

Memoirs

In February of 1924, my mother and father, Leonard Gwinn and Minnie Ray, married and moved into a large frame house at McKendree, WV. This house stood next to a small frame building which housed a store owned by my grandfather, George Loomis Gwinn. I was told that the large house was a “boarding house” for use by people coming on the trains to visit relatives at the McKendree Miner’s Hospital, which stood on the hill across from and above the store, but whether my mother and father operated it as a hotel I do not know.

In December of that year, I was born in that house, with my aunt Mable Gwinn, a nurse at the hospital, attending. My first name, Mable, came from her, and my middle name, Leona, was a shortened version of my father’s name, Leonard. One year later, the big house burned to the ground, and my parents lost everything they had begun their married life with, and had to move across the river to Round Bottom, the big house on the farm belonging to my grandparents. My mother told me later, near the end of her life, that the fire and the loss of their possessions taught her never to put her trust in material things.

I don’t know exactly how long we lived at Round Bottom, but it must have been at least two years, because my brother, Marshall, was born there in 1926. My father taught the Estuary School, which stood at the west end of Stretcher’s Neck Tunnel, for at least one year. Then he began to work as a telegraph operator for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, and we moved to Quinnimont, West Virginia, about five miles up the river. The name “Quinnimont”, I learned at an early age, comes from the Latin words meaning “five mountains. It is nestled at the foot of Backus Mountain, and Grandview Mountain, Batoff Mountain, Sandstone Mountain, and Garden Ground Mountain are visible in front.

When I was five years old, my brother Joel was born. I remember I was banished to my Grandmother’s house at Round Bottom while he was being born. Young children then were kept as ignorant as possible of the “facts of life”. I remember that the aunts told me that I had a new baby brother, and I wondered where they got him. They told me possibly from the Sears and Roebuck catalog, and I spent much time leafing through the infant’s clothing section of the catalog wondering which baby they had ordered.

At the time we moved there, Quinnimont was a busy little town, indeed. It was a terminal for the Laurel Creek and Piney Creek branches of the C&O, and all local passenger trains stopped there. Many coal trains moved through the yards daily. Most men who lived in Quinnimont worked for the railroad. My father worked in the “tower”, the tall structure at the end of the station. Windows on all sides of the tower allowed the operator a view of the tracks both east and west. My brothers and I loved to visit Daddy at his work. He showed us how the telegraph key, used to send messages between towers, worked. We were

allowed to help him throw the switches, long bars set in the floor which actually moved the track in the railroad yard, so that trains could be switched from one track to the other.

The center of Quinnimont social life was the church. A small frame church building, built about 1874 for the New River Car Company, stood on a hill above the train station. My father and mother, both graduates of the Alderson Baptist Academy at Alderson, were deeply religious Christians and avid Baptists. They were determined to revive this church. My father spent much of his free time making needed repairs to the building. He taught a young men's Sunday School class, and became superintendent of the Sunday School. My mother was very active in the Ladies Aid. Ministerial students from the Alderson Academy served as preachers. They came on the train on Friday evenings, and spent the weekend until Sunday evening at our house. I remember that we children had to be very quiet while they were there, so they could study and prepare their sermons. One of them once said to my brother Joel, who was about five at that time, "I'll bet you hate to see the preacher come, because you have to be so quiet." To my mother's consternation, Joel replied. "Oh, no! I like to see the preacher come, because we have marshmallows on the sweet potatoes for dinner when the preacher comes!" These preachers were never called "Reverend". They were referred to as Brother Bowling, Brother Duling, etc. Some of them became lifelong friends of my parents.

Probably because of this religious atmosphere, at the age of seven, after a sermon by Brother Leslie Bowling, I went down the aisle at the Quinnimont Church and made my "profession of faith". I know now that I had very little understanding of what that meant, but since my parents firmly believed that I would not go to heaven unless I did that, they allowed it. Soon after, Brother Bowling baptized me in the New River not far from the church. My faith has taken many paths since then, but it has never left me, and now, in my old age, I find myself remembering some of the old hymns and Bible verses that have been a source of comfort to me all my life, so I suppose my early confession and baptism did, after all, have some meaning.

One of my earliest memories of our life at Quinnimont was being taken to a neighbor's house to hear the voice of Santa Claus coming from KDKA Pittsburgh on probably what was the only radio in Quinnimont. I also remember that my father and mother took us on "Fannie", the train that ran up the Piney Branch, to see the Christmas parade in Beckley and see Santa Claus in person in the parade. I remember seeing my father with baby brother Joel riding on his shoulders, walking to the train station to catch the Piney train back home. I also remember how the Santa Claus story came to an end for me. One Christmas morning, we awoke to find that Santa had not been there at all--no toys under the tree. The disappointment was great. But then came the sound of bells and a knock on the door, and Santa, red suit and all,

came in to explain he was running late that year. He had a sack on his back, from which he distributed toys to us, including a “Tickle Toes” doll for me. But after he left, I, too sharp for my years, noticed that he had forgotten his sack, which still lay on the floor. It looked to me suspiciously like a sack I had often seen around our house. I questioned my mother, and she explained that “Santa Claus” was really the spirit of love that parents have in their hearts for their children, and because of this they had asked the neighbor to “play Santa Claus” for us. I accepted this, but it never seemed quite the same after that.

I began school a year later than most children, because my mother thought that I was “sickly”. Therefore Marshall and I were in the same grade throughout school, though he was younger than I. But my mother, who had been a teacher for a year or two before her marriage, had already taught me to read at home, using a set of phonics cards. Therefore, I was ahead of most of the children, and was thought of as precocious, which, I’m sure, gave me a sort of superiority complex which has perhaps been a handicap to me all my life. I was often taken to the other classes to demonstrate my capacity for spelling. I could spell “circumstances” while I was still in the first grade, which made me a celebrity of sorts. I am grateful to my mother, who gave me the gift of reading, and who read to us daily from the literature book that was her textbook at the Academy. Some of the poems are in my memory to this day.

However, my behavior wasn’t always the best. I remember that I was in trouble for throwing rocks at some of the older students. This may have been justified. Marshall and I had to walk about a mile along a dusty dirt road to the Quinimont school. One morning, some bigger boys were “picking on” my little brother, calling him names and teasing in the way schoolchildren do. I picked up some rocks and let them fly. When I got to school, my teacher made me stand in the corner.

At the end of my third year in school, the gloom of the Great Depression was settling on Quinimont, as it was everywhere. Railroad business became very bad, so that my father’s work was cut back drastically. He went to South Charleston and took a job in the Carbide and Carbon Chemical plant, where his brother, Laban, was working. We were very poor at that time. My mother “made do” as best she could, though I know she missed my father very much. I remember that sometimes we had only cornmeal mush for supper. I sensed the mood of sadness and depression that seemed to settle over the whole community.

At last my father saved enough money to rent a house on Franklin Terrace in South Charleston, and we moved there. It was a big gray house overlooking the highway, railroad tracks, and chemical plants. He and Uncle Laban, who was a skilled carpenter, began to build a house for us in a better location on Montrose Drive. They worked on the house in the evenings and on Saturdays when they weren’t at their jobs in the chemical plant. We moved into that house when it was only

partly done. It was an adventure for us kids to live in a house where in some places we had to be careful not to fall through the floor joists!

Strangely, the thing I remember most about school in South Charleston is that I worked in the lunch room kitchen. Franklin Roosevelt had not yet succeeded in putting into place all of his National Recovery programs, one of which would result in the hot lunch program, with free or reduced price lunches for poor kids. But poor kids could earn their lunches by working in the lunch room kitchen, and this I did when I was in the fourth grade. As I recall, my job was to scrape the plates before they were washed. But a big plus was that we kids who worked in the kitchen got bigger lunches than the other kids, and I guess we were hungry. I remember a mixed fruit salad with oranges in it that was just heavenly to me. Oranges were a rarity in our diet at home.

We must have lived in South Charleston about three years. After the fifth grade, the C and O notified my father that he must return to his job with the railroad or lose his seniority and his retirement. He was reluctant to lose his benefits, and I think he was a railroad man at heart, so we moved to Hinton, a convenient town for him to work the “extra list”. He could ride trains to any office where he was called to work. We moved first to a dilapidated old house on Summers Street. I was unhappy there. By now I was old enough to sense the stress that having little money and many worries caused for my parents.

We moved three more times in Hinton, each time to a rented house. I suppose the happiest time for me there was when we lived in the “West End”, near Uncle Carl and his family and my beloved cousin, Janelle. She was two years younger than I, but we were inseparable, had great imaginations, and consequently, got into trouble together many times. Whenever we got a nickel, we went to Mr. Turner’s store. There we spent our five cents thusly: one penny for a jawbreaker (a large candy ball with bubble gum inside), one for a licorice stick, one for a Sugar Daddy (a caramel lollypop), one for a Mary Jane, and one for a package of cigarette papers. Mr. Turner must have wondered about the cigarette papers, but he never questioned. We used them, of course, to make cigarettes out of corn silks. We felt very sophisticated as we “smoked” them, imitating movie stars. It was embarrassing and incriminating when I singed my eyebrows trying to light my cigarette. I don’t remember how I explained this to my mother.

In the summer of 1939, my parents took me on a wonderful trip to New York City. (My brothers stayed with Grandma Ray.) My parents went primarily to be able to attend the American Baptist Convention held in Philadelphia. Here, we stayed with their old friends from Alderson Baptist Academy, the Bowlings and the Dulings, now attending Crozier Theological Seminary. Then we went on to New York for about a week, staying with my Aunt Lena and Uncle John Claypool. We went to Radio City Music Hall to see the Rockettes, and saw some of the exhibits of the World’s Fair. I remember how excited my Dad was at

all the futuristic inventions and ideas. Then I was allowed to stay with the Bowlings an extra week and come home on the train all alone! What a great adventure!

The time we lived in the West End of Hinton was perhaps the happiest time of my childhood, but it was the beginning of terrible times for my parents. My father became very sick. For a long time there was no diagnosis, despite frequent trips to the C and O Hospital in Clifton Forge. X-ray technology was in its infancy, and there were few radiologists to read the x-rays. At last his disease was diagnosed as tuberculosis, which in those days meant years of treatment and usually certain death at an early age. We three children were often packed off to Round Bottom to be cared for by Grandma Gwinn and the aunts who were still at home. We were well cared for and very happy to be in that heavenly place (see *Round Bottom, Home of the New River Gwinns*). But it must have been a time of great anxiety for my parents. My father was hospitalized at Pinecrest Sanitarium at Beckley. (I have preserved the record of his time there by transcribing his 1939 diary).

My poor, desperate mother decided to take us and go to live with her mother at Renick. Her reasoning was that we could have good food and plenty of milk there. In those days there was no public assistance, and my father had little, if any, health insurance. She also thought that she could be of help to her mother. She was sacrificng for us, and though we didn't know it until later, she was sacrificing her own health for us and for my father. As often as she could, she made the long journey, walking the two miles to the train station, taking the train to Ronceverte, then to Prince, and riding a bus to Beckley to visit my father. My brothers and I walked almost two miles to attend the Renick school, which was grades 1-12. I think Marshall and I were in the fifth grade, and Joel only in the first or second. But at midyear, I, too, was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and was ordered to spend most of my time in bed.

At the end of that school year, our family was completely divided. My mother was ordered into the sanitarium; my brothers were sent to live with my mother's aunt and uncle, Uncle Boss and Aunt Deemy, who raised turkeys on a big farm near Friars's Hill. I was sent to live with Grandma Gwinn at Round Bottom. I was still required to spend at least two hours a day in bed. But since it was Round Bottom, I still had a happy time here, and I helped Grandma and Leila all I could. Aunt Nell, Uncle Estel, and Billy and the twins were also living there (poor Grandma, how did she stand it?) Aunt Nell was working as a nurse at the hospital, Uncle Estel was a night watchman for the C&O. I more or less served as a baby sitter for the kids.

That fall, I, too, was ordered into the sanitarium, where I was to spend the next three months. I took the standard "cure" for that time, which meant lying flat on my back for a month, only having the head of the bed elevated for meals. I remember bursting into tears when a young

doctor “read me out” for rolling on my side and supporting myself on my elbow for a few minutes, when he was in the room. Then I was gradually allowed “privileges”—getting up to go to the bathroom, then bath privileges, then walking privileges, and finally being allowed to walk outdoors for a few minutes each day. In spite of this, I remember this time as mostly happy. I was the youngest patient in the “san”. The nurses spoiled me, the orderly teased me, my aunts sent me cards and little gifts. After I was allowed privileges, I could go visit my mother and father occasionally. My brothers delivered the newspaper in the hospital, so I saw them every day.

After three months, my mother was well enough to leave the hospital, and she immediately set to work to get her family back together. She rented a tiny upstairs apartment in a house on Bailey Avenue, across the street from the hospital. There she brought my brothers, and when I was well enough to be released that is where I “went home”. It was cramped and crowded, but we were all together again.

At last my father was well enough to be released. He went back to work on the railroad, at Beckley Junction. We lived for a little while in a very pleasant house on Mabscott Hill, from which he could walk to work, and then, for what reason I don’t know, we moved into an old, shabby house on Virginia Street in Beckley. There was still almost no money, and I know now it was difficult for my parents. My brothers still delivered newspapers. I was able to go back to school, my freshman year at Woodrow Wilson High School.

I was never able to “fit in” at Woodrow Wilson. For one thing, I was now older than my classmates, having been out so long. I was not allowed to participate in sports or take “gym”, because of my illness. We didn’t have money enough for me to participate in such activities as band, even if I had been physically able. So I was more or less a “loner”. I made good grades. I had one boyfriend, Howard Brown, and he was really the fun in my life. He was a country boy, and his friends enjoyed country things like picnics and hayrides. He was my same age, but he was already a senior that year, because he had been so bright as a little boy that he had been allowed to skip the second grade. This was not a good idea, because it put him in classes with older children, and from that time on, though he made good grades, he was never able to excel again, and I think this had a harmful effect. But he graduated at age 16, while I was still a freshman. With some friends, he went off to Boston to work in construction work. I must have driven my parents crazy that summer, because I was a weepy, moody teenager. I don’t remember those times with any joy at all.

My family moved again, to a better house on Queen Street, a shorter walk to Woodrow Wilson. It was in the living room of the house on Queen Street that we heard the news of Pearl Harbor, which was to change all our lives forever. It was my 17th birthday, December 7, 1941.

Howard and I were in love (puppy love, my parents called it). He and his Dad had built his first car more or less from scratch, while we still lived on Virginia Street. It was a Model A Ford, with a rumble seat. Howard painted it "robin's egg blue", with latex house paint! It would go anywhere, even in deep snow. I remember that when we still lived on Virginia Street, there was a snow about three feet deep, which had paralyzed the whole county. I think my Dad was much relieved, because he thought, "That boy won't make it from Piney View out here this evening." But he underestimated Howard and the Model A. About midmorning he arrived. He and my brothers shoveled out the walk and constructed a shelf along the sides of it. Then he took me out in the Model A, to his home and to his grandfather's home at Daniels, just riding around for fun in the car. Hardly any other cars were on the road, but the A Model would go anywhere.

That summer, I think, I was making up for all the kid fun I had missed while being sick. We tooled around in the Model A, sometimes taking my brothers along in the rumble seat. Howard taught me to swim in the New River. He took me to the Stanford skating rink. I never learned to skate, but we both enjoyed it when he held me up with his arm around my waist. We spent a lot of time at his parents' home and at his grandparents' on the farm at Daniels. They had a lot of family fun together, which my poor parents never seemed to have time for. My father got very angry when Howard let Marshall and Joel drive the car on Queen Street, though of course they were too young. We were all kids, and did kid things.

But childhood was soon to be over. Howard, who had turned 18 in June, got his draft notice, and he and a bunch of his buddies decided that, rather than wait to be drafted, they would enlist. He went to Huntington for his physical, then was waiting to be called to go for basic training. That fall, I began my junior year in high school. In February, he got his notice to report to Huntington. We decided we wanted to be married before he left for service, and on February 16 we were married in my parents' living room, with only our parents and my brothers present. He left the next day, and I was to see him very little in the next three years.

He went to Texas for his basic training and placement test, and then was placed in the field artillery. But the government decided there was need for pilots as the invasion of Europe approached, and after further testing some ground force men (the best and the brightest) were chosen for the Army Air Force. Howard was chosen and sent to Cedar Falls, Iowa for training at Iowa State Teachers College. The cadets were given further military training, but were enrolled in college courses as well. In the spring of that year, Howard's parents and I went on the train to visit him. They returned after two or three days, but I spent two weeks with him, one of the most bittersweet, happiest times of my life. We were honeymooners, not having had a honeymoon when we were first

married. He had great pride in his uniform, and was excelling in his college work. His dream was to become a pilot.

Before the end of that semester, his dream came crashing down around him. The invasion of Europe had begun with D-Day. The need for ground forces became greater, and “for the convenience of the government”, all former ground force men were “washed out”, and returned to the ground forces. Howard was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri to become a private in the 97th Infantry Division. From that time on, he did what he was expected to do, but he had no pride in himself nor any respect for his government.

That fall, I went to Alderson Broaddus College, on a “work scholarship”. The students did most of the work, which partially paid for tuition, room and board. My job was waiting tables in the dining room and washing dishes, alternating between the two jobs two weeks at a time. I am sure my college experience in my freshman year was quite different from that of most college students. We were like a family there. Out of a student body of only about a hundred, there were only about a dozen boys, all of them “Four F”, exempt from the draft for physical disabilities.

I remember one experience which was probably unique. I doubt if there was a comparable experience on any other college campus. I was taking a course in piano, and with three of my classmates had practiced a two-piano, four player version of Chopin’s *Polonaise*. A group of Baptist ministers were meeting at the college. For entertainment, we were to perform for them after dinner. However, it was my duty to wait tables that week. I remember that I served the meal, then dashed up the back stairs to my room to change into my evening dress, came down and played the piece while the guests were still eating dessert, then dashed back upstairs and changed into my work uniform in time to clear the tables!

One more memory from Alderson-Broaddus that I must recount. The choir director and voice teacher was a huge black man, Mr. Perry Arter. He had a magnificent voice. We all loved him, and he would joke about his race. “You can shake hands with me. My black won’t rub off!” A restaurant in downtown Philippi made good ice cream sundaes, and we girls liked to walk there occasionally. But a sign in the window said “Whites Only”. We decided one day to treat Mr. Arter to a sundae. About a half-dozen girls surrounded him, and we walked into the restaurant and sat down at a table. The waitress looked at us strangely, but she served us all! Thus we integrated a restaurant in Philippi in 1945, long before desegregation became the law of the land.

We had good times, but the war hung over us. My friend, Mary Root, was the only other married student my age. Her husband was in the Pacific, but was not allowed to tell her where he was. She began to get letters from him with a strange middle initial in her name on the address. The first letter was addressed to Mary *L.* Root, the next to Mary *E.* Root,

the next Mary Y, etc. She found that the letters spelled *Leyte*, and knew that he was in the invasion of the Philippines.

In May, the news of VE Day was announced in chapel. I went alone and sat out on a hillside behind the college, and thanked God that the fighting was over for my husband and that he would soon be returning to me safe and well.

Howard was in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia when the European war ended. We knew it would take some time for him to get back to the states, so I stayed at AB for the summer session, then went home to his parents. We fully expected that now, having fought through Europe, he would be stationed somewhere in the United States for the rest of the war. After a short furlough, he went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I went with him, and we began to look for an apartment in Fayetteville.

But about a week later, his outfit got orders to go to Japan. They had been trained for an invasion from the sea, and at that time the government was planning for the invasion of Japan. Across the country these boys went, and shipped out on a troopship from Seattle, believing they were headed for the invasion. Three days out, they were told that the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima—August 6, 1945, and that Japan had surrendered. They continued on to Japan, and were stationed there for seven more months in the army of occupation, a tired, disgusted, homesick bunch of boys! They missed Thanksgiving and Christmas at home again that year. Howard developed a rash over most of his body, but would not report himself sick for fear they would put him in a hospital and he would miss the return home. On the ship returning home, he finally reported to a doctor, and was told the rash was simply a “nervous rash” caused by his anxiety.

This time, I returned to my parents’ home on North Kanawha Street. In August, Howard’s grandmother, Josie Brown, became sick. His Aunt, Ethel Trail, asked if I would come and stay with her, since Ethel was a teacher, and could not leave her mother alone while she went to school. Chloe Smith, who had come there as a young woman to help with the farm housework, was also there but Chloe’s duties would not permit her to stay with Grandma all the time. Ethel’s husband, Jim, was still living there and farming. Howard’s grandfather, William, was still living. My job was simply to stay with Grandma and attend to her needs. I had a cot near the foot of her bed, so was with her day and night. I bathed her every morning, brought all her meals to her, and was a general full-time nurse. Mildred Campbell, Aunt Freda’s daughter, who was a student at West Virginia Tech, relieved me on weekends. Dr. Burns, from Raleigh, made regular visits, and taught Mildred and me to give Grandma the injections of digitalis she needed. On September 23, 1945, Grandma passed away. The funeral was held there in the living room of the farmhouse, as was the custom in those days, and she was buried in the family cemetery on the hill above the house.

Meanwhile, Howard had shipped out on a troopship for Japan, believing they were headed for the invasion. Three days out, they were told that the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima—August 6, 1945, and that Japan had surrendered. They continued on to Japan, and were stationed there for seven more months in the army of occupation, a tired, disgusted, homesick bunch of boys! They missed Thanksgiving and Christmas at home again that year. Howard developed a rash over most of his body, but would not report himself sick for fear they would put him in a hospital and he would miss the return home. On the ship returning home, he finally reported to a doctor, and was told the rash was simply a “nervous rash” caused by his anxiety.

At last, in the spring of 1946, he was discharged from the Army, and we were together at last. We had been married for over three years, but had spent very little of that time together. Now we began to try to adjust and make a home together. He could not seem to find a job that paid a living wage. That summer, he and my brothers, with the help of his father, built a car, practically from scratch, from an old Model A Ford that had sat in a neighbors field for three or four years. His mother and I canned vegetables from the garden, and fruit. That fall we set out for West Virginia University in the car loaded with the products of our work. This car was a wonder! It had no windshield wipers, no glass in the side windows. It had been a convertible, and he and my brothers had replaced the missing top with a tarpaulin. I had stuffed the seats and then upholstered them with “brattice cloth” his Dad had scavenged from a coal mine. He had built the floor of tongue and groove wooden flooring. The springs were so rusted and worn that when we drove over the street car tracks still in the streets in Fairmont, the whole car “hit bottom”, the canned goods rattling and the whole car bouncing.

In Morgantown, we moved into one of the decrepit old trailers hurriedly put in place in a temporary trailer park on the hill near University High School. These were emergency housing for the unexpectedly large number of married veterans deciding to accept the opportunity offered by the GI Bill. (I wrote an article about our life there for GOLDENSEAL MAGAZINE.) Since the \$90 per month stipend Howard received was not enough for two people to live on, he got a job filling and maintaining the fuel oil heaters and Coleman cook stoves in the trailers. I went to work for a clothing store in downtown Morgantown, and later as a nursemaid and nanny for the twins of a local funeral director and his wife. Howard also sold Fuller Brushes, and his territory included Scott’s Run, a rough coal mining community outside of Morgantown. The people of Scott’s Run were mostly poor and not well educated. They often ordered mops, brooms, and cleaning supplies they could not afford, and then could not accept delivery. Often our tiny trailer was stuffed at one end with Fuller Brush products awaiting delivery. I remember that one time we had a case of shampoo in the trailer. We went home to Piney View for a weekend visit. We returned to

find that the weather had turned cold while we were gone, and the shampoo had frozen and burst, running all over the floor of the trailer. We had a sudsy time cleaning that mess up!

We had some fun times while we lived in the trailer, but it was very hard to manage on so little money. Howard's nerves had been shattered by his war experiences, to an extent that we did not fully recognize at that time. He could not concentrate on his studies. We decided to return to Piney View and try to find a more settled life. His Dad had bought a lot on Crescent Road, in an undeveloped part of Beckley. We bought the lot, and ordered a kit for a small house, really intended to be a vacation cottage. Howard and his Dad erected it on the lot. It was very small, only three rooms and a bath, but after two years in a smaller trailer it seemed ample for us. Howard quickly got a job as a lineman with Appalachian Power.

The following summer, he took some courses at Beckley College, finally receiving an Associate in Science degree. I also enrolled at Beckley College, hoping to earn an emergency teacher's certificate, qualifying me to teach without earning a full degree. There was a shortage of teachers at that time, since so many had left for the service or wartime jobs.

But at the end of that summer, the hoped-for event occurred. I was pregnant with our first child! Our baby was born April 5, 1949, at Raleigh General Hospital, delivered by Dr. Robert Wriston. The entire bill was \$120!

Life for my parents had become difficult. My father had recovered enough by about 1940 to return to work. My little brother, Jon was born. But then my father's condition worsened, and in August of 1950, during surgery to remove his left lung, he passed away. Life was difficult for my mother, but she persevered, caring for Jon and working.

Howard continued to work for Appalachian, but also went to Washington and took the examination to get his broadcast engineer's license. He then began to "moonlight" at WWNR radio station. I remember one night he was asked to climb the tall broadcast tower to replace a light bulb after midnight when the station was off the air. I went with him, holding the baby in my arms. This was a dangerous exploit. The tower was very tall, and he climbed it with no protective equipment. He was paid \$20 for this job. It was big money in those days. He also worked during football games and other events.

He grew more and more restless and unhappy, however, and regretted leaving Morgantown without more education. When Tom was in the first grade, we decided to go back. We sold our little house, and moved to a rented apartment at Maidsville, outside of Morgantown. He re-enrolled at the University, and I also began to take more courses toward a teacher's degree. Tom's school was in a new building, very clean and nice. Howard and I arranged our classes so as to be at home when he was. The second semester, Phyllis, who had gone to Berea

College but was not happy there, decided to come and live with us and enroll at the University, also. Near the end of that school year, Tom's school building burned down. He was devastated. The school was moved into an old, depressing building.

The following summer, we moved into an old house in Sunnyside in Morgantown, a section where there were many houses rented to students. It was a bigger house, and was in walking distance of Seneca School, a good grade school. It was also within walking distance of the University. Howard had taken a part-time job with the U.S. Bureau of Mines. He worked part-time for the radio station, broadcasting ball games. I got a part-time job at the University Library, and Phyllis worked in the University greenhouse. We were all going to school!

By the end of the year when Tom was in third grade, I had accumulated enough credits for my bachelor's degree. I applied for a job with the Monongalia County school system, and was hired to teach in the Oak Grove School, "over Cheat", about ten miles out of Morgantown. With a little more money coming in, we were able to move to a better part of town, a larger, nicer house on Ridgeway Avenue. Tom could go to school with me, and enrolled at Oak Grove. Though not his fault, this made my first year of teaching much more difficult. I believe to this day that the principal, Mr. Shuman, disliked me intensely for some reason, or perhaps he was just a difficult person. I had told him that I did not wish to teach my son's class. So he diabolically divided the fourth grade, gave me half of it, and also gave me half a second grade to teach! It was extremely difficult to plan lessons for two levels so different in curriculum. But I did it, though it took its toll on me. By New Years, I was so exhausted that I came down with a bad case of flu. There was a shortage of substitutes, and one of the assistant superintendents had to take my class for a few days. Afterward, he called me, and apologized for my situation, saying, "Mrs. Brown, there is not much hope for education in Monongalia County when teachers are placed in such a situation as you have out there!"

At the end of that year, I asked for a transfer to another school, but instead, the principal, Mr. Shuman, was transferred, and the principal of Tom's former school, Mrs. Tritchler, took his place. She was an excellent person to work with, and I had a pleasant year, teaching only the fourth grade.

The summer before, Tom, Howard and I had gone on a vacation camping trip to Pocahontas County, our first time to see this part of West Virginia. We drove as far south as Watoga State Park, then back up through Pocahontas and on to our old camping spot near Romney. We loved what we saw. Soon after, Howard saw an ad in the Charleston Gazette for telescope operators at the radio astronomy observatory then being built near Green Bank. He immediately applied, and the best part of our married lives then began. At the end of my second year of teaching at Oak Grove, we moved to Green Bank.

Pocahontas County was then, and probably is now, the most beautiful part of West Virginia, and one of the most beautiful and unspoiled areas in the eastern United States. Living there was a wonderful adventure. At the time we moved there, it was like reverting to a time fifty years in the past. Wood burning heaters, oil heaters, well water, party line telephones, a weekly newspaper with hand set type—all these were the norm for that area. The climate, because of the altitude, was quite different from most areas in West Virginia. We moved on the last day of May, and there were two feet of snow on Cheat Mountain.

The Observatory had built a few houses on Observatory property for the use of visiting scientists, engineers, and upper levels of management. But we plebeians had to arrange for our own living quarters. We had rented a small, very old house from the principal of the school, Virgil Harris, who lived across the road. It was a frame house with no insulation, heated by a Warm Morning wood heater in the corner of the kitchen, and a fuel oil heater in the living room. There was no heat at all in the bedrooms, and it was very, very cold. The bathroom had been added to a corner of the back porch, so it was necessary to go outside for a bit to reach the bathroom. The interior was in very poor condition, with wallpaper hanging in loose folds from the ceiling. We immediately set to work to make it more livable. We tore down the loose wallpaper, patched the bare spaces with brown paper bags, and painted over them with latex paint. With new draperies and our own furnishings, it took on the look of home.

Much of our free time that first summer was spent just exploring. The woods were full of wildflowers. We loved going to the highest elevations just for the views. We explored Gaudineer Forest, Wautoga and Seneca State Parks, the Greenbrier, and the Sinks of Gandy. We went to Spruce Knob and Seneca Rocks. Tom camped out in a field with a friend he met, Ronald Bowyer. It was a glorious summer.

That fall, Tom enrolled in the seventh grade at Green Bank School. One of his teachers, Estes Crist, I consider one of the great natural teachers. For the first time, Tom mastered the multiplication tables. I had applied for a teaching job, but had been cordially ignored by the Board of Education.

In February, the Friday before Lincoln's birthday on the following Monday, a teacher, who was 82 years old and still teaching, went home after the school day, lay down on her living room couch, and died! Monday was a holiday, for Lincoln's birthday, and the county superintendent and his assistant showed up at our door. They were desperate for a teacher to take her place. So it was that I began teaching at Huntersville.

Teaching at Huntersville was like going back into the past. The school building was a two-story frame structure. The first three grades, my charge, were on the first floor. Grades four through six were on the second floor, taught by the school principal. The school lunchroom was in a separate cinder block building about 100 feet to the rear of the building. There was no plumbing, so an outhouse stood between the school and the

lunchroom. A pot-bellied stove, fed by coal heated my room. There was a long table at the front of the room, intended, no doubt, for a reading table, but piled high with miscellaneous books and papers. Under the table stood a can of kerosene oil, used by the janitor to start the fire in the morning. The room was bare of any educational displays or pictures—no alphabet cards, color cards, vocabulary cards or math materials. It seems my predecessor had been nearly blind. The desk drawer contained a very large magnifying glass and a wooden paddle. These gave a clue as to how work was graded and discipline maintained! When I asked where the children washed their hands before going to the lunchroom, I was informed that they didn't, "because their little hands might get chapped."

I had some quick organizing to do. The table was cleared of books and the oil can removed to the anteroom. Some homemade alphabet cards and number cards soon graced the top of the blackboard. A galvanized bucket filled with water soon sat on the top of the stove. Before we went for lunch, each child's hands were rinsed over a camp wash pan brought from home. After a few times when I forgot to put coal in the stove and let the room get quite cold, I enlisted the aid of the biggest third grade boy, who had been held back in school. His task was to watch the fire, and if it got low, to put on some coal. He knew how to do this, because his home was heated with the same kind of stove.

The rest of that year was a happy experience. These children loved school. Each grade consisted of only about seven children, so I was able to give almost one-on-one instruction. Most of them came from poor homes, so school was the best experience of their lives.

At the end of that year, 1961-62, the sixth grade at Green Bank became open, and I was transferred. The room at the front corner of the old building, which housed grades 1-12, became my "home away from home" for the next fourteen years, seven of the years teaching sixth grade, then seven teaching first grade. The building was antiquated, but there was indoor plumbing, though the lunch room was in another building. Mr. Virgil Harris, a veteran school administrator who "ran a tight ship", was the principal.

Tom graduated from Green Bank High School in 1967. He received the Observatory scholarship, and that fall he enrolled at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, a school highly recommended by an alumnus, our friend Marvin DeJong. It was a hard adjustment for him, since it was so far away, and he could not return home until Christmas that year. Nelson and his family, who lived in Grand Rapids, made things easier for him. Howard's father, Harry, passed away about two weeks after Tom left for school, and Tom could not even come home for his grandfather's funeral, which made it very hard. But he did manage to adjust to college life, and, as he always had, made very good grades.

Meanwhile, Howard and I began to feel lonely, and this led to what might be called the biggest mistake of our lives. The story is not finished yet, and I may never know the end result. Our loneliness and our love of

children led us to adopt two little girls, Glenna and then Connie, her sister. This gave us great pleasure, but later it was the cause of great distress and heartache. I will not give any details here, but it does explain some events that occur later.

In 1979, Howard was asked to go to Socorro, New Mexico, to work out the cryogenics problems the Observatory was having on the new VLA telescopes being built and installed there. This move was a wonderful adventure. The Observatory rented a beautiful house for us, across the street from Jon and Dora Spargo, our friends from Green Bank. We knew several families who had been transferred there—the Van Horns, DelGuidices, Dolans, and others. Living in New Mexico was quite different, and we found it to be a great adventure.

Howard's work was exciting and very demanding. Each morning, he walked a block to a corner where the bus came to take the workers out to the VLA, on the Plains of St. Augustin between Socorro and Magdalena. This was a scenic ride through the desert. As one neared the VLA site, the "Magdalena Mountain" came into view. On the side of it appeared to be an image of Mary Magdalene, hence the name Magdalena for the town at its base. Magdalena in the old days had been the railhead for loading the cattle from the cattle drives. It was a real western town, where rodeos were held. Our friends Rudy and Eileen LaTasa lived there.

Socorro was a very small town, but with an interesting history. There was a church built in the 1500's by the conquistadors, using Indian slave labor. Nearly all the buildings were built in the Spanish style. Very few people had modern refrigerated air conditioning; "swamp coolers", contraptions on the roof filled with damp grass or straw through which fans blew the air, cooled the rooms.

On weekends, we explored the country around us. Ruins left by the "ancients", canyons and mountains, the Bosque del Apache wildlife refuge, and the Navajo reservation south of Socorro were all exciting to us. We visited White Sands, near Alamogordo, where the first atomic bomb was exploded. We took Connie and Glenna with us on these trips.

More and more, however, it became evident that Glenna had serious psychological problems. We sought counseling from Judith Raymond at Socorro General Hospital. Glenna finally had to be admitted to Vista Sandia, an excellent treatment center in Albuquerque. The psychiatrist there told us that she had a personality disorder, untreatable, and that we should "put her out of our lives and forget her". This we were never able to do. When the problems became so great that they were putting us in danger (and I won't dwell on them here) Howard sent Connie and me home on a plane, and had to have Glenna committed to a sixty day stay at the state mental hospital in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Then he, too returned to Green Bank.

I had resigned from my teaching job at Green Bank school, but began to substitute as much as I could. I also began to write a bit. Howard, bless him, bought and assembled a potter's wheel for me, and bought an

electric kiln. I had taken a pottery course at NMIMT, a small college near us in Socorro. It was very soothing to me to work with the clay.

Connie and Glenna, meanwhile, each married; Connie to Richard Leary, Glenna to Daniel Black. Glenna had never even attended high school. Connie had not graduated. Howard and I felt that we had failed completely in the attempt to give two little girls a good home and educate them to take useful places in society.

In 1981, because of cutbacks in government spending under the Reagan administration, pressure was put on Howard to take early retirement. This he did at the end of that year. He often said later that he regretted it, but I think now it was for the best.

My mother died in October of 1981, and Glenna gave birth to her first son, Adam, two days after.

In May of 1982, a good friend of Howard's, Craig Moor, was leaving the Observatory to take a job with Bendix Field Engineering at Columbia, Maryland. Craig was a young engineer who had been assigned to work with Bendix on a project for NASA involving plate tectonics. Craig had been asked to form a group of engineers and technicians for this project, and he offered Howard one of the positions. So off we went to live in a rented apartment in Columbia. It was an exciting time for me. We had never lived in a city before, and I loved the Mall, the library, the Open Space in the planned city of Columbia—very different, but pleasant to me. Pepper Moore was so nice to me, showing me around while Howard was at work.

Personal computers were just coming into use. We bought one of the first portable computers, a model invented by Adam Osborne. I had hours to work with it alone in the apartment while Howard was gone during the day. I taught myself Wordstar, a word processing program. How great it was to be able to write without having to use correction ribbon or fluid. I had never learned to type, and now I could write without worrying about errors! I wrote the first article I had ever submitted to a magazine, and GOLDENSEAL actually accepted "The Gwinns of Round Bottom", and published it! This was the beginning of a long, pleasant relationship with Ken Sullivan and Debby Sonis, then the editor and assistant editor of GOLDENSEAL. I was to have eight articles published in GOLDENSEAL, and much later I contributed to the *West Virginia Encyclopedia*, published by the West Virginia Humanities Council.

By the next summer the work at Bendix had slowed. Howard became bored and homesick, and so we returned to Arbovale. He continued to make frequent trips to Columbia as a consultant.

Meanwhile, we traveled, camped, and fished. We went to Acadia National Park in Maine. In November of 1985 we went to the Grand Canyon, camping all the way in a tiny fiberglass camper we had assembled ourselves from a kit. The evening after we had visited the South Rim, we turned on the truck radio. A news program was giving the news of a disastrous flood in West Virginia, and we heard Marlinton mentioned. All

the telephone lines were out, so we headed at once for Tuscon, hoping that the Observatory there would have had some news. But they, too, had been unable to reach anyone in Pocahontas County.

We began a fast trip home, driving all the way back from Tucson in two days. As soon as we arrived, Dick and Henrietta Riegel told us that we should get to Marlinton as soon as possible and retrieve our safety deposit box from the bank. Marlinton was in a state of devastation. Merchandise was being shoveled out of the stores along Main Street, and loaded with end loaders into National Guard trucks to be hauled away to the dump. At the bank, the contents of safety deposit boxes were dumped into garbage bags, and given to the patrons to be dealt with any way they could. We spread our important papers (deeds, wills, etc.) on sheets in the bedroom floor to dry. I ironed them with the steam iron to kill the germs.

The next few weeks were spent in trying to assist the people who had lost everything in the flood. We helped to clean houses, Howard cleaned oil space heaters to get them operational again, and I sorted clothing and food at the community center in Cass. The effects of this disaster were to last for years to come. We found, a few weeks later, that our old fishing and camping place on the Arnold farm near Romney, had been destroyed by the flood. The actual course of the river was changed, and the beautiful fields that had produced so much corn and other crops had been covered with river rocks. The Arnolds had lost a tractor and other farm implements. We never went camping there again.