Forward

I published these 22 reminiscences in the *Marblehead Reporter* between 2012 and 2015. Since then the *Reporter's* website, www.wickedlocal.com, has been overhauled several times, most recently by Gannet, publisher of *USA Today*. The links between my website, www.davidecrowley.com, and my *Reporter* articles are gone. Here they are in PDF format. I've changed some of the titles provided by the editor to ones I prefer. (May 12, 2022)

1) *All you have to do is steer*

One day in the summer of 1947, when I was eight, my mother, father and I stopped at the Barnacle, a seaside sandwich shop on Marblehead Harbor, in Massachusetts where I grew up. My mother, who had been a reporter in New York and who had written two children's books, never hesitated to befriend strangers especially if she detected a whiff of eccentricity about them. A couple who seemed a bit older than my parents sat near us at lunch.

The woman introduced herself as Dorothy Palmer. She was an artist and her husband Marshall worked at Union Hospital in Lynn. She spoke with what seemed to be an affected society accent, drawing out her "and" until it sounded like *ahhnd*. The rest of her speech was elegant and was formed into perfect grammatical sentences. It's no wonder that she and my mother who treasured the proper use of English hit it off so well. She invited us to dinner in their home at 26 Franklin Street, close to the harbor.

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Later, my mother filled me in on details. Dorothy had been born in New York into the Birdseye family of frozen food fame and Marshall had been employed by the American Thread Company in which his family had an interest. Dorothy's name and affected pronunciations reminded my mother of Mrs. Potter Palmer from a Marx Brothers movie, she said. Maybe my mother was thinking of Mrs. Potter, a character played by Margaret Dumont in "Cocoanuts." I laughed. Dorothy Palmer did sound like Margaret Dumont.

"Marsh," as Dorothy called her husband, suffered from depression, my mother reported, and often cried for days at a time. In bad weather, he wore a long

overcoat and an old aviator's leather helmet. He told me once that, as a young man, he had flown a biplane around the Custom House Tower, then Boston's tallest building. He didn't tell me if the stunt cost him his pilot's license, or if he even had one. Marshall, Dorothy told my mother later, depended completely on her. If she died before he did, she claimed, he'd simply walk down the street and into the harbor.

In my teens, Dorothy became my first after-school employer. We were to clean up the narrow garden which stretched back over a hundred feet behind her small house. I did a lot of raking and bundling of brush while she worked as hard as I did, digging and pulling weeds. A narrow path led back between high shrubs and small trees and Dorothy wanted to line it, on each side, with sizable rocks.

Dorothy Palmer at my mother's book signing October 20, 1951

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Marshall can't have made much as a surgical technician at Union Hospital and whatever Birdseye money had been settled on Dorothy must have been gone in 1947 when we met them. To generate needed income, they decided to rebuild the lower floor of their home into an apartment that they would rent out, while they lived upstairs.

I assume that contractors did some of the carpentry and other work needed to outfit the second-floor apartment with a kitchen and bath, but I'm certain that Dorothy did much of the scraping and painting herself. I helped with this work in the afternoons. I had to be very quiet, she insisted, because Marshall, who worked at night, was asleep.

Never before or since have I washed a ceiling, but that's what Dorothy required me to do as she prepared the downstairs apartment for final painting. She helped, but it was the most arduous and uncomfortable job I had ever undertaken. Maybe that's why my shoulder started hurting, fifty-five years later, when I thought of writing about it.

One day I ran into Marshall at the bus stop near their house. He wanted to show me his new invention which was a small aluminum clip to place over the tips of hypodermic needles after use. It would save patients untold pain, he said, because the needles often got dulled, acquired burrs, or even bent over in the sterilizer. I had received a shot or two in the days before disposables and agreed with Marshall that his discovery would be a boon to mankind. He didn't say anything about patents, nor did I hear about the invention again.

One afternoon when Dorothy was working on their new upstairs apartment, she said that we needed to move the grand piano across the living room. "OK," I said as I took a deep breath. "I'll take the heavy end and you lift at the keyboard. "Oh no," she replied, "There's a much easier way." She crawled under the piano, found the balance point, and arched her back. The piano lifted just a little off the floor. "All you need to do is steer," she said as she began to crawl.

Sometime in my college years, Dorothy told me that she was going to work in the "Association" building, an old wooden shoe factory near the corner of Green and Creesy streets. Now in the late 1950s, the three-story structure housed some small businesses including the manufacturing firm that was to employ Dorothy. As she described the work, I realized that this elegant and deeply cultured artist was going to be an assembly line worker, and what's more that she looked forward to it. She was even more enthusiastic, a year later, when the company moved to a small modern brick building on Green Street near the entrance to the town dump.

Her new job, she told me, would involve the complex assembly of miniature parts, work that she loved.

Marshall, it turned out, didn't have to walk into the harbor. He predeceased Dorothy in 1962 by thirty-four years. When she died at age ninety-nine in 1996, the Unitarian church in Marblehead considered burying her in its ancient graveyard. The State, which regulates burials, said no. The last internment was around 1850 and there wasn't enough space after the church added a wing in the 1960s. Instead, the Unitarians installed a memorial garden for cremated remains with a single headstone bearing small bronze plaques for each occupant, which is where I found the dates for Marshall and Dorothy.

In 1989 *Marblehead Magazine* published a profile of Dorothy, then 92. She told a writer for the magazine that in 1937, American Thread transferred Marshall from New York to Boston and that they had planned to settle on Cape Ann, with its renowned artist's colony. They stopped in Marblehead on their way north and were directed to the rooming house overlooking Lovis Cove. The proprietors (Mary and Gilbert "Colonel" Hodges) were out, and someone suggested that Marshall and Dorothy could get a good view of the "J" boats, then in contention for international prizes including America's Cup, if they walked up to Fort Sewell. They found the benches lined with spectators. She told the interviewer what happened next:

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I knew Dorothy for a scant few years in my youth; my mother moved on to other friends after I left for college. And I don't even remember her mentioning Marshall's death which occurred while I was in graduate school in Vermont. When I read of the cemetery controversy in the late 1990s in the *Reporter*, I was amazed that Dorothy had lived so long and was delighted that she had chosen to be a Unitarian as I did, here in St. Louis, in 1973.

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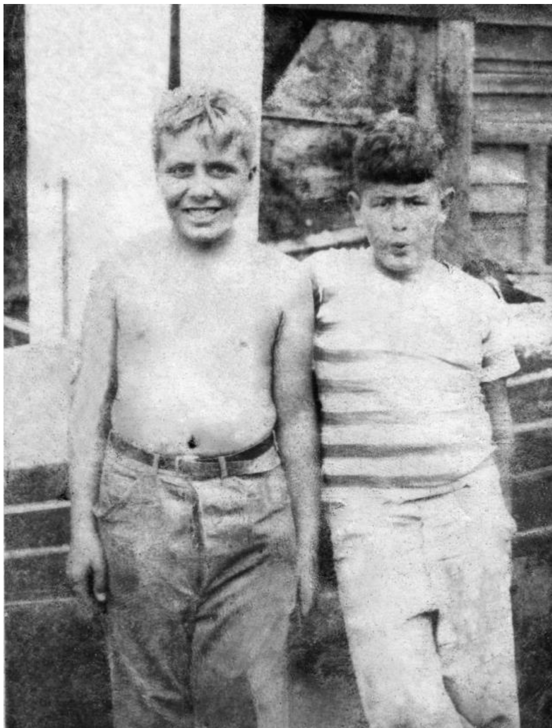
The grand piano that she moved on her back across her living room had belonged to her widowed mother in New York who had raised Dorothy with the help of a German governess. Along the way, the mother gave Dorothy a love of education, art, music, and adventure. She traveled widely, both before her marriage to Marshall, and later, after he died. Somehow supplied with extraordinary flexibility and strength, Dorothy threw herself into factory work with the same enthusiasm that she brought to her life of culture and refinement. Now that's real class. (From the *Marblehead Reporter* August 9, 2012)

2) *Freddy at 8 Stacey Court*

Stacey Court in Marblehead was easy to find, even after fifty years. We turned into Stacey Street just opposite the Old North Church, passed Edgar Bartlett's Garage on the right, and drove straight on between high hedges. We made a sharp left and there it was: the house at 8 Stacey Court where my childhood friend Freddy Petersen had lived. Just beyond was the B&B at 10 Stacey Court where we had made our reservation before leaving our home in St. Louis.

I was delighted to see that the large willow with its spreading limbs and the wide expanse of lawn where Freddy and I played were still there. The yard was fringed with flowers and contained a small fish pond, added sometime during the sixty-four years since Freddy and I first met in 1948.



David (left) and Freddy in the back yard at 20 Circle Street. Photo taken in 1948 by an engineer from Polaroid using an early version of the Land Camera. (Photo restoration by Walter Beagley)

He was eight and I was nine. His mother Vivian had brought him and his older brother Herbert to the US from Argentina after learning that her husband was having an affair with a secretary. She was a Christian Scientist and it was this church that helped with US sponsorship and found her part-time work as a translator at the "Christian Science Monitor" in Boston.

Freddy spoke with a Spanish accent and pronounced "while" as "whilst," and "were" as "where," which was how his British teachers had taught him in Buenos Aires. We played and fished in the harbor and he became my most loyal friend. Unlike other boys who bullied me, Freddy was courteous, kind, and well-spoken. His English improved rapidly and the Britishisms fell away.

With one foot still in his home country, he filled my mind with the wonders of its magnificent capital: broad avenues, beautiful buildings, theaters, concert halls, and the world's largest radio studio. Sixty-five years later I still think of Freddy and Buenos Aires every time I hear anything about Argentina. Herbert was a marvelous pianist. I loved listening to him play

wonderful pieces by Chopin and other composers. I took lessons myself for a few months but found it too frustrating.

In spring 1949 an ad for a home permanent-wave kit appeared on TV and in magazines. “Which Twin Has the Toni?” featured two women with luxurious curly hair. One spent hours in a beauty shop and the other used Toni’s home kit. So inspired, our mothers outfitted Freddy and me in dresses and curly wigs for the Marblehead’s annual Fourth of July “Horribles” parade. We carried a sign with the “Toni” question in the competition for the most imaginative costume. After expecting a first, we won third prize.

In 1951 Vivian sent Herbert to Mount Herman Academy and later that year moved to Newton to be close to a full-time job she had found. Apart from a few visits during high school I never saw Freddy again. My mother kept up with Vivian for four decades and relayed the news to me: They acquired a sandwich business; she and Herbert fought but she got along well with Freddy; Herbert married and divorced then moved to Florida where his deaf daughter was murdered at age 26. There was no mention of Mount Herman or the piano.

I lost track of Freddy after my mother died in 2000 and worried that he had died. In early 2012, one of the bullies who harassed me when we were kids told me that Freddy had punched him in retaliation for an attack on me a day or two earlier. I never knew that I had a defender.

In August 2012, I found Freddy in Florida through an internet search. He was successful in construction and real estate and was still working at seventy-three. Herbert had died in late 2009. “Yeah, I defended you against other kids, too,” he said when I thanked him for sticking by me. “I had a wonderful childhood,” he added, “but the hardest part was leaving Marblehead when I was twelve.” (From the *Marblehead Reporter* August 8, 2013)

3) *Facebook diaspora*

The internet has been a boon for all of us who live far from Marblehead and still love our hometown. One of the first groups to cover Marblehead history was started by Bill Purdin on Yahoo in 1999. It attracted comments for a few years, but history buffs could always go to Bill's Marblehead Magazine website for photos and wonderful articles from his print magazine— published from 1980 to 1994. For a long time, I ignored the internet's social networking sites. After all, that was for kids, and I'm a grandfather. But that changed in 2006 when my daughter told me of the wonderful Marblehead photos she had found on Facebook.

Dan Dxey's family has been in Marblehead since 1629, but Dan himself moved to Maine with his wife about 9 years ago. He brought along a collection of Marblehead photos that he obtained over the years mainly from Harry Wilkinson who wrote as "Mr. Whip" for Marblehead Magazine. And a few years ago he began posting his photos to a Facebook group called "Marblehead Historic Images."

In researching for a memoir, I struggled to find dates or details for an incident that I remembered clearly. It was in a warm day and school was out. I could have been any age between seven and thirteen. Chris Brown and I were swimming at Gas House beach and had climbed up on Molly's Rocks in our bathing suits and bare feet. We heard a loud thump and turned to look. Somewhere in the direction of the Old North Church, a gray cloud of smoke was rising and dissipating in the still air. It seemed close to us. We scrambled down, got into our sneakers, and ran up Gas House Lane. Before us on the left, a small house was split apart, with some of it lying in the street. I had walked past this house almost every day and had watched the progress of its recent renovations. Now it was destroyed.

I looked up to see the first fire engine arrive and walked up Orne Street to get a better view. Now firemen were carrying what looked to me like a large gray doll in a blanket out of the wreckage. When they kept walking up Orne Street towards the Mary Alley Hospital I knew that the form in the blanket was not a doll but a woman. Father Collins might have been walking beside the blanket administering last rites. Later my mother told me that the woman, Phyllis Mahan, had tried to commit suicide by turning on the gas. She had been transferred to Salem Hospital and was recovering.

In 2010 during a visit to town, I asked Marbleheader Rufus Titus if he knew about the explosion. He couldn't supply the date but had known Phyllis Mahan. She made a full recovery and she and her husband rebuilt the house. He and his wife had trusted her enough to babysit their children.

25 Orne Street following a gas explosion on June 4, 1951. (Courtesy of Dan Dixey's Marblehead Historic Images)

In 2012, I opened Facebook to find two clear photos of the exploded house in Dan's Marblehead Historic Images group. He gave the exact date as Monday, June 4, 1951, when I was twelve. Carl Coffin, a Marbleheader who lives in Australia, commented that he had just delivered a newspaper to the house when it blew up, knocking him down. I added my comment: the girl in the foreground was Anita Magee, my Gerry School classmate, with her mother. Anita lives in Australia, too. Warren Perry lives in Beverly and identified the policeman as Edward "Count" Brady, and the two men with him as Frank and Albie Merrill. I am not in the picture.

Every day or two here in St. Louis, another Marblehead image or an illuminating comment about one, pings my iPhone. I go to the computer in my study, bring up Facebook and dig into Dan's latest treasures from the past. (From the *Marblehead Reporter* August 22, 2013)

4) *Marblehead Summer Theater*

The Social Security statement I reviewed in preparing for retirement showed that my first recorded earnings were 165 dollars in 1955. That was my job as a stage carpenter for the Marblehead Summer Theater when I was 16. I had climbed the stairs in the back of the High School auditorium and headed past the projection booth to a small office where a man had me fill out some paperwork. I'd need a Social Security card, he said and added that the Summer Theater operation was directed by Lee Falk, the artist who drew "Mandrake the Magician" and "The Phantom."

The scene shop was at Richard Price's boat yard off what is now Fort Beach Lane, in the large shed used for winter storage and offices. The foreman was Bob Foote, who said he was a student in MIT's photography program. Another man, maybe in his late twenties, came from New York and was the theater's scenic designer.

Foote showed me the flats–wooden frames covered with canvas—that formed the walls in every stage set and said that they reused them after each week's play simply by repainting. If they were too beat up, they'd build new ones. There'd be other things to build, too, mostly platforms. He explained the combination power tool that we'd use. It was called a Shopsmith® and converted from a table saw to a drill press. And, of course, there'd be lots of lifting and moving when we changed seats.

I thought I could handle the work OK. I'd done plenty of repair projects at home, but I hadn't used a table saw more than a couple of times. Foote and I did all of the rough work in the shop, but most of the painting fell to the scenic designer. He sketched a few rough outlines on the bare flats, and with a few strokes of his paintbrush added wallpaper, windows, pictures on the wall, doors, and even flower pots.

All the time Foote kept up a constant patter of bawdy songs, lewd expressions, and lyrics from recent musicals. His favorite was the Rogers and Hammerstein song that ran all through "South Pacific," *Dités moi pourquoi la vie est belle, Dités moi pourquoi la vie est gai*. Now, fifty-eight later these French words are still in my head, to say nothing of the bawdy songs, two of which Foote composed himself. As for lewd expressions, well… I hadn't believed that a Marblehead boy could learn new ones.

Late Saturday evenings we loaded the sets for the next week's play into a truck at the boatyard and drove about a mile to the High School auditorium. We

struck the old set, moved it aside, and put up the flats for the new play. We carried lots of furniture.

Confined as we were to the boatyard we didn't get to meet the celebrity actors and actresses who starred in the shows or even see them in rehearsal. I did get a glimpse of Sarah Churchill and Gloria Vanderbilt at a beach party, but it was my mother who got to meet a real star.

Ethel Waters with Julie Harris and Brandon De Wilde in the 1952 film "Member of the Wedding"

1955 was the last season for the Marblehead Summer Theater and one of the last plays was "Member of the Wedding" starring Ethel Waters, a famous blues, jazz singer, and actress. Most hotels and rooming houses wouldn't accept African-Americans, even an Academy Award nominee like Waters. My mother's good friend Julie Pevear and her husband owned the large house on Pleasant Street that now houses the Bank of America. Julie, a warm and big-hearted woman, offered a room to Ethel Waters for the duration of the show and asked my mother to stop by to meet her.

They sat in Julie's kitchen and shared a quart of ice cream after a performance. It was very late and I was home in bed. Waters spoke of the numerous problems faced by black performers on the road. My mother was a champion talker but this time she felt privileged just to sit and listen. I wish I had been there. . (From the *Marblehead Reporter September 5, 2013*)

5) *Father Michael Collins*

For everyone in Marblehead when I was a kid, Father Michael Collins was the face and voice of the Catholic Church. He was a big man at six foot four with a ruddy Irish face and had a natural affinity for people. He supervised the sisters who prepared us for the first communion; he instructed us for confirmation when we were thirteen, and he heard our confessions on Saturday afternoons.

My confession, like every Catholic child's, came from a prescribed list: so many "taking the Lord's name in vain" — that covered swearing; a few "talking back to our parents," and a usually underestimated number of "impure thoughts." I don't know if I was the only youngster to stretch the definition of "impure thoughts" to include unconfessed "impure deeds," but I bet I wasn't. Thank God for Father Collins.

When I got into the confessional after a long anxious wait, he didn't ask for details. My penance never varied from one-to-five "Our Fathers," five to ten "Hail Marys" and a good "Act of Contrition." He never said just "Act of Contrition." It had to be a "good" one. I felt great relief when I approached the altar rail to recite the prayers.

My mother attended a wake for the husband of a friend Mary Lawler. Father Norton, the priest from St. Michael's Episcopal Church, murmured heartfelt condolences to the new widow and led the bereaved in solemn prayer. Father Collins strode in, smiled at everyone, and said, "Hi." He walked over and hugged Mary. He changed the mood in the room from doleful to cheerful in just about a second, she told me.

He performed his ecclesiastical duties as efficiently as possible, so he could spend his time outside among the people of the town, and at the firehouse, where he served as chaplain. Like me, Father Collins loved chasing fires. He had a complete set of turnout gear in his car with a white chaplain's shield on the helmet. Most firemen then were from old Marblehead families, almost all protestant, but Father Collins, radiating warmth, good humor, and acceptance of everyone, fit in perfectly.

In those days, a loud air-horn at the fire station on School Street signaled the fire alarm box number with a sequence of blasts. Everyone had a card giving the location of each box. If I was home when an alarm came in, I'd run to the card, and if the box was within a half-mile of my house on Front Street, I'd be off on my bicycle.

For those of us in the pews, twenty minutes was the legal limit for a Sunday mass, including a sermon. This boundary, not always observed by other priests, was the work of Father Collins and I learned why.

One Sunday he had just completed the distribution of communion and was returning to the altar when the alarm came in. The rest of the Mass went by quickly in a blur of priestly motion at the altar with a breathless stream of rapid-fire Latin. I looked up from my missal and Father Collins was saying, "*Ite missa est*," and then, "*Dominus vobiscum*." We were done and he was gone.

Father Collins with Fire Chief John Adams at the scene of the gas explosion at 25 Orne Street, June 4, 1951. Photo courtesy of Warren Perry.

Here he is in a photo from 1951 when a gas explosion destroyed a house on Orne Street. I was at the scene early but had left before large crowds and press photographers arrived. The spectators in this picture seem stunned, but Father Collins is there to offer comfort. Thank God that the woman who was injured survived and recovered.

Equally stunning to all of us who loved Father Collins was the announcement in the summer of 1952 when I was thirteen that he was to be transferred to Somerville. Most priests remained for three to five years in a parish before the archbishop moved them, but Father Collins had been in Marblehead for nineteen. When I cried at hearing this news, I knew I wasn't the only one who did. (From the *Marblehead Reporter* September 19, 2013)

6) *Scanners: A Hobby*

It all started in Marblehead in 1944 when I was five. We had just moved to town and I was playing with my new friends on Dunn's Lane, Billy, Stevie Goodwin, and a couple of others. We heard a siren and one of them said, "It's a fire, let's go!" They ran off down Elm Street, but I knew I had to check with my mother before I could follow them out of sight of our house. "It's just down Elm Street," I told her, "OK," she said, "but stay with Billy and Stevie." The fire wasn't much; the firemen poked around in a garage for a while, but there wasn't even any smoke. I was disappointed. Had I wanted to see a real fire with danger and big flames and lots of action with fire hoses? Of course! What kid wouldn't?

As I grew older I learned about the horn that could be heard all over town and that signaled each fire alarm box number with a unique sequence of blasts. We had a card that gave the location of each box, and I'd jump on my bike if the alarm was close to the house. But most of the time, there wasn't a real fire. I'd arrive out of breath, but there wouldn't be a single hose on the ground. It got to the point that I wouldn't bother chasing an alarm unless I could see smoke.

One day when I was in my early teens, I heard a two-way radio barking from a fire engine. The firemen could talk with the Central Fire Station and report back what they found on arrival. If I could listen to the radio calls, I'd know if there was a real fire. But having a radio that could receive the fire department was way beyond my imagination then. It wasn't until 1976 after I had moved to St. Louis that I found a scanner that could cycle through specific police and fire frequencies checking for activity.

Neither my work nor my personal life was going well, then. Out of frustration and loneliness, I threw myself into the police and fire radio scanner hobby. As better scanners came on the market I bought them and compiled long lists of St. Louis area frequencies. I joined a local club of scanner enthusiasts and wrote a column for a national radio magazine. When I visited my parents, I brought a scanner to listen to Marblehead police and fire and gave my father one for Christmas. I was obsessed with the hobby.

After I remarried in 1989, I spent less time with the radios, but I still kept a scanner running in my study. On a visit to Marblehead in 1998 we stayed at the Boston Yacht Club and one foggy evening I tuned in some marine frequencies. I heard the

Hannah Glover and a smaller boat preparing to return their passengers to the State Street wharf from Salem. The fog added an element of danger that captured my attention; my wife continued reading her book. Hannah Glover made it through and advised the other boat, the Shepherd, to stay at its dock in Salem until the fog lifted. We watched the lights of Hannah Glover from our window as it proceeded through the patchy fog from State Street to the Corinthian Yacht Club to drop off its remaining passengers. With the dissipating fog, Hannah Glover radioed the smaller boat to proceed. The Shepherd set out with its load of passengers but found itself embedded in a murky bank somewhere off Peaches Point.

The Hannah Glover on a clear day. Photo by Kimberly Gallagher

Moored boats loomed out of the dense mist and Shepherd's captain radioed Hannah Glover for help. The moorings meant that the rocky shore could be close. Glover's skipper asked for names of the boats which would give him Shepherd's exact location if the names were familiar. At first, they weren't, but then, proceeding at dead slow, Shepherd spotted a boat known to Glover's captain. He ordered the Shepherd to tie off at its mooring and wait.

At nine o'clock Hannah Glover set out to find Shepherd. Since the fog hadn't lifted when Hannah Glover approached she ordered the hidden vessel to shine its searchlight and sound its horn. After fifteen minutes the boats found each other and Hannah Glover guided Shepherd and its passengers safely to State Street.

Neither captain betrayed a hint of anxiety in their radio communications during this incident. Afterward, they commented that the passengers had enjoyed their adventure, but the Glover's skipper joked that the other captain should have paid

more attention in navigation class. For me, the ability to eavesdrop on drama like this keeps me listening, even today.

Here in St. Louis, the internet allows me to hear Marblehead police and fire calls. As I write, the police are blocking off lower Washington Street. Probably a bicycle or foot race, I think. But then I remember. It's Memorial Day and Marblehead's wonderful parade is about to step off. (From the *Marblehead Reporter* October 20, 2013)

7) *A Larsen Christmas*

Beginning in 1944, we joined the Selmer-Larsen family every Christmas Eve for their traditional Norwegian celebration and dinner of *risengrøt*, a rice porridge, *julekake*, a special Christmas bread, along with other Norwegian delicacies, which Mrs. Larsen, Elsa's mother, spent several days preparing

We met Elsa Brown and her two sons Chris and Erik, who lived right across from us on Elm Street, on our second day in Marblehead on August 2, 1944. Chris and I were five and Erik was seven and we all went to the Gerry School in the fall.

Elsa's father Johann Selmer-Larsen was an artist, sculptor, and model boat builder who emigrated, like my mother's father, from Norway early in the twentieth century with his wife Margretha. Elsa had an older sister Ingrid, an artist like her father, and two brothers: John who lived in Maine, and Ivar who lived in Marblehead with his wife Margaret. Ingrid was unmarried and Elsa was in the process of divorcing her husband.

As Chris and Erik became my first Marblehead playmates, Elsa, Ingrid, and their mother became my mother's closest friends and helped to inspire the "Azor" books that she wrote. As she said later, "I felt at home with the Larsens. They were so much like my family at home. They celebrated Christmas as we did growing up, with *Julenisse* [Christmas elves] and Julekake. They became my second family."

On Christmas Eve when we were little we sat at a table in the kitchen for dinner, that is, after running up and down the stairs of the Larsen's three-story home at 126 Front Street, or exploring the back staircase where we found treasures like Mr. Larsen's old fencing foils. The promise of special Norwegian cookies brought us to the table, not to be enjoyed until we had eaten our *risengrøt*, served with lingonberry syrup, cinnamon, and a pat of butter in the center.

"You must eat the *risengrøt* from the outside in*,"* explained my mother, "Eat around the edge in a circle until there's just a little mound left in the center. If you're very lucky you'll find an almond there. There's only one in the whole pot and the person who finds it will be married in the coming year."

I looked at her. At age seven the prospect of marriage didn't appeal to me. "It's really for grownups," she said, "But if you do get the almond, we'll give you something special."

The celebration began every year as we arrived early on Christmas Eve and mounted the concrete steps leading up from Front Street to the Larsen's house, which like many Marblehead homes, was built on rock ledge. Once, inside we

A Larsen Christmas in the late 1950s. Back row: Margretha Selmer-Larsen (seated), Dave's father Joseph Crowley, Dave. Middle row: Dave's mother Maude Crowley and Elsa Brown. Front row: Ivar Selmer-Larsen, his daughter Elizabeth, Erik Brown, Ivar's daughter Ann, and Ingrid Selmer-Larsen.

Left to right: Dave, Elsa Brown, Erik Brown, Margretha Selmer-Larsen, Ingrid Selmer-Larsen, Ann Selmer-Larsen, Margaret Selmer-Larsen, Maude Crowley, Joseph Crowley, and Elizabeth Selmer-Larsen.

exchanged many *gledelig juls*, the Norwegian Christmas greeting, and Elsa offered my father highballs and my mother coffee. When I became an adult I got a highball, too. The adults gathered in the living room, sitting in a circle that sometimes spilled into the hallway. The conversation was cheerful and funny.

Ivar, who thankfully passed his sense of humor along to my contemporary Chris, made quiet wisecracks or deliberately butchered the Norwegian pronunciations of the food we were to eat: Julekake became "jewel cage" and *risengrøt* was "rising grass."

Often, before dinner, we crowded into the hall to telephone out-of-town relatives who couldn't be there. Mrs. Larsen spoke with her brother in California and with her son John in Maine; we called my grandparents in

Brooklyn and my aunt and uncle in Manhattan. Each of the Larsen family exchanged greetings with each of their distant relatives, and each of us spoke with ours, but some of the Larsens spoke with my New York family, too, who they knew from summer visits. If we got tired of waiting for our turn at the phone we sat on the narrow winding stairs which led up from the hall to the second floor.

With the traditional Norwegian summons, *Vaer sa god*, meaning "be so good," Mrs. Larsen called us to dinner. Once seated, we began our *risengrøt* and looked around the table, and tried to guess who would get the almond. Then we had a course of lamb or pork with *julekake* and vegetables and later dessert and coffee. After Elsa, Margaret and Ingrid had cleared the table and put the kitchen in order, we had more drinks and exchanged our *skals*," or toasts. Once, we toasted with Aquavit, the fiery Scandinavian liqueur.

We continued this delightful tradition with the Larsens on and off for almost forty years; I attended into my twenties and occasionally beyond. Mr. Larsen, Chris and Erik's grandfather, had a stroke in 1957, but at Christmas and other special occasions, Ivar and Erik would carry him downstairs from his bedroom to join us for a while at the table. My last Christmas Eve with the Larsens was in 1983 when I brought my father, then disabled himself, for a short visit. My mother was too worn out that year to join us. Except for Erik Brown, Ann Selmer- Larsen, and me, everyone in the photos is gone. (From the *Marblehead Reporter* November 28, 2013)

8) *Dr. Sturgis*

She might have been seventy when we arrived in Marblehead in August 1944 when I was five. Her back yard was right across from our house at 3 Elm Street, but her front door was on High Street at number 34. Chris and Erik Brown, my first Marblehead friends, and I used the alley between her house and theirs to cut back and forth between the two streets. We passed her back porch every day where she kept an old-fashioned ice box with a pan underneath to catch the melted water. In her front window was a card telling the iceman how many pounds to deliver the next time.

She loved children: she showed us her garden as it flourished each spring with corn, tomatoes, and beans growing right among the flowers and invited us inside where we played musical chairs and other games in her parlor. Sometimes we sat on her horsehair couch which felt prickly on our bare legs in the summer. There was a Tiffany lamp and a couple of tasseled lamp shades too. And on weekends when we didn't have school, she cooked pancakes for us on her black iron gas stove, but she called them griddlecakes.

She told us how she worried about the boys still fighting overseas and how she prayed that they would come home soon. Later when I was older, she showed me some sheet music on her upright piano and joked about "Batch's fudges, "referring to a selection of fugues by J.S. Bach. Her name was Dr. Mary Sturgis, and she lived in New York during the winters. She was thin, had white hair, and might have been five-foot-five if she hadn't been stooped by age. She had graduated from medical school early in the twentieth century when few women did but she was unable to practice her profession, my mother said, because of her father's drinking. She had never married and had no children.

In 1948, when I was nine, our Elm Street landlord needed his house back for a cousin, forcing us to find another place in Marblehead which we did, a few blocks away. But in 1950, that landlord needed his house back too, and we had to move again, this time into rented rooms where we stayed for a year. In the spring of 1951, when I was twelve, my mother had a falling out with the rented-room landlady and we were on the move once more.

I hadn't thought much about Dr. Sturgis since we left our first Marblehead house, right across from hers, but my mother had stayed in touch and asked for her help. She had two spare bedrooms and a large sitting room upstairs, which we could have temporarily. After school let out in the spring of 1951, we moved into

The 1727 house at 34 High Street where Dr. Sturgis lived. Dave and his parents stayed in upstairs rooms during the summer of 1951.

our fourth Marblehead residence—our rooms with Dr. Sturgis. Now after three years and three moves we were back in the Elm Street neighborhood where we had started six years before.

My grandparents from New York wanted to visit us in our new quarters and there was some discussion between my mother and Dr. Sturgis about where they would sleep. There was no room upstairs; my mother and I occupied the two spare bedrooms while my father slept on a couch in the sitting room. My grandmother got the horsehair couch downstairs while my grandfather made do in an armchair. They got very little sleep, they said the next morning.

In the few months that we lived with Dr. Sturgis, I spent a lot of time in her kitchen while she cooked. I took on the job of emptying the water pan under her ice box on the back porch, along with a few other light chores. We talked, mostly about practical matters; sometimes she gave simple medical advice or told jokes. I once sanitized an off-color joke that my mother had told me; if Dr. Sturgis had heard the original version with the four-letter word, she didn't let on.

One day she had a pressure cooker on the stove and explained how it worked. The little rubber button on the top was a safety device, she said, to prevent

the metal pot from exploding if the pressure built up too much. A friend of hers in New York had forgotten about her pressure cooker on the stove with a chicken inside. She heard a tremendous noise from her kitchen, rushed in, and found the remnants of the cooked chicken stuck to her ceiling. It had been extruded though through the safety hole after the rubber button had given way.

I started the seventh grade at Marblehead Junior High School in early September 1951. Three weeks later we moved into our fifth and final Marblehead residence: our own home at 34 Front Street. I never saw Dr. Sturgis again, but I often wondered about her, and about what her life had been like. I still didn't understand how her father's drinking prevented her from practicing medicine.

During the four months that we lived with Dr. Sturgis, I was delighted to be back in our Elm Street neighborhood Some of the kids I had played with before were still there; others had moved away and there were a couple of new ones about my age. In the evenings we gathered and talked as we walked around downtown Marblehead. We still ran, swam, and played sports like normal twelve-year-olds, but there was something new among us—actual conversation about things that mattered, beyond sex and sports, about the town, our families, and our futures. I saw a glimmer of hope: I might grow up and be able to relate to other people as an equal. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, May 15, 2014)

9) *Hurricane Carol*

I grew up in Marblehead, which has not one, but two ideal harbors (three if you count Salem), and promotes itself as the "Yachting Capital of the World." Even some kids my age and younger owned small boats, some with sails and some with outboard motors.

In 1951, when I was thirteen, my mother bought me a 12-foot wooden lapstrake dory which I sanded and painted each spring after storing it in our yard over the winter. My father engaged two men with a truck who helped me launch it in the spring and haul it out in the fall. A neighbor sponsored me for junior membership in the Boston Yacht Club, then next to the town landing, where I tied my boat to one of its floats.

In the summers, I rowed my dory all over the lower end of Marblehead Harbor, in and out of coves and around rocks. Sometimes I fished with friends for flounder that fed near the bottom and for mackerel that came once or twice each summer in large schools.

Boston Yacht Club at Front and State Streets showing the float where Dave kept his boat before Hurricane Carol tore it away. From an old Marblehead postcard.

On the morning of Tuesday, August 31, 1954, when I was 15, a hurricane was predicted to hit the New England Coast, possibly by mid-afternoon.

I went down to the yacht club to haul my boat out of the water and onto the float to ride out the storm. The sea was rough, even in the harbor, and the float pitched and bucked with all the skiffs and dories tied there crashing and bumping against each other. I untied my rowboat and tried to use its mooring rope to maneuver it around the other small boats to a clear spot where I could drag it out of the water and onto the float. A wave came, pulling at my dory and yanking the line from my hand. I reached and grabbed the gunwale of the boat before it got away.

My dory lurched again and I was suspended, stretched out over the water, with my toes still on the float and my hands on the boat. A strong hand grabbed my belt and lifted me back onto the float. My boat pitched and rocked, and was carried away. I walked home to tell my mother of the loss of the dory and of my rescue by the stranger who had pulled me up.

The storm, Hurricane Carol, arrived after lunch. The house shook and trembled. “Hang on,” I told my mother, and we grabbed the heavy dining room table and held on to each other. Out in the yard, I could see our small apple tree slowly lean over and then come to rest on the ground with its branches on our side porch.

The storm abated. The sun came out and there was a period of calm. Then it came back and blew just as hard as it had before. Our house shook but it held up, as it had through every storm it had weathered since it was built in 1780.

Carol left catastrophic damage all over the New England coast. Life magazine featured photos of the devastation including a shot of Marblehead Harbor with boats of all sizes, descriptions, and value jumbled up and crushed against the rocks and on the beaches. The floats from the Boston Yacht Club and elsewhere in the harbor were gone, many having washed up at Riverhead Beach at the head of the harbor. There was no sign of my boat.

About two weeks after the storm, when some of the cleanups had been completed, a school acquaintance told me that he thought he saw my dory resting on a float moored in the harbor up near Riverhead Beach. A few days later, my rowboat was back in my yard.

One of the gunwales was broken, and the floorboards and one of the two seats were gone. The top plank on one side of the hull was sprung out a little bit, but otherwise my boat, despite the battering it received, was intact.

At fifteen, I wanted to learn more about woodworking and decided to rebuild my dory myself using my father’s simple hand tools: a couple of saws, two block planes, a screwdriver, a hammer, two C clamps, and an eggbeater drill. At the boatyard, I bought half-round oak for the gunwales and brass screws and went to the lumberyard for the pine to replace the floorboards and seats.

In boatbuilding, there are few straight lines or right angles, but I managed, somehow, to reconstruct everything that Hurricane Carol had taken away. After a couple of coats of paint, my dory looked as good as when we bought it. In the meantime, the remains of a downed apple tree were drying under our porch. My father and I had cut it into fireplace lengths, using a borrowed two-man saw, on the weekend after the storm. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, June 18, 2014)

10) *The tour*

Sometime in 1947 when I was eight, my father, Joe Crowley, took me on a tour of the *Boston Herald Traveler* where he had worked as chief copy editor since 1935. We began in the city room, at the U-shaped desk where he sat on the inside, or in the "slot" as they called it, with copy editors in green eyeshades ranged around the "rim" facing him. "Copy" was anything intended for the day's edition and was typed on sheets of paper of irregular size but a bit larger than the standard 8 ½ by 11 inches.

They checked every detail, wrote the headlines, and reduced each story to the required length, he said. When satisfied with a story, he rolled it into a cylindrical carrier and dropped it into a pneumatic tube which sped it downstairs to the composing room. By then he knew how many column inches the piece would occupy, its typeface, its position on the page, and where it would appear in the finished paper. He had learned to read the typed stories upside-down, so he could confer with the men facing him without turning the sheet around.

My father had to be at the copy desk in Boston by 7:00 AM, which meant taking one of the earliest trains out of Marblehead after stopping at Mrs. Toft's candy store near the station for *The Boston Herald*, the morning paper. The *Herald* told him what stories he might have to deal with while putting together the *Traveler*, the evening paper, which had a copy deadline of 2:00 PM. When my father left work at 3:00 PM, another crew took over the city room and worked all evening and half the night to produce the *Herald* for the next morning.

He took me next to the composing room on a floor below the city room. We started at the linotypes which were arranged in two rows against one wall. These machines, each taller than my father, looked like monstrous overgrown typewriters with huge keyboards. He explained that the operator could produce a line of type cast in lead called a slug. The successive slugs, or lines, of a column, fell into trays, which were assembled by a makeup man into an entire page of type held in a flat metal frame. Other groups in the composing room produced engraved plates for photos and ads, which the makeup man included in the frame. It took several more mechanical and chemical processes to produce the curved lead plates, one for each page, that were bolted to the circular rollers of the giant presses that printed the newspaper.

The pressroom occupied the lower two stories of the building because no upper floor could support the weight of the huge machines. Men on the floor and catwalks above tended to the presses which produced a deafening roar when

Dave's father Joe Crowley (right center) congratulates copy editor Ellis Heneberger (left center) on Heneberger's retirement in September 1947. Copy editors Jerry O'Brien (rear, facing camera with glasses and eyeshade) and Cameron Dewar (right with bowtie.

running. The machines were silent when I was there with my father; it would be too dangerous for a child to be anywhere near the giant rollers when they were running. One of the pressmen made a paper hat for me, just like the one he wore to keep ink out of his hair, but the right size for me—a few quick motions of his hands with a sheet of newspaper and the hat was done.

My father, who started as a street reporter in the 1920s, was an expert in the mechanics of newspaper production as they existed when I was a child, that is before the computers transformed almost every aspect of the process he had mastered. Sometimes I wondered why he didn't encourage me to follow him into his work, knowing as he did that I loved mechanical things. But he also knew that newspapering had its rough side which I might be not able to accommodate. He didn't have to tell me directly. I already knew by the time of my first tour of the Herald-Traveler when I was eight.

At dinner each night in Marblehead he told my mother the highlights of his day at the paper and about the personalities and quirks of the people he worked with. One of his copy editors—among the best, and a close friend—had developed

a drinking problem that grew worse and worse. This man often called in sick on a Monday morning and missed other days too. The anguish that this behavior caused my father became more apparent as he realized that he'd have no choice but to let the man go, which he did, after a couple of difficult months. The memory of my father's pain stayed with me as other anecdotes reinforced in my young mind the association of newspaper work with heavy drinking.

It was a couple of years later, when I was ten, that I became fascinated with aviation and model airplanes. By this time, my father had developed stomach ulcers brought on, he thought, by stress at the *Herald Traveler*. He had been promoted to City Editor and became immersed in vicious city room politics.

I wanted an aviation career and, in high school, decided to become an aeronautical engineer. The physics and math required for engineering were too much for me and I flunked out of college when I was twenty and became a psychologist and computer specialist instead. Around that time I learned that my father had also flunked out of college and that he too had planned to become an engineer. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, July 10, 2014)

11) *BB gun dreams*

It might have been all the western movies I saw—or my growing desire for revenge against bullies—that accounted for the violent fantasies that could only be fulfilled with firearms. In my imaginings, I dropped evil riflemen from rooftops with double six-guns or leaped from second-floor balconies to land on my horse to ride off in pursuit of the bad guys.

I looked for some satisfying way to approximate these dreams in the reality of my life as a 9-year-old child whose actual days were absorbed in school, play, and family routine. Cap pistols were fun, but they didn't satisfy; there were, after all, no bullets, and actual firearms were well beyond my reach.

A couple of friends had Daisy BB guns, modeled after the Winchester lever-action carbines featured in the movies. How they had persuaded their parents to supply them with weapons that my mother saw as lethal was beyond my comprehension, but nothing stopped me from pestering her and my father for a BB gun of my own.

Jean Shepard's wonderful 1983 film, "Christmas Story," about a boy who covets a BB gun, was many years in the future but his tale, minus the ditzy parents, could have been mine.

"Well," my mother said one day when her resolve was beginning to weaken, "maybe if you would use it only under Young Paul's supervision." Young Paul was my cousin in Danvers, the teenage son of my father's brother Paul. Young Paul had a .22 caliber rifle that he used for hunting squirrels and rabbits in the fields behind their house. I hadn't seen him once in Marblehead. My mother's idea would work only if I went to Danvers, nine miles away to use my BB gun there. It didn't make sense.

An ad in the back of a comic book led me to the Johnson Indoor Target Gun. It propelled standard BBs with a strong rubber band, like a slingshot, and was made of brown plastic with a stock and two pistol grips like a machine gun.

"What could be safer than a toy gun powered by a rubber band?" I argued. After insisting that I use it only in my room with paper targets, my mother agreed and supplied the fifteen dollars I needed to send away for this child's weapon. A couple of weeks later an oblong box arrived in the mail and I rushed up to my room to give it a try.

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FAMOUS Johnson INDOOR TARGET GUN

Parties for adults or youngsters will never drag when you have this **safe** Johnson Target Gun! Nothing like it before—has amazing target rifle accuracy, even across a playroom, yet is safe enough to shoot in living room, and approved for use by children. Automatically feeds and shoots 65 re-usable pellets in rapid succession. Precision made with burnished steel barrel, adjustable sights, and strong propelling unit by makers of famous Johnson machine gun used by our soldiers, 28½" long, it has the heft and feel of a real gun; gives valuable training in marksmanship plus superb entertainment for family and friends. Comes complete with bull's-eyes, metal target gallery, paper targets, shot-saver backstop, pellets, and extra power unit. An extraordinary value—Ideal for Xmas-giving! **Order No. F45**

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526 BRECK BLDG., BOSTON 10, MASS.

A 194O's ad for the Johnson Indoor Targe Gun boasts its relation to the weapon used by GIs during the war in the Pacific.

To my disappointment, it was only a single shot and had to be cocked each time by pulling the rubber band back with a special metal grip. At eight feet, which was all the distance I had in my room, the gun was reasonably accurate, but sometimes it didn't have enough power to puncture the paper targets and left only a dimple. Some of the BBs landed in the shipping box that served as a holder for the target, but most went on the floor.

After a couple of weeks, I tired of shooting at paper targets and of spending so much time on my hands and knees retrieving BBs from under and behind furniture. My mother and father had forbidden me to shoot the gun outdoors, but one of the windows in my room opened to Circle Street, and it seem harmless enough to see what its range was. If the gun was so feeble that it could only bruise paper targets, then, surely it couldn't do much damage outside.

I pushed up the window and aimed carefully at the clapboard side of the house across from ours to see if the BB could reach it. Somehow the simple toy gained power when exposed to fresh air and the BB flew directly into a second-floor window, which it broke. Suddenly I was frightened and felt my stomach contract.

Of course, I had to tell my mother what happened. She went across and spoke with our neighbor, Carrie Vent, who had come out to look at the shattered glass. She arranged some sort of reparation for the damage, but came back and told me that the BB gun had to go. I felt ashamed at having caused this trouble; my parents didn't have much money and the repair would be an expense. When the police arrived to dispose of my gun, I was relieved. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, July 24, 2014)

12) *The "Casino Follies"*

"Erik and Joe Phillips went to the burlesque show at the Old Howard last night," Chris told me one day in 1953 when we were 14. "They wore long coats and man's hats to make them look older at the ticket window. You were supposed to be 21 to get in," Chris added. Erik was Chris's older brother, then 16. Both have been my friends for 75 years since the day in 1944 when I met them in Marblehead. Chris and I, along with a lot of other kids, had been speculating and joking about burlesque shows for a long time and couldn't wait to see one ourselves

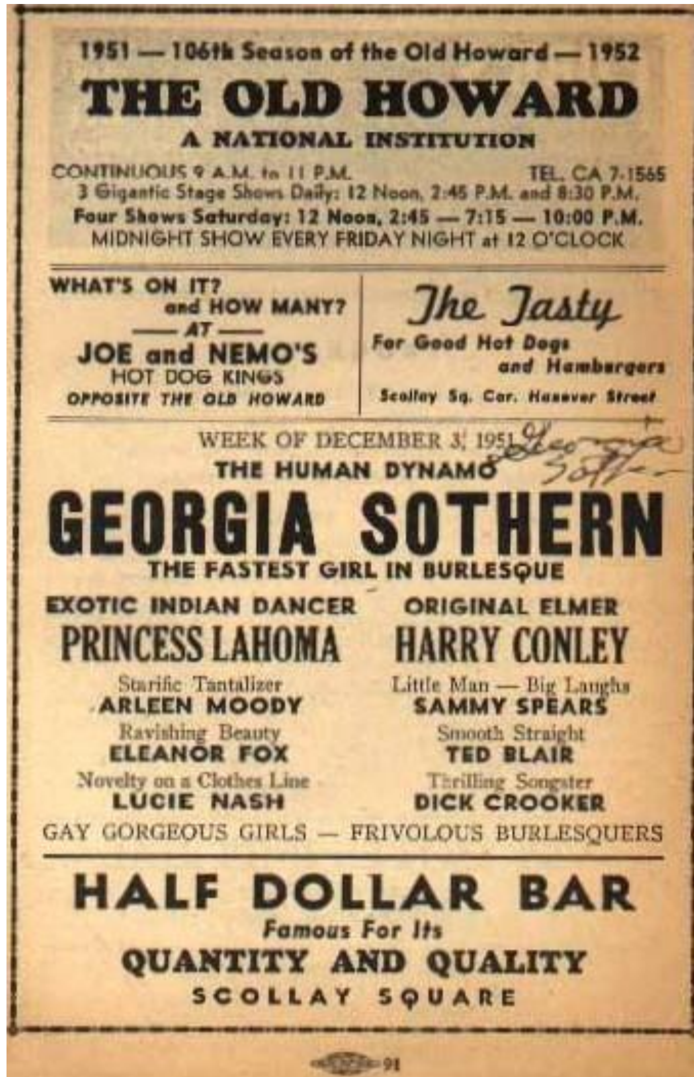
In case you're wondering, the Old Howard was a theater in Scollay Square in Boston and a burlesque show was a form of entertainment in which women danced on stage for a male audience. They removed their costumes piece-by-piece in dimmer and dimmer light until nothing was left but a tiny garment below called a G-string, and two adhesive disks called pasties. These women were strippers although, if you asked one, they would say "exotic dancer."

"It was wild during the war," my father said of Scollay Square, "filled with sailors on liberty, dozens of bars, and all sorts of entertainment, of course." I didn't have to guess what he meant by "all sorts of entertainment." When I was 16 I had yet to see a burlesque show. He had seen many, he admitted and told me about the comedians and their crude skits which usually preceded the appearance of strippers during the second half of the show.

I knew Scollay Square from the subway station where we had to change trains when we rode into Boston from the Wonderland station in Revere where we parked our car. Upstairs on the street was the infamous burlesque house: The Old Howard.

By the time I was 17 in 1956 and ready for my trip to the burlesque show, the Old Howard was gone. Erik and his buddies had been there just before it was shut down by the city. A court had determined that a performance by a dancer named "Irma the Body" violated Boston's decency laws. What was left for us was the Casino Follies, around the corner from the Old Howard on Hannover Street. And we had to settle for strippers like Blaze Starr because Irma the Body wasn't on the playbill when my friends and I made our trips to the burlesque show.

Early one evening we piled into a friend's car and drove from Marblehead to Wonderland where we boarded the subway for Scollay Square. We rode the long escalator up to the street and made our way to the theater. We passed a closed store



Old Howard Program

on our left with a sign advertising "rubber goods." These goods had to be sexual, we concluded, simply because the shop was in Scollay Square, but the only items in the window were trusses for hernias.

No one asked our age when we bought tickets to the show which featured the read-headed Tempest Storm, the most voluptuous and desirable stripper known to us. After we settled in our seats, a vendor came around selling what he said were rare and expensive watches for something like two dollars. One of my friends bought one and we took a close look. The stem broke off when he tried to wind it.

The show began with an MC, some jugglers, and a three-piece orchestra. Two preliminary dancers warmed us up for the main act. As each removed items of clothing, the spotlight illuminating them changed from yellow to blue and then to darker and darker purple. After they unhooked the last strip of cloth on top, they turned their backs to the audience and disappeared through the curtain. It was the stripper's standard exit.

Tempest Storm's act was no different in form than the performances of her less-endowed predecessors on the stage. But her dance was longer and the spotlight stayed brighter further into her disrobing act. And she did indeed stretch the bounds of her skimpy garments much more than the others had, especially on top. When the show ended, we agreed, that Tempest Storm was worth the trip.

We headed back to the subway around 10:30 that night. As we passed the street exit from the escalator we had used earlier we heard a train pulling into the station below. At that hour it would be a long wait for the next one. We didn't have time to go around to the station entrance and put our tokens in the turnstiles. Instead, we charged down the up-escalator and jumped on the train just as the

doors closed. We were lucky; there were no guards on the platform. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, August 21, 2014)

13) *Gordons*

I couldn't find it in either of St. Louis's two large stationery stores after I moved here in 1969. And if I were looking for it today, I'd be even less likely to discover it in a big box palace like Office Max or Staples. Those stores don't even stock what we used to call stationery—boxes of writing paper with matching envelopes—just in case you want to write someone a letter.

Harold and Elsie Hammond at the counter in Gordon's in the early 1950s. Photo from of Dan Dixey's Marblehead Historic Images.

What I needed was a new copy of *Ward's Motor Record Book* where I kept track of gas mileage, oil changes, and repairs for my car. I had used them for several years, just as my father had before me. I had a stack of old filled-in books and the last copy in my glove compartment had only a couple of unused pages left. It was maybe a month before my next trip home when I knew I could get THE Ward's books, at Gordon's at 111 Washington Street in downtown Marblehead.

All through college and graduate school, I knew that any odd item of stationery I had taken a liking to—special envelopes, blue carbon paper, or even a particular type of mechanical pencil would be sold out and not reordered at the university bookstore. The graph paper I needed was gone, replaced with a snazzy new line of hair dryers.

Harold and Elsie Hammond, the efficient proprietors of Gordon's, must have skipped all those business school classes that taught you how to replace practical items on your shelves with trendy gadgets crafted to attract hordes of impulse buyers. Instead, they stocked necessities for all ages.

There was a toy section in the back where I bought many of the model airplane kits I assembled starting in the late 1940s and there were cap pistols too, both necessities for a 10-year-old boy like me. There were comic books - tame

ones like “Superman” and “Donald Duck,” - just not the ones I wanted, like “Tales from the Crypt.” A Senate committee had determined that horror comics caused juvenile delinquency, and Harold and Elsie were too sensible to offend parents. Another stationery store in a different part of town – Howard’s – did have the horror comics, and later on men’s magazines like Playboy and Hustler.

Towards the front of Gordon’s, there were magazine racks, paperback books, newspapers, and even a small lending library. My job, in my teen years, was to stop in every week and pick up the magazines, Time, Life, and the New Yorker plus the Salem News for my father, while my mother shopped at Louie Halpern’s Marblehead Supermarket across the street.

Then there were the blessed items of stationery that my mother and I craved. You see, we both had serious addictions to paper goods - just the right kind of notebook filler or graph paper for me to use in school and special manila envelopes for her writing notes.

I used the Ward’s Motor Record Books until 1993 when I bought my first serious computer and put all my auto data into a spreadsheet. I arranged the columns and rows just like the layout of Ward’s pages. Ward’s had a special section for trips which I approximated in part of my spreadsheet. Twenty years later I still use the spreadsheets based on Ward’s books that I could only get at Gordon’s in Marblehead.

I still suffer from the stationary addiction: I have a cabinet full: enough to stock a small office. Gordon’s closed in the 1970s, but if I dig enough in my horde, I know I’ll find something I bought there. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, December 11, 2014)

14) *Radio serials*

I knew nothing of radio serials when we moved to Marblehead in 1944 when I was five. I had listened to the NBC Symphony with my parents on our radio back in Newton where we lived before, but I had no idea that programs like Superman even existed.

Late one afternoon I was playing with my new Marblehead friends Chris and Erik Brown who lived right across Elm Street from us. “Let's go inside,” Erik said, “it’s almost time for Superman.” I listened in amazement as the Man of Steel shot across the sky,

> *Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, it’s Superman!*

I told my mother and the next afternoon at 5:15 she helped me find WNAC in Boston on the dial of our console radio. After Superman, there was Tom Mix and then Captain Midnight. Later I found Dick Tracy at 5:00 on WCOP and in the evening the Lone Ranger which was a full half-hour, twice as long as the afternoon shows.

These programs filled my mind with their wonderful adventures and supplied me with imaginary companions who were all but real. When Captain Midnight lay in mortal danger at the end of one episode, I tossed in my bed that night feverish with worry that he might not survive.” What happens if he dies?” I asked my mother who had come in to reassure me. “Captain Midnight isn’t a real person,” she said, “and if he died, I guess they’d have to end the program.”

Like every kid, I ordered premiums which were special little toys that you sent away by supplying a cereal box top or label from the sponsor’s product and maybe a dollar. The first was a little ballpoint pen attached to a ring. Ballpoints were new in the mid-1940s; I had never seen one. After a week, it started to smudge and leak, just like other early ballpoints.

Dick Tracy offered a wrist radio, promoted to resemble the one he wore in the comic strip and radio drama. When it arrived, it turned out to be a large plastic earphone with a wrist strap and a button on the side. I opened it up and saw that it had a little crystal, just like the ad said. I held it to my ear, wiggled the side button, and heard a radio station. I was amazed. It didn't sound as good as our console radio and it was almost impossible to tune, but it worked.

Next was the plastic Ovaltine mug from Captain Midnight. You filled it with cracked ice, Ovaline, and milk put the cap on, and shook it hard. My mother did all this and the resulting shake tasted great.

Ad for the Dick Tracy wrist radio

A new program, "Straight Arrow" with an Indian hero, appeared when I was about 8, and it offered a plastic arrowhead that glowed in the dark and included a working compass in the center. It sent for that too, and it did exactly what the sponsor promised.

The best of all premiums was Superman's "The Flying Train." I received two plastic 78-RPM records containing an eight-and-a-half minute adventure, set to music and song, and featuring two criminals named Frog and Snicker. Clark Kent, Superman's everyday alter ego, and his companion Lois Lane are traveling on a train. The hoodlums' plot to blow it up so they can steal a gold shipment from the front car. Superman saves the train, but the criminals capture Lois. He saves her too, and in the end, Frog and Snicker sing their tuneful lament:

Here in a prison cell we sit
throughout each lonely day.
Before turning crooks we should have quit,
For we learned crime doesn't pay,

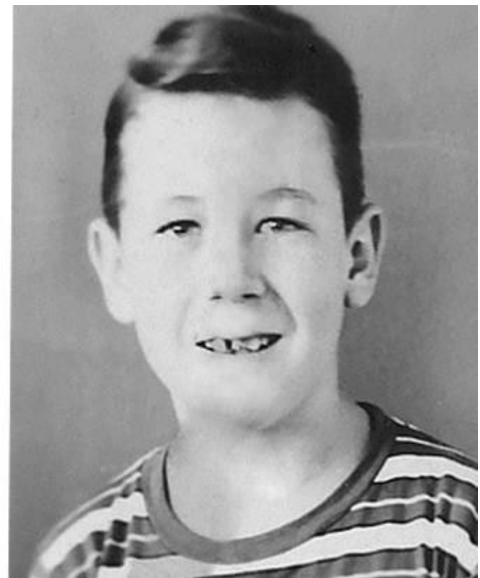
For we learned crime does not pay.

For me, the radio serials never lost their magic, even when I discovered photos on the internet showing my childhood heroes as men and women in business suits and dresses standing before microphones. Other kids complained about the cheesy trinkets they received after sending away for the marvelous devices touted by their radio heroes. Not me. Everything I sent away for worked exactly as advertised, even the wrist radio. Was I disappointed? Not one bit. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, December 25, 2014)

15) *Cap blaster*

It started when Tommy White and I were in the fifth grade at the Gerry School in Marblehead in 1949. We must have been around ten when we happened on a small metal toy that we called a cap rocket, which used paper caps to blast a small projectile the size of a grape into the air. Paper caps contained small amounts of gunpowder and made a convincing pop, at least to a child, when we used them in the cap pistols that all boys had when I was a kid.

It was the detonation of the gunpowder that launched the projectile part of the cap rocket into the air. It had a feather that stabilized it in flight and just like a small rocket it turned over at the peak of its ascent and fell back to earth, usually within easy reach, or so we hoped. The metal made a satisfying ping when the cap exploded and another one when the projectile landed.



Fifth grade photo of Dave (left) and Tommy (right) with the 1936 patent (2032161) drawing for the cap blaster. M. L. Wiener was the inventor.

Not satisfied with a small bang or a flight below tree level, we added caps, but found that four explosive caps were too many; there was a loud bang but the metal toy split open ruining it. What we wanted were rockets, but fireworks were illegal in Massachusetts, and the cap rocket was as close as we could get.

Tommy was passionate about aviation of any kind, even at age ten. We graduated to model airplanes made from balsa-wood kits. I got my first one at Finch's store on Washington Street and assembled it at home. I had the whole balsa frame put together, fuselage and wings, with glue drying before the next step which was to apply the special tissue paper that formed the skin. I left the model on the chair in my room when my mother called me for dinner. Forgetting about the

airplane, I ran back upstairs later and plunked down into the seat. As I settled, I felt and heard a crunching sound under me. I knew just what it was. I sprang up but it was too late – the model was crushed.

I got a little further with the next airplane which was powered by a rubber band that you twisted by winding the propeller. It stretched back from the nose to the tail inside the fuselage. You had to install the rubber band before the paper went on. It would be great, I thought, to test the propeller by winding the rubber band as tight as I could, just to watch it spin. The instructions said to wait until the model was complete before testing the propeller, but I had no patience and proceeded to wind it up. I had it just about tight enough when there was another crunch. The model collapsed nose to tail, just like an accordion. By this time, I had developed the skills needed to repair and complete it.

In the meantime, Tommy had discovered "Jetex" model rocket engines, which were small metal cans with a solid fuel pellet inside that you lit with a fuse. There was a bracket for attaching it to your model airplane which we did on the Gerry School playground, the original testing ground for our cap rockets.

In the spring of 1950, my parents and I moved into rented rooms where I had no space to build airplanes. It wasn't until the fall of the next year when we had settled into our own house that I could get back to the models. Then I built replicas of World War II aircraft: The British Spitfire which I painted white, and a few naval aircraft like the Douglas Dive Bomber, the Grumman Hellcat, and the Chance-Vought Corsair. Other modelers like Tommy were much more serious about it and got into planes with little gasoline engines, but I never went that far.

Tommy joined the Air Force during his senior year at Marblehead High School, and after his service, received an engineering degree from Northeastern University. He spent his entire working life in the aviation industry and retired as a senior manufacturing engineer for a company that makes precision parts for aircraft engines. He was still employed with aviation when I talked with him around the time my mother died in 2000. He retired to Florida with his wife in 2004 and died there in April 2012.

I kept my keen interest in aviation but unlike Tommy could not pursue it as a career. The cap rockets that we played with 70 years ago are beyond most people's memory, but every time I look at a model aircraft magazine or watch a YouTube video of the latest modeling developments, I think of Tommy and how he got me started. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, February 19, 2015)

16) *Brown's Island*

In the first two years after we arrived in Marblehead in 1944 when I was five my parents organized several picnics on Brown's Island in Little Harbor. They invited a few of my father's newspaper pals from the Boston Traveler along with three families that we met in our first year in town. Don and Shirley Willard lived on Peach Highlands with their three kids, including Nicky, my age. Don wrote a column for the Boston Globe and had a great sense of humor. Their neighbors Everett and Amelia Goodwin had four sons who were older than me and a younger little girl. Jack and Mary Riley lived near the Goodwins and came to the picnics but didn't have kids.

Everett Goodwin was essential to the success of these events. He supplied the lobsters which he caught in traps from his boat, the "Allie-O". You can read all about Brown's Island and the Little Harbor lobstermen in Hugh Bishop and Brenda Booma's delightful book, *Marblehead's First Harbor* (History Press, 2011). As the book points out, you can walk out to Brown's Island on the mudflats exposed at low tide, but at high tide, you need a boat. The adults scheduled the picnics so that most of us could walk out early at low tide carrying light provisions for lunch. Later in the day when the incoming tide gave Everett enough water to bring his boat within wading distance of the beach, we got the lobsters, corn, and cooking pots needed for dinner

In the meantime, we played, waded in the water, and swam. We had to watch the bottom carefully to avoid stepping on broken clamshells or glass. If we felt a squirt of water come up under our feet, there was probably a clam underneath, but we couldn't eat them. During most of my childhood, clams and mussels in the harbor were off limits due to bacteria counts or algae blooms like red tide. The grownups said to keep out of the woods and the grassy field behind the beach. There were poison ivy, fire ants, and other biting insects. What's more, we might fall if we climbed up on the high rocks on the northern end of the island.

Our parents built a large wood fire in the rocks at the back of the beach and boiled the lobsters and corn in the big pots that Everett had brought out. They didn't use the traditional clambake method where they buried the lobsters, clams, and corn in a pit covered with seaweed because it took too long. Besides, boiling worked fine. We kids drank Manataug soda, bottled in Marblehead right off Dunn's Lane, while the adults had stronger stuff.

Before sunset, as dusk settled in, Everett ferried us in his boat to one of the docks in Little Harbor, where we could easily walk back to our cars parked along Orne and Beacon Street.

A couple of weekends later, he invited my father and me out on his boat to watch him pull lobster traps which he called “pots.” I sat in the stern and took careful note of his operations: he approached the wooden buoy identifying his trap from the starboard side. He took his engine out of gear and let it idle and then snagged the buoy with a gaff. Then he looped the line over an open pulley at the end of a davit and wrapped it a couple of times around an open winch next to the steering wheel. The winch spun from a power connection to the idling engine. He fed the line by hand into a growing coil on the deck beside his feet. “Never step in the coil,” he warned. “You could be caught, pulled over the side, and drowned when the pot went back in.”

Lobster boat model showing davit and open winch (just to the right of the steering wheel) used for hauling traps.

When the heavy trap came to the surface, he heaved it out of the water and rested it on the broad gunwale. He opened the trap, pulled out a couple of crabs which he threw overboard, and then one small lobster. “Probably a short,” he commented, as he took a metal gauge out of his pocket and held it up to the struggling creature’s shell. “Yup,” he said, and tossed the young crustacean back in. He cleaned some old bait out of the trap and replaced it with a redfish that he

took from a large pail. “Watch that rope,” he called as tipped the heavy pot over the side. I pulled my feet back as the line spun over the rail and the coil on the deck unwound. He flipped the buoy overboard as the last of the line played out. He had better luck with his other traps and by the end of the morning, he had almost a dozen lobsters in a wooden box on the deck.

I returned to Brown’s island a few more times and took my daughter Hanna there one summer when I was in my thirties. We stayed out of the woods; the memory of a dose of fire ants I had received there on an earlier visit was still fresh. I lost track of the Goodwin family for many years but reconnected at a high school reunion when their little girl, Joan, turned up as my friend Hooper Cutler’s second wife. She said that her father Everett had retired to Florida and that after his death in 1997, they had scattered his ashes, as he had wished, on the waters of Little Harbor. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, February 26, 2015)

17) *Trips to the dentist*

Most people dread going to the dentist, but I never did even though I needed lots of repairs to my teeth. I had cavities in my baby teeth and wore braces fitted by an orthodontist in Boston. Dr. Perkins, until I was six. That's when the wonderful dentist I had growing up in Marblehead, Harry Keissling Bailey, DMD took over. I knew his middle name because it was inscribed on the diploma always in view when I sat in his chair. I couldn't translate Latin from the Harvard School of Dental Medicine or decipher the roman numerals indicating the year of his graduation but the name was inscribed in an ornate calligraphic script, "Henricum Kiessling Bailey." If I turned my eyes a bit they fell on his undergraduate degree from Hamilton College in central New York State, just east of Syracuse. That year of graduation was 1935, a fact I learned from an internet search, not from remembering the diploma itself.

He was thin like most people in those days, of medium height, maybe five foot, nine or ten (It's hard to tell how tall an adult is from a kid's view), and had dark brown hair. He wore a white tunic that had a collar like a priest's, except that it had a button in the center. His son Harry was my classmate from the first grade on. After dental school, he joined another Marblehead dentist, Dr. Pete Sturgis, who took care of my mother's teeth after we moved to town in 1944. A year or two before World War II broke out, Dr. Bailey opened his practice, specializing in children.

If I swiveled my head further to the left in his dental chair, I could see out a glass door to the side porch which often contained small children's toys or the kids themselves who lived in the upstairs apartment in the house at 82 Pleasant Street that Dr. Bailey rented and later bought. When he first opened his practice, he and his family had lived in that apartment and did so while he was away serving as a dentist in the War.

A low fence bordered the yard where the kids from the upstairs apartment played and I usually left my bicycle leaning against it on the Pleasant Street side during my dental visit. My bike had been stolen before, so I locked it before heading into the office.

Everything about Dr. Bailey and his office was like being in someone's comfortable home, especially in the spring and summer when the doors to the side porch and Pleasant Street were open with screens, in the days before air conditioning. I was in the center of a tactile environment where I felt that I could reach out and touch the buildings, the cars going by, the people, the children playing, and the dogs I could hear barking.

There was the house next door, the Victorian homes across the street, the Boston and Maine train station on its embankment at the corner of Spring and Pleasant, opposite Brown's florist that I could see out of Dr. Bailey's front door. And the YMCA and Warwick Theater were just a few steps away. I had a detailed three-dimensioned map of all of the older sections of Marblehead in my mind, and could have walked to most places blindfolded, I thought. All of this was firm and solid in my mind either from Dr. Bailey's dental chair or from his waiting room.

He had the best comic books—my favorites were Donald Duck and Popeye. Mickey Mouse did nothing for me nor did the Disney dogs Pluto and Goofy. Donald and Popeye had recognizable human characteristics and a range of extreme emotions, and every time I saw them on the printed page I heard their wonderful voices from the cartoons we watched every Saturday afternoon at the Warwick Theater, just down Pleasant Street.

What's more, Donald had a delightful and wacky family: the sappy girlfriend Daisy, the unruly nephews Huey, Louie, and Dewey, the stuffy uncle Scrooge McDuck who rode in a chauffeured limousine, and the aunt who drove a Model T Ford.

My reverie with the comics came to an end when Priscilla Barclay, Dr. Bailey's receptionist and assistant, called me in. I knew Priscilla because she had been Dr. Hopkin's receptionist, too, when I needed stitches on my forehead and finger from childhood accidents. Besides, she was a close friend of Elsa Brown, mother of my classmate and buddy Chris. Priscilla and Elsa had graduated from Marblehead High School together in 1933. Like Chris's mother, Priscilla was always warm and welcoming to me. She'd give me a friendly wave and nod towards a chair in the waiting when she was busy at her desk or helping the doctor with another patient.

Dr. Bailey in the mid-1950s, Dave at age 5, and age 76. Dr. Bailey's photo is courtesy of his son, Harry.

Before my teens, I seldom required a Novocain shot, because my numerous cavities were shallow. And the drilling rarely hurt because of Dr. Bailey's great skill with old-fashioned dental burrs attached to a handpiece powered by a belt engine. He was always gentle, calm, and even-tempered. Sometimes the drilling came too close to the nerve and I'd cry out. "Just a tiny bit more David," he'd say, "and I'll be done. Besides, an injection would hurt more than this." These were the days before disposable Teflon-coated needles and kids like me feared the shots more than the drill.

When the cavity was almost ready for filling, he'd ask Priscilla to mix some amalgam, a standard filling material that is less used today than when I was a kid. She had a mixing machine that I could hear vibrating behind me. When my tooth needed a material that required some setting time, Dr. Bailey would stick some cotton dental rolls in my mouth and take a smoke break at Priscilla's desk right behind the dental chair. They'd chat about this and that, usually topics that went over my head, but once he mentioned a teacher at Marblehead High School who I knew but did not have in class. Her teeth were so neglected that he hated treating her, he said. I said nothing, of course, especially with a mouthful of dental cotton, but I knew what he was talking about from seeing her at school. Today, it's hard to imagine the sight of rotting and broken teeth in someone's mouth, but that's what she had.

It may have been the deplorable state of this woman's mouth (or possibly mine) that prompted him to renovate his office by adding a second treatment room for a hygienist. Some time in high school, I began regular visits with the hygienist myself.

When dental fluoride treatments appeared, Dr. Bailey applied a solution of it to my teeth at the end of each visit. The Town of Marblehead put it in our water supply soon after its benefits were proven and avoided the insane political battles in other places where vocal minorities insisted that fluoridation of the water supply was a Communist plot.

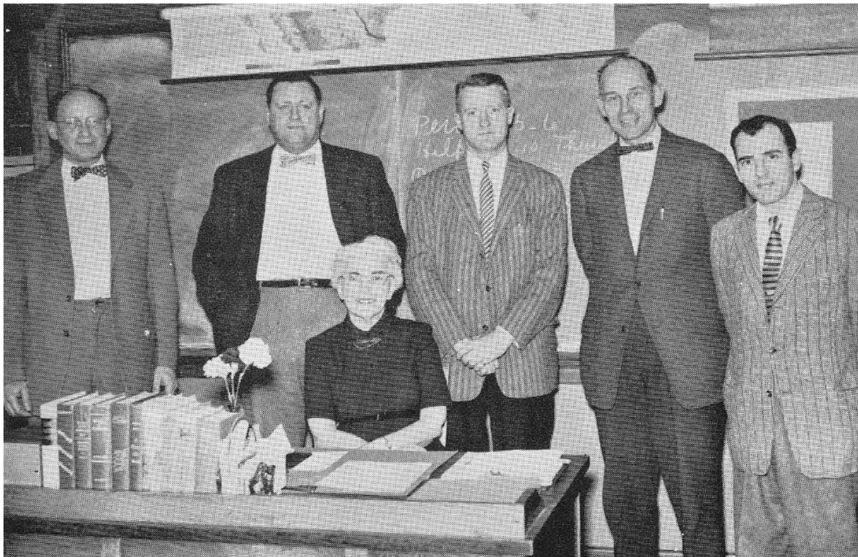
One day in my teens I came in to find him delighted with his new high-speed air-powered cutting drill which replaced the vibrating grind of the old dental burrs. It was equipped with a continuous water stream which cooled the tooth enough to tolerate the heat generated by its rapid action. By this time he knew of my growing technical interests and liked to show me the latest stuff. Later on, he asked me to test earphones that delivered white noise to distract his patients from what he had to do to them. The noise didn't work with me because, unlike most people, I was interested in his work and tried to catch a glimpse of the reflections in his glasses.

After college, I got away without much dentistry for about fifteen years. By that time I had moved to St. Louis, and needed a crown, a signal that my woeful dental genes had returned to torment me. A competent dentist downtown did the job, but trouble followed with other teeth. It was my great luck to run into a young graduate of Washington University Dental School, Dr. Douglas Watanabe, DDS, who lived upstairs in my apartment building in the suburbs and who offered to take me on as a patient. He has been my dentist for forty-eight years now.

He has all of Dr. Bailey's gentle skill and demeanor plus modern methods that take more and more pain out of dental work. Besides, he sent me to great specialists when I needed root canals, extractions, and implants as I grew older. Like Dr. Bailey's, his office was a converted house when I first started seeing him, though now he's in a medical office building. I joked with his receptionist that I was there so often that his office was my home away from home, just as my Marblehead dentist had been. Besides, just like Dr. Bailey before him, Doug has the best magazines. He flies an acrobatic biplane in his free time, and I get to feast on his aviation magazines while I wait my turn. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, March 26, 2015)

18) *Vera J.*

She was the strictest of disciplinarians—the implacable enemy of note-passers, whisperers, wise-crackers, dozers, gigglers, goof-offs, or any other cut-up who dared to enter her classroom at Marblehead High School. You couldn't tell how tough she was from the photograph of the Social Studies department in the 1957 yearbook that also has my picture. Five men are standing in suits and sports jackets and then a compact white-haired lady is seated at a desk and flashing a bright smile, a smile that we seldom saw in her classroom. The 1943 yearbook picture doesn't give her away either, because in that photo a solid-looking lady with graying hair shows warmth and sympathy in her eyes and the tiniest hint of a smile at the corners of her mouth. Many students feared her, even five and six decades later, when they wrote on Facebook about avoiding her classes any way they could.



1Miss Thompson (seated) Left to right: Mr. Dempsey, Herm Hussey, Mr. Emery, Paul Simpson, Mr. D'Ari. From the 1957 MHS yearbook.

She called the boys by their last names only in a military roll-call style and called the girls "Miss." Her name was Vera J. Thompson. She stood erect at maybe 5 ft-4 with no sign in her posture of what must have been her 60-plus years. But for her white hair and the wrinkles on her face, she could have been thirty. Vera J., as we called her, spoke in clear grammatical sentences and made minimal gestures with her arms, and displayed only modest animation on her face, as if she had calibrated the motion of her body to the exact extent required for effective teaching.

Her topic in my junior year was American History, covering the settlement by Europeans in the seventeenth century through the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth. Only three things that she said remain in my memory from sixty years ago. There was a studious boy in the class named Alan Reynolds, whom she addressed as "*RAYnolds*," and she spoke of Senator Henry Clay from Kentucky as the "Great Compromiser" as Congress struggled before the Civil War to determine

whether slavery would be permitted in the new states west of the Mississippi River.

And once she revealed a seemingly insignificant detail of her personal life to the class, which I took as a huge compliment coming from a person with such a fearsome reputation. This tiny revelation meant that at fifteen and sixteen years of age we had earned enough of her trust to be treated, for a moment, like one of her adult friends.

Vera J Thomson from the 1943 MHS yearbook. (Courtesy of Marianne Cataldo.)

When she taught, she stood to the left of her desk maybe three feet in front of it, and never moved. On that day, she was standing on a soft rubber mat, and said, "I bought this mat because my dentist said that he had to stand all day, too, and that it helped his feet."

I don't know if it was just a coincidence that at some point in my junior year in high school I started reading the historical novels of Kenneth Roberts who wrote about the French and Indian Wars and the American Revolution, setting his stories in the Champlain Valley, Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, and Quebec.

I started with *Rabble in Arms* written in 1933 and finished with *Boon Island* published in 1955, consuming maybe five of his books by the fall of my senior year. By that time I had grown to love American history, and the region about which Roberts wrote, so much so that I chose to go to Middlebury College in the western half of Vermont.

As soon I could, I took an American history course there, taught by a dean of the college, no less, but he lacked the quiet inspirational magic that Miss Thompson, my Marblehead High School teacher had achieved. All I remember from his course was that a boy in the row behind me, who had drunk too much the night before, threw up one morning and the professor dismissed the class on the spot. I took more history at Middlebury with better teachers and my interest continues to this day.

Despite her reputation, I don't remember Miss Thompson ever reprimanding a student in my high school class. She didn't need to; her quiet unassuming authority and a glance from her eyes did it all. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, May 14, 2015)

19) *Joe Mitchell in Marblehead*

I've just finished Thomas Kunkel's long-awaited biography of Joseph Mitchell, the celebrated New Yorker writer who died in 1996 and was married to my mother's younger sister Therese. There's nothing I can add to Kunkel's comprehensive *Man in Profile* (Random House, 2015), except to say that the courteous, deferential, and loving man characterized by Kunkel, by numerous colleagues, and by admiring reviewers of his books was the same man we knew in the family.

Joe Mitchell with Nora in Marblehead in 1945. (Photo by Therese Mitchell.)

He gave all of us the same respectful and absorptive attention that he devoted to the curious and mostly obscure subjects of his New Yorker profiles—men like Joe Gould, the Harvard-educated Greenwich Village vagrant who claimed to be writing an oral history of the world. The story of Mitchell and Gould became a movie, "Joe Gould's Secret" released in 2000, with Ian Holm in the title role and Stanley Tucci portraying my uncle.

Joe, Therese, and Nora spent 2-3 weeks with us in Marblehead in the early summer each year from my earliest childhood in the 1940s through 1980 when Therese died. When we lived on Elm Street, they stayed in the house with us, but Joe often returned to his work during the week and came up on weekends. During World War II he once had to stand on a crowded train from New York to Boston.

When I was six, I ran into the side of a moving car and was stunned. Joe carried me into the house for the trip to Dr. Stebbins to make sure that nothing was broken. Nora, a year and a half younger than me, was my closest companion during the annual visits when I was little. I was an only child and couldn't wait each spring for their arrival. I envied all the Mitchells in North Carolina who got an entire month and sometimes more out of them in July and August.

As his readers know Joe was fascinated by all sea life. On one of his first summer visits, he waded out to the sandbar off Grace Oliver's beach and witnessed

near his feet a claw-to-claw battle between a lobster and a large crab. I don't remember which of the two crustaceans won, but the incident made its way into one of my mother's Azor books, with Azor and Chris Brown as the witnesses.

At least once during each visit, he took us for a seafood feast, often at Swenbeck's in Salem Willows but sometimes at Callahan's in Essex and there was always the annual drive to Rockport and Gloucester. Joe and Therese's second daughter Elizabeth was born in 1948, the same year that we moved from our Elm Street home into various rentals. Then, Therese, Nora, and Liz stayed in rooming houses and settled for their visits at Ethel Dermody's Nautilus at 68 Front Street, close to our permanent home at 34 Front. Joe visited less often from New York as he was tied up with several *New Yorker* profiles.

As Nora became a teenager, she made friends in Marblehead including Tommy White who taught her to drive in the 1942 Buick convertible that Therese bought for the family's summer trips. Sometimes she hung out with rougher boys which frightened me because I knew their reputations for unprovoked violence. Elizabeth befriended Gay Lockerbie, from Darling Street, and Judy Fleming, the young sister of my friend David.

Most summers, my mother and I met Therese and the girls for breakfast at the Driftwood right across from the Nautilus. The girls ran off to join their friends as soon as they could but I stuck around as I got older to listen to my mother and Therese talk. Each February Therese came up from New York alone to celebrate her birthday on the fourth, my father's on the first, and my grandfather's on the second.

Therese in Marblehead for her Febrary 1978 visit. Photo by Maude Crowley.

The birthday visits continued for years, even after Therese's stroke in April 1979. After her diagnosis of terminal cancer in 1980, Joe brought her up for a final three-week visit to Marblehead. My mother said that watching her beloved sister dying in front of her eyes was the worst agony of her life. Therese was cheerful throughout the ordeal because Joe had managed, with a supreme effort, to keep the dire news from her. Therese spent her final days in Joe's family home in Fairmont,

North Carolina, as she had wished, and died there on October 22, 1980.

I flew down from St. Louis for the funeral and arrived just as the undertakers were carrying her coffin up the front steps and into the front parlor for the wake. It was a great honor when Joe asked me to be one of her pallbearers. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, May 28, 2015)

20) *Biology Forever*

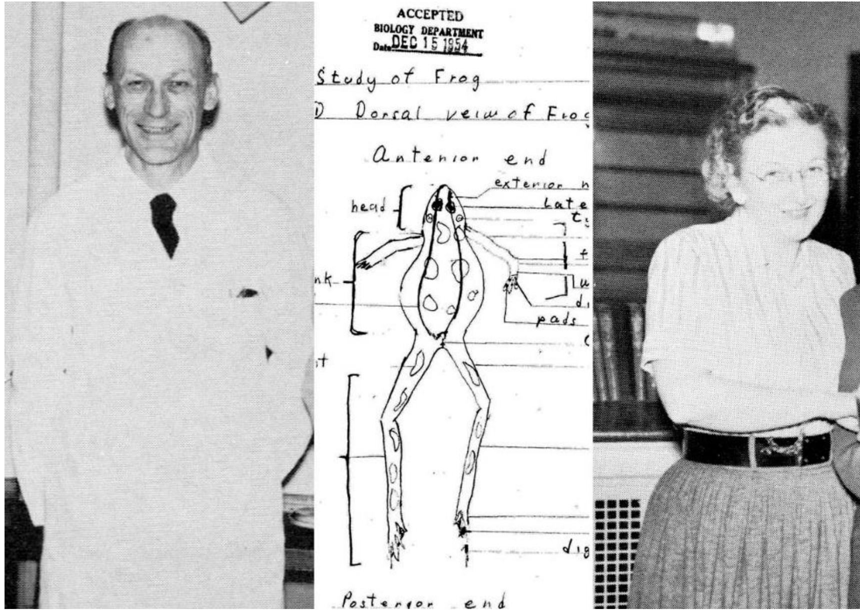
For several years I taught a course called Biological Psychology here in St. Louis to night-school students at Washington University. I knew it was time for a change when I was droning on for two and a half hours with around a hundred PowerPoint slides and my students who had worked a full day were falling asleep.

Biological psychology is an intensive course that deals mostly with the brain and its role in everything we do, think, and feel. I needed to redesign it to include an hour of discussion and only the most important slides. I flipped through the text page-by-page and wrote an outline of the entire book in pencil on lined paper. It took at most four hours. In another few hours, I had the whole outline entered into Microsoft Word on my computer, with the difficult concepts highlighted in red.

I've done this kind of outlining many times but I never stopped to wonder why it came so easily or how this skill had become so automatic. Had I learned it in college or graduate school? I had some great teachers there, but I don't remember anything about outlining, only the term papers, and that's because I still have them.

Among the things my mother saved from my childhood, I found a complete set of outlined class notes for the biology course that I took from Mr. McKey at Marblehead High School in my sophomore year from 1954 to 1955. Most of them are in ink and are quite legible and there are numerous clear drawings with the Latin names for organisms and their various parts. Some of my illustrations had to have come from looking at plant and animal cells under a microscope. The renderings of nerve cells have all the parts, with proper labels, that I use today in the fancy PowerPoint slides that the text publisher gave me.

I was amazed to find that I could teach the basics of a college-level biology course from my old notes just by adding the parts about DNA and the molecular stuff that wasn't in the textbooks 60 years ago. And, I was 15 when I took these notes.



(L-R) MHS biology teacher Gordon McKey, the frog, librarian Olive Elliott

"Think," Mr. McKey wrote on the board, at the start of each class, and that's what I put at the top of each page. He was a bit shorter than I was, maybe five foot-five, thin, and bald on top. He spoke in clear sentences, his voice rising and falling for emphasis, and paced back and forth, sometimes climbing the steps of our tiered classroom to look at our notes.

Often he went behind the bench down in front to write the difficult Latin names or to make neat drawings on the blackboard. And moved his arms a lot, maybe to point at a chart, at the blackboard, or one of us if our attention wavered, God forbid. There were no projected slides; it all came from his head and his notes.

"Clear the decks," he'd bellow just before handing out a mimeographed pop quiz or writing a few questions on the board. We swept our books and papers off our desks and stowed them below. I was just as scared of him and his quizzes as everyone else was, but I got A's in biology for the whole year.

We began our frog dissections in December 1954, just before I turned 16, with many of my classmates dreading the process. The dead amphibians smelled awful with the formalin preservative that stung our noses. We pinned the slimy creatures to our cork-lined pans and began, carefully, to slice, peel, dissect and draw, labeling each structure. I had no trouble with the dissection and Mr. McKey always approved my drawings.

One day in the spring of 1955, he spoke of himself. He had been a professor, once, at Colby College in Maine, but wasn't kept on because didn't have a doctorate, only a master's in biology. He didn't say what stood in the way of his Ph.D., whether it was money, or possibly the War. He complained of the pettiness of academic politics and of the snobbery of some who did have their degrees. There was bitterness in his voice and I felt sorry for him, but I had to conclude that Colby's loss was Marblehead's gain.

But where had the outlining skill come from? One day in the early fall, groups of us in the tenth grade went to the library where Miss Olive Elliott, the librarian, taught us how to do it. She explained the major categories denoted by roman numerals, with the subcategories indicated with capital letters, then further subdivided with Arabic numerals, lower case letters, and so on down to the tiniest subdivision of a topic that we needed to organize. With this introduction and a full year of Gordon McKey's teaching, my outlining skills were firmly in place, as long as the topic interested me. I have at most a page or two of notes on English and one on Civics, and those I can barely read, even though we had great teachers for those courses too.

Biology stuck with me through college and graduate school and partway through an academic career that ran into trouble, just as it had for Mr. McKey. Now retired after 22 years in the computer field, I was back teaching my favorite subject. After all, as Gordon McKey wrote 65 years ago in my 1957 MHS yearbook, "Biology Forever." (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, June 18, 2015)

21) *Close Shave*

We arrived in Marblehead in 1944, when I was six, 315 years had passed since the town's first settlement. Over those years civilization had gained a foothold, but Marblehead's reputation for isolation, disorder, and peculiarity persisted from the early days.

My parents were journalists, and my mother started taking notes during our first week here. In 1955, after she had published four of the five "Azor" books, she told a reporter that "[Marblehead] is filled with story material at every turn in the road and bend in the harbor."

Everyone had a nickname, she found, like "Anchor Float" Dixey, the brothers "Gashouse" and "Gold Tooth," and "Jumpin Jack" Sinclair. Some time in his youth Sinclair had a small role in a play at the Lyceum Theater (69 Washington Street) which required him to hide in a barrel from marauding Indians, one of whom wielded a tomahawk. This actor missed a cue and instead of striking the barrel, hit Sinclair in the head. He sprang from the barrel and ran off stage and out of the theater. As with most Marblehead nicknames, this single incident in his youth branded him for life as "Jumpin Jack."

My mother learned about him from Phil Regan, the barber who cut my hair when I was little. Phil was a trim man, around 60, maybe five foot five, and wore a white shirt with a colorful tie beneath his white barber's smock. He talked while he worked, mostly about the artists in town and about one of the best, his good friend Glenna Miller who died young, of leukemia, in 1949.

I paid little attention to his chatter; I focused on the fancy grillwork of the footrest of his chair and on the items on the bench in front of me: the little machine that dispensed lather, the brushes, the hair tonics, combs, clippers, towels, razors and the little can of talcum that he used to sprinkle on his brush when he swept my face and collar free of loose hairs at the end.

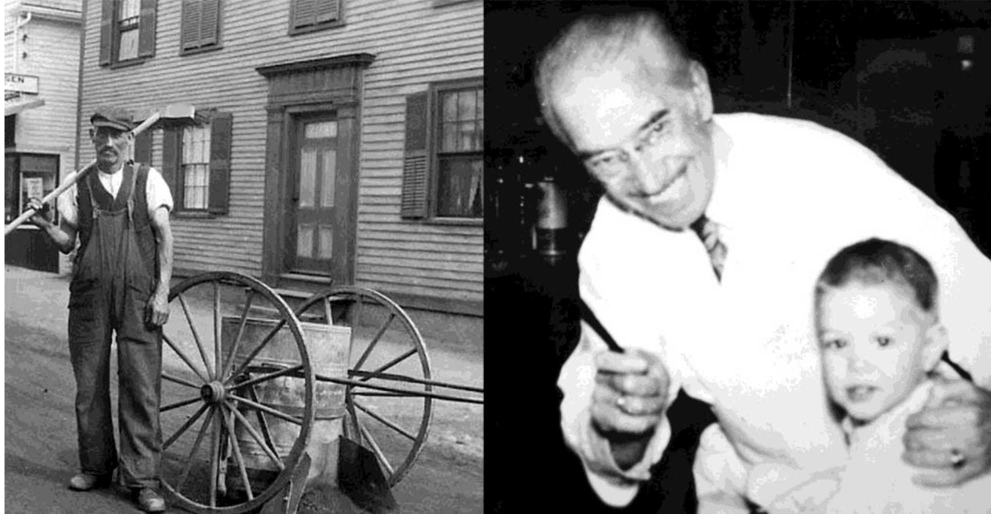
He polished his straight razor on the strop hanging from the side of the chair, and the blade flew up and down in a shining blur. On the final stroke, he gave it a slight twist that produced an audible ping. That way the curved end of the blade would be just as sharp as the rest of it. Then I knew that he was about to outline my ears and neck and that my haircut was almost done.

When he swiveled me around, I saw the paintings that his favorite artist had given him: a couple of water-color renderings of old houses in Marblehead and a portrait of Phil himself. My mother sat in one of the chairs behind me and listened while Phil expostulated about art, complained about the tourist busses or the

annoying little bell on the door of the Brick Path antique store across the street, or told stories.

A man came into the shop once for a shave and there was an accident. I'll never forget what happened or how it turned out.

I had no idea of the man's name or when the mishap occurred and didn't until a few months ago when I went back through my mother's writing materials stored in our basement here in St. Louis. While I was getting my hair cut and not paying attention to the barber's chattering, my mother behind me was taking notes. I have her notes from that day.



Left: 'Jumpin Jack' Sinclair in May 1915 on State Street with J.O.J. Frost's bakery at the far left. (Marblehead Historical Commission). Right: Phil Regan gives Kurt Sternberg one of his first haircuts in the early 1950s. (Kurt Sternberg photo)

The man getting the shave in the 1920s was "Jumpin Jack" Sinclair, among other occupations, worked for the town at Waterside Cemetery. He was a gentleman with a good sense of humor and liked to tease Phil about his eccentricities.[1] When he turned his head to make his point, Phil warned him, "If you don't stop moving around something will happen and it won't be my fault."

Jack had a wen on his cheek—a benign cyst that develops from hair follicles. Just as Phil delivered his warning, Jack twitched again and the razor sliced the growth clean off. There was a lot of blood. Phil poured styptic powder, jammed a clean towel against Jack's cheek, and reached for the phone to call the doctor. When he turned back, Jack was halfway out of the chair and as he left told Phil that he didn't need any medical help.

[1] Thanks to Scott Campbell for supplying the information on Jumpin Jack Sinclair.

A few days later, Jack stopped in and said, “Phil, I had [that growth] for 60 years and now it’s gone. You did a wonderful piece of work. There’s no scar!”

Phil was a perfectionist in his trade even if it was accidental, and when I got out of the chair, he stopped me at the door when he saw my head in the sunlight. He was also an artist and needed to trim a few hairs that he had missed. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, July 2, 2015)

22) *Bartlett's garage*

I may be a primitive guy afflicted with nostalgia but I want the place where I get my car fixed to look like a garage. It's easier to list the features that shouldn't be found in a real garage than to name everything that should. A real garage does not have an elegant waiting room with comfortable chairs, TV, free coffee, magazines like *Forbes* or *Wired*, artificial potted plants (real plants are worse), and nature scenes on the wall. All that's great for a prosperous dental practice but not for a business that fixes cars.

Wayne's Auto Body at 9900 South Broadway in St. Louis where I got my fenders undented here in St. Louis was a real garage. You waited on one of two chairs next to the secretary's desk. The technicians came in out to ask questions and look stuff up and all the magazines were trade publications for body shops. The best part of this place was the coffee maker which was in the single restroom on top of a file cabinet. It couldn't last. They moved to fancier quarters with the designer waiting room and modern clean restrooms without coffee pots (at least in the men's).

2013 photo by the author

That's why it was so satisfying to my atavistic soul to step into Edgar Bartlett's garage in Marblehead. It hasn't changed in the seventy years since I first saw it in 1944 when I was five and Edgar was fixing our 1935 Pontiac. Today, the shop is run by the genial brothers Greg and Mike Quillan, Edgar's grandsons who took over from their father Jim about 20 years ago.

It could have been a livery stable once because they found hay and dried manure underground when they pulled out an old gasoline tank a few decades back. By 1915 it was John P. Goodwin's machine shop which had been fixing bicycles as early as 1886. Edgar started repairing cars there in 1924 and ran it until

the 1960s when he turned it over to his son-in-law. About 30 years ago the wooden walls of the sprawling structure showed signs of imminent collapse and the Quillans got special permission from Marblehead's Old and Historic Districts Commission to replace them with cinderblock.

They did such a good job that the place looked just like it did when I was a kid, both outside and in, when I took a good look around in 2012. The cars, of course, weren't the pre-World War II models that I remembered but recent Toyotas and Hyundais, along with a vintage MG undergoing restoration in the back.

A Real Garage: Bartlett's in 2013 (Photo by the author)

One day when I was a child I watched Edgar's guys test a car for the safety inspection. There was a large white target with grid marks attached to a wall that they used to align headlights for proper aim. To check the brakes, they accelerated from outside on Stacey Street and jammed them on about fifteen feet short of the headlamp target.

I wondered how many cars with bad breaks crashed through, but Greg Quillan assured me that none had and produced as proof the old white aiming target which was stored behind some other stuff. Also, he told me, there was a special mechanical device that rested on the car seat next to the driver and measured deceleration.

If any vehicle from my childhood came close to failing the safety inspection year after year, it must have been the 1928 Model A Ford roadster owned by Mary Hodges. She drove it into the late 1950s when Edgar told her that he couldn't stretch the inspection rules anymore. The car looked like a solid lump of rust on wheels as it put-putted along the street with Mary in thick glasses, and a cigarette

dangling from her lips, glaring ahead with unyielding determination showing from every muscle in her face.

Mary, who must have been in her seventies then lived in an old house perched on the rocks overlooking Lovis Cove right across from the Barnacle restaurant. The salt spray had removed any trace of paint. Inside, she rented rooms to tourists and sold antiques from her living room. Her husband Gilbert, whom she called the Colonel, sat in an armchair in a full suit and vest and didn't seem to move or speak the day I visited with my mother. She replaced the '28 Model A with something inexpensive and small, like a Crosley or a Nash Metropolitan.

Today everything in Edgar's garage looks familiar: cars in various states of overhaul, supplies of auto parts, tool cabinets, several floor jacks, an auto lift, and an office devoid of anything elegant. There's a desk, two chairs, computer for looking things up, and on the walls are vintage license plates and advertising placards for long-defunct parts suppliers. Plus a mechanical time clock that workers of the past used to punch in and out. And a file cabinet covered with parts stickers and on top, Edgar's old cash register. There's a single bathroom in the back of a storeroom, with a toilet and sink. The only thing missing from Bartlett's restroom is the coffee pot. (From the *Marblehead Reporter*, July 23, 2015)