrigerator company. He was extremely ambitious and very bright. He took classes and kept educating himself along the way. He was truly a self-built man.

Things were heating up in the War in Europe. In 1941 I found out I was pregnant, but I lost the baby at six weeks. I had two more miscarriages and was beginning to wonder if I would ever be able to carry a child full term.

During this time, Dorothy was not happy living in Fond du Lac. So she returned to Kenmore in April and married Dave Rackliffe at the Kenmore Methodist Church. I was Dorothy's matron of honor. She wore a formal, white wedding dress with a veil, which was much more traditional than my Irish attire at my wedding.

After walking down the aisle, I felt a bit lightheaded. I looked at the preacher and exclaimed, "I think I'm gonna faint." He told me to "just kneel down, pray, and stay there." So I knelt down and stayed there, like he said. When the happy couple had said their vows and it was time to leave the altar, Barney came and walked me back down the aisle. They laid me down on the couch in the reception room in the back of the church. The following day I went to the doctor and found out I was pregnant.

The pregnancy was fairly easy, except that I was tired all the time. When I went into labor I called the doctor and she said to come to the hospital right away. It was a magnificent, sunny Sunday afternoon and the newly fallen snow was glistening. So, before going to the hospital, Barney took me for a ride around Delaware Park to see the snow. When we finally arrived the doctor asked, "Where have you been?" An hour and a half later, December 14, 1941, just one week following the attack on Pearl Harbor, we had our baby girl.

My mother was there to see her first born grandchild. I told her I wanted to name the baby Shari. Mother said, "She'll be a freak if you name her Shari." So we named her Sharon Ruth Downs, and what does everyone call her? Shari.

Early in my pregnancy with Sharon, we decided we needed a bigger place. We had moved into an upper flat on Westgate Avenue. I vividly remember coming home from the hospital with Sharon on Christmas morning. Everybody on our street knew I had given birth and, when we pulled into the driveway, I noticed the neighbors had put up a tree with presents underneath for the new baby. It was such a surprise and a blessing for our little family.

At that time the bakery delivered directly to our house. In fact, it was the same deliveryman we had when I was living with my folks. He came to know me very well and how I craved chocolate when I was pregnant. I wanted any kind of chocolate I could sink my teeth into. The deliveryman wanted me to have a girl so badly that every day he would leave three chocolate cookies at the back door. He kept this up throughout my entire pregnancy. When I had my little girl, he was so excited, he brought me a giant cream puff with about an inch of chocolate fudge on top.

I set up the bassinet in the kitchen and every day I would tend to my chores and sing to Shari "Rosie O'Day, Rosie O'Day..." We had a good time together, just me and my little baby girl. She was a happy baby and laughed a lot. The people in the neighborhood would come and visit us regularly. Aunt Laura came to visit wearing a big, black hat with a wide brim. Underneath the brim it was bright red. When Aunt Laura held Shari wearing that hat, Shari gave

her the biggest smile. Aunt Laura was a kind woman with snow white hair, which she had from the time she was 27 years old.

A lovely couple with 2-year-old twin girls lived downstairs from our flat on Westgate. They had their hands full with those two little pistols. Even when their mother harnessed them with a rope tied to the garage door, those girls could maneuver their way out and were soon headed in different directions with their mother chasing after them. If I had had half the energy of those two little girls when I was pregnant, I would have had a much easier time.

We had a dining room in our flat but no dining room furniture, so we went back to the good, ol' crate boxes. Barney nailed four crate boxes together and we painted them and we put our wedding china in them. We had a card table in the center of the dining room and covered it with a table cloth. My grandfather gave us a wicker couch and chair and my mother gave us some furniture. So every stitch of furniture we had was given to us. Sharon slept in the crib that my father had made for me. Before moving to Westgate Avenue, we had been living in a furnished apartment and had nothing of our own. My mother gave us her bird's eye maple bed and dresser set. We had most of our hand-me-down furniture for many years.

Barney was very successful at Remington Rand. He was moving up in the company. He didn't have to serve in World War II because he was designing record keeping forms for all the armed services. These forms were used to keep track of all the equipment and the food the military was using. He was too valuable at what he did and they wanted him to stay right where he was. I am so grateful that my husband was always there for his family.

During the war years when we had to ration everything, my grandfather would go early in the morning to the farmer's market and buy bushels of apples, tomatoes, and various other produce. He would bring them to us and we would can them. I canned everything including peaches and pears. I spent hours peeling the fruit and preparing it for canning. With Shari in the bassinet in the kitchen, I sterilized jars, prepared the fruit and made sure they were all packed properly and stacked in the cellar. We had a cellar full of all kinds of canned goods. The food didn't spoil, so we ate it all winter long. After the war was over, we finished eating everything in those jars, and then I threw the jars away. I could have reused them, but I swore I would never can another piece of fruit unless we had another war. Canning was a big job, one I thankfully never had to do again.

We lived in the flat on Westgate for less than two years. From there we moved to Wannaka which is located along Lake Erie, east of Buffalo. All this time we had no car, so we would take the bus into town. We celebrated Shari's first birthday in our lovely cottage.

On Saturday nights we would hire a babysitter and go to the tavern along the lake shore. We would dance and sing together all evening. There were no theaters nearby and we didn't have television yet, but we knew how to entertain ourselves. We would also have friends over for dinner and a game of bridge.

At one point in Barney's career with Remington Rand, he was only home three weekends during the year. He traveled all over the United States putting on trade shows. He would set up everything for the show and spend the entire weekend conversing with the attendees and the other vendors at the show. It was difficult for me to be home without him.

We were only in Wannaka for about six weeks. We shared a house with an older couple and then moved to Cheektowaga, a suburb east of Buffalo near the airport. We were there for several years. We lived in an up and downstairs duplex next door to Geri and Henry Davis, a couple who had no children. They fell in love with Shari. Shari spent almost as much time with Geri as she did with me. Soon thereafter they adopted a little boy. I'll never forget the day the busy, 26 lb. 1 year old was placed on Geri's lap. She looked at me with bewilderment and asked,

“Marian, what am I gonna do with it?” So I taught her how to bathe him and how to feed him and helped her set up the nursery. They named him Douglas. He became Shari’s play pal and they spent many hours together.

It was nice to have Geri there. We lived on Ellen Drive and my sister rented the duplex around the corner, so that our two backyards met. By then Dorothy had one son, Gary. This was as close to country living as either Dorothy or I had ever experienced and it was good for the children to have each other.

Did it ever snow in the wintertime! One winter we were snowed in for three days. We still didn’t have a car, so we had to walk everywhere, including the grocery store and way down to the corner to catch the bus. There were two cars on our street that were covered with snow from December to April. We almost had to tunnel in the snow to each other’s houses and we’d share food because we couldn’t get to the store. The husbands had trouble catching the bus to get to work and back. Henry who lived in the other half of our house had a car and he and Barney would share in the shoveling duties. By the time winter was over, the snow was about 12 feet high.

Chapter 7

In 1945, when Remington Rand changed their home office from Buffalo to New York City, we moved to Crestwood, north of New York City. I lost two babies after I had Shari and then I became pregnant again. We lived in a nice, big, two-story house on top of a hill. It had a back porch off the upstairs bedroom. Out of our window we could see the train coming and going from New York City. We could walk all along the tracks. Flocks of Canadian geese and ducks congregated in the park down the street.

We moved into our home six weeks before my due date. The lady who lived there before us had come from a big house and she never got rid of anything. She had boxes from the floor to the ceiling in most of the rooms and the place was filthy. It took three and a half vans to move her out of there. They moved us in with all her mess and dirt. I couldn't stand it. I felt like my skin was crawling. So, even though I was expecting a baby in six weeks, I spent days cleaning up the place.

In May we moved in and Barry was supposed to be born around the 20th of June, 1945, but he didn't come until the 20th of July. Apparently he had become wedged in a "funny spot" and would not come out. The doctors felt they could not take him by C-section and nothing else could be done. They called my father because they were not sure I would survive.

After four false alarm trips to the hospital, I was sent home, where I changed the sheets, got into bed and told everyone "I'm not pregnant; it's just a stone." Then little Barry decided it was time to join the world.

Barney had to call the ambulance and halfway to New Rochelle, Barry (Byron Enoch Downs, II) was born. I kept saying "I'm giving birth to a grapefruit" because that's exactly how it felt. We got to the hospital, but our baby had already been born. They whisked me away, cleaned me up and put me in a room.

Barney was sitting with me in the hospital room and I asked him, "What's that funny noise out there?" It was 3:00 in the morning. He went outside my room to look, and when he returned he said "You'll never believe it. That's our baby sucking his thumb." Barry was sucking so loudly we could hear him clear down the hall.

Our new son was very healthy, but he had done a job on my cervix. Turns out I was in labor the whole time I was cleaning up the house, but the pains would stop before it got to the point where he could push himself out. He was born face up instead of face down.

The births of both of our children were surrounded by headline news. First, Shari was born seven days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. And the day we brought Barry home from the hospital, we heard on the radio that a plane hit the Empire State Building.

Barry was such a strong baby, when we put him on the changing station, we had to hang onto him because he would arch his back and, with his heels, he'd try to push himself right off the end of the table. We caught him a couple of times doing that, so we had to really watch him. He was extremely active for a newborn, perhaps because he was a month old by the time he was born.

When my mother came to visit, Barney would babysit so she and I could go into New York City and see a Broadway play. I can't remember all of the plays we saw, but one of them was "Bloomer Girl" starring Nanette Fabray. I also went with Barney into the City to see plays. On one of our trips, after the play we went next door where the Three Sons musical group was playing. On our way out of the building, I fainted dead away. I was taken to a couch out in the hotel. The Three Sons came by and they held my hand and they patted my head and consoled

me. After a few minutes I was fine. We left the hotel, took a taxi to the train station and caught the train back to Crestwood. I still don't know why I fainted, but I was alright after that.

When we moved to New York, we were in the middle of World War II. Food was being rationed and we were issued food stamps. When I went to Tuckahoe to do my shopping at the A&P (Atlantic and Pacific Grocery Company), there was very little meat, but lots of East Coast fish, lobster, and crab.

When Barry was 3 weeks old, the little girl down the street was jealous that Sharon had a baby brother, so she bit him on the hand and almost bit off his toes. I had to take him to the doctor who bandaged up his foot and his hand. This happened on the day the War ended. We saw everybody celebrating in the streets on our way to the doctor's office. We had confetti up to our armpits. When we returned home, we joined in the celebration. I gave Shari two pot lids and she and I walked down 125th Street and she banged the pot lids together and we yelled, "Hooray, Hooray." That was a night to remember. Thank God, the War was finally over.

On Halloween when Barry was just a few months old, we took Shari trick-or-treating around the neighborhood. The next morning when I got up, I found her in Barry's crib feeding him candy that she had collected. She said she was "sharing" with her little brother.

Shari was a lovely little girl, and nobody could believe how well she talked. One time when she was ill with a fever, the doctor came to the house and was examining her. She looked at him and politely said, "Please don't put that cold stethoscope on me," and the doctor said, "What did you say?" She said "Please don't put that cold stethoscope on me." He said, "How can she talk like that, she's only 3 years old?" I said, "Well, she can say anything."

Grandfather Bommer loved to come to our house to visit, but since he was still working, selling real estate and insurance, he wouldn't show up until after 8 p.m. Shari would already be in bed, but we would wake her up so she could play with her great-grandpa and then she would go right back to sleep. My sister wasn't so accommodating. She told Grandfather under no uncertain terms was he allowed to visit her family after 7 p.m. So he didn't. Grandfather Bommer continued to work until his death at age 72.

Chapter 8

Until we moved to New York we had never owned a car. One day a coworker at Remington Rand said to Barney, "I have this old Willy's Falcon Knight that's about 20 years old. It needs a new part but, other than that, it runs good. Would you like to have the car?"

Barney was excited to finally have a car. He figured out what part was needed and made the part himself from the sole of an old shoe. Then the car ran like new. It had a big, wooden steering wheel and when you pushed the horn it went "a-hooga, a-hooga." We must have driven that car about 10,000 miles. And it always started. The man next door was constantly begging his brand new car to start. He was so desperate at times he would say to his car, "If you don't start this morning, I'm gonna get that old car next door."

We kept the car in the garage underneath the house next door. It was such a treat for us to have a car. Going for drives was something new and exciting. I remember Sharon had to have her tonsils out and when her father took her to the hospital, she was so excited because she was sitting in Mama's seat in the car and Daddy was taking her someplace. She waved at me, grinning from ear to ear. She had no idea where they were headed. I had to stay home and take care of Barry. I felt bad for her, but she recovered quickly.

Barney took very good care of that old car. He drove it all over. It was such a convenience for all of us. After several years, Remington Rand worked out a deal where Barney could go to Detroit and pick up a car cheaper than we could buy it in New York. So we went to Detroit and picked up a new club coupe and drove it home across Canada to Buffalo and then on to our home in New York. That was our first new car. We had had the other car for quite a few years before we had enough money that we could afford to buy a new one. In those days, no one bought anything unless they had the money. No credit. Nothing was ever paid "on time."

We had not had any pets since we were married. One day Shari came home with a little Scotty puppy from across the street. Barry was 2 years old. The lady told Shari she could have him for free. I said "No dogs. No dogs." When Barry saw the dog, he shrieked, "the buppy, the buppy." My heart melted when I saw how excited both of the children were and we had "Bubbles" for about 16 years.

Also when Barry was about 2, Grandfather Bommer died. I knew I would miss him terribly, but I was grateful that he was able to meet his two great-grandchildren before he passed away. Grandfather Bommer and I had such a special bond that I know he will be one of the first people I see when I get to Heaven.

Chapter 9

One Christmas when Barry was about 6, he had lost his two front teeth. So he wrote a letter to my mother and said "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth," quoting the famous song. My mother had developed a very dry sense of humor and saw this as an open door to play a joke on her grandson. She went to her dentist and asked if he could give her two front teeth. The dentist gave her two of the biggest, ugliest teeth he had pulled and my mother placed them in a red, jeweled box and sent them to Barry. She wrote a note on the card, "I didn't want you to be disappointed so I got you exactly what you wanted for Christmas." Barry was a little confused at first, but realized his grandmother had just played a joke on him. We never laughed so hard.

Shari was our little social butterfly. She visited everyone on the street, and they all knew and loved her. I made her summer outfits, including a navy and white striped, seersucker play dress trimmed with red rick-rack sewed on an applique with her initials. When one of the women in the neighborhood saw the letters on Shari's dress, she asked her, "What does the SD stand for?" Shari answered, "South Dakota."

By the time Shari was 3, she could sing over 90 songs. When my mother would visit, or we went to visit her, she would put Shari up on top of the upright piano and that little girl could sing all the songs that her grandma played. One Christmas, we hosted a party for all our friends and several of Barney's coworkers. Shari was the star entertainment that night. She was never shy and was very talented. She stood in the archway and recited, "Twas the Night Before Christmas." She knew the whole story by heart, word for word. Our guests couldn't believe it. Then Shari sang several songs for them, too.

When Shari was about 5, I took her to see the St. Patrick's Day Parade near St. Patrick's Cathedral. She couldn't see it because she was too little, so I put her on my shoulders and walked up Fifth Avenue.

I also remember taking Shari to the play "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" starring Roz Russell. It was later made into a movie starring Marilyn Monroe. When the play was over, I said "Come on Shari, it's time to go home." She said "No, no, no, we're gonna stay and see it again. It was so good I wanna see it over again." She thought the play was going to be like a movie and would be repeated.

Once we took Shari to Navy Week and saw all the ships parked in the Hudson River. We also took Barry and Shari to the Macy's Parade in New York City so they could see all the big balloon characters. There was so much excitement and so many people.

Another time, the Shriners were having a convention in New York City and we drove the car downtown at about 11:00 at night and drove up and down Times Square until about 2:00 in the morning. The place was alive with people. There were bands playing and people ripping pillows open and shaking them out of the hotel rooms so there were feathers everywhere. Our car had a vent in the front and the Shriners shot water guns at us and our feet were soaked. It was exciting. And the kids were watching everything from the backseat. We drove down around Times Square several times. It seemed there was always something exciting going on in New York.

Chapter 10

Barney continued to do well at Remington Rand and had received several promotions. Traveling the country was still a requirement for his job, along with setting up shows and planning meetings. The company was working on the Eckert-Mauchly computer which was so big it took up an entire room. Then they contracted with the Federal government and Barney would travel to Washington, D.C. on business. He enjoyed his work, and didn't mind traveling. He kept growing in his positions as well.

Everyone loved Barney. He was a very gentle person. He loved people and people loved him. He was always adored by everyone because he was willing to help and was always volunteering to do more than his share, always with a smile and never complaining.

He was always there for me, too. One example was when I had to have all my teeth removed and was toothless for six weeks. Barney cooked all the meals and ground the meat so that I could eat. As hard as he worked at his job, he always took time for me and the children.

In 1947 we purchased a house that was just being built in Bethpage on Long Island. The purchase price was \$7,999. We borrowed a thousand dollars from my dad for the down payment. Twenty-six houses were being built in this tract. We moved in on the 22nd of December and on the 26th of December a big snow storm in New York closed down all the highways so the rest of the houses sat empty until April. It took them that long to get rid of the snow and finish building those houses. So we lived there all by ourselves, except for one man in the corner house. Across the street was a forest of scrub oak trees.

Spring came and we soon had a few neighbors. Martha and Frank Jupay moved in behind us with their two little boys. Frankie was the younger one and he was a pistol with a hot temper. When he'd get mad, he'd straighten his legs and his whole body would become rigid.

The Burkharths lived next door. Mr. Burkhart was a fireman in one of the small villages nearby. When we moved into Bethpage, Levittown was just being started. There were only 300 homes, but eventually 10,000 homes were built there. It was an ever growing place for families because it was close to the schools.

We had a good size yard but no garage. Our upstairs was unfinished. Barney and I built the garage and then we built a fence around our yard and planted a garden and had a huge tree in the front yard. The house had a living room and a dinette, kitchen, master bedroom, and a small bedroom, and we eventually finished off the attic and put two bedrooms up there.

Barney took Barry fishing in Long Island Sound and would tie a rope around him and attach it to the boat so if he fell in he could pull him up. That little boy would sit there and fish with his father for four or five hours. Well that little boy is now well into his 60s and he's still out there fishing.

Barry also loved hunting. He actually became a better hunter than his father ever was. Barney never killed anything other than a few chickens while growing up on the farm in South Dakota.

It was 1948 and no one in our neighborhood had a television. So when Barney came home with a TV he won at a company convention in Boston, we couldn't wait to show it off to the neighbors. It was a huge console television set that went all the way down to the floor, but the screen itself was only 13" wide.

On the weekends everyone in the neighborhood would congregate at our house to watch television. We didn't mind, as long as they brought their own refreshments. Some days we would have 25 to 30 people in our living room watching "The Ed Sullivan Show" on our little 13" TV. One year we had a visitor from out of town and decided to take him to Jones Beach for

the weekend. When we arrived home, there were 27 people in our living room watching television. Our visitor was shocked. "How did they get in?" he asked. We replied, "Oh, heavens, we never lock our door. And we don't mind as long as they bring their own food."

I remember while living in Bethpage, our good friends, Elizabeth and Henry Jens, owned a floral shop up the street from the Grumman aircraft factory. They had an entire section where they grew their own plants. Elizabeth had 18 children. While we were friends she had at least four of them. She would work all day in the fields with the plants, go in, have a baby, get up, make breakfast for everyone the next morning and go back to work. It was nothing for her, and she did it 18 times.

One Christmas, Barry received a cowboy hat and shirt, a set of pistols and cowboy boots, and looked around for more presents. When we visited the Jens that same day and their 18 children were thrilled to open their new boxes of crayons and coloring books, Barry felt a little guilty about expecting more. He really should have been satisfied, since that was also the year he received "his two front teeth" from his grandmother.

Elizabeth Jens would later work with me in Girl Scouting. She was a natural when it came to crowd control. She was also the treasurer of the Lutheran Church. The Jens were blessed to have Henry's mother, Grandma Jens, living with them. I remember once I had pneumonia and was in bed for a couple of weeks. Grandma Jens came every day and took care of me and fed my family. The Jenscs were lovely people and all those children were so well behaved and loved and were respectful to both of their parents.

Chapter 11

When Shari was 8 and Barry 5, Mother Downs, Barney's mother, lived with us for about four months. She was severely diabetic, but would not follow the doctor's orders on what she should be eating or when she should take her medicine. She used a test tube of urine to test her blood sugars and once she left the tube in a tin can on the stove and forgot about it and it blew up all over the floor, walls, and ceiling.

I remember trying to bathe that 200 lb. woman and not being able to lift her out of the bathtub. She was almost twice my size. I finally had to let all the water out and put on her nightgown, and then Barney came in and lifted her out of the bathtub. Mother Downs returned to South Dakota to live out the last days of her life.

Our neighbors the Popes and George and Jean Wilford had sons the same age as Barry. Jean, Aleen Pope, and I were good friends and the three boys were inseparable. The Welfords also had a daughter. When the three boys were about 5, Jean became pregnant with their third child.

About that time, my father was spending a lot of time in Florida on contracts for the refrigerator company. He installed refrigerators in all the new mobile homes that came on the market at that time so he was very busy. He also spent a lot of time in New York and would stay there while working. He would be gone for two or three weeks at a time, leaving my mother alone. She became a sedentary person, still very introverted, and when Dad came home for a week, she never wanted to go out or do anything with him. They used to go dancing and take trips into New York City, but my mother was no longer interested.

Then the unthinkable happened. While visiting us on Long Island, Mother went into New York on the train to see Dad. During their meeting, Dad informed her that he wanted a divorce. He added, "I don't want any objection and I want it now." Then the two of them got on the train and came out to Long Island. Dad told me to get a babysitter so we could talk.

We all sat in the living room as my father paced nervously back and forth. Finally he spoke. "I wanna tell you something and I don't want any discussion. It's final." He said, "I've asked your mother for a divorce and I want it as soon as possible. This just isn't working." Up to this point they had been married 30 years.

Dad took the train back to New York and then to Washington and left my mother with me. She cried day and night and I couldn't do anything with her. It placed an enormous amount of strain on our entire family.

One morning that first week after Dad left, I took Barney to the station to catch the train to work. It was pouring rain. I'll never forget that day. Barney got out of the car and walked up to Mr. Pope who was standing there getting ready to go on the train. Barney and Mr. Pope began having a serious discussion. Barney came back, opened the car door and said "My God, Aleen had the baby and she died but the baby lived." With that, he closed the door and went and boarded the train for New York. My mother was facing the wall crying at home and now this. I was devastated. That was one of the worst days of my life and I didn't know how to cope.

I decided I couldn't face attending Aleen's funeral. I volunteered to watch all the children so everyone else could go. I had eight or nine kids that day as well as my own two and I kept them in our toy room in the cellar. My mother came down for a little while and helped me. She asked, "Why did you take on all of these children? How could you do this to me?"

I tried to explain to my mother that she was not the only one facing a difficult time. I said, "Mother, I have a friend who died and they're all at the funeral and I couldn't bear to go the

funeral so I decided to take care of the kids." I felt so helpless for both my mother and for this young man who was left with two young children to raise alone.

Mother and Dad did proceed with the divorce. I found out later he had been dating a woman he met in Florida while he was still married to my mother. My cousin Dorothea who lived in Syracuse ran into them on the street in New York. Was Dad ever surprised when he heard Dorothea call his name! At that point he had no choice but to introduce the woman. Her name was Louise and she was the secretary of one of my father's clients.

Louise was not like my mother. In fact, she was the exact opposite. She smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol. Needless to say, I didn't have a very good relationship with Louise. We were always cordial with one another, but I knew from the moment I met her that she was not our kind of people and I could never understand what my father saw in her.

My mother took the divorce very hard. She stayed with me and Barney for a week or so and then went home to Wisconsin. About five years later, my sister talked Mother into moving to Michigan to be near her. Mother rented a small apartment. While living in Michigan, she was in charge of the music in a fund raising gala, featuring performances by all local entertainers. She led the orchestra in accompaniment. Mother continued giving piano lessons until her death at age 88.

As far as my mother was concerned, she was still married to my father. She never dated or remarried. She never even looked at another man after my father left. As I said, she was a very quiet and reserved person and it went against her nature to go out looking for companionship. She was content with her music and the satisfaction of watching her students master the piano.

Chapter 12

When Sharon was in the second grade I couldn't wait to sign her up for Girl Scouts. I loved being a Girl Scout growing up and finally my little girl was old enough, almost. Sign-ups were in the fall, but she wouldn't be eligible until December. One of my friends had become a leader and told me "Bring her to the meeting anyway."

Sharon and I walked into a sea of little 7 and 8 year old girls and their mothers. Before we had time to find a seat, my friend whisked us away and guided us into a different room where another large group of women and their daughters were waiting to be indoctrinated. My friend said, "Wait, here; I'll be right back."

Upon her return, my friend announced, "Marian, you're gonna be the leader of this troop because you know more about scouting than all of us." And that's how I became a Girl Scout leader. Twenty-seven little Brownies were counting on me to teach them everything I knew about Girl Scouting. And their mothers entrusted them into my care once a week for the next year.

I loved working with children, but these little girls weren't old enough to do the more exciting things such as camping and badge work. Therefore, most of our time was spent on very mundane, simple activities, mostly remedial arts and crafts projects.

Marching in a parade was next to impossible with these girls. Even my own daughter was pigeon-toed and couldn't walk a straight line. I was telling my neighbor Martha that my Brownie troop would be marching in the annual Memorial Day Parade, but I added, "You know, you can't teach 7 year olds to march." Martha replied, "That's ridiculous; of course you can teach them to march." "I said, "Okay. You come down and you teach them to march."

So Martha came to our meeting, determined to prove me wrong. She was certain she could teach those little girls to march. Well, after about the third meeting, she threw up her hands and announced, "You're right; you can't teach them to march." But in spite of their innocent clumsiness, the girls were adorable in full uniforms including hats and gloves, smiling and waving as they passed their proud parents on the sidelines. Martha, by the way, became my assistant leader.

After one year with this troop, even though my daughter was still a Brownie, I decided being an intermediate leader better fit my personality and passions. There were so many things I wanted to teach, but the Brownies were just too young. So Martha became the Brownie leader and I took the Farmingdale 10 year olds, 35 of them. Of all the girls I had over the next four years, 31 became First Class Scouts and 29 went on to become Curve Bar Scouts. We produced the largest number of Curve Bar Scouts in one troop in the entire United States. I had a wonderful time with those girls. They were terrific and I even taught them to march.

Barney, Barry, and Sharon joined me on many weekends with my troops at Camp Edey, the Girl Scout camp in Suffolk County. The girls learned to dig latrines, build fires, and they completed all of the nature badges. When I was growing up, I wouldn't have thought about digging my own latrine, but I learned and then I helped teach my girls how to do it. We taught them how to dispose of garbage when camping. We had a separate receptacle for tin cans and another for garbage. If they messed up and put the garbage in the wrong can, they had to dig in and get it out and put it in the right one. "Oh, do we really have to do that? It's so yucky," they whined. "Yeah, we gotta do that," I replied. They learned quickly to follow instructions.

The girls swam in the lake and spent half their time trying to "drown" my husband. Barney enjoyed swimming with the girls and teaching them to dive. When Barry was about 4, he would jump into the boat and begin rowing on the lake. He only had the strength to row on

one side using both hands, so he rowed around in circles, until the girls would swim out and bring him back into shore. That made him very unhappy and, no matter how tightly we tied up the boat, somehow Barry would figure out a way to untie it and was soon out in the lake rowing again.

The girls bunked in cabins and learned to keep their spaces clean. In the evenings we sang around the campfire and made the traditional S'mores, with chocolate squares, roasted marshmallows, and graham crackers. Oh how our girls could sing. We taught them three-part harmony. They were so talented they were invited to sing in New York City for Girl Scout Sunday. They were also invited to sing on national television.

In the off season, many of the girls' fathers would go to Camp Edey and paint and do repairs, to make sure everything was ready for the girls.

In Farmingdale, whenever my girls moved up to Senior Scouts, I stayed and took on another group of 35 fifth grade girls, continued with them all through the four years and then would send them on through. In the meantime, Claire Duffy had a troop of over 20, and Dorothy Lafferty had another large group. We helped each other with badge work to make sure our girls all made it on to the next level.

We were Lafferty, Duffy, and Downs, all good Irish Catholic names. We each had our troop meetings at the Catholic school in the cafeteria. Whenever the Father saw us he would shake his head and say "I can't believe it; Lafferty, Duffy, and Downs, and they're all Methodists."

One of our troops wanted to earn the dance badge. When doing badge work, I always tried to include several different activities simultaneously so the girls could earn more than one badge at a time. I told them they could hold a dance and each of them could invite a boy to come. The first thing we did was teach them all to dance. We started with a simple box step.

The dance was one of the joint activities we shared with the other two groups. Typical for their age, the girls all towered over the boys. We held the dance in the Catholic school cafeteria which was below ground and the windows of the cafeteria were way up by the ceiling. During the dance the parents were seen peering into the windows from up above.

The girls brought the boys in and formally introduced them to each of us leaders and our husbands and we presented each girl with a lovely gardenia corsage. The dance began at 7 p.m. We had provided what we thought would be enough pop to last the entire evening, but it was gone within the first hour and we sent some of the dads out to buy more. We played the kids' favorite music on a record player and they all danced in squares all over the dance floor. At first they resembled robots, very stiff and mechanical. As the evening progressed, their confidence grew, they became more relaxed, and they all seemed to enjoy themselves.

The three patrols joined forces on another large project. This time it was a dinner with enough food to serve all 35 Girl Scouts and us three leaders. Each patrol was responsible for one course of the dinner. One patrol prepared the hors d'oeuvres, one the main dish, and my patrol was in charge of making cookies for dessert.

I had about 18 girls in the church kitchen baking cookies from boxed cookie dough. We had baked three batches and were starting to make the fourth when we realized there was no more cookie dough. I asked the girls, "Where did it go?" They answered, "I guess we ate it. We only took a little sample here and a little sample there." But somehow they managed to devour an entire batch of raw cookie dough.

The girls set and decorated the table, prepared and served all of the food, cleaned up afterwards and, in the process, earned several badges. We could do so much more when we worked together with the two other patrols because, even if a couple of the girls were unable to

participate, we could still continue with the project. It was rare that any of our girls would miss a meeting or activity, though, because they all loved their troop.

Each of my girls earned five badges when they put on a two-hour minstrel show. It is believed that in most groups, 20% of the people do 80% of the work. That was not so with our troops. Every mother was required to serve the troop on at least one project during the year to benefit the girls. This project was a family affair, with the mothers helping the girls make their own costumes and the fathers helping set up the stage.

Half of my troops' fathers worked at the Burlington Silk Mill in Farmingdale where they dyed all the Burlington fabric. They donated yard samples of pure silk fabric for the costumes. The fabric was 45 inches wide and a yard long. We made the most stylish blouses, but I do believe this is where I got my white hair. That was the most horrendous sewing badge I ever worked. Most of the girls were all thumbs when it came to sewing. They each took turns stitching up their blouses on a sewing machine with the help of the volunteer mothers. That was the most difficult badge any of them had ever earned.

The minstrel show was held at the Farmingdale High School auditorium to a packed audience. The girls not only made their own costumes, they wrote the script and performed all the parts. One of them pretended to be me. At that time I was a golfer and I wore golf socks with a little ball on the back of the heel. One of the girls came out onto the stage with a huge ball on the back of her shoe and the audience laughed hysterically, knowing she was mimicking me. The girls told jokes and sang songs and performed several short skits. It was an amazing show.

Each of my girls earned their babysitting badge which taught them first aid and what to do in an emergency. There was never a shortage of babysitters, because we had so many girls and everyone in town knew they were the best and could be trusted.

When the girls who had bridged up to Senior Scouts (ages 16-18) were having trouble getting a Senior leader, I took over the group for one year. I took them on a field trip to the Air Force Base in Hempstead, Long Island, where they were given a guided tour of the facility and learned about the different aircraft. They were invited back to the base to attend a dance. Many of those same girls later became Wing Scouts. Wing Scouts are Girl Scouts 19 years and older who were interested in aviation. I wasn't sure their interest was in aviation or the young men they met when visiting the base.

One of the keys to my successful Girl Scout troops was forming troop committees. They were a complete support to me and took care of all the outside details, including transportation to outings. I never had to worry about anything except being a leader to the girls. I had a chairman who delegated well and all of the parents were expected to lend their support on at least one activity throughout the year. Many of them were involved in multiple projects and activities. When the girls received their rewards, they were thrilled, and rightly so, because they had worked very hard.

Chapter 13

Sometime after my father and mother divorced, Dad invited us down to Washington, D.C. where he was living. Neither of my children cared much for their grandfather, and they certainly did not like Louise. No one knew quite what to say to her. She was close to my age and talked and acted in a manner that was in such stark contrast to anyone else in our family. Nonetheless, my father and Louise married and stayed together until my father's death 30 years later.

Dad left the refrigerator company and moved to Orlando, Florida. He and Louise bought a hardware store and asked Barney and me to come down and join them in the business. Things were changing at Remington Rand and so we thought about it and decided the move would do us all good.

In 1954 we sold our house in New York, loaded up the family and the dog and drove to Orlando. On our way we pulled off the road south of Ocala, Florida at 2:00 in the morning to figure out the wonderful fragrance that had wafted its way into our car. It was February and the dead of winter in New York, but what we discovered when we stopped was the perfume of the orange blossoms in full bloom. We took it as a sign of good things to come.

We moved into a small rental house and Barney and I both began working in the hardware store. Louise placed me in charge of taking the inventory. I never dreamed there were that many screws, nuts, and bolts in one place.

We attended the Broadway Methodist Church and quickly made many new friends. And, of course, I wasted no time finding a Girl Scout Troop to lead. I knew that was my calling, at least during that time of my life, no matter where I was living. I also served as a volunteer trainer for the Girl Scouts in Florida.

It didn't take us long to realize that we had made a big mistake moving to Orlando. Louise would stand in the middle of the store and bark at my husband, "Hey Fatso, bring up a hundred pound bag of fertilizer for this customer." I despised anyone who would make fun of my husband. He was not fat at all. He was treated like a hired hand. Barney was better than that. He had practically ran a large company and now he was sweeping the sidewalk in front of the hardware store every morning at 8:00 and then working hard all day, running around the store hauling items for customers, and listening to my stepmother hurl insults at him.

Our social life while living in Florida did not include my father and stepmother. Most of our friends were from the church, many of whom became our best customers at the hardware store, because of Barney. They saw how my father and stepmother treated him and how rude they were to the customers. They would come from way across town to buy their lawnmowers and other hardware needs and to try and make Barney feel important.

I worked part time in the store, but I was always available for my children. I also lead my new Girl Scout troop.

We lived in Florida one year before the Civil Rights Movement, but as far as I was concerned, the color of one's skin made no difference to me. We are all God's children and should be treated equally. I soon found that Southerners did Girl Scouting a bit differently, but I wouldn't stand for it. As program chairman, I was told by the Council that they would be providing 75% funding for the white girls and 25% for the black girls. I said, "No, no, no. We're not gonna do that. We're gonna give them each 50%." They explained, "Well, Chicki, you don't do that." I replied, "Oh, yes I do."

Nobody in the South had ever trained a black leader how to lead, but I did. I made it very clear that "A Girl Scout is a friend to all and a sister to every other Girl Scout." Some of the

white leaders found it difficult to accept this, especially from a newcomer. They finally realized they couldn't argue with me and every girl received equal treatment and each received the proper instructional training for badge work, no matter what.

During our time in Florida, my mother's brother Charlie was living in Kissimmee, Florida during the winters, a small community just south of Orlando. No one locked their doors in those days, so Uncle Charlie would show up with his friends when we weren't home. As soon as we turned the corner to our house, we could hear him playing the piano. My mother's other brother, Uncle Bill, lived west of Orlando in a small trailer in the middle of an orange grove. His trailer was such a mess, I would try to clean it up a bit, but he had so much stuff, I could barely move around. I don't think he ever changed his sheets. He was not well and so I tried to check in on him as much as possible and take him to his doctor appointments. Several years later Uncle Bill was found dead in his trailer after it caught fire. He was 95 years old. At least 16 Social Security checks were also found in the trailer, uncashed.

It had only been a few months since I started working at the hardware store when I began feeling as if there was something physically wrong with me. I knew it was more than just working upstairs in the unbearable heat. I couldn't figure out why I felt so poorly, so I went to a doctor. He discovered that my cervix had never recovered after carrying Barry. The doctor thought if he cauterized my uterus the problem would be solved. However, the cauterization didn't seem to help much. As soon as I returned to work I began to feel worse. Once Louise realized how ill I was, she suggested I see her doctor for another opinion.

I went to Louise's doctor on a Friday and the next day he called me at home and said "I want you in my office at 9:00 Monday morning with your husband." I couldn't imagine what could be so serious that the doctor would call me on a Saturday advising me to be seen as soon as possible, and to bring my husband.

On Monday morning when we arrived at the doctor's office, he wasted no time and very pointedly stated, "I want you to know that your cervix is cancerous and needs to be removed right away."

Barney and I were both in shock. We couldn't believe I had cancer. Of course I did as the doctor suggested and checked into Orange Memorial Hospital. The operation took seven hours and he took out everything – my uterus and my ovaries. He also removed a huge blood clot. I was very ill. I spent ten days in the hospital. I counted 17 bouquets of flowers from friends and fellow church members. One woman from the church came every day to my hospital room and changed all the water in the flowers and rearranged them. She never spoke to me. Like an angel, she kissed me on the forehead and then quietly slipped out of the room.

I was very weak when I came home, weighing only 100 lbs. It took a long time for me to recover. We had moved from our rental to a lovely, three-bedroom house we purchased on Meridale Road. I would either lie in my bed in the bedroom or on a lawn chair in the living room. My incision was so long, it was painful to get up and down from the bed or the toilet. And as if the heat and humidity in Florida weren't enough, as soon as I was off the operating table, the hot flashes began, and here I am in my 90s and they are still coming, even with the "patch." Before my surgery I wore an A bra size, and within nine months I grew very large breasts. I told everyone that "what they took out down there grew back here!"

God gave me back my life. Before my cancer, I was not taking very good care of my body. I realized after my surgery that God gave me only one body and I must begin taking better care of it. And that is what I have done.

The neighbors on Meridale were wonderful. We had only lived there four months, but they knew I was home alone during the days following my surgery, so they took turns taking

care of me and cooking all of our meals. The couple next door was originally from Storm Lake, Iowa. The wife would come in and get all our clothes and wash them, iron them, and put them back in the closet. Barney always had a clean, pressed shirt to wear to work. I don't know what I would have done without her help.

I conducted my Girl Scout meetings from the lawn chair in my living room. I was the program chairman for the Girl Scouts there and also had a lovely troop of girls. All our training sessions were done in my home, as well as all of the badge work with my troop. Because of my health situation, I was not able to do the big programs that I had done in Farmingdale.

My recovery was slow, but I gradually returned to being a mom and a wife. Sharon was in seventh or eighth grade while we were living in Florida and performed in a musical production at school. She wore a pink poodle skirt that I had made for her and sang the love song, "Cherry Blossom Pink and Apple Blossom White," while a woman from church accompanied her on the piano. I was so very proud of my daughter, and happy to be well enough to see her perform.

Florida has lovely flowers. I enjoyed working in the yard and I had an exquisite garden there. However, there were two things I could never get used to. First was the humidity. We would go to sleep for about three hours and wake up sopping wet. The next day we would leave the bed unmade so it would dry out. The second thing I hated was the bugs. Spiders and cockroaches scared me nearly to death. If we turned on the lights in the kitchen at night, the cockroaches would scurry in all directions.

While living in Florida, I became fast friends with Meryl Gladstone who lived on our street. We were like sisters. She needed me as much as I needed her. She was the most faithful of all my neighbors when I was recuperating from my surgery. She had three children – Jim, the oldest, her sweet daughter Holly, who was 10 or 11, and a little boy named Guppy who was about 7. Guppy would come with her and crawl onto my bed where I was resting and we'd read books together and talk about whatever was on his mind. Meryl's husband, Tatum, was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force. His job was traveling to accident scenes, analyzing what caused the accidents and reporting everything he learned to General LeMay. Tatum was such a caring man, he was scheduled to travel to England for three months about the time I had my surgery. He told the Air Force he couldn't go until he found out I was alright. So he stayed for three days after I had the surgery to make sure I was going to live and then he went to England. While he was in England, Meryl came every day to take care of me until Barney could get home from the hardware store.

About a year after arriving in Florida, we had had enough. We said goodbye to my dad and Louise, our friends, our church family, and my Girl Scouts.

Chapter 14

We put all of our furniture in storage and left Florida behind, along with my uterus and ovaries. We had no idea where we were headed, but we really didn't want to return to New York City. Barney fixed up the backseat of our Plymouth Club Coupe with a stand and blankets, like a playpen for the kids and the dog. We mounted a table upside down on top of the car to carry our camping gear. Barney had sent out several resumes and we headed north.

The first night we stopped at a campground in northern Georgia. The water in their swimming pool was runoff from the mountain so it was extremely cold. Nonetheless, it was a beautiful campsite. The next night we camped in Indiana, in a brand new campsite up on a bluff overlooking the Wabash River. It was really pretty there, too. The next night we spent in Wisconsin, outside of Madison. The tall trees surrounded our campfire. Every night, after spending the day driving and interviewing for jobs, Barney would read to us from Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan books. We could almost hear Tarzan flying through the trees.

Barney had an appointment for a job interview with Workman Service in Chicago so he left me and the kids at the campground in Wisconsin and took the train to Chicago. Barney had another interview in Milwaukee, but was offered and accepted the job with Workman Service as the office manager in Chicago. Sam Workman was headed to California for a six-week vacation, so he sent Barney to Minneapolis for the first six weeks to train with the manager there. "When I get home, you can come back and I can get you started here in Chicago," Sam explained.

When Sam returned from California, Barney had done such a good job in Minneapolis, he asked Barney to stay and head up a new division in data processing instead of taking the job in Chicago. We were all thrilled, as we were beginning to like Minnesota. We borrowed some money from my mother and rented an apartment in St. Paul. We set up our camping gear, since everything else was still in storage. We had all we needed – sleeping bags, camping stove and dishes. We "camped" out in the apartment for the six weeks until Barney received his first paycheck, when we bought a few things for the apartment, and paid my mother back.

The Nelsons, whom we had known in Cheektowaga, New York, were now living in Minnesota and gave us some furniture, as did the people who owned the apartment house. Before long we were living quite comfortably. Later we bought a television. Barry and three or four neighborhood boys his age gathered at our apartment to watch the Mickey Mouse Club every afternoon. They would all sit Indian style with their innocent eyes fixed on the screen singing along ... "Who's the leader of the band that's made for you and me? M-i-c-k-e-y, M-o-u-s-e."

Our daughter was now a typical teenager. She would try to ignore me whenever I asked her to do something, anything to get out of doing it. I would tell her, "You know, Shari, if you ever said 'Yes, Mother, I'd be glad to,' I'd faint dead away." One time she came home from school and I asked her to clean her room, and she answered, "Yes, Mother, I'll be glad to." She went upstairs and cleaned her room and when she returned to the kitchen, I was lying down on the floor, full length on my back with my arms spread out, pretending I had fainted. She rushed over and yelled, "Mother, Mother, Mother!" She slapped my face on each side, "speak to me, Mother." I opened one eye and said "I told you I'd faint dead away if you ever said 'yes, Mother, I'd be glad to.'" She was so angry with me for scaring her.

We lived in the apartment for about a year and finally saved enough money to retrieve our furniture from storage in Florida. We moved from St. Paul to 28th Avenue South in Minneapolis and across the street from Lake Hiawatha. Barry was elated when he began catching fish in the lake. Minehaha Creek was deep and yielded a few fish as well.

We loved our new neighborhood. There was a house down the street that was once owned by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It had been converted into a museum.

Our house had a large upper floor and a basement which we set up as a playroom. The kitchen was also downstairs. We gathered with some of our new friends for Thanksgiving dinner in our basement.

We chalked up our year in Florida as a life experience we did not want to repeat. We settled into our new surroundings and continued on with our lives. We joined the Minehaha Methodist Church and made many new friends. The children were happy in Minnesota.

Barney became involved in the church. For three years he served as the Lay Leader for the Minneapolis Diocese, which included all of the Methodist Churches in Minneapolis. There were about 15 churches at that time.

I was Barry's Cub Scout leader and drew from my experiences as a Girl Scout Leader, teaching them some of the same crafts, including buddy burners, which is a useful homemade heat source for camping. I was only allowed to be Barry's leader for the first year because he would be turning 10, and at age 10 the boys were required to have a male leader. I had been a Girl Scout leader in New York and Florida, and, after a year with the Cub Scouts, I led my first Girl Scout troop in Minnesota.

Chapter 15

In 1956, after 16 years of marriage, Barney and I finally took time out for a real honeymoon. Some friends volunteered to keep an eye on the children for two weeks. We drove from Minneapolis to Florida, along the Mississippi River, stopping at Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and other historical spots along the route. I remember eating at a restaurant on the river that had once been a hospital for the soldiers of the Revolutionary War. We spent two days in New Orleans, enjoying the Cajun food and the quaintness of the homes and the horse-drawn carriages. The New Orleans bus tour was the most interesting one we had ever taken.

We stopped along the northern Florida shore and watched the boats full of shrimp. Barney and I ate two bowls of shrimp at one restaurant. We rode a glass bottom boat at Silver Springs, Florida where we saw colorful fish and huge snakes. I had a movie made of me with a six-foot-long snake wrapped around my neck and arms. I wanted to show my Girl Scouts and my children that I practiced what I preached. I was always telling them not to be afraid. They were amazed when I showed them the film.

We traveled to Tallahassee, Florida and saw the capitol and ate some more shrimp. We visited the Barnum and Bailey Circus headquarters in Sarasota, Florida.

Dolphins swam alongside our ferry out to Sanibel Island. The beach at Sanibel Island was world famous for its shelling. I spent hours collecting shells and washing them and packing them to take home. I convinced Barney to send our suitcases home by greyhound so we could pack the car with shells. I had 35 Girl Scouts back home and what wonderful projects we could do with all those shells.

On our way home we did some bird watching in Miami, visited St. Augustine's, the birthplace of Florida, and wound our way through Georgia and Tennessee, stopping at the Grand Ole Opry. It was an unforgettable honeymoon and well worth the 16-year wait.

Chapter 16

In 1957 we purchased a home in Richfield, Minnesota on Pillsbury Avenue, South, and lived there for nearly 20 years. Shortly after we arrived in Richfield, I was called on by Mary Lillenburg, the New Neighbors hostess, who invited me to join the New Neighbors Club, where new people in town gathered together to get acquainted and participate in group activities. They also held a luncheon once a month. When I arrived, there were about 60 members. Mary was there, as well as Ellen Bond, the hostess for the northern part of Minneapolis. After I was in the club for about six months, Mary had to resign as the New Neighbors hostess for Minneapolis so I applied and was chosen to replace her.

As hostess I was responsible for calling on all new neighbors in the area, but they had to have moved from at least 50 miles away. It was my job to do as Mary had done for me, to invite the new neighbors to join. I had a booklet with a list of sponsors, one representing every type of business, offering discounts and coupons to the new residents. We had a car dealer that provided me with a car with "New Neighbor City Hostess for Minneapolis" written on the side.

I remember once I did not have a grocery store sponsor. Apparently they had tried for years to find one in Minneapolis, but no store would sign on. I went into National Foods one day and talked to the men in charge. They decided they would become a sponsor. They would donate a dollar a call. The contract wasn't filled in right then, but they signed it anyway and I walked out very dignified all the way to my car. When I was away from the store, I yelled "Yippee," as loudly as I could and went right to Ellen Bond, who had previously told me it was impossible to obtain a grocery store sponsor. So that was a feather in my cap of which I was very proud.

The job as City Hostess gave me the opportunity to meet many wonderful people and to earn a small salary. I also received commissions for selling sponsorships, and the League paid for all my expenses when I attended the conventions.

The purpose of the club was to connect people together through activities. We taught bridge, golf, tennis, and dancing. Every three months we held a dance for all the members.

I remember calling on a new lady who lived about six blocks from our house. I was telling her all about Minneapolis, showed her our booklet and how to contact the fire department, the police department, and the hospitals. The booklet also listed all of the parks and everything she would need to know about the area. As we were chatting, we suddenly heard fire engines close by. She said to me, "Somebody's in trouble." I finished my house call and headed home. As I came down my street, I could see the fire engines at my house. Sharon had hosted a sleep-over the night before and cooked breakfast with her friends. They had fried a large package of bacon and saved the grease. When she came home from school that day, she was melting some of the grease on the stove to heat up some food and left it to answer the telephone when the kitchen caught fire. As I approached our house, I saw Sharon and Barry sitting on the front porch. Before they saw me, I heard them talking to each other, "Oh, boy, Mother's really gonna kill us this time. We really did it up good." Luckily the firemen put the fire out and it was contained in the kitchen. I was just thankful no one was injured.

New Neighbors was a national organization headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio. There were New Neighbors leagues in all the leading cities – Kansas City, Omaha, Denver and, of course, Minneapolis and St. Paul. I started as the Assistant City Hostess and then I later became the City Hostess for the south part of Minneapolis which included all of the suburbs.

For my house calls I tried my best to dress in a professional manner with hat and gloves, rain or shine, whether it was sweltering hot or 30 degrees below 0. I went into new housing tracts

where people were moving in, but sometimes construction was still going on and I would get my car stuck in the mud.

The club began to grow quickly because I was constantly on the move, recruiting new members. In 1961 at the national convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, I was selected as the Hostess of the Year for the entire United States. They presented me with a bottle of champagne, a new briefcase, and several other gifts. When I returned to Minneapolis, the local club held a luncheon in my honor.

One year the New Neighbors Club entered a float in the Aquatennial Parade. Everyone in the club helped decorate the float. We had a flat-bed truck and built an arch like a canopy over the top and the president of the club sat under the canopy and the vice president and treasurer sat in the front. We had Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts walking alongside the float.

We even hosted a camping trip for the New Neighbors Club at a northern Minnesota campground. The Indians who lived there put on a pow-wow, beating their drums and dancing for us. Everybody in our club joined in the dance. We all played cards at night and the men went fishing during the day. There were about 20 couples and their children. We not only made new friends, we were all learning about our new State.

Of course I was involved with scouting in Minnesota and took the liberty of recruiting Girl Scouts while meeting with new neighbors. I met one family with two daughters, Amy and Nancy Brawley, both eligible for Scouts. The mother was working, so I approached the father and he brought the girls to our meetings. Their mother and I became close friends, and, little did I know, in 1965 Amy would become our daughter-in-law.

I advertised my Girl Scouts for babysitting service to the new neighbors. Also at that time, I was teaching Sunday school and many of my Girl Scouts were in my class, so I knew they were developing into well rounded, grounded, young ladies with deep moral roots.

One of the women in the New Neighbors League had a 6 year old daughter and a 1 year old son. The boy was disabled, unable to sit up or feed himself. My Girl Scouts, 15 and 16 years old, were so well trained and trusted that this woman had them stay with her two children so she could take part in the New Neighbors activities.

Some of my Girl Scouts knew me so well they were finding it difficult to call me Mrs. Downs. It just seemed too impersonal to them. However, they didn't think it would be proper to call me by my first name, so they decided to vote on what to call me. It took them three weeks, lots of debating, but they finally decided on the name. So at one of our meetings, they had me kneel on a cushion and they touched each of my shoulders with a troop flag, knocked my hat off and said I was to be known from that day forward in Girl Scouting as Chicki Downs. I expected Ducky or Downy, but I never dreamed they would name me Chicki. I asked "How come you chose that name?" they said, "We'll tell you, Chicki Downs, in case you don't do what we want you to, we can call you Chicken." So ever since that day I have been known as Chicki.

Chapter 17

Sharon graduated from high school in June of 1959 and was married six months later to Donald Parrish. On the day of Sharon's wedding, chaos ensued at our house with out-of-town friends and preparation for the ceremony. When everyone arrived at the church, Barney said "Where's Marian?" They had forgotten me. I was still at home. Apparently when they left I was in the bedroom doing something and they just assumed I was with them. So Barney came back and picked me up.

It was a lovely wedding. Sharon was beautiful and her father was extremely proud, walking her down the aisle.

In 1962, after a difficult pregnancy, Sharon gave us our first grandchild, Carolyn Marie Parrish. We call her Carrie. When Don called to tell us the baby had been born, I hopped on a plane and flew to Seattle where Sharon and Don were living. Don worked for Boeing Aircraft.

This was my first time in Seattle and I was thrilled when I saw Mt. Ranier. As we descended, I saw the Space Needle, which had just been completed for the World's Fair.

Don met me at the airport and took me to see my first grandbaby. Of course she was adorable. Four days later, we brought her home from the hospital and many of Sharon's friends came to see the new addition. About two hours after arriving home from the hospital, Shari said to me, "Mother, I don't feel very good." I felt her forehead and it was burning hot. So we returned to the hospital to discover that Shari had a kidney infection. She pleaded with me to not let them keep her.

Shari did not have to stay, so I took care of her and the baby. I never changed my clothes in eight days. I also kept up the house and the bedding, which was a challenge with Shari's 104-degree fever. The sheets would be drenched and I had to dry them in the oven because of the rainy Seattle weather. I also gave Carrie her first bath.

Shari and Don lived on the side of a mountain and we could see all of Seattle, the World's Fair, the Space Needle, and the boats across the peninsula. Many nights I sat in front of the window rocking the baby and watching the boats on the harbor.

Shari was finally beginning to feel better. After eight days Barney came from Minneapolis. He took one look at me and said "My God, you look awful. What happened?" I told him all I had done while Shari was ill.

Barney did not tell me right away that while I was gone our 16 year old dog, Bubbles, was not doing so well and he had to have him put to sleep. It was a joyous time with a new baby, but marked with sadness of losing a dear friend and beloved member of the family.

Barney and I borrowed Don's car and drove all around the peninsula and down to Tacoma along the ocean. We picked up shells and had a wonderful time. My mother also came to see the baby and we took a photograph of the four generations - Mother, me, Shari, and Carrie.

Chapter 18

Between my job with the New Neighbors League and Barney's work, we had done very well financially. I was also sewing for people, primarily making suits. We were able to buy a lovely home on the corner of Pillsbury and 63rd Avenue South. We loved it. It was a nice home, three bedrooms with a huge fireplace in the family room and two-car garage. It had a big basement which we finished off and made into an office for me and a bedroom for Barry.

At that time, my sister and her husband were having difficulties with their 16 year old son, Craig. Dorothy and Dave had adopted Craig right after he was born. He had been the joy of their life, but his teen years were taking a toll on them and the rest of their family. They were at their wit's end and were about to return him to the State of Michigan, when Barney and I stepped in.

I told my mother that, if they asked us, Barney and I would take Craig and see if we can help. It could have been a risky proposition if, in our quest to help one young man, our own son would be influenced into bad behavior. Our prayer was that the opposite would be true, that we, as well as Barry, could set Craig on the right path to success in adulthood.

So Dorothy and Dave put Craig on a plane and Barney picked him up at the airport in Milwaukee and drove him to our home in Minneapolis. From that point on, Barney tried very hard to form a relationship with Craig, which was met with much resistance.

We turned the basement into an apartment for the two boys, replete with a ping-pong table and plenty of room for them. The last straw for Dorothy and Dave was when Craig became involved with a woman who lived in the neighborhood who was promoting sex between him and her 12 year old daughter, as well as herself. Craig was very upset because he wanted to continue relations with this girl. The woman had encouraged him to wear all black clothes and to crawl out of the upstairs window and sneak over to her house at night. It was a miserable mess.

Craig had no desire to obey our rules, either. We had never lived near him, so he didn't really have a close relationship with us. So Barney took hold of this boy and applied some firm love and began to straighten him out.

At one point Craig was so defiant he threatened to leave our home. Barney said, "Well, now, Craig, I'll tell you, you leave here and within three minutes the police will be notified to pick you up and you'll be sent back and you will never be allowed to come back here again." Craig gave him a hard time and went downstairs and called his father. He yelled so loudly into the phone at his father that we could hear every word from upstairs.

Sharon's husband's mother had purchased a house across the street from us and their 19 year old son George befriended Craig. One night George took Craig out drinking with friends, who were all much older than Craig. When Craig returned home that night, Barney took a hold of him and wrestled him down to the floor. With his knee in his chest and Craig's collar in his hand, he exclaimed, "I want you to know something, Son, I'm the boss and I set the rules and you will not smoke and you will not drink as long as you're in my house. You will obey what I say. I am generous and I'll make the rules, but you must live up to them. There will be no ifs, ands, or buts." This was just what Craig needed. From that moment on, Barney was the boss in Craig's life and Craig grew to love and respect Barney and did whatever he was told.

Dorothy paid for Craig to go to a psychiatrist while he was living with us. He went once a week and was told that neither Barney nor I had the right to tell him what he could or couldn't do and that he could do anything he "damn well pleased." Everything the psychiatrist said was unraveling any kind of relationship we had begun to build with Craig. So one day I decided to go with Craig to see the psychiatrist. This man ripped me up one side and down the other, telling

me I had no right to tell Craig what to do, that he was 16 and old enough to run his own life and I should butt out. I could almost feel my hair standing on end and I took Craig by the arm and we left. I said to Craig, "You will never, ever go back to that man again." And he never did. I added, "We said these are the rules and you will live by our rules as long as you are living in our home. We're not doing anything that's wrong. All we want to do is help you. We want you to get straightened out so you can go back home."

Well, that young man calmed down, settled in, and straightened up his life. He spent his sophomore year in our house, bonding with his "brother" Barry, and socializing with my 45 Girl Scouts who met in our home every week. He eventually fell in love with one my Scouts, Sherbette Callstrom. He returned home and finished his last two years of high school and went on to college.

While in college, Craig decided to become a Wesleyan Presbyterian minister. He eventually married Sherbette and, upon graduation, became the minister of a church in Blue Rapids, Kansas. He was the only minister who lived in the city limits. All the other ministers came from other towns to preach on Sunday and then went back home. So no matter what religion the people were, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Craig went to see them in the hospital or in the jail, wherever he was needed. He was a wonderful pastor. Everyone adored him. He loved working with the youth, and could relate to them because of what he had gone through himself as an adolescent, and the fact that he still had a lot of little boy in him. Everyone in town was amused by the pastor who rode his motorcycle everywhere he went.

In 1987, after 12 years in Kansas, Craig was given the opportunity to transfer to a larger church in Nebraska. On the 7th of January he was installed into the new church. He and Sherbette had bought a house there, since there was no parsonage for the clergy. On the following Saturday he was out jogging with a friend who was a doctor, and one mile from the hospital, they came to a hill. Craig said to his friend, "I'm gonna rest for just a minute, go on ahead, I'll meet you at the top of the hill." When the doctor got to the top of the hill and looked back, Craig was lying on the ground. The doctor rushed down to see what was wrong. Craig had stopped breathing. His heart had disintegrated and he died right then and there. He was only 40 years old. He was survived by his wife, Sherbette, two sons and a daughter, and both of his parents. No one had any idea that he had a heart problem, and because he was adopted, no one knew if it was a genetic condition.

Barney and I had just attended Craig's installation in the church in Nebraska, and a week later we flew to Kansas for his funeral. There were so many people at his funeral that not everyone could fit inside the church. The yard outside was full of people, and they hooked up a loudspeaker so all could hear the service.

Craig was dearly loved, and too young to die. His little girl was only 2 years old and his boys were not much older. It was such a shock to the entire community, as well as to his family. He was buried under a tree on a panoramic hill in Blue Rapids, Kansas.

Craig had two sets of parents mourning his death – his adoptive parents, Dave and Dorothy, and me and Barney.

Craig and Sherbette's children are all grown now. The United Presbyterian Church saw to it that all three of them received a college education. One son is a doctor's assistant, the other son a pharmacist with a Ph.D. Their daughter teaches high school business courses.

Craig would be very proud of his children. Sherbette remarried and lives in Grand Island, Nebraska and has a wonderful husband. She works in the library there. Sherbette was one of my Scouts who became part of my family and I still consider her a part of my family.

Chapter 19

Little Carrie was 9 months old when Barry graduated from high school in 1963. In celebration of his graduation, Barry and I drove to Seattle where Sharon was living. We camped along the way, first at Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills campground. Barry loved to fish, so we caught our supper. As we cooked it on the open fire, a half grown bear walked through our campground and kept right on going. He didn't pay any attention to us at all. The air was so cold we slept fully clothed inside our sleeping bags, under a full moon which illuminated the President's faces. By 4 a.m., we moved inside the car, turned the heater on and drove around to stay warm. Between 4 and 6 a.m. the animals came to life and we watched buffalo, deer, and wolves.

The next night we camped in Yellowstone and it was even colder than it had been in South Dakota. In Idaho we slept one night in the car behind a gas station.

When we arrived in Seattle, Don and Shari were a bit envious of our adventures and said "Let's all go camping." So we packed up and went to Forks, Washington to a brand new campground. We were the first group to camp there. It was right on the Pacific Ocean. I remember they had a counselor who would walk up and down the shore and tell us about the shells and stones that were there. We had a wonderful time with Shari and her family.

We also camped at Mt. Ranier. There were several tree stumps at the site and we put bread out on the stumps for the animals and birds. Carrie loved watching them. She would get up close to the birds and talk to them.

We walked as far up Mt. Ranier as we could. Don had Carrie in a knapsack on his back. The mountain was covered with clouds so we could not see the peak. We asked God to please raise the clouds so we could see the top of the mountain. And He did. He raised the clouds so we could see the top and then lowered the clouds down again. We thanked Him for that magnificent experience.

It was time for Barry and me to return to Minneapolis. Don had been looking for a job in Minneapolis and had scheduled an interview with Control Data. So Don, Shari, and Carrie rode home with us in our car. Don did get the job and he moved his family to Minneapolis. They bought a home in New Hope but it was not completed so they lived with us for three months.

Shari was pregnant at the time. I remember taking her to the hospital in Minneapolis, where Carrie's little sister, Cheryl Lynn Parrish, was born on July 9, 1964. Cheryl arrived just one day short of sharing her birthday with her 2-year-old sister. I brought Carrie to the hospital and she waved at her mother and her new baby sister through the glass.

Sharon had several miscarriages following her two births and was told by her doctor she would not have another baby. So she and Don adopted a little boy and named him William Byron Parrish. He was born on April 6, 1969 and was 5 weeks old when he became part of our family. When Barney and I came to see our new grandson, the woman helping with the adoption looked at Barney and said "This baby looks just like his grandfather." And he did. When Billy was 7 weeks old, Sharon found out she was pregnant. She was blessed to carry her second son, Richard Lester Parrish, to full term. He was born on New Year's Day, 1970. So Bill, at 7 months old, had a baby brother. Sharon's pregnancy with Richard was difficult and included weekly shots in order to carry him to full term. He was very small, but healthy. Praise the Lord.

Shari and Don were divorced when Billy was about 16 years old. Shari then married George Thomas Dornbach on March 2, 1984 in San Jose. Billy began to act up and Sharon decided to send him to live with his father. Don had remarried also, and Billy didn't get along well with either his father or his stepmother and left after graduation. He is doing very well now.

George has two daughters, Lisa Jill Dornbach and Heather Lynn Dornbach from his previous marriage. We have come to know and love them both as part of our large family. Both of the girls are married now and have children of their own. Lisa is a school teacher in the Sacramento area and has two sons. She married a man who designs all of the lighted signs in Times Square. Heather is married and has a son and two daughters. We see them once in a while when the families are together. We love George. He has been a wonderful husband and father. He has also been a big help to me over the years.

Chapter 20

From 1957 to 1962 I worked with the New Neighbors League. We had been sponsoring 40 events every month and had grown to 1450 members in Minneapolis. There were subcommittees for every aspect of the club. I decided it was time to retire and spend more time with my Girl Scouts. I would take a group of 45 girls from 17 different senior high schools and lead them for five years.

The girls were not the only ones learning new things. When we became a Mariner troop, it was also new to me, as we learned everything there was to know about ships. I took the girls to Great Lakes Naval Training Base where there were over a thousand sailors. We ate in the dining hall and stayed in the WAIF quarters on the base for three days and those sailors did everything but turn inside out trying to get to my girls. They were really sharp girls, ages 16 to 18. We went to a ball game on the base and each girl had at least five sailors to escort her to the bleachers and sit with her through the game.

My girls were always well behaved. On the same trip, I took them to Marshall Fields in Chicago and turned them loose to shop. They knew my rules and they respected me and I trusted them. I was sitting in the glove department on the main floor and next to me was a tower inside the store so that the girls could go all the way through the store and still be within earshot. At one point, the store manager came over to me and asked "Are you the one who turned all those girls loose?" I said, "Yes. But don't worry; I have complete control of my girls." He said, "That's ridiculous. They're all over the store." I said, "Yes, I know, they're doing their shopping." He said, "Well you said you had complete control." I said "I do. Let me show you," and I whistled and immediately, from all directions, the girls popped their heads over the railing and asked, "Did you call, Chicki?" I said to the man, "See what I mean, I have complete control of them." He was speechless.

The girls had earned their own money for the Greyhound bus ride and the shopping trip. We were not charged to stay overnight at the base. We all had such a good time. Not only did one of those girls become my daughter-in-law, another one married my nephew. They both still talk about that trip.

While many of our trips were memorable, none so much as the two-week bus excursion to New York and Washington, D.C. A lot of planning went into that trip and all 45 of my girls had to earn their way. Three grandmothers chaperoned the group, including me and my two assistant leaders, Georgia Parrish who was my daughter's mother-in-law, and Meryl Wiggins, Wiggy for short. Georgia had never been outside of the Wisconsin/Minnesota area her whole life. Wiggy was one of the sweetest women I had ever met. She was 5 feet in height and as broad as she was tall. I was a good leader, but I'm not good with finances, so I put Wiggy in charge of the money. That way I was able to lead the troop and not be bogged down with the business end of it.

In September of 1963 we began planning our trip the following July. The World's Fair was in New York that year, and that's what the girls all decided they wanted to see. They also wanted to travel to Washington, D.C. The girls earned their money primarily by babysitting. We had them bring money to Wiggy each week to put into their account. The total estimated amount each girl needed to earn was \$160 for hotel and food accommodations throughout the entire trip. Wiggy taught them all how to budget their money.

I would never ask my girls to do anything I wouldn't do myself, so I gave piano lessons and I made ballet costumes for the dancing school. I earned my money just as I had required the

girls to earn theirs. The parents then decided they would earn the money to pay for the bus. So they put on a huge spaghetti dinner at the Catholic school.

The day of the dinner was November 22, 1963, the same day that President Kennedy was shot and killed. There was such an uproar that the entire country was in shock. We were not expecting much success with the dinner, but, nonetheless the girls' relatives, friends, and neighbors all came out and we cleared \$600.00, the exact amount needed for the Greyhound bus.

After months of planning and saving, we were finally on our way. The first leg of our trip took us to Youngstown, Ohio, and by our second night we had reached Washington, D.C. We stayed at a lodge, eight girls to a cabin. Georgia and I walked around the lodge to check on the girls. They seemed to be having fun, giggling and chatting. We didn't say anything as the prattle continued on well past 11 p.m.

The next day, at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, after a few hours of sightseeing, I said to the bus driver, "Back to the hotel." The girls whined, "No, no, no, Chicki, don't you remember, we're going to the Smithsonian Institute." I said, "It's back to the hotel." I told the bus driver he was excused for the night and he exited the bus.

I stood in front of the pouty faces and said to them, "You've all made the rules for this trip. What are the rules for the hotel rooms?"

"Lights out and mouths closed at 11 o'clock," they answered.

"That's right. However, I was walking around with Mrs. Parrish last night and we saw that you were all having a wonderful time. But the mouths weren't closed and the lights weren't out at 11 o'clock. So it's now 2 o'clock. I want you to all go lie on your beds and rest and think about it. At 4 o'clock, you come to my cabin and you tell Mrs. Wiggins, Mrs. Parrish, and myself whether you are going to continue on with the trip or if I will be putting you on a Greyhound bus home."

All the girls replied, "Oh, no."

I reminded them, "You made the rule. I'm just making sure that you live up to it. Because I'm not gonna have any sick girls on this trip." So they all quietly exited the bus and proceeded to their rooms.

At 4 o'clock the girls entered our room. When they came in, the first thing I said to them was, "Give me your Girl Scout promise," which they did, in between sobs. Then each girl said, "I want to go on the trip. I promise I'll obey the rules that we set."

That was a turning point in our trip. From then on I never had to check a room or anything with those girls because they were there. When we went to the World's Fair I let them go out in patrols. I said "You meet me back here by 2 o'clock" and at five minutes to 2 they were all there.

One of the most exciting parts of the trip was seeing the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall. It is a spectacular building, with a seating capacity of 6500 people. I imagined my Barney as a young, handsome usher there before we were married, dressed in his uniform and donning his infectious smile.

In planning this 14-day trip, the girls had written a letter to Hubert Humphrey, the Senator from Minnesota, and asked if he could meet them and show us the Senate at the Capitol. The girls also wrote to Clark McGregor, our Representative, asking the same thing. Representative McGregor made a reservation for us and we were met at the gates of Arlington Cemetery and were escorted to President Kennedy's grave. We had created a wreath to put on the grave. We formed it into a trefoil and decorated it with artificial yellow chrysanthemums on top, about 3" thick. Around the sides we put fake evergreen leaves. It was exquisite. Then we took brown pipe cleaners and we wrote GS Troop and our troop number on it.

Hubert Humphrey took us to lunch. He then showed us the Senate and explained how everything worked. Clark McGregor took us to the House of Representatives and explained to the girls how the Legislature functioned. When we came out of the Capitol building, there was a band from the State of Montana playing on the steps. Robert Kennedy was there and his wife Ethel, and he was receiving an award from Lyndon Johnson, who was President at that time.

Our 45 girls had two different uniforms – our regular Girl Scout outfit and then we made cruise outfits with a navy blouse, culotte skirt, and red jacket. We collected patches from all the places we visited and sewed them on our jackets. It was quite impressive to see 45 girls and 3 adults all dressed alike. We were wearing our cruise outfits that day. We were asked what group we represented. “We’re Girl Scouts from Minneapolis, Minnesota,” we answered. We were then introduced to Robert and Ethel Kennedy.

During our 24-hour stay in Philadelphia, we saw the Liberty Bell and other sites. Then we spent four days in New York City, three days at the World’s Fair, and another at Jones Beach on Long Island. There we met with some of the Curve Bar Scouts that I had in my troop in Farmingdale, Long Island. They were now mothers with future Girl Scouts of their own. It was a sweet reunion and an inspiring time for my Minnesota troop, to sing songs with these wonderful, young ladies I had led not so long ago. The Farmingdale group brought lunch for everyone and we had a bonfire on the beach. Many of the Minnesota girls had never seen the ocean before and I know they will always remember the wonderful time we had.

We returned on the bus to our hotel room in New York City. As I said, Georgia had never been anywhere in her life and was a bit paranoid sleeping in a high-rise hotel room in such a large city. As she was pinning all the drapes together so that nobody could get into our room, I reminded her “We’re 26 stories up, they can’t get up here, Georgia.” She made me laugh, but I understood it was because she had led such a sheltered life. I assured her that no one was going to break in and attack three old ladies.

Our next stop was New London, Connecticut. We visited the Coast Guard Academy where my husband had been a student when he was young. He had spoken about it often but this was the first and only time I had ever been there. We visited the submarine base and the whaling village.

Then it was on to Albany and across to Niagara Falls for two days. My aunt and cousin came down and we took the girls on the Maid of the Mist underneath the falls and all around. We had a wonderful time. We stayed in a hotel in Canada. The French bell boys were all enamored with these 45 high school girls. They thought the girls were cute so they planned a party for them. The next morning the bell boys said to me, “Madam, the girls didn’t show up for the party.” I said “No, they didn’t, because they knew they’d get killed if they did, by me.” He kept saying “No, nobody came, nobody came.” I said, “No, because I have good girls.”

Then we went across Canada to Grand Rapids, Michigan where my mother and sister lived. We stayed in the Girl Scout camp there and my sister and my mother invited the whole town out to welcome us. My girls sang for the crowd and told them all about their trip and what a grand time they had. As the girls returned to the bus, my mother thanked them for coming and gave them each a bag she had prepared with an apple, some cheese, and other goodies. My sister and mother were so thrilled that I stopped by with my group.

From there we went through Chicago and back home. Sherbette, the girl who later married my nephew, was part of this group of girls. My nephew was living at home in Michigan at the time and came down to meet the bus. When Sherbette stepped off the bus, he kissed her in front of all the girls which delighted them all. It was so romantic. When we arrived home, all the

girls' parents said "Chicki, this is the deal. Next year, we leave the girls home and you take us on the trip."

I am sure the memories from that trip have never left any of those girls. Thankfully, they all stayed healthy through the entire two weeks, except for one girl who became constipated and I had to give her an enema.

I took those same 45 girls camping many times. Even though they were from 17 different high schools in Minneapolis-St. Paul, they attended every meeting in perfect uniform. We had crews and they elected crew chiefs who performed inspections. If a girl missed two meetings without a perfect uniform, she was out of the troop and the next one on the waiting list was in. I only put one girl out in all my years of leading. They all came because they wanted to be there. People would say to me, "Oh you're too strict. Girls won't do that." Well, they did.

I think we make it too easy for girls these days. Girl Scouting has changed completely now and it's a shame. They have lost the incentive they had when I was a leader. When it was run by volunteers, we were strict and everyone learned manners and how to represent the Girl Scouts in a positive light. We also had more exciting programs and activities. The people they brought into the national organization did not know badge work and did not have daughters in troops. They had no understanding of the importance of having the girls accomplish difficult projects or goals. It's the same thing with the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts who achieve Eagle are outstanding men. We have had many U.S. Presidents who were Eagle Boy Scouts. It was part of the training to be good citizens on into adulthood. And today I see young people and they dress atrociously and they don't take care of themselves. I saw a little girl the other day that must have been 10 or 11 years old and she had on high heels. It's absolutely ridiculous. They showed on television one morning little girls, 9, 10, and 11 years old, having their eyebrows plucked, having facials, and shaving their legs. They are trying to make women out of little girls, not letting them be little girls. I really feel sorry for them.

I guess my goal was always to have the girls achieve as much as they could, to grow into fine, young women. And I think I played an important part, assisting their parents in doing what they needed to do and teaching them how to work. Hopefully more women will lead girls into scouting with the same emphasis we had. I think God put me in that position to work with those girls and to love them and to help them grow and mature. I also hope that someone who reads this book might take the initiative to return Girl Scouting to what it once was.

By the way, when I took my scouts out camping, on Sunday morning we would have an all-church service. We had Protestants, Catholics and Jews, and we had some who didn't go to church at all. We would sing a song or say a prayer from each church and have them tell a little bit about their church and what they did there. It was really a wonderful opportunity to interact. We always said grace whenever we shared a meal together, even when camping. These girls learned to respect one another, no matter what religion they were. It also deepened their desire to do what God would like them to do. My relationship with Jesus Christ was no secret and my girls respected me and my religious beliefs.

Chapter 21

In the fall of 1964, I took my mother on a trip to Germany to visit my sister's son, Gary, his wife, Lucy, and their 7 month old daughter, Mary. Lucy's mother, Melba, also traveled with us. Dorothy and her husband, Dave, had lived in Austria for over ten years.

Gary and Lucy met us at the airport in Frankfurt and took us to their home in Heidelberg. Their sweet, little Mary was the rolliest, polliest, cutest baby I had ever seen. She had bright red hair to match her rosy cheeks.

Gary, Lucy, and Mary lived in an apartment on the second floor. From their living room window we could see the entrance to the Heidelberg Castle. A train track led up to the castle at the top of the mountain.

This was the first time my mother or I had ever been to Europe. We spent two weeks with Gary and Lucy and they drove us all over Germany in their Volkswagen bus. We saw everything there was to see. We bought jewelry in a little town about ten miles away, and ate at a restaurant in Munich which overlooked the famous church with the little wooden dolls in the steeple clock. The dolls come out every hour and half-hour and, as the music plays, they go round and round.

We saw the site of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. It snowed one day while we were there, in October, and we actually saw people training for a marathon in the freezing, cold weather.

At the Oktoberfest parade, my mother was waving her hand with a handkerchief and crying like a baby. I turned to her and asked, "Mother, why are you crying?" She said "I never dreamed I'd see anything so wonderful."

While we were there, we traveled to Paris for a weekend. My mother didn't want to go, so Melba and I boarded a double-decker bus, the first seats upstairs right in front. We went all the way from Germany through France to Paris. On the way the bus driver said, "Now if you'd like to go to the Folies Bergere, it's the 200th anniversary, you have to go tonight. The only tickets we could get were for tonight." So I talked Melba into going with me to the Folies.

We sat in the balcony next to an American sailor who had high-powered binoculars with him. The show started and the curtains parted. The entire stage was like a huge spider web. They had ropes and girls woven into the web like spiders. I took a double take and realized all the girls were nude.

The sailor said to me, "Would you like to look?" I said "Of course." So I looked and then gave the binoculars to Melba to look. When she did, she exclaimed loudly, "They're nude, they're nude!" And she closed her eyes and never opened them the rest of the performance. I enjoyed the show very much. I thought it was elegant, not crude or vulgar like in Las Vegas. It was really very delicately done, the way the dancers were woven together and how everything was choreographed with the music and dancing.

It was non-stop entertainment. When one performance ended and the curtains closed, another act immediately came out in the front followed by the curtains opening to another larger scene. Melba missed a fabulous show.

While in Europe, we tried to take in as many sites as we could, including all of the cathedrals and shopping areas, as well as the lush wine country. We traveled to Heidelberg and watched the people dance around the May Pole in the middle of town.

One weekend while we were there, Mother and I took a bus to Adelboden, Switzerland, to visit the Girl Scouts Chalet. I had no idea that, only months later, I would be visiting the Girl Scout Chalet in Mexico.

When Dorothy's husband, Dave, died in 1999 following a long illness, she had his ashes spread at the top of his favorite mountain in Austria where he loved to ski. They also placed a bronze plaque up there with his picture telling that he is buried there.

Chapter 22

In February of 1965 I was off on another adventure. I had been asked to represent the United States at the Girl Scout Chalet in Cuernavaca, Mexico. You had to be a Girl Scout leader or volunteer trainer in order to be considered for this trip, so I asked my co-leader Wiggy to join me. There were leaders from six different countries represented, including Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Norway, and the United States.

Wiggy and I left our husbands behind for a month and boarded a Greyhound bus in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We got off the bus in Dallas, Texas and spent the night. While in Dallas, we took a bus tour to see the route that President Kennedy had taken and the place where he had been shot just one year earlier.

The next day we climbed aboard a Mexican bus, the Transporta Del Norte, which took us into Mexico. That was an experience and a half. We were the only English speaking people on the bus. Everyone else spoke Spanish. The driver would be going along and then all of a sudden he would drive off into a field. We were stopped three times by the police in our first ten miles into Mexico. The police made everyone get out of the bus and then they took the entire luggage off the bus. I think they were looking for dope peddlers. Some of these women had funny hairdos, great big, spiral bee hives, and Wiggy and I thought they might have had drugs hidden in there. Every time the bus would stop, one of the women would run to the bathroom and they'd have to drag her out. We couldn't understand a word they were saying.

We had no idea why the bus driver would take us off the road and drive into a field and then go back onto the road. Eventually the bus made it to Mexico City. We spent two days sightseeing there. We went down to the main square where there was a beautiful church and several stores. Two children "adopted" us, accompanying us everywhere we went and talking to us. We had no idea what they were saying so we just smiled and nodded in agreement.

Then it was on to our final destination, Cuernavaca, which is about 50 miles south of Mexico City. Our bus went up over the top of a mountain and down into the valley where Cuernavaca was located. This was in February and all the trees were in bloom. They were yellow like Easter lilies which stood straight up. They even grew in the trees. There were purple trees that were absolutely gorgeous. We were taken to the Girl Scout Chalet where we met the ladies from the other countries who were there.

We had such a good time. We worked in patrols, slept in patrols, and had duties like we would give our own patrols to do. One time we would have to set the table for the meal and another time we would serve the meal. Another time we would clean up after the meal. It was interesting because they used all Spanish names. The only one I remember is they called a fork a tenedor. We learned to speak a little of the language while we were there. We also shared how we did things in our own troops. We shared songs as well as programs and projects that we had completed with our girls. We taught them plays that our girls had performed. We all shared what we made with our own troops.

We were there on Girl Scout Sunday and they took us to Acapulco to church. We all went in full uniform. There were also Girl Guide troops from Mexico in their uniforms.

One thing that stood out in my mind about Mexico was the pineapple. I had never tasted fresh pineapple right from the farm. It was so sweet and juicy, I ate it every day we were there.

We were taken to a private beach next to Acapulco, but had to go through a very poor town to get there. The children had no clothes or shoes and were playing in the mud.

We had only been at the beach for about a half an hour when one leader had become so sunburned she was in bed for a week. The sun is so intense closer to the equator, and it seemed

especially warm for us Minnesota gals. The water was warm and wonderful. We took a boat out into the ocean and saw a statue of a saint underneath the water. We also saw the homes of Hedy Lamarr and other movie stars who lived along the shore of Acapulco.

We noticed a man on the road with an armadillo and he stopped to let us see it. Then he tried to sell it to us. All we wanted was to take a picture of it, but the man wouldn't let us. So we bought the armadillo, paid him for it, took the pictures, gave the armadillo back to him, and got in the cab and left.

All our travels around the area were by taxi cab. I remember going from Cuernavaca to Acapulco and the taxi driver stopped at a rest stop. We were going to buy some candy and he got in front of us and said no. "Infirma, infirma," meaning we would get sick. He saved us from getting sick by not allowing us to buy the candy.

The taxi driver took us to a huge cave and we saw stalagmites and stalactites hanging from the ceiling. That was creepy, but very interesting.

One day they put up a pinata that looked like a chicken. They blind folded us and gave us a stick and we hit the chicken and finally when it broke open it was full of candy, which was good candy that didn't make us sick.

We toured the castle where the King of Spain had lived with his wife. Here we saw more of those absolutely magnificent trees with the bright yellow blossoms that looked like Easter lilies. In San Jose, California where I later lived, we had La Jacaranda trees with the purple flowers, but I had never seen anything like these ever before, or since.

Our last night was spent in Mexico City and the next morning we were ready to leave for home. I said to Wiggy, "I'll go down and get the cab, you bring the last suitcase and I'll meet you downstairs." I waited and waited. I had the cab ready to go and Wiggy didn't come. Finally she got out of the elevator and she was crying. I said "What's wrong?" She said that the young bellboy would come down one floor and then he'd stop at every floor. He tried to kiss her and hug her. She'd say "no, no, no" and then he'd go to the next floor and try again. So by the time she got downstairs, she was hysterical. The bellboy was trying to make time with her and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. Wiggy was about 55 years old at the time. She couldn't convince him that she was not interested in young, Mexican men.

On our way home, we stayed overnight again in Dallas and then we returned to Minneapolis. We were gone for over a month and had a wonderful time. My sweet, understanding husband was thrilled for me, but equally delighted that I was finally home. Not too many husbands would approve of their wives being gone that long, let alone into a foreign country, on a bus no less. It was a true testament to our strong marriage.

I'll never forget how much fun it was working with the women from other countries. We shared with each other and I know our troop benefitted immensely from everything we learned. I had the opportunity to tour three Girl Scout world centers in my lifetime. I wish I was still young enough to be involved in scouting. I always loved working with young people and I also enjoyed teaching the leaders.