



Memoir by Thomas Bottomley, 2008

EARLY CHICAGO YEARS

I entered the world without ceremony on July 28, 1924, in Grant Hospital near Chicago's Lincoln Park. I expect to leave it without fanfare when the time comes. My brother, John Albert Bottomley had preceded me by just over a year. He was called Demi, as in demijohn.

While still in Chicago, we acquired a dog, a big airedale called Joe. When he stood on his hind legs, he could put his front paws on Dad's shoulders, and Dad was 6' 2" tall.

WILMETTE

We made a couple of trips north through Evanston to see our bungalow in Wilmette under construction. We had a Dodge touring car with side curtains, but may not have been Dad's, as we never did much car-riding while we were living in the city. It may have belonged to his cousin, Gene Glen. We moved into the house some time in 1927.

I vaguely remember racing Demi up the steps to the attic, when the house was almost finished; the winner would get his choice of bed location. Demi won, of course, as he had the advantage of age and size. It didn't matter much, as we often shared his bed, which was in a small gable alcove at the front of the house, which faced north. And although much of view of the sky was obscured by a large elm tree in the front yard, lots of stars were visible on clear nights. The tree had to be cut down for some reason, probably about 1929 or 1930.

The Village

Because street lights were relatively dim in those days, and there was not much action after dark in the shopping area of Wilmette, there were times when the night sky was almost totally filled with stars. There were a few summer evenings when we had beach parties at the village lakefront, and as twilight faded, the first star would appear faintly in the sky, then a second and a third. In a few minutes the entire sky would be filled. And on cold, clear winter nights, walking home from the village center, the stars would seem so low and be so bright that they were almost within reach.

I don't know what the population of Wilmette was, then or now. It had a very upper middle class section east of the tracks, and a somewhat lower middle class section west of the tracks. At least prior to the depression, there were no poverty areas, but during the depression while we were there, our house was often a poverty area unto itself. There were vacant homes at times, but people did seem to move into them with no great time lapses.

Two railroads ran through the village: the steam-powered Chicago & Northwestern line, and the electric Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee railroad. The former ran through town in a straight line, parallel to what was then Main Street (later Green Bay Road), with the station just north of



Wilmette Avenue. The “North Shore” used Chicago’s Rapid Transit elevated lines to their terminal at Linden Avenue in Evanston, and then continued west along the village streets, where it turned north about a block south of Wilmette Avenue, half a block east of the Northwestern tracks. The “North Shore” station was just south of Wilmette Ave.

In those days, the Northwestern gates at Wilmette Avenue were hand operated by a crossing guard who ducked out of his little shack at the sound of an approaching train’s whistle to man a hydraulic pump system that lowered and raised the gates. These were converted to automatic electric operation in the early 1930s, about the same time Main Street became Green Bay Road, the name it carried from where it originated in Evanston to wherever it ended, presumably in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

We lived at 1323 Gregory Ave., an east-west street one block north of Isabella Street, the dividing line between Wilmette and Evanston. Many of the village streets were brick-paved, and grass literally grew between the bricks in the summer. The bricks were replaced with macadam in about 1929 or 1930. Phyllis visited there in September, 2005, and reported that the asphalt paving was being replaced with bricks, on the theory they required less maintenance, and in 50 years could be turned over to provide a new surface.

Our route to the village shops was north on Thirteenth Street two blocks to Oak Circle, along this curved block that ended at the junction of Wilmette Avenue and Central, then east on Wilmette Ave. past some wooden frame homes, a small church on the south side of the street, the library on the north side, and past Millens Hardware store to Main Street, with a cafe restaurant on the northwest corner, and Wilmette Drugs on the southwest corner. We sometimes stopped here with mother for a dish of ice cream, which was served with a couple of sugar cookies.

Both sets of railroad tracks were on the other side of Main Street, and past these was the shopping area and the village hall. The latter was in the classic Greek style, almost a Parthenon in miniature, without the sculptured frieze above the columned porticos at each end of the building. On the south side of Wilmette Avenue were a candy store, a shoe store, a very small dime store, and I know not what else, although a Walgreens drug store opened on that block in about 1932. There was a Blue Goose grocery, which we seldom used, preferring a smaller place that gave us credit. We probably were deeply in debt to it when we left town in the summer of 1934. There was a sort of clothing store in the area where school supplies were sold at the beginning of the year, the Wilmette National Bank, and a movie theater. Our family physician, Dr. Hecht, had his office on the second floor of a building with shops and a restaurant on the ground level. He never wore an overcoat, and on the coldest days made house calls in a little coupe that he was able to keep parked in front of his office. We probably also were in debt to him.

I was so young when Demi and I started attending movies, I had no understanding of their mechanics; I did not realize that light was being projected on the screen. I also assumed the pictures of movie stars posted on the front of the theater were of local talent hired by the theater. Later, of course, I knew better. There was a period when Demi and I went every Saturday. On one occasion we sat through the program a second time -- at least until Mother came and dragged us out -- because *Rin Tin Tin* did not appear. It was a serial, of course; we figured it was a



permanent fixture. “Rin Tin Tin” and the comic strip “Etta Kett,” both of early 1930 vintage, still show up as answers in today’s crossword puzzles.

The Bungalow

Our brick bungalow must have had fairly generous rooms on the ground floor, as the living room had a fireplace flanked by book cases on one wall, our sofa backed against the three front windows, and there was room for a small grand piano, a couple of easy chairs, enough space to set up a card table and chairs, and lots of floor space where Demi and I could play or wrestle. A wide, arched entry opened into the dining room, where the table, without leaves, could seat six; with leaves there was room for at least eight and ten with a bit of squeeze.

Also in the dining room in our first years was a small table at which Demi and I had our breakfasts and lunches. Joe the airedale stood with his head between our shoulders, ready to go for any unguarded scraps. A swinging door led to the kitchen, with a gas stove at one side and the sink along one wall. A long counter and cabinets were on the rear wall, which had a window overlooking the back yard. We did not have a refrigerator; they were still fairly rare, and our ice box was located in a little wooden shed-like room behind the kitchen. On one side of this room was the door to the back porch. A door in the kitchen led to the basement stairs.

To one side off the dining room there was a short hall with stairs to the attic directly above those from the kitchen to the basement. In the hall were entries to the front and rear (master) bedrooms, and to the bathroom. We did not have a shower, but we did have fish, painted in oils, by Dad, on the tiles around the tub. The front bedroom also had a door to the entry hall, a large closet with shelves and a small window onto the front porch.

The laundry was in the southeast corner, with wash tubs and a low, two-ring gas burner on which a copper wash tub could be placed. We did have a washing machine with wringers, and at one time a mangle.

At the front of the house was a wide brick porch with a waist-high brick wall on two sides; the third side had steps leading down to the sidewalk. This porch was often a fort, or the wall facing the front yard was the bulwark of a ship at sea; Demi and I raced between the “bulwark” and the front of the house to stay on the “high side” as the ship rolled in the sea.

A sun room was added to the house behind the kitchen, probably about 1929 before the depression set in. It had windows to the rear and the east side, a Dutch door was the entry from the small ice box porch. I don’t know why such a door was installed; there were no other homes that we knew of that had one like it. There were a table, some chairs, and a day bed in the room, and at a time when we had a live-in maid, she slept here. In the summer months we often had dinner in this room; it was unheated, but on sunny winter days the south-facing windows heated up, and that was a help.

Milk and ice were delivered in horse-drawn carts. We took our milk from Bowman Dairy Co., and Demi and I, in our younger years, occasionally chanted “Bow-man-Dai-ree-Com-pan-air-ree” when we saw the wagon in front of our house. In summer we and the other neighborhood



kids would sneak onto the back of the ice wagon, to gather the ice shavings. I assume the iceman knew of this, and accepted it as part of the job, but he did chase us off when he spotted us. We had a sign that was placed in a front window to indicate the size of ice block wanted. I think it was for 25, 50, 75, and 100 pound blocks with the number arranged around the sides of the card, and the card was rotated so the desired number was at the top.

Phyllis, Sam, and Myrtle

We had been living in this house a year or so when Phyllis was born, February 26, 1928. She was given the bedroom on the first floor, across from the master bedroom. I have almost no memory of her as an infant; just a snapshot or two. As I recall, I thought she looked very ordinary, and it was not until she was in her teens that I realized she was, and always had been, extremely beautiful. For most of her adult life, she was the woman that high-fashion models tried to look like when they posed. Indeed, at one point she did some modeling jobs.

As she grew older, she did take part in some of our games with “Uncle” Sam and “Aunt” Myrtle, who came to visit us every other Sunday afternoon. Phyllis’s best friend was Barbara Bailey, born just a few weeks after she was, and who lived with her mother and grandparents at the corner of 13th Street, on our side of Gregory Avenue. In the Spring of 1934, I was home from the hospital where I had been treated for a burned leg. I was still bedridden, and had been installed in what had been Phyllis’s room on the first floor so I wouldn’t have to navigate the stairs to the attic. There was a mirrored dresser against the wall, just inside the door that led to the front hallway. On the dresser was the toy battleship that Dad had made for me when I was hospitalized. One day when Mother was away and we had a sitter with us, Phyllis and Barbara pulled out the bottom drawer of the dresser and sat in it. As I lay in bed and watched with horror, the dresser tipped forward and the battleship slid off onto the floor. It may have bounced off their heads; I don’t remember if the mirror broke, but I think not.. I was concerned about the state of the ship, not the girls. The sitter rushed in, righted the dresser, soothed the girls, and put the battleship back on the dresser. It was not damaged.

The sitter, probably a teen-ager, was the daughter of Mrs. Fitzhugh, a very large woman in whose care we were occasionally left. She lived a few blocks south of us in a little cottage on what would be 14th Street in Wilmette, but it was Ewing Avenue over the Evanston border.

Wilmette Schools

Logan school was the first I attended, and I have never known if it was named after the family that lived two doors east of us. My first year there was on a clandestine basis; Demi, a year older, started when he was five. I, being only four, was not eligible. I was thrown in as a make-weight because his class was so small. It also got me out of the house for a few hours, leaving Mother with just the infant Phyllis to take care of. I was officially enrolled the following year, but got no credit for my previous schooling. I think I have always resented the need that I had to repeat kindergarten, almost as if I had flunked it the first time.

There were four classrooms on each of the two floors, and a basement that had the “boys” and “girls” rooms, as well as two small classrooms with shelves, perhaps, and one piano, but no other



furniture. In one, as kindergarteners, we did such exotic routines as “Farmer in the Dell.” At one point I augmented my home piano lessons with those given at the school.

At one time there was some sort of function which mothers attended, and Mother brought along Phyllis, who was probably no more than two years old, but toilet trained. She had to make a trip to the toilet, and I was told to escort her. I took her into the “girls” room and a stall, getting a lot of strange looks from other girls in the room. I now wonder if I was supposed to just shove her through the outer “girls room” door, and let her take it from there. But she was so little.... The school was five or six blocks from home, and I suppose Mother escorted us there for a few days or weeks, but after that we were on our own.

In kindergarten we made a number of field trips: the local firehouse, a milk bottling plant, Lincoln Park zoo, and even a local farm. After the zoo trip we made clay animals. I made an absolutely perfect black panther, but when the parents were invited to see our work, the production purported to be mine had developed yellow spots or stripes.

The kindergarten school day was a bit shorter than that for the first-graders, so after my class was dismissed, I could head into Demi’s room, and take a seat alongside him until it was time to leave.

First grade was a snap. Both Demi and I were early readers; I am sure this is because both our parents read to us a great deal. We could sit in Dad’s or Mother’s lap, and listen to *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, or Kipling’s *Jungle Stories*. When we were both still in kindergarten, Demi would spread out the Sunday “funny papers” on the living room floor to read. I had to read from the wrong end, upside down as it were. But read I did, and when my first primer started with “I am a gingerbread man, I am, I am,” I had no difficulty in following the language or twists of plot.

Second grade? I remember nothing of it. In third grade, we presented a pageant of American heritage history. I had a few lines as Peter Minuit, if he is the one who founded Rhode Island. The show was performed for an audience of kindergartners.

At one point we were given a reading test, possibly something like a multiple-choice quiz. It evidently showed I was reading at an eighth grade level.

There is no doubt I always read quickly. All through my scholastic career, I was always the first, or close to the first, to finish anything in the nature of a true-false or multiple-choice test. Perhaps once or twice it meant I could leave the room early, but mostly it meant sitting quietly until the period was up and some of my classmates were still struggling with the test.

Anyhow, fourth grade was a high as Logan school went. From there one went to Howard school, where Demi had already put in a year. It was still a very local school, and it was felt that I could overcome any failings resulting from missing most of the previous school year. Classes were small, teachers were sympathetic.



But it was not to be. We lost our Wilmette house to the Great Depression that summer, spent a few weeks with relatives on Chicago's far south side, and moved into a far north side apartment after school had already begun. Talk about being thrown to the sharks! The fifth grade class of almost 50 pupils was deep into fractions when I showed up. Mrs. Bunker, the teacher, was never aware of my background, and just figured I was more dim-witted than average.

But I digress. In Wilmette, at the end of each school year. Mother would invite all of our teachers to lunch, and they would all show up. I presume she was active in the PTA. One day, when the thought of school was depressing, I stayed home and reported the holiday was required for a PTA meeting. I probably had cause to regret that statement. On another occasion I was playing on a swing during third grade recess, and saw no reason to return to class at the end of the recess period. I remained where I was until lunch time, and returned to class for the afternoon session.

We had dirt alleys which were being paved about that time, and once, after finishing lunch, I sat on our rear fence to watch the steam shovel and the workmen. Time passed, Mother was not keeping an eye on me, and I was an hour so so late getting back to school.

On Halloween we had all the kids from Demi's and my classes for a big party in our basement. Other than bobbing for apples and wearing costumes, I don't recall what we did other than eat. In at least a couple of winters there was a sleigh ride. I think the horse-drawn sleigh, with its load of hay, made two round trips, picking up kids at their homes on the first pass, and dropping them off at the second.

Toy Ships

Dad made toy ships for us; they not only looked more or less like real vessels, they had to function as well. For Demi, in 1929 he made a three-masted bark, which Demi named *Northern Lights*. We called it a ship, not knowing the fine distinctions of rig. On the fore- and main-masts it had the lower sail (course), topsail, and topgallant square sails (again we didn't know the names, but I'll bet Dad did). They were all hooked together so they could be raised or lowered, yards and all, with a single line at each mast. There was a jib to the bowsprit, and a gaff spanker on the mizzen mast. Shrouds were string lines to each masthead. There were no ratlines. The steering wheel turned the rudder with gears from a toy wind-up motor. Batteries under a deck house powered a light inside the deck cabin, as well as red and green running lights. A small working compass was in the binnacle, and a heavy lead keel gave enough stability so the ship could be sailed.

For me, at that time, he built a two-hatch Great Lakes ore carrier, with a forward pilot house and an aft engine room cabin. It had hatch covers that slid open, and winches that cranked to wind or unwind lines that ended in hooks. Power was a wind-up motor.



While we were still in Wilmette, Dad made a four-piper destroyer for the son of a family friend, and during World War II he made a submarine that was supposed to submerge and re-surface, but he had trouble getting a water-tight seal to the inner works.

To the best of my knowledge, he never worked with plans, and while these toys may not have been accurate models of real ships, there was no question of what they were supposed to be -- and they could be sailed on a local pond. There were times when we had the gas, electricity, or phone cut off, but we were the envy of our friends, who may have had new Silver King bikes, but they did not have functional square-riggers or battleships.

The Puppet Theater

Another of Dad's projects that started in Wilmette was our puppet theater. That's what we called it, although it more properly should have been called a marionette theater, with the little figures suspended and operated by strings. The stage was made from a big radio packing crate, with a proscenium arch, footlights, overhead lights, and a roll-up curtain. With colored bulbs that could be switched on or off as necessary, the wiring was probably an electrician's nightmare. There were backdrops and wings for a variety of scenes, including an elaborate "throne room" with silver-papered walls and a central "fountain" shielding colored Christmas tree lights.

Dad made all the marionettes with *papier mache* heads. The wooden shoulders, articulated arms and legs, and a cotton torso, were all covered with clothing that he stitched together himself. It was roughly done, perhaps, but perfection as far as we were concerned. The little wood feet were shod with lead to weights them down. Strings led to the head, arms, and legs from a hand-held stick with two cross pieces. One cross piece had the strings to the legs, and it could be removed and wiggled from side to side to "walk" the puppet on the stage.

It is impossible to remember all the characters we had, but they included a king, a queen that did double-duty as a serving woman, a handsome prince, a beautiful princess, a clumsy oaf, and a giant. It limited us to fairy-tale themes; and we also could do King Midas with the golden touch, using a metallic-paper forest scene that changed dramatically from green to gold as the appropriate lights were switched on and off.

Demi and I wrote one play, "Mugel the Giant," based very loosely on a book I had read while walking home from the library where I borrowed it (it was a very short book and I walked slowly). The king had a very snooty daughter who considered herself too good for any of her suitors. There was also the buffoon servant, and the lady's maid. The king conspired with a handsome prince and the giant to stage a kidnapping of the princess, and her dramatic rescue from the giant and dragon by the prince.

Neighbors and Kids

Hugh and Sue Reading (pronounced Redding) lived next door to us, on our West side. Their children were Hubie, Pat(ricia), Bill and Tommy. Bill was Demi's age, Pat a bit older, and



Hubie even older, really out of my age range. Tommy was a few years younger, perhaps a year or two older than Phyllis. One winter the Readings flooded their back yard, making it an ice rink. On the other side of the Reading house were neighbors who kept chickens in their back yard; I probably never knew their names, nor those of the people of the last two houses on that side of the street.

Next to us on the east were the Quinzers, who had no children; the Logans with Alex, Dan, Bob and Teresa; the Mendenhalls with little Bobby; and the Baileys on the corner at 13th Street. The elder Baileys were the grandparents of Barbara, whose divorced mother Lydia lived with them. Barbara was born a few weeks after Phyllis. They spent their early years together, and have remained friends through all their years.

Directly across from us were the Hartmans, with little Helene, and at the corner on 13th Street the Ebberts, with Peggy, Howard, and another younger brother whose name I have forgotten.

Possibly about 1930, the Readings moved to Highland Park, Ill., and the Hartmans moved into the Reading home, and installed a sandbox behind the house for Helene. A new family that moved into the former Hartman house had no kids of their own, but a nephew, or perhaps a grandson who lived in Iron Mountain, Mich., spent a couple of summers there with them. In 1932 the Hartmans moved away, and in the fall of 1933 the Freys took that home. They had one son, somewhat older than Demi.

Alex was the oldest of the Logan children, probably in his mid- or late teens when we first moved to Wilmette. Dan was a few years younger, but still big enough to appear to be an adult, at least to me. Bob was about two years older than Demi, and Teresa a year older. There was a period when she spent a lot of time with us, bossing us around, either at our home or hers. Bob was the one we were closest to in the long run.

The Logans had a play house in their back yard; it was furnished with at least chairs and a table, possibly a sofa as well, along with a collection of books, toys, and games. I don't remember spending a great deal of time in it. There were one or two times during the summer when Bob, Demi and I spent the night in a pup tent in the Logan's back yard, and Mrs. Logan served us a pancake breakfast in the morning. The Logans also made their own root beer, using the Hires Root Beer powder that was then readily available.

Mrs. Mendenhall was blind, and little Bobby was two or three younger than I was. I played with him occasionally at his home, usually reading to him. Mrs. Mendenhall did not seem handicapped at all by her blindness, at least within the confines of her home.

Peggy Ebbert was my age, and we always were in the same class at Logan School. She looked like Shirley Temple, but without the curls, and was probably the first love in the heart of every boy for miles around. Peggy's dad had a car, and there was a period when he took his kids, plus Demi, me, and our dog, for Sunday drives. It must have been a sizeable car.

The great Bottomley-Ebbert war took place one afternoon, possibly in the summer of 1932, or early summer 1933. It was a pitched battle, with time and place set in advance, to be fought with



mudballs at the rear of the Ebbert house. Demi and I not only made up our supply of missiles, but drew up some paper medals to award each other after our victory. It was the two of us against Peggy and her two brothers. The air was thick with mud balls for a few minutes, and the enemy retreated into their house. We had won; I was elated, but for some reason Demi turned grumpy, and no medals were awarded.

The last time I saw Peggy was the occasion of her birthday in 1934, after we were settled in Chicago. It could have been her tenth or eleventh. After the party at her house, the guests were loaded into a couple of cars and driven to a movie at the Norshore Theater on Howard Street in Chicago. It was a song-and-dance film, possibly with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers; not one in which I had a great deal of interest.

While I was in the hospital in 1933, the Freys moved in next door. Their son (Bob?) was a year or two older than Demi. In the summer of 1934 Bob and Demi turned up missing. That evening the Freys got a phone call from Bob's aunt, in Three Rivers, Michigan, The boys were there. Somehow they had scraped up enough money to purchase tickets on a steamer that took them across Lake Michigan,. I think they were brought home the next day.

Brenton Smith

There were no boys of my age in the immediate neighborhood, so my particular friend was Brenton Smith, the only child of an English teacher at New Trier High School. I would have attended this school if we had not left Wilmette in 1934. The Smith family lived in an old wood frame house on Wilmette Ave., a couple of blocks west of Main St. Sometimes we played at his home, sometimes at mine, but I can't recall just what we did. One summer, possibly in 1932, some sort of boys club was formed, and I think we had just one meeting in a church basement. It was decided to have a hot dog picnic one morning, with the group to assemble at the church portico, and then proceed to Wilmette Beach for the picnic. We showed up with our hot dogs and buns, but no one else did. After waiting for half an hour so, we went to the beach on our own, and ate the hot dogs cold. I don't know if any more meetings were held, but that ended our association with the club.

Brenton did take piano lessons from Mother, and may have been her only paying student. Once we went with Mother to Kimball Hall in Chicago, and while waiting our turns for our recitals, we could look down and watch the "Els" on the Wabash Ave. elevated tracks. The recital audience was made up of mothers and teachers.

Wilmette Beach

At the end of each school year, Mother invited all of our teachers, past and present, home for lunch. Demi and I got home first, were fed, and shooed out of the house before the teachers arrived. We had been issued our summer wardrobe: a new pair of overalls and a straw hat. Other than underpants, this is about all we wore until it was time to go back to school. The hats didn't last long. We wore bathing suits for the beach, of course, but did not put on shoes except for special occasions.



Wilmette Beach was a big attraction. It was about a mile from us, and we walked there and back. We bought a family membership at the start of each season, so we could get tags at the bath house that enabled us to change into bathing suits. Our street clothes were put into baskets that were stowed according to our tag number. The tags were numbered brass discs on rubber rings that could be worn around the ankle. When we left, we turned in our tags, showered, and got back into our regular clothes. When we were older, Demi and I donned our bathing suits at home, brought our towels with us, and skipped the bath house.

The beach lay below a low bluff that ran along the shoreline, and the Wilmette waterworks, housed at the top of the bluff. On sunny days when the sand got too hot to walk on, a stream of water was fed down the sand to provide a path to the beach for bathers. North of the waterworks was a narrow band of woods that ran for several blocks.

Fine, pebble-free sand formed the beach, as well as the lake bottom itself in this area. The Chicago beaches we later used had coarser, dirtier sand, and lots of pebbles and stones that made wading difficult. The combination of smooth sand and fresh water has always made the Wilmette beach rank as the best in my experience.

Out in the water there were two lines of ropes; one fairly close to shore in fairly shallow water, the other out in deeper water, marking the outer limit of permissible swimming. Between these a large raft was moored, where adults and big kids could climb aboard. I wasn't that big. When the lake was very rough, there would be a line of bathers of all ages hanging onto the inner rope, and jumping up and down as the waves passed under them. What sport!

Demi and I started the season with fairly painful sunburns, but we took some pleasure in peeling the skin from each other's backs when it reached that stage. We were then set for the remainder of the summer.

We learned to swim properly here. Dad pointed out to us the swimmers who kept their heads out of the water, thrashing inefficiently with their arms. And then showed us how to keep our heads down in the water turning them up to one side to breathe. I think I swam well and was fairly quick, but only for short distances.

On one of our family trips to the beach, when Phyllis was about 17 or 18 months old, she decided her bathing suit was uncomfortable, so removed it. Mother quickly set her straight on that.

Perhaps once a year we had an evening beach party, with "Uncle" Sam and "Aunt" Myrtle along. We could build a fire on the beach at the base of the bluff, using twigs and branches fallen from the trees, and on this we cooked our hot dogs and marshmallows. The evenings did not cool down all that much; I don't know that we -- at least us kids -- had to change out of our bathing attire. Sometimes we were treated to the moon rising over the lake.

Around the house we played the usual outdoor games: tag, hide-and-seek, kick the can, also a lot of cops-and robbers. This last involved a lot of shouting "Bang, Bang! You're dead!" "No I'm



not, you missed!” I don’t know why we assumed that any cop, spotting a known criminal, could shoot him, and that armed robbers would shoot at any policeman if the opportunity arose.

One summer Helene Hartman’s uncle, who was a horse race devotee, brought home a batch of losers’ tickets. These became the basis of neighborhood treasure hunts, where one person or team hid the loot, and then left a trail of clues for the others to follow. It involved a lot of chasing around and climbing fences.

A Tree House

When the Hartmans moved from the house across the street to the one next door, the family that moved into their old home had a nephew, or perhaps a grandson, who visited them in the summer of 1932. I don’t recall his name, but he was probably about Demi’s age or a bit older. I am sure it was he who came up with the idea for a tree house, after an unsuccessful attempt to build a raft in our back yard. Someone had tree house plans, possibly from *Popular Mechanics* or a similar magazine. The ideal tree was in the Hartman back yard, and since the Hartmans had just moved away from Wilmette, getting permission was no problem.

At any rate it was decided to raise the money by holding a fair in the Logan’s back yard. So we made up posters that were put up around town, and attracted a small crowd. I am sure something was exhibited in the playhouse, home-made root beer was for sale (made by the Logans in their basement with “Hires Real Root Beer” packaged for home brewing); the Logans’ pet rabbits were available for viewing in their cage, and I had charge of the stereoscopic picture slide viewing in a pup tent. There were several other attractions and activities, but the biggest draw was the boxing ring, where Dan Logan took on all challengers, possibly for 25 cents a try. There was one challenge, but the outcome was so one-sided that no other contenders came forth.

We did raise the money for lumber, and the tree house was built. It could have had a rope ladder, but most likely cleats nailed to the tree trunk. The house was very sturdy, and probably lasted for several years after we had left the neighborhood. A few of us may have slept out in it.

Jerry the Dog

Our airedale Joe was very protective. That meant he wanted to go after the milkman, iceman, and other adults who might come for a visit. The neighborhood kids were not seen as a threat. For a time we had a strong wire strung from the house to the fence back at the alley. With Joe’s leash attached to this, he had running room in the back yard, but couldn’t get in the area of the back door.

When the opportunity arose to swap him for a wire-haired fox terrier puppy, owned by our family doctor from Chicago, Dr. Gore, the trade was arranged. Dr. Gore had a farm where Joe could run free, and the terrier, Jerry, turned out to be a small and very amiable beast. One thinks of terriers as being yappers, but Jerry took everything in stride. Once in a while he’d give a single, gruff bark if something seemed to warrant it. He suffered with patience the mishandling of kids, such as being lifted at the rear by his tail. Because he was frequently given table scraps as well as his regular dog food, he soon became somewhat fat, and lost the springy terrier look.



When the weather warmed up in May, or stayed warm in September, school doors were left open, and it was not unusual for Jerry to wander in and lie down under my desk. Jerry's pal, in the Wilmette years, was Ki-Yi, the Logan's dog, a sort of miniature collie. They always hung around together.

When we had to leave Wilmette and stay for a few weeks with Mother's Aunt Myrtle Reese on Chicago's South Side, Jerry was left in the Logan's care. But Jerry wandered away somewhere, and it may have been a month or so before he was located and brought to our new Chicago apartment. We had Jerry for about 13 years, and even in Chicago we often let him out at night, knowing that he would be at the back door in the morning. One morning he didn't show up. We made up posters and probably offered a lost dog reward, which resulted in us adopting a female miniature collie-type mutt we named Betsy, after we learned that Jerry had been run over by a car a few blocks from home. Betsy was pregnant.

Piano Lessons

Since Mother had trained as a piano teacher, she decided to offer lessons to the neighborhood kids. This may have been just after the start of the depression, and she hoped to supplement Dad's meager earnings. I know I broke my right elbow before I was five years old, and had to give up practicing for a bit, and I may have started lessons before the initial pitch to garner more students. At any rate, a free, introductory group lesson was offered, and about six children showed up. We sat around the dining room table, with cardboard two-octave piano keyboards in front of us, and were shown how to hold our hands properly above the keys. There must have been more than this; most likely the names of keys.

Except for my friend Brenton, I don't remember any one else coming back for a second lesson. Of course, with the depression, there wasn't much disposable income for frills such as music lessons. Brenton kept on for quite a while.

The lessons were based on the Helen Curtis teaching method. The first book had an orange cover, and after some introductory exercises, contained such all-time favorites as "Lightly Row," "Oats, Pease, Beans and Barley Corn," and "Home Sweet Home." The second book had a green cover, and all I can remember is "Shadow Dance," in the key of D, that involved a lot of hand-over-hand maneuvers.

In my second year of kindergarten, or perhaps in first grade, I also took piano lessons at Logan School. I had a work book with groups of notes that I had to identify, and the names of the notes spelled out simple words. Gold stars were pasted at the top of the pages when all the blanks under the notes had been filled in properly.

There were two pupil recitals that I took part in. The first, at Orchestra Hall in Chicago, is one of which I have no memory whatsoever. The second was the one with Brenton. At this I gained a small measure of "notoriety" for transposing some simple tunes from one key to another. Incidentally, Mother's piano was a Kimball, and in June, 2006, it was still in the family with Phyllis's son, John Partridge. John put it up for sale, remarking that it would take about one



thousand dollars to bring it into decent shape, at which time it would be worth about one hundred dollars.

I continued to attack the piano on and off for many years, taking one semester each at Roosevelt College in Chicago -- the lessons held in a practice room at Kimball Hall -- and the University of Miami. Somehow, in all this instruction, I was never taught basics such as the reason for the various time signatures, nor the nature of musical phrasing. It was not until much later, when I had been teaching piping for several years, that I began to have some understanding of musical construction.

Cornet or Trumpet?

When Demi was about nine years or ten years old, he was completely decided on his career. He was going to be a sailor, he was going to draw, and he was going to play the bugle. He insisted on the bugle for so long and so desperately that Mother said, in effect, "Okay, but you have to learn to play the cornet, which is a bugle with more notes available." She located a teacher in Evanston, who offered a lesson and the use of a cornet, for something like a dollar a week.

Demi went for one lesson, and I was brought along; probably Phyllis as well. Then we came down with the measles, or one of those kids' diseases that required quarantine. And since we came down in sequence, as it were, it was weeks before we could get out. This may have been just before we lost the house. In any case, there were no more lessons, and we had the cornet. This particular instrument seemed longer than a true cornet, and stubbier than a sleek trumpet, but I always thought of it as a trumpet.

There may have been an instruction book, but it was lost early on. I don't think Demi ever picked up the instrument after that first lesson -- and we heard no more about bugles -- but I did learn the fingering for the scale of C major, and could just about handle the range of that one scale. I don't know how it came about, but I wound up in the Gale School (Chicago) orchestra from sixth through eighth grade. I could play the notes within my range, and twiddle my fingers the rest of the time. Someone in the orchestra had a relative who played an instrument in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and this man showed up at one of our rehearsals and wanted us to tune to "A," When I played my "A" it was wrong; the "A" on my music was really B flat in concert pitch. That was embarrassing.

At my graduation exercises in 1942 I had a two-bar solo, which I had to play from my seat in the auditorium.

Training in Art

Dad was a talented artist. He did an excellent portrait of Mother, but mostly he made some very accurate copies in oil of other paintings. There are three paintings that Phyllis now has. One is a copy of a Pushman(?) Oriental figure; the others are on the two sides of the same canvas. On one side is what appears to be an Italian canal scene; on the other is a landscape in the manner of Constable.



When Demi and I were about seven and eight years old, respectively, Dad showed us the basics of using oil colors. Mainly it was mixing a very small bit of color with a lot of white. I don't know what pictures we painted at that time, or even if we completed any at that stage. Certainly there was nothing worth keeping. At the age of 12 I did a picture of my battleship *Uncle Sam*, a bow-on view of it plowing through the sea. This I still have.

We did have our blackboard wall, and that was in almost constant use. It was evident early on the Demi's skill was far better than mine; I am sure most of the chalk work was his. Since he had decided on his career as a sailor, that option was closed to me, so I figured I would be an airplane pilot, and for many years most of my pencil drawings were profiles of planes. Incidentally, in the years we lived in Wilmette, airplanes were so rare that in the warm months, at least, we would run out into the yard to look whenever we heard one in the area.

Wilmette Harbor

Just south of the shore side park was Wilmette Harbor, just north of the Evanston border. The north branch of the Chicago River (or perhaps sanitary canal) emptied into it, with a sewage treatment plant just west of the Sheridan Road bridge. The huge dome of the Bahai Temple loomed in its park behind the harbor; we could see it under construction from Wilmette Beach. It is still a very handsome, inspiring structure. On the south side of the harbor was the Italianate residence that belonged to the Marshall Field family -- later sold to the Goldblatt family. On the north side, about midway between the Sheridan Road bridge and the harbor entrance, was the U.S. Coast Guard station, with its launching ramp for its lifeboats.

There were some fairly large cruisers moored out in the harbor, probably no more than 40-footers. Small cruisers and sailboats were moored head-to along the concrete wharf east and west of the Coast Guard building. Most of the sailboats were Snipes, Lightnings, and some 110 and 210 class daysailer racing boats.

A rock jetty between wooden barriers ran out into the lake from the north side of the harbor entrance. Dad, Demi and I clambered out to the end a few times to fish for perch; we may even have caught a few. For 25 cents we could buy a pole, line, bobber, sinker and hook at Mullens hardware store. This jetty was later finished as a concrete pier.

Fourth of July

Wilmette had a "Decoration Day" parade -- we now call it Memorial Day -- at the end of May. It was held on a road near a waterfront park, and all I recall are bicycles decorated with red, white and blue paper ribbon woven into the wheel spokes. If there was a Fourth of July parade, we never attended. This was a holiday we celebrated at home.

On the third of July we went to "No Man's Land," a strip of beachfront territory that was under the jurisdiction of neither Wilmette nor Winnetka, the next village to the north. Here fireworks vendors set up their booths along Sheridan Road, the main drag. We never had much money to spend; in 1933 Demi and I each were given 25 cents. Usually we were able to get a few packages of "Lady Finger" firecrackers, so-called because they were so small you presumably



could hold one in your fingers when it went off. I don't think we ever did that. Perhaps we could afford one package of the more powerful crackers, and some sort of firework that involved scraping a red tablet-shaped gadget underfoot along a sidewalk to get a series of small pops and bangs. There were also tablets that exuded a "snake" when lit. I know we had sparklers, and silver cones that erupted in a shower of sparks when ignited; these were for night.

Neighbors were somewhat more affluent, so there were more of the bigger firecrackers, as well as cherry bombs that went off all day long.

Once we went to Soldiers Field in Chicago for the fireworks display. At some point I was given to understand that many men who had seen service in the trenches in World War I flung themselves down when white parachute flares were sent up.

Fire

On July 9, 1933, Bob Logan had a few firecrackers left, and he had a toy wooden boat that he no longer wanted. Demi and I watched in his back yard as he set fire to the boat, then tossed firecrackers in, one at a time, to explode them. This seemed to be an interesting diversion, so we decided to go home and do likewise, although we had no firecrackers and no boat.

But by sawing a point on one end of an orange crate board, and nailing a couple of pieces of 1 x 2" board to form front and aft ends of a paper cabin, we did have a boat. Dad was at work, Mother was visiting Mrs. Ebbert at the corner, but for some reason we decided to produce the spectacle in the yard next door, behind the house vacated by the Hartmans.

The paper burned, but the wood did not go up in a blaze; one small flame crept at one corner of the superstructure. I crouched a couple of feet from the boat, while Demi went back to our basement and returned with a can of wood alcohol. He splashed some onto the boat; there was a big *Whoosh*, and the left leg of my knickers was on fire.

I took what I consider was the most reasonable action under the circumstances. I panicked. I ran in circles whooping and hollering until Demi managed to snag me as I passed the old sandbox. He was able to throw me into it and smother the flames. There must have been pain as well as the searing heat, but the brain is kind in a case like this, and I have no memory of either.

I have always considered myself soft-spoken, but everyone in the neighborhood came running to the scene. Mother later told Phyllis that she felt as if she were running in slow motion, as in a nightmare. A man who lived not only on the other side of our alley but on the other side of 14th street, showed up. He had the reputation of being a bootlegger during prohibition, and of being something of a sot before and after it ended. It was he who carried me into the house, where I was placed on Phyllis's bed in her downstairs bedroom. He told me of a man who had burned a finger, kept it straight, and never could bend it after it healed. So I bent my leg, which proved to be a mistake.



Dr. Hecht was soon there, opened some big skin blisters, and applied tannic acid. This hardened the skin into a leather-like coating. It was decided that more was needed than just home care, so I was brought to the Cook County Hospital in Chicago about a week before my ninth birthday.

I was to remain there until mid-November.



Visiting days were limited to two hours on Thursday and Sunday afternoons, and the visitors were required to remain in the corridor and look at the eight or so boys in the room through the large glass windows. A few at a time could crowd to the open doorway to talk to their offspring for a few minutes. Mother was there every visiting day, and always charged into the room to kiss me before retreating to the hall. She was joined by Dad every Sunday. Since we did not have any baby sitter at the time, Demi and Phyllis came along and waited out on the street, four floors below. There was a period when I was permitted to walk about in the room, and I could look down and wave to them.

It must have been late summer, while the “Century of Progress” fair was still open, that the *Graf Zeppelin* appeared over Chicago, and I was able to see it from the hospital window as it circled around the center of the city.

It took some time to straighten the leg, with weights attached to it, so I had a framework with a lamp bulb in it, making a tent over my legs. After that I was given a soak in a bathtub every other day, to loosen the previously-applied wrap of adhesive tape, and allow a new wrap to be wound around it.

There were two doctors assigned to my case; one was a woman who had a relation who was being featured for some misdeed in the daily press. She appeared once when the nurse was re-wrapping the tape, and decided it was being done too slowly. She grabbed the tape and spun it quickly and tightly in place, then left. I was returned to my bed, but by this time I was in pain, and blood was running out under the tape. The head nurse, and probably a doctor was summoned, and one of them slit the tape along the inside of my leg. The slit ends sprang apart, leaving a gap of an inch or so along the leg. I never saw that woman doctor again.

In late October or early November I went on the operating table for a skin graft, with skin taken from the upper right leg. When the graft seemed well on the way to healing, I was discharged. On my first night at home, I was given my choice for dinner. What I chose was spaghetti with ketchup. As far as I knew, that was the only way it could be served.

Hospital fare was probably very nutritious, but lacked variety. Thin oatmeal was served for breakfast every day except for corn flakes on Thursday and Sunday. Watery, lumpy mashed potatoes with every dinner. I don't remember anything else.

But the open sores on the leg did not appear to be healing, so I remained in bed with a makeshift canopy over the leg for several months. At some point I suggested to Dr. Hecht that adhesive tape be applied over the sores; it doesn't stick to the open areas. He tried it, and it worked. I think by the end of April, I was able to return to school, there to face multiplication and long division.

The World's Fair

Chicago celebrated “A Century of Progress” with a World's Fair that opened in the summer of 1933. It featured two skeletal towers, possibly taller than any building in the city at that time, with observation platforms at the top. Between the towers, at about mid-point, and aerial



tramway operated using cars named after characters in the “Amos ‘n’ Andy” radio show. It would now be considered politically incorrect, but it was extremely popular at that time. There were the usual industrial, agricultural, and cultural exhibits from just about every civilized country in the world, a big display of modern railroad trains -- we were taken by a friend of Dad to see the streamlined, silver *Burlington Zephyr* streak by on its run to the fairgrounds that year. There were open Greyhound “busses” that carted people around, possibly free, fan Dancer Sally Rand performed somewhere, and there were lots of machines where one could insert a penny, and have it squeezed into an oval shape.

But as far as I was concerned the children’s play area was the main attraction, with its towering Magic Mountain, and the usual kiddy rides. In the illustrations, the “Mountain” appeared to be at least four or five stories high. I got to take a five-minute ride in one of several small boats attached to a central pivot that allowed them to circle the center structure. Then it was off the to Magic Mountain!

What a disappointment. I shuffled along in a line of kids climbing the circular staircase outside the “mountain” to height of about 15 feet, and then, inside the “castle” at the summit, I was shoved without ceremony onto the slide that quickly deposited me back at ground level outside the structure.

We did get back once after I got out of the hospital, and visited all the streamlined trains that were on exhibit there.

The Last Days in Wilmette

It was still in the depths of the depression, and things were not going well with Dad’s publishing operations. There were several occasions when our electricity was shut off, or our gas, or our phone was disconnected; the mortgage payments lagged, and at the end of summer we were forced to vacate our house. We found temporary shelter at Mother’s Aunt Myrtle’s home on the far south side of Chicago. We had to leave our dog, Jerry, behind in the care of the Logans until we found a place for ourselves.

Aunt Myrtle and her husband, John Reese, had adopted two children, whose names don’t spring to mind. At this time the boy was about 12 years old, and the girl just 16, She was an unwed mom, with a baby just a few months old, so it was a crowded household. Demi and I slept in the attic.

Some time later, after the girl was delivered of twins and Aunt Myrtle obtained a divorce, we learned that Uncle John was the father. As I understand it, he operated a bar, made life miserable for the girl, and at some point she was able to abscond; I don’t know if she took the children. Because of the scandal involved in the paternity, the divorce was granted on the grounds of physical abuse. I think Mother had to testify that she saw John Reese push her aunt down the basement stairs.