

## The Story of Me: Part One

This is the story of me-Muriel Helen Knapp Splitgerber also known as Mim to family and childhood friends, Murt to college friends (my first roommate knew another Muriel who was Murt so she thought I should be, too) , Auntie M to niece Chris, M to tennis friends in Waukesha and Ma, Mom or Nana to immediate family and friends. Since I met Chick in college, he calls me Murt as did our employees at Trier's. My personal choice was Mimi Scanlon, which I envisioned in bright lights on Broadway or in the movies when I was young and prone to day dreams. All of this describes the continuous process to become who I am.

Life began on Nov. 7 1928 in Elmsford, N. Y. I was born at home as was customary in that era. My parents, Joseph Garrison Knapp and Helen Shute Knapp and brother Joe were there to greet me. Joe, (or Jo-Jo as he was called), was three years old at the time. We lived in a little white house until I was 2 years old when we moved into my grandmother's house in Pocantico Hills, only a few miles from Elmsford. I did not know if this an economic necessity or choice of a more desirable place to live as this hamlet was approximately 200 people and completely owned by John D. Rockefeller.

Our house was located at 8 Willard Ave. The house was white clapboard with a front porch on three sides. There was a front door, side door and a back door. The garage was formerly a barn and was located at the rear of the yard. The yard was very large- a front yard and a side yard with a large garden and the back yard which backed up to a woodsy area with a little stream where we caught polliwogs.

The house consisted of a living room, a "front room"(another

living room), dining room with walk-in pantry and a kitchen which extended along the back of the house and another pantry. There were 4 bedrooms on the second floor and 2 bedrooms in the attic. They were needed because at different periods of time, Aunt Lil and husband, Harry LaBounty and Aunt Marion lived there.

All the rooms at one time had fireplaces for heat since the house must have been over 100 years old at that time. My mother had all boarded up except for the main living room (with artificial logs) and the dining room, which was a working fireplace.

There was a front foyer and open staircase and a side entrance hall. The so-called "front room " became the library complete with piano. The living room was the larger and adjoined the dining room which was large enough to contain a table that could seat 12. The butler's pantry contained all the "good dishes" and glasses. etc. The kitchen ran along the back of the house-the pantry and steps to the cellar were at one end. The back porch extended off the back and was strictly utilitarian. The cellar was big and gloomy with an enormous coal furnace. There was a small room that held the results of the canning season-tomatoes, peaches, rhubarb, etc. as well as the home-made root beer. It also became a dark room when my parents decided to dabble in developing film.

We were not the only residents in this big house. At various times, sisters Lil and Marian and their respective spouses lived there as well. They did not live there simultaneously but, apparently, this was a safe port in the storm of their marriages. I have memories of the loud arguing going on from time to time. Eventually, they both got divorced; Aunt Lil stayed with us for a number of years until she had yet another unfortunate marriage. Aunt Marian left the house, town and country after her divorce

and escaped to Anchorage, Alaska. She worked for the railroad there for many years. She also remarried and retired in Squim, Washington. Her later years were happy ones. Aunt Lil did not have such a happy life. I remember both first husbands and liked both them very much.



We had a series of dogs while I was growing up: Peggy, a sheltie that was really my brother's dog, Aunt Lil's Boston Bull dog, a mean little critter; a little black cocker spaniel called "Blackie"(really creative) that got run over when he ran into the path of an oncoming car. Then, Mother offered to take Patches, a wire-haired terrier that belonged to another family(who must have been delighted to get rid of him). If someone came to the door, we would take the dog by the collar and push him the length

of the kitchen, gaining time while he got a grip on the floor to run back. Need I say-he didn't stay long!

My parents were loving, caring people who wanted us to have all the advantages that they did not have growing up. Mom was somewhat sickly growing up and did not finish high school. I do not know where my grandmother received money to live on and raise the children as grandfather died when they were quite young. I don't ever remember my mother talking about her dad. Her general attitude about men was not favorable as was my grandmother's or my aunt.

Fortunately for all, my dad happened along. He first dated Aunt Lil then Mother. He was born in New York, the last child of Michael and Ellen Scanlon. His mother died in childbirth and father shortly thereafter leaving Dad and his siblings to be parceled out among friends and relatives. Dad went with an aunt named Lou Knapp. He grew up in White Plains. (More about this in his notes and writings.) He quit school at 13 and survived by resourcefulness, doing assorted jobs and finally, getting a factory job in Fisher Body division of General Motors at Tarrytown. He eventually became Personnel Manager, then Director of Public Relations retiring as Assistant to the Vice President of Personnel Relations of General Motors. Dad's birth name was Scanlon. His parents emigrated to this country about 1860. Due to a family disagreement, my dad had no communications with his brothers in adult life. I can remember only one visit that we made to Uncle Dan's apartment in New York City. They had a son, Danny, who was bed-ridden with a heart condition. He was about 13 years old. Apparently, there was at least one more cousin by Michael but this is the only visit that I remember. The cause of the split was a dispute over some land that Dad felt he had entitled to.

I often describe my home town and early childhood as a fairy-tale life because the town was controlled, maintained and owned by the Rockefeller family. According to history, John D. Sr. chose this location for his estate around 1890 and began buying land from the farmers in the area. The town was in existence by then so he bought all of the houses and used them for the employees of the estate-butlers, gardeners, chauffeurs, etc.

My great-grandfather, Abram Weeks, owned farm land which is now property of the Rockefeller's. We believe that succeeding family members were allowed to live in that house as a provision of the sale. I remember my grandmother's father, Abe Weeks, when I was quite young and he was quite old. He lived with us (or we with him) until his death.

Grandma and her brother and sister all lived in the same town. I remember my uncle Al, who was a butler for the Rockefeller's. and Aunt Becky being part of the family gatherings when I was very young.

The village consisted of one main street ( the highway which ran through the town) and a few residential streets branching off this main thoroughfare. Our house was on one of these cobblestone streets. There was a firehouse, grammar school, a catholic church , Protestant church and small general store, selling mostly penny candy. The Rockefellers built the school , firehouse and the church that we attended, the Union Church(Protestant.)

The school was a red brick with spacious grounds and a swimming lake behind the school. The lake was a source of many hours of pleasure for us. We learned to swim at an early age (which has

resulted in a life-long activity for me). We were fortunate to have an Olympic-trained swimmer as our coach. In the winter, our beloved lake became our skating pond.

Our grammar school went through grade 8 unlike most elementary schools today. There were thirteen children in my graduation class-almost individual instruction. I did well in school with no pressure from Mom and Dad. Their education was so sketchy that they were proud of my grades and that I was salutatorian of my class (remember 13 in the class!)

We lived close enough to school to walk to and from school. We also went home for lunch. I loved rainy days because we could stay at school for lunch and I could have cream cheese and olive sandwiches. When it rained, that meant that the parents had to pick up their children. So, we all waited at the side door while each car drove up to the door and the principal called out the name of the child to be picked up. Talk about service!

When I was a little girl, Christmas was such a magical time. We did not decorate the tree until Christmas Eve, so when we came downstairs on Christmas, it was so anticipated! No gifts were under the tree until Christmas morning. At first stirring on Christmas morning, we all had to wait til Dad went down to plug in the tree. I can still re-live the thrill of coming downstairs and into the living room(whatever the tree was that particular year) and seeing all the gifts where there had been none the night before. We followed the tradition of cookies and milk for Santa, of course. Mom and Dad were very extravagant with their gift giving, probably because their own childhood was so devoid of those pleasures.

When I was quite young, Mother made Christmas decorations and

sold them to neighbors to make extra cash. She would cut Huckleberry branches(from the same bushes whose berries we picked for pies in the summer) mix a paste of flour and water, then dip the branches in Lux flakes producing sparkling, snowy branches. They were so pretty. Now, the same results can be produced with a spray can.

We always had relatives for Christmas dinner which was turkey-ham was for New Year's Day. My aunts and uncle would come and cousins to play with. We had four cousins on my mother's side- Marian Donegan, 10 years older, daughter of Frances & Malcom; Larry Enright, 6-7 years older, son of Bea and Bob; Malcom (Pally) Enright, a few years older than me, son of Bea and Bob; Joannie Shute, between Dot & I, daughter of Bert and Jim.

We especially liked to dive under all the coats piled on one of the beds and bump down the stairs. The entertainment for the afternoon was a card game called "Michigan", a rummy game played with pennies and "white meat". It was a simple game played with four honors cards in the center of the table; the money was placed on those cards. The deck was dealt to all the players-any number could play-and the cards were called out as they were placed in front of the player. One had to follow suit and if the ace, king, queen or jack was played, the player got the money on the card. There was much laughing and teasing during the game. I don't remember any other games being played.

Besides the family gathering, my parents had a big Christmas party for neighbors and work people and family. We were shuffled of to bed, of course.

We would often take a walk after the midday dinner-sometimes the winters would be quite mild in the East.

Other times it would snow and we would ski on wooden strap-on skies. We also had several good sledding hills.

There was always a Christmas pageant and party at Sunday School where Santa Claus ho-hoed in and we all got stockings with candy, little treats such as crayons and the inevitable orange in the toe. We sang Christmas carols, had cookies and punch. I have no memory of batches of Christmas cookies being baked in our kitchen but maybe there were. We(kids) certainly weren't invited to participate-there were enough cooks in that kitchen!

At grammar school, we made the ever popular paper chains and forgettable gifts for parents. During my ballet career-short-lived but spectacular-we performed the Nutcracker Suite. I performed the Sugar Plum Fairy solo with a classy costume of crepe paper tu-tu with balls of yarn as the sugar plums. I think I spent more time getting the lamb's wool just right in the rabbit fur toe caps than actually dancing. Maybe that how my toes got so sensitive to being "broken" later in life.

Besides our sledding and skiing, we spent a lot of time ice-skating. When we were young, we skated on the swimming lake. Later, in high school, there just weren't enough boys there, so we went to the Tarrytown Reservoir where the high school kids went.

My childhood was very sheltered. We really did have a village raising us. Everyone knew each other and looked after each other.

There could not have been a better place for my parents to achieve their goals for us. We had a very tranquil existence. A great school to attend, play activities like swimming, skating, roller-skating (on 4 wheel strap-ons), church socials, Halloween on



Halloween NIGHT, bountiful Christmases, friends to play with, and older friends to watch over us, places to roam and explore, sleigh-riding, bike riding-all of this with only to normal growing-up problems such as: I hate my hair, my sister is a pest, Rosie is mad at me, or I am mad at her, etc., etc.

So- on to high school in the big town of Tarrytown-about 5 miles away. We actually had a choice of two high schools- Washington Irving High School in Tarrytown or North Tarrytown high school which was closer but , apparently, didn't have the status or "class" that W.I. had. To be honest, we weren't even asked which school we would like to attend.

We were then bussed to school and back-getting to that bus on time was a problem for me. My night-person traits had already surfaced. Being that far from the center of activity and my new-found friends was a source of consternation during my four years of high school.

There was a local bus that made a few runs from North Tarrytown to Pocantico. The two towns were next to each other so we had to walk about 2 miles to get to the bus stop. The last bus was about 10:30 pm and if we missed that one, we had to make the dreaded phone call home to be picked up. That was never well-received. They were never happy to oblige.

We had the usual high school hang-outs- Russ's where the "in" crowd went and Pinky's where we went when Russ had committed some unpardonable sin to one of us (yelled at us). If we did not go directly home on the school bus(we never did) then we had to walk about 2 miles to the bus stop in North Tarrytown to catch the local bus.

This arrangement made dating pretty limited although dating was not an important part of life then. We moved about mostly in groups. Driving was limited because a driver's license couldn't be had until age 18. But, the bigger issue was cars and gas. Two cars per family certainly was not the norm and gas was rationed. Therefore, while our little village was idyllic when we were young, the distance put a crimp in our social lives.

My best friend throughout school was Rosie Johnson. I can't remember when this bond formed. She was one year behind me in school. My other best friend was Dottie McFadden who was in my class. Dottie and Rosie lived a few houses from each other. I lived several blocks away. As is often true with three friends, we were often 2 against 1 in any dispute-not always the same 2 paired up. The rest of our gang were boys; Ole Manna, Joe Pellegrino, Red Materne, Boots Mackey. We were all the same age so played Kick the Can, Hide and Seek, went sleigh-riding, skating and generally hung around as a group. There were others that were older or younger that joined us at various times.

Our grade school was a lovely brick building with 8 classrooms, gymnasium, library, kindergarten, home ec/cafeteria and administration offices. The building and grounds were well-built and maintained. It had passed the tests of time as it still remains essentially the same.

I took the usual rounds of music and dance lessons. I attempted piano unsuccessfully but mastered the baritone horn well enough to play in the school band. I was better at ballet and appeared in the usual dance recitals. Swimming was the only sport that remotely interested me. Athletics was not a big thing in our lives or of my friends. Organized sports had not invaded the elementary school to any extent.

The church that we attended-Union Church- was also a beautiful structure and remains essentially the same with an addition., After we left town, Rockefeller commissioned Marc Chagall and Henri Matisse to design and produce new stained glass windows drawing national recognition for the church.

Church, every Sunday, was a given. Dad was very active in the administration-president of the group at one point-Mother was in the Ladies Aid Society which provided the usual services as needed. We attended Sunday School and sang in the choir. The Rockefellers were often in attendance and provided financial support. Their children also attended Sunday School.

Dancing in that era was a big part of life. There were large ballrooms available for public dancing. Regular dances at the high school were well attended. A teen center opened during our high school years and dancing was one of the activities. Of course, we girls danced with each other as much as with the boys but never mind.

My parents loved to dance so went to a local restaurant/night club every Saturday night. They were good enough to win dance contests. As music patterns change, big band music and dancing belongs larger to the senior set. When we become history, so will the big band heritage.

This type of music was so connected to the WW II era and since the war affected our lives during high school, my memories of them are intertwined. Our older brothers and friends were destined to be drafted immediately upon graduation. Brother Joe went into the Air Corps with visions of being a pilot but was assigned to an air base in England. We, at home, were affected

only by being inconvenienced by air raid drills, black-outs, gas rationing and some food rationing. Since the Fisher Body plant became Eastern Aircraft, we were not too deprived as Dad's position put us in a different level for stamps. Regular radio reports and the newsreels that preceded the weekly movie kept us current.

The Music Hall movie theatre was a regular part of high school entertainment. We purchased all of the "movie magazines", read avidly about our favorite movie stars. An afternoon at the movies consisted of a newsreel, cartoon, an episode of the current serial (western or Buck Rogers) then the movie. Sometimes there was a double feature. And, as always, the BOYS. We also attended movies with Mom in the evening.

My love for the movies has never abated. I can never see too many. My diaries-written during 7-8th grade and sporadically during high school- contain many entries of my movie-going. We also went into "the city" to attend the movies which were always preceded by a live stage show. We saw many of the big bands. Of course, the most memorable was Frank Sinatra performing with Tommy Dorsey. The was at the beginning of his career when the bobby-soxers followed him everywhere. I never included myself among them but there we were in the second row, screaming along with the rest of them.

You may have noticed a complete lack of discussion of academics. My course of study was called the college course. We were being schooled to pass the State Regents exams necessary to be admitted to any college.

My activities in high school were anything but athletic. Although I loved to swim, any other sport did not interest me. I found any

excuse to skip gym. I was quite good at forging Mom's signature. I skipped school, one day with Peg Elliot, Joan Chillemi and Jean DeSoto only to be discovered by our Superintendent. We were on top of a hill with our record player and a blanket thinking how smart we were when Mr. Thompson appeared. He never looked our way or said a word but the next day, we were called to the office. We didn't do that again!

I remember one other visit to the principal's office, sent by the speech and drama teacher, Mrs. Hadley. Seems Pat Byrnes and I were talking instead of listening. She told me another time that I would never amount to much but my sister would! A real blow to my self image, especially since I had been in some plays and was beginning to fantasize my stardom with my new name--Mimi Scanlon! But, high school has a way of keeping one humble.

I was a cheerleader in my junior year. We had these cute little outfits, appeared at all the games and pep rallies in the auditorium. We even had life-sized cut-outs made of us. All of this importance came crashing down when I wasn't elected for the senior year. Rumor had it that Eddie Pearce did me in because I wouldn't go steady with him. True or not, it soothed my bruised ego. My diary reports, "I don't care!"

I also participated in French Club and Chorus. Music has also been important to me since I can remember. I love to dance and sing (my kids always told me to stop) and listen to the radio. This interest has never been channeled into any proficiency with an instrument or even to conquer reading even my parents offered me every opportunity.

The high school had about 200 students so it seemed that we all knew each other. But groups of friends are like amoeba, forever

changing shape whether because of imagined slights or just plain proximity, who knows. Even tho Rosie, Dottie and I were so close during elementary school, by the time high school ended, Dottie had moved on to others and Rosie was gong steady with Frank Wood so we did not spend much time together.

Peg Elliott, Jean DeSoto, Joan Chillemi and I were close for a time. Barbara Luedke, Betsy Carlisle, Pauline Montgomery and I all made ourselves gypsy blouses and full skirts and called ourselves "the Big Four." Such arrogance! Peg and I were the instigators of any plot and Jean got pulled along for the ride. One night, Peggy and I played the violin on the corner and begged for contributions much to the horror of our parents when we were recognized and reported on. Barbara and I were not very close. Possibly because she went steady with Herb Lyon, my unrequited love.

After graduation, everyone went separate ways. Some went to college, Rosie got married, guys went in the service. Since I was attending NYU in the afternoo-evening sessions, I got my first job. I was a clerk in a record store in Tarrytown on the most popular corner in town. Returning service men-the 52-20 club-hung out there all day every day. I fell madly in love with one-a very one-sided affair it was. He was much more sophisticated than I. But I could watch him every day as I swept the front sidewalk of the shop. He was going steady with a more Mature woman. We had one date and he probably concluded that I was a naive young woman and not his type.

College- I really did not have a clue of what I wanted to study only what I did not want to study-secretarial or teaching. My dad was all for secretarial school so was very skeptical about this college business. My grades were always satisfactory without too

much effort put forth and the pursuit of knowledge did not seem to be a goal. Housewife was the career of choice in that era.

I was accepted at New York University extension in White Plains- a campus established mainly to accommodate the influx of returning service men. Hence, I was one of seven girls among some 150 men, which sounds more exciting than it really was. They were mostly from the city and generally older so dating opportunities were not overwhelming. However, the lack of women cut down the competition for parts in the performances by the drama club.

I had a few unsatisfactory dates there, but I did meet my first real boyfriend. Lou was from Mt. Vernon where his dad owned a florist shop. We went steady for the last half of that year until we moved. He visited us in Janesville and enrolled in Univ. of Wisconsin. His plan was to become engaged. My plan was to move on. So although I saw him once walking past the dorm, it was over.

Any decision about continuing at NYU was unnecessary because Dad was offered a promotion. In the corporate world, several turn-downs of offers to advance would soon result in no more offers. Since this was Dad's last chance, he made that heart-wrenching decision to pull up our roots and move to -of all places- Janesville, Wi.

My mother announced it to me in this manner: we were having a driving lesson (18 was the legal age in NY) when she said she needed to have me drive as she would be needing help. I immediately thought she was pregnant! Too many movies! Typical of New Yorkers, we thought the country didn't go farther than the Hudson River. Moving from the only home that we had ever

had was hard enough for us-but devastating for my mother. We cried all the way to Wisconsin despite Dad's attempt to interest us in the beautiful scenery.

During that first summer in Janesville, Dot and I applied for jobs detasseling corn. Of course, we had no clue what that was-we'd never seen a field of corn- but it paid real money. The ad called for workers and supervisors I was sure that I would progress immediately to supervisor. We boarded the bus about sunrise and unloaded at a field full of tassels-the feathery stuff at the top of the stalk which must be pulled off so the corn did not go to seed (I think.) The rows of corn were tall as "an elephant's eye", way over my head and close together. We had to walk down the row, pull down the corn stalk and pull off the tassel. It was so humid, hot, buggy and just plain miserable. I lasted one day-no supervisor's job. Dot, on the other hand, lasted two weeks.(Hear that, Mrs. Hadley?)

I next worked at the local J.C. Penny's in the dress dept. which consisted mainly of housedresses-no exactly high fashion. I lost that job because I never sold enough to earn a commission. My whistling also annoyed the other clerks.

So far my working career has been less than successful. On to college:

I did not go to the University until the second semester to establish residency. So I hung out with Dot and her high school friends often-quite the reverse of the younger sister tailing along with the older. The local YMCA had dances every Friday night so that became my social life. Unlike our dances in high school, there were a couple of really good dancers that attended so I was excited to be able to dance so often.



College life in a big university was meant to be a preparation for "Life" but, in reality was a care-free time, free from the parental demands and financial pressures, surrounded by your peers. I lived in a dorm on a lake -formed livelong friendships and found a husband!

My major was Home Economics with the goal of fashion merchandising as a career. The thought of buying clothes and being paid for it was very appealing. However, the prescribed course of study to accomplish this included many science courses- all the courses that I avoided in high school. So, I stumbled through with an F in Physiology and D in chemistry and left school to get married after 3 and a half years. Dad was not willing to pay for any more school and I was not willing to earn my way so, I left and worked til we got married. Granted, I put slightly more effort in my studies than I did in high school. I was having too much fun with my social life.

Chick and I met on a blind date at the end of the spring semester. He belonged to the Delta Sigma Pi fraternity where my roommate dated one of the members. After summer break, we were both back at school early. He called for a date and before long, we were going steady. We became engaged in July of that year. I moved back home and went to work at a dress shop as cashier until we got married in April 1950 (between basketball and baseball season!)

Our family had joined the Trinity Episcopal Church in Janesville since Mom had attended the Episcopal church in Tarrytown while growing up. The reception was small and held at our house. We honeymooned in Milwaukee and moved into a tiny apartment in Plymouth where Chick was going to sell insurance. That choice of

jobs did not prove to be a good idea so we moved to the big city of Chicago for a job with Lumberman's Insurance and I went to work in the office of Edgar A Stevens, a very up-scale women's store. My job was in the A/R dept. operating bookkeeping machine, I like my job-it was a small office, my boss was great and I especially liked the employee discount applied to all those lovely clothes. Definitely a step up from the dingy store in Janesville.

At first, we lived in a very large room in a very large home owned by a professor at Northwestern University and located directly across the street from the campus. Apartments at that time were rent-controlled and very scarce. There were no cooking facilities so we ate most of our meals in the university cafeteria. We finally found a 3 room "garden"(read basement) apartment and were delighted to get it. I spent a lot of time spraying for bugs, including cockroaches. But we bought our first TV and that was our life while we lived in Evanston.

My dad, meanwhile, was promoted and moved to Flint, Mi. We soon followed since Chick's job was not satisfactory and we had no purpose for living in that city. He went to work at the GM tank plant; I went to work for Chevrolet Parts and Service in the office as a key punch operator.

We lived in Flint for seven years. Chick eventually started teaching there and got his masters degree at Michigan University. We managed to buy our first house in Flint-2 BR, LR, dining area, kitchen and full basement. I quit working at that time to become pregnant but that was not to be at that time. We decided that adoption was the way to go and were chosen to be the parents of Michael Charles at the age of 8 months. It was a joyous time-we lived close to my parents and he was the apple of

their eye.

Moving from Flint was a wrench for me to move away from my family and friends. I had been quite active in some women's clubs and made good friends along the way.

We found a "co-op" apartment in Waukegan- a four unit building with shared responsibilities of the common area. This was the fore-runner of condominiums. We stayed here for a couple of years before we built our second house-a 3 bedroom ranch style with a nice basement which, unfortunately, leaked whenever it rained. But, we had a nice group of friends from Deerfield so it was a good place for parties. Scott was born there as was Tracy. My pregnancy was a wonderful, unexpected surprise. Mike was then 6 so enjoyed having a new brother. When our little girl, Tracy, came along 2 years later, we decided that our family was complete since I was 37 at that time.

We lived in a friendly neighborhood and had block parties during the summer, kids, grown-ups and dogs. Our back door neighbor had a swimming pool-a big attraction for Mike. He hung around the back fence with his swim suit on waiting for an invitation. Chick coached football during his tenure at Deerfield as assistant coach to Fred Harris. Barb and Fred had 3 children as well. We spent a lot of time together forming a long-term friendship. Chick had aspirations to be in school administration resulting in our relocation to Portage, Wi. It was again hard for me to leave a place that I enjoyed. I had been active in Junior League leaving it as president. Mike was then 8, Scott 2 and a half, Tracy 8 months and Max, our white poodle.

Moving to Portage was a different experience for us since we had been living in suburban areas since we were married. But we had

both grown up in small towns (Plymouth-about 5,000) and agreed that it was a good environment to raise our kids.

Portage was a town of 7000. Some nice, large older homes, busy downtown section and a swimming lake which reminded me of "home." In Waukegan, we had Lake Michigan. It was great to go to the beach but the water was very cold year round. Silver Lake was a similar experience to my early years offering our kids the same activity of swimming every day. But I soon discovered the unseen menace that marred every summer--MOSQUITOES! Since Portage was built on a swampy area, the little critters bred abundantly. Which attracted bats that found an unending food source. [I didn't know til late in life that there were areas of the country that did not harbor bugs. Thankfully, we found that place.]

Our new house was located just a few blocks from the high school-another 3 bedroom ranch. We had nice neighbors, Pat and Dave Geltmeyer and their 3 boys.

Being a principal of the high school in a small town results in instant acceptance socially. As a couple, we were encouraged to join the curling club. Curling is a sport that involves gliding a big stone across the ice to the other end-sort of shuffleboard on ice. Putting my finely honed athletic skills to the test in the cold left me cold! But then, there were parties after every match so it wasn't a total loss. As the principal's wife, I was invited to bridge and women's clubs everything but teacher's functions.

At that point, I really wanted to live in an older home. There was a home for sale that was owned by a local attorney and his wife who had kept this house in good condition. We spent the rest of our years in Portage in that house. We put a spiral staircase to

the third floor making a very large bedroom for the boys. The town was a very active town socially so we gave and attended many parties; cocktail parties with large groups were the norm. I was active in several women's groups and an arts council. As a result of a chance conversation with the high school drama teacher, I admitted to my desire to act again. We decided the town needed a community theater and using my involvement with the arts council and Chick's position, we organized a theatre group.

Starting an acting group (to be Portage Players) gave me the opportunity to satisfy my desire to "act." I had little experience, no training but I really wanted to act. So, as the leader of the group, I received some attention that I might not have gotten. It was one of the most exhilarating and joyful experiences of my life. We had so much fun-there was no downside-and this provided an outlet for many people in the community that would not have had a place for this energy. The fact that it still survives after 30 years leaves a warm spot in my heart.

Portage was a very important part of my life. I made many good friends, was successful with my interests and grew as a person. There is always a price to pay in pain with change. It was a difficult time for Chick and me. His emerging ideas on education were not being met with great acceptance in the community, Mike reached the age of rebellion in a climate of social upheaval (70's) and I was developing my own opinions about myself and my role in life.

Chick was always supportive of my plans. Besides being an important force in getting the theatre group started, he lent his physical strength to another project that I started with two friends- a boutique.

It began as a lark for three women who had not the foggiest notion of how to run a business. Jeans shops were very in vogue at that time and we thought Portage needed our exceptional tastes (all different). We rented a second floor downtown and remodeled it into a very stylish shop with much help. We went to "market" and learned how to order inventory, display the merchandise, place newspaper ads, try on clothes. One thing that we did not learn was how to make money!

By this time, Chick had left the high school and was getting his doctorate in Madison and working for the University.

After Chick received his Phd, the search was on for the perfect job in the perfect suburban school. The choice was narrowed down to Waukesha. So, more tears were shed as we left a place where we had many happy and many sad memories with great hopes for a satisfactory replacement.

We looked for another older home but that was not to be. Instead, we found a desirable acre of woods in a nice new subdivision a few miles out of town. And the building process began again.

The house was not ready to move into when school started so we rented a small cottage on a small lake in a small town close to Waukesha. Mike was now a senior, Scott in Jr, high school and Tracy going into the third grade. The transportation problems were complicated --delivering the kids to their individual school and Chick to work with one car-unheard of now. The combination of new schools, new job, unsatisfactory living arrangements, completing the house and loneliness led to considerable stress and tension.

The house was a tri-level: 4 bedrooms, living room, dining room, family room, laundry room, basement and garage, about 3500 sq. ft. I finished all of the woodwork, wall-papered and painted along with my delivery/pick-up service so I kept busy. We were all happy to move into the spaciousness of our new home.

We had 2 dogs by that time. Max, our first poodle, was put down when Tracy was a baby. He had become very snappish and I was afraid that he would injure Tracy as she was in the crawling stage. I vowed to never have another poodle but when the Harris's black poodle gave birth, that little black puppy was irresistible.

As Mike got older, he had a paper route in the country (or, Dad did since Mike was somewhat unreliable). One family had litter of collie-German shepherd pups. So, Babe came to live with us. She grew to be a revered member of the family-the best dog ever! During the time that we lived in Hickory Highlands, there were visiting dogs (Big Red, an Irish Setter would come for several days until the "mean master" would come for him), various cats- one to deliver a litter- gerbils and abandoned baby rabbits. The taxi-ing back and forth to town soon became overwhelming to me. I gained an appreciation for my parents position as we grew up. Hence, we began the search for older homes again-in town. We located a lovely, lannon-stone , English Tudor style home in an older neighborhood. In retrospect, the house was too grand for the neighborhood but we fell for it. The sunken living-room was 30 ft. long with fireplace, leaded glass windows and high-beamed ceilings. The dining room had built-in cupboards with leaded glass, big kitchen, den, four bedrooms, basement complete with pool table (nobody ever wants to move those monsters) and a large yard bordered with lilacs. The location was more convenient for the kids and as Tracy grew into high school, it became a central

location for parties!

Chick's hopes for a fresh approach to education was not to be fulfilled. His short-lived tenure at Waukesha High was filled with community outrage and dissatisfaction combined with a withdrawal of support from his superintendent. Philosophical differences with the Board of Education resulted in a release from his contract.

(Note: Refer to Chick's accounting to this two schools to gather a complete understanding of his philosophy of education and a more traditional approach.)

The continual lack of support for Chick's methods of education left him emotionally unprepared to start anew in that field. Running a business of his own seemed a good course to follow. Since there was no clear-cut choice that came to mind, we began by looking at newspaper ads.

By then, I was also ready to step out of the house and into a "real" job. One ad seemed intriguing-a clothing manufacturing firm. (All those clothes made for me!) Further investigation pointed out the futility of entering that type of business with no prior experience. But, the real estate agent had a business of his own that he needed to sell to fulfill family commitments. The business was housed in the same complex as the agent's office. How Leon came to acquire this business is another story but of no consequence to the telling of this tale. At this point in time, Leon's son, Jack and wife Miriam were running this concession supply business. Leon wanted Jack in the real estate business-Miriam was returning to school to complete her degree in nursing in Sept.-this was August! Chick was becoming anxious to move on-Leon wanted someone to run the office so here's the



deal: I go to work in the office, Jack remains temporarily, Chick finishes his contract at Waukesha (his office a broom closet) and a new pattern of life emerges.

The financial arrangements included having access to the books so we (Chick) could determine whether there was a chance of success. This was an established business, well-known in that segment of commerce. It had been neglected due to the original owner's poor health then an inept manager. We retained the name of Trier's because of the reputation of Frank Trier among the customer base.

Leon was a character—an escapee from the concentration camps—he came to America and was very successful in a business that supported his family and friends. He was a good friend to us and helped us out many times. His acquisition of the concession business was by chance and we offered a good solution for him. He told us that this business needed NO experience. Well, that was certainly far from the truth but it was not hi-tech either. In the simplest terms, we bought concession products in bulk from the manufacturers of the goods and distributed them to the users that sold the finished products to the public. We were the "middle man."

Along with selling the products and services, there was a popcorn popping facility geared to popping large quantities of popcorn for resale. Since all the products were fun products to eat—popcorn, cotton candy, sno-kones, Good Humor bars, nachos, soft pretzels etc., the kids thought this was delightful since Mom frowned upon those types of goodies at home (for the kids, not me.)

When we started this venture, I was on crutches having broken a bone in my foot falling off my shoe (wooden clogs which were

fashionable at the time) at Summerfest. That did complicate things. For me, the greatest adjustment was the universal struggle for all women with children that return to full-time employment-how to find competent child care and how to compress all the responsibilities from all day to nights and weekends. This business was not an eight hour a day business. Our customers worked while their customers played and we had to be available for emergency deliveries at any time.

The years before Scott and Tracy reached high school were particularly difficult. I think all working women feel the guilt when trouble erupts at home and we are not available to solve the problem. It's such a tug-of-war to try to satisfy everyone. As with any new experiences, there are many things to learn. Jack was very laid back so I was not intimidated by him. Besides Jack and myself, there was only one other employee-the delivery man, Julio, an immigrant from South America here on an (expired) student visa. We all got along very well.

Chick would work at the high school then come to work at Trier's. I answered phones, waited on customers, did the bookkeeping, etc. After the school year was over, Chick was there full-time and Jack left. Mike also started work delivering and working in the warehouse. At various times, the whole family was there, especially during large popping jobs. That was a messy, oily job and difficult to keep the equipment clean, but it was so good that it was well-known in the Milwaukee area.

Writing about Trier's is more than a few chapters, it would fill a whole book complete with a cast of characters. We all learned about the world of business, progress and about each other independent of family relationships. And we all grew as individuals in spite of or because of it.

During our twenty years of business, we located three times to larger quarters. When we purchased Trier's, it was located in an old building shared by Leon's office and assorted apartments. It was 2 stories-offices downstairs and upstairs. The warehouse section had a balcony that housed the popping plant i.e. six poppers which dumped the corn onto a conveyor belt which carried the finished product to a tumbler that sorted out the unpopped kernels and a holding tank where the large bags were filled. There was a small parking lot and an alley that was not conducive to unloading trucks. It became apparent as the volume of business increased, so did our need for space.

Our first move was to a business complex several miles west. When a business relocates, the concerns about visibility intensify as it is vital for the customers to reach you early as possible. The physical and geographical part must be done without interrupting the normal business day. Naturally, that meant confining the major move to a weekend.

The popping plant was always the greatest challenge to set up. We were subject to Health department regulations so we had to work step-by-step through them. That was a constant thorn-in-our-side in all our years-keeping the popping plant and warehouse up to standard. We didn't ever seem to get employees that would accept responsibility for that chore. We were often cited with infractions as they appeared with out warning.

These interruptions can be very costly. OSHA visited one time and discovered bugs in a flour products which resulted in destroying pounds of products in the dumpster.

When we outgrew that facility, we (Chick) decided it was time to

invest in a building. We found a suitable one not far from our present location and the process began. We had more room in this place but had to do much more remodeling. Moving is always more expensive than one plans and, with a business operation, the cost is compounded. Imagine our chagrin when our only competitor also moved-to one mile from us!

During our business years, we sold a line of custom food carts. One day, the owner of the company was visiting and as we talked about our recent vacation in San Diego, I flippantly suggested that we would set up an office there if he had an opening for a distributor. Serendipity waved her wand and Dan called to say my wish had been granted if we were serious. Following our usual course of action, I make the suggestions, Chick makes the plans.

In two weeks, we flew to California , arranged for an office, found a place to live and became frequent flyers. That lasted for a few years until the cart company reorganized leaving us on the outside looking in. By then, my love of California was irreversible. We decided to retire in San Diego when the business sold.

While we owned Trier's and until we sold it, we moved-and moved-and moved. In Milwaukee and in California. I have to say that it seemed a good idea at the time; in retrospect, it seems kind of reckless.

We lived at NW Barstow until 1985. Mike and Scott had moved out and Tracy was on her way to college. We found the house very big and we were in or by Trier's and it received very little attention. It had never been given the care that it deserved and needed. Lack of time and money prevented it. We also had a friend of Mike's, who was working at Trier's, camping out there.(Another Trier's chapter.)Therefore, we decided to sell-

Tracy and I going to an apartment in Waukesha and Chick going to Portage with Babe.

For the next several years, our lives were unstable. I fell off a horse and broke my wrist to be followed by the onset of rheumatoid arthritis resulting in a hospital stay of 10 days, and confinement to bed rest for 2 months. Through good fortune, good genes or good health, I recovered completely with no residual effects.

Now, we moved again. This time to an apartment closer to work. It was a very lovely apartment in a very lovely complex. Tracy was still with us until she transferred from UW Whitewater to UW Milwaukee and moved into an apartment near school. Our beloved Babe died of old age during that time and we moved again. This time, we purchased a condo in Waukesha and rented the Portage condo.

We stayed there for two years but we and the other owner of the condo were just not a fit. And, back to Regal Crest, in an apartment not as nice as the first but adequate and convenient to work. It was about a year later that Chick's aunt died and according to the wishes of his deceased uncle, the home in Waterloo passed to the nieces and nephews. Chick decided that it would be a good idea for us to buy the other shares and rehab the house which was a disaster.

Aunt Evelyn was 83 when she died and had spent the last three years of her life in bed. She was an eccentric recluse. The house was indescribable in its decay. Imagine floor to ceiling boxes, papers, junk in every room with only a path to get through, refrigerator with sickening remains of food that had been there for years. The basement had preserves that had been

fermenting for years. Compound this sight with a barn built for storage with cases of paper towels, toilet paper, books and magazines. It took weeks to make the place livable. But, paint, carpet, new cupboards, flooring and old-fashioned soap and water can do wonders. The house was very well built with good woodwork and workmanship. We lived there for three years. But, an hour commute one-way was too much for me. Much to Chick's dismay, we sold making a tidy profit in a week. We then moved to Waukesha to a large apartment building complex by the river. It was nice living in Waukesha -we saw the grandchildren more often and it was closer to work. The building was located on the river where the city has built a nice park with playground equipment, bike trails and picnic facilities. Chick's 65th birthday was celebrated there in the Schuetze building. That lasted a year. Since we planned to sell Trier's, we thought we'd live out the time in Saddle Ridge. We did not anticipate the length of time that sale would take to finalize.

That year was particularly difficult. After finding a buyer, and negotiating a contract, we were not certain until the actual signing that the deal would be completed.

We became experts at moving and storing during the years of dual living in Wisconsin and California. We rented a condo in San Diego the first year to settle on an acceptable area of the city that would best suit us.

San Diego actually has 4 climates- coastal, inland valleys, mountains and desert. We, inadvertently, stumbled into the most satisfactory of all to my mind. The coast is beautiful with the ocean at your doorstep. It is also out of price range for ordinary folks. The unpleasant part is the frequent cloudiness, marine layer or fog that rolls in -morning and night. We had enough of

that in the Midwest. The inland valleys enjoy temperatures about 10 degrees warmer than the coast and sunny most days. We feel that we have the best of Southern California. Our rental condo was a very pleasant 2BR-2BA in a lovely building. The area is convenient to the freeway and the tennis club where Chick played and I swam. Our office was 15 miles away.

When we first came to Ca. we came on a time-share exchange to San Diego Country Estates which is actually located in Ramona- a village in the mountain area of San Diego County. We also stayed there while we were getting established in our condo and office. It was Chick's idea to buy a home there. For me, it was more commuting since we spent all our time in San Diego. I committed to one year in Ramona. The condo there was quite large-2BR (the master BR was a loft up a circular staircase), LR with fireplace, vaulted ceilings, eat-in kitchen and downstairs BR with bath. (By now, I sound like a real estate agent. We finally agreed to move into San Diego after about one and a half years, making a nice profit. Our next home is located in the same neighborhood-San Carlos- as the first condo. It is a comfortable town home across from a mountain.-convenient to everything and an ideal climate. Since we made this last move, housing prices have sky rocketed but our moving days are, at last, over. We are content unless catastrophe sends us back to Wisconsin. Time and circumstance will sort that out.

At this writing, we still own two condos in Saddle Ridge in Portage. That area was just developing when we left Portage. It seemed to be a good investment also keeping a connection. The first condo was occupied as a second home. We built the second house because we like the location and the floor plan. Mike also built one next door and we have lived there at various times through the years. We are quite emotionally attached to it even

though wisdom would indicate selling it.

(Reader should refer to Charles' autobiography for the widely diverse opinions on this as well as other subjects.)

Living in two homes so far apart was quite an experience. We came to California with only clothes and a few cooking essentials. We literally camped out when we moved into our first condo. A bed, a TV and a few dishes sustained us for a while. Over the years, we accumulated another complete household. Some of our trips to Wisconsin were driving trips so I would transfer items (pictures, dishes, etc.) during those trips. UPS was an expedient if expensive moving aid.

Eventually, our possessions dwindled down: some to Scott and Mike, garage sales and Good Will. Mike and Scott became quite adamant about moving us every year and we knew we could not afford two households much as we would like to have a base in Wisconsin. Our timeshare in Oconomowoc will have to do. One of the problems with the dual residence was continuity. In California, we had established friends with my two high school friends and been included in their social events while still trying to maintain a social life in Wisconsin.

Being gone for long periods of time in either place made life difficult. Friendships are not self-sustaining. It takes an effort from each person to continue or the relationships atrophy. The more frivolous problem of two homes was grocery shopping! How many times I bought an item that I was sure that we were out of only to find that it was the wrong house. Needless to say, there was much waste. I enjoyed the flying, though. I could read uninterrupted for 3 hours. I was also forced to remain seated for that time. For me, a incurable putterer, that's a challenge.



When time came to settle in one place, there was no decision to make (for me.) I felt very much at peace in California. Leaving children and grandchildren was a wrench but it was time to choose the quality of our lives.

Retirement, contrary to the belief of many, is a wonderful reward. One is restricted only by economics, health and a lack of imagination. Some will be apprehensive about boredom. But, there are so many opportunities, aid or volunteer to fulfill and enrich one's life. These opportunities are often far from one's normal life time work but a chance to explore one's capabilities. There is a wonderful sense of freedom with out the time restrictions.

We have been incredibly lucky to have good health, a nice place to live, good friends and family while enjoying this together.