

CHAPTER 3

The Present as the Future for the Young

Those of us who were young adults or just reaching that stage of life derived a real advantage from that Great Depression in having that much preparation for life's hardships. We had the additional advantage over later generations, especially the college generation of the Viet Nam war era, in having tangible problems to cope with.

Would we be able to afford new shoes, or getting old ones repaired when half-soles cost only a dollar, or we would, as I did more than once, insert folded newspaper or cardboard to cover the holes in the soles. We walked much more, having no choice.

Would we miss any meals?

When I was at the University of Delaware and also worked on the *Wilmington Morning News*, when I needed a suit or an overcoat I had to save up for them. In advance I watched what was then one of the country's finest newspapers, the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. Its detailed reporting of that city's life included the arrests of fences, those who handled, among other things when it related to clothing, stolen clothing along with the stocks of merchants who had gone bankrupt.

When I was able to buy new shoes I got them only from Ben Mudrick, a short, quite round and jolly and always jovial, friendly and honest man who sold only, to the best of my knowledge, bankrupt stock.

When I accumulated \$10 in savings I went to Philadelphia, 30 miles away, the *Bulletin* clippings in my pocket. I saved only those relating to a few blocks of South Street, apparently so named because in the earliest days that was the southern end of the city. Every building was originally a storefront and a home. At the time of my patronage where I went they all seemed to be entirely commercial properties.

Of those who had been charged as fences, and who could be expected to face extra expenses for lawyers and/or fines I selected the one that then appeared to be more promising. I never entered one that did not have three stories. I went immediately to the top floor and searched for a suit I liked. I do not remember ever not selecting one that far from the front door.

"I like this," I'd tell the salesman, usually the owner.

He'd tell me the price. I'd tell him I had only \$10. When as invariable they forecast their financial doom if they parted with such a prime piece of merchandise for so ridiculously low a price I started walking out. They argued with me step by step. If I did not get that suit before I neared the door I then emptied all my pockets on the nearest countertop and said something like, "That's all I have" again and then I'd just wait a few moments. If by the time I ready to leave I did not have the suit any one time I can't remember it.

That, some welcome hand-me-downs from relatives and shoes from Little Ben's Big Shoe Store, the name of friendly Benny's emporium, is how in those years I clothed myself. I can't remember paying Benny more than \$5.00 for any pair of shoes some of which were of the most expensive brands.

At that I was probably better off than many of my high school fellow students.

The Great Depression taught its youth willing to learn how to cope, how to address and solve problems and to a degree to accept life as it was. It was pretty grim then. Yet life went on.

This is not to say that some of us did not have problems of ethics and morals like the Viet Nam war college generation faced with the draft and with that war.

We did not face the draft. But those of us when went to State universities were compelled to take two years of military training.

Came the Oxford pledge as that oath taken by some students at that famous English university

was called, not to fight in any war. I agreed with it. I believed in Ghandi's way: peaceful resistance.

The Viet Nam generation believed it invented objecting to compulsory military training.

I did that in my sophomore year and persuaded the university's committee on scholarship and discipline that I was sincere. I was. But by the time we were in World War II I realized that there could be no peaceful resistance to the Hitlers of the world that could have any meaning. He and the others had to be met with force. With a clear record of conscientious objection I hastened my enlistment into the army.

My purpose in this autobiographical part of this book is to recount some of the experiences I believed helped me for the work I ultimately did when President Kennedy was assassinated.

Each of these stories reports some learning experience, some learning about coping and how to do it, learning that the world is a place of changes and that we must understand these changes and live with them- and that we can do that without compromise with honor or with principle.

At the time I objected to compulsory military training- not to the teaching of military science, mind you, but compelling it as a condition of getting an education- I was, I believe, correct on principle that it ought not be required.

At the time Hitler menaced the world it was not in any sense a compromise with principle to enter the army voluntarily and faster than I would have under the regulations if I had not wanted to get into doing whatever I could about Hitler.

That this was an emotional rather than a logical decision I learned soon enough because it was soon apparent that there were many things I could do that would help the war effort more than as a limited-duty military policeman.

This, too, was a learning experience confirmed when I was assigned civilian roles as an enlisted

man and then after medical discharge, helped the war effort much more than I did as a military policeman.

Principles, I learned, relate to real situations and in this world those real situations can and do change, sometimes with extraordinary rapidity.

Before the Oxford pledge, in high school, I was an active kid in extra-curricular activities and also a good student. I took extra courses and graduated in the upper third of my class, a member of the National Honor Society and with a record number of credits from the extra courses I was allowed to take. I spent one year with classes every minute including lunch period.

Radio was then in its infancy. It fascinated me. I began custom-building radios and I organized a radio club in the high school. When I saw the advantages of what then did not exist in educational institutions, a private rather than a public public address system, private because it would be controlled by the school administration, I asked the Radio Corporation of America to discuss it with our club. That even then a giant corporation invited us up to its Camden, New Jersey plant, we discussed it, they showed us through the phonograph-record part of the plant, and then they did design and actually built, on the notion of a kid, the first such electronic system ever. They brought it to Wilmington, demonstrated what it could and would do, and made an instant sale of the first such system ever.

Did this not teach not to assume that anything at all is impossible without making a real effort to achieve it?

Did it not also teach that success may require thought, planning and the best possible presentation to the most important audience possible?

When my mother died my older sister, in going over what she left, found two stories relating to my high school career from the paper for which I later worked. One was on my thinking through the

need for and basic design of what RCA then designed scientifically, made and delivered. The other reflected the consummate, really disgusting bad taste of which I was capable together with its acceptance and appreciation by an audience of no better taste.

I was in the drama club with the modest name of The Thespians. It decided to do a Broadway hit of that period, the play "Jonesy." I had the comic role of a Jewish traveling salesman. That I was sick at the time, sick enough so I was not able to go to the senior prom, does not in any way excuse what I did.

The same morning paper said that I was the star of the show!

Ugh!

What I actually did was to play a caricature of all the prejudicial stereotypes of the anti-Semites, complete with accent and exaggerated gestures particularly with a stiff straw hat almost all men wore in those days.

That made me the star of the show.

That was not good learning, particularly not for a young person and least of all for one who is Jewish. People liked it but it was shameful.

Only much later was it good learning, when I realized how awful it was.

My most important learning in high school began early when I elected a course in journalism. That was probably as a freshman. By my junior year I was managing editor of the school weekly paper. That year the editor, my friend James Borup, the only son of a wonderful Danish couple (I think they came here because they were anti-royalist), had scholastic difficulties and was denied all extra-curricular activities. I edited the paper, as it turned out with no or virtually no supervision.

It was printed at the plant of the local Sunday paper, the *Star*. I worked there Thursday

afternoons and Friday mornings. The paper was distributed at the end of classes on Fridays. It was not uncommon for me to be the last person to leave the *Star* building on Thursday and it was common for me to do the last-minute work through all or almost all of my classes on Friday mornings. But the paper never once missed getting to the high school in time to be distributed.

Once when everything was running late and I feared the paper would not get out on time I made much of it up before leaving the print shop Thursday evening. When the printers got to work at 8 o'clock Friday morning I was there before them. They took one look at what I had done and I had a preview of the sitdown strikes, in much more moderate form, that would be resorted to in a few years by some labor unions. The printers just refused to do any work for the time they estimated it would have taken them to do what I had done. That was work for which they would have been paid. They still got paid for it merely by not working for that time. There was no plant-owner complaint.

Those printers did not have to undo and redo anything I had done.

Jokingly they offered me a job- and told me if I took it I'd have to join the union. That was my first experience with unions, with working people who had joined together in common interest and to protect their jobs, the conditions of their work and the pay they could take home.

The pages were put together in forms called "chases." They were on what was called and was literally a "stone," a broad, flat, thick stone. Nearby were seven very noisy old linotype machines. There the written stories were cast in type to be placed in the chases in accord with the layouts I had made. Too many layouts were made at the stone and it was less common than it should have been for there to be no layout in the last minute, where I made the front page up at the stone in the last minute to accommodate late news of importance to the students. Or that I thought I was.

Often on Thursday nights I wrote stories instead of studying. Those stories were not set in type

until after the plant opened Friday morning. The deadline for the paper to be printed and be able to reach the school on time was 11 o'clock. I pushed it too often but somehow the paper never missed getting there on time.

There not only was no supervision of me- none was possible. The responsibility was mine and mine alone.

For the year I was the de facto editor I recall no serious complaint. I never once got chewed out for any story. Or how I "played" any in the paper.

That year "my" paper won the All-American Honor Rating at the Columbia School of Journalism's annual competition for high school papers.

I was rewarded- by not being made editor for my senior year.

That was my first experience with anti-Semitism.

It was quiet, unspoken.

No racist slurs. No personal insults. Just the clear expression of the prejudice that Jews are not fit for positions publicly recognized as highest. Even after a year's performance of filling that position better than anyone else in the school's history had- but without the title. Even after bringing the honor to the school.

Jews had to appear to be subordinate to someone even when they are not.

Most of the major colleges and universities in the area, particularly the professional schools, for doctors and for lawyers, had unspoken and unrecorded quotas. Jews were limited to 10 percent of admissions where they were admitted.

But then most of them admitted no blacks at all.

If I protested this gross discrimination- after all, without any real supervision I had won this high

honor for my school- I do not now recall it. My present belief 65 years later is that while I was disappointed I was aware of and accepted the realities.

The sports editor under me, an athletic girl, was made editor, I broke her in as editor and then resigned from the paper.

Anyway, I'd learned enough soon to be acceptable to the city's morning paper after I graduated from high school.

But what was of enormous importance to me later was recognizing the need for care and accuracy when there was nobody to correct me if I made any mistakes. That year made it almost second nature for me to be alert and to feel and meet responsibility.

It wasn't long before I was an editor for the United States Senate. That was before I was old enough to cast my first vote. I was past 21, the voting age then, but only after the general election.

For young people many of their life's experiences can be learning experiences if they heed them.

Despite missing all my junior year Friday classes my grades were good. There was no scholastic barrier to my entering college. But I did not have any money.

A cousin I had never met got me a job with his brother, a butcher who also was an entrepreneur. Among his other businesses was what then was becoming popular, a miniature golf course. Joe Cottler, a man of culture, a musician, a music critic, an English and literature teacher and writer, whose first book was within a few months a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, had married my cousin Betty. Her mother, my paternal grandfather's oldest sister, and her husband had taken my father in when he emigrated from Russia during the pogroms when the Czar's Cossacks were massacring Jews merely because they were Jews. My father worked days and went to what then were called "Americanization" schools at night. In time he saved enough to bring his brother over and in turn, they

both saved to pay the steerage fares of the rest of the family.

Joe and Betty were childless. they treated me as their son. From them I developed my first real cultural interests. They introduced me to a new world.

Philadelphia is a large city geographically. It was 21 miles long. All of Manhattan would have fit in its Fairmont Park, which was close to the center of Philadelphia. Each trip to and from work gave me an hour of reading time, two hours a day, via several trolley cars. I did not have to be introduced to reading but the books I read were those of these mature cousins.

From time to time I could make a deal with the golf course's night watchman for him to come to work early if I made that time up for him. That was so I could go to the summer concerts of the great Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra then conducted by the charismatic Leopold Stokowski. They played their summer concerts at Fairmont Park's Robin Hood Dell. That was only about a half-mile from the schvitz, the then still popular Russian and Turkish baths owned by a maternal great uncle and aunt. Those baths featured steam baths and plaitzahs, massages of which I remember only that the body was massaged with bunched short balsam branches after it was soaped and washed from hoses of warm water. There were steam rooms that really steamed and were so hot it could burn to sit on the marble and tile seats. Most had to take towels to sit on. But it did get sweaty bodies clean!

When I pulled in my great-aunt on my mother's side, Tante Segal, had a fine meal for me by the time I was clean and dressed. I'd gulp it and take off. After the concert I returned, swam a bit and then slept in the sleeping dormitory all those baths then had. My uncle Max had me up in time for a quick breakfast before the much longer trolley trip of close to two hours to my day's work.

Joe Cottler, who was close to my size, lavished his clothing on me. I was well clothed for my first semester in college, and thanks to him and Betty and their meeting almost all my living expenses, by

college time I had, for the only time, accumulated enough to pay all my college costs for the semester on its first day.

Merely being with such mature, well-educated wise and cultured people was a mind-opening experience for a youth from a working-class background.

What they did for me, unasked and without reward other than gratification from doing it, I never forgot and as they did, I relish the appreciation of the students who visited, corresponded and who worked for me part-time while they were in college.

Because Joe and Betty spent all the time they could with me, summer- nights I had to work and they had nothing planned they drove those many miles in their Star roadster to pick me up and save me the long, hot and sometimes tiring and boring trip home- and in merely engaging in what for them was normal conversation for them taught me much.

Once Joe, a violinist, asked me about the Theramin, of which he had heard. It was an electronic device for making what was supposed to approximate music. It consisted of an oscillator whose squeals and other sounds were controlled by waving the hands near two short rods that were aerials. In explaining how it worked to Joe I actually "invented" what a man named Hammond later did, the Hammond organ. I had told Joe that RCA, which owned the rights to the Theramin, should have controlled the oscillations with a keyboard instead of the varying capacity that controlled the oscillations by moving the hands to alter body capacity. They could be controlled by a series of fixed condensers that were activated by a keyboard. Until then that idea had not occurred to me. But had it I'd not have been able to do anything with it because that required the means, money, I did not have.

Another time, when we were talking about commercial aviation, then in a very primitive state, and of the problems for it when there was cloud cover or fog, from my experience as a radio operator I

"invented" what was years in coming but did come, guiding planes by focused, short-wave signals that, when followed when there was little or no visibility, would guide planes blindly to a safe landing. I'd had some experience with radio short-waves, and I knew this could be done. I lacked the means of even thinking of doing it.

I never forgot the indispensability of means in being able to do what one wanted to do.

On the Morning *News* I was the youngest, younger by a year than the "copy" boy. Traditionally they were "boys" and when they were wanted they knew on hearing the cry "Boy!" I think that copy boy went on to be a tennis star but I'm not certain. Someone of his name did.

Carl Wise, the soft-spoken, fatherly city editor, instead called me "son." He guided me around several to me shocking experiences in his quiet, effective, fatherly way.

After World War I a Congressman named Volstead succeeded in making it a criminal offence even to possess alcoholic beverages and they were not legally available except on a doctor's prescription. That is what gave us bootleggers, leading to the growth of organized crime. One of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's campaign promises was to have the Volstead Act repealed. That was one of the first promises he kept. It then became legal to sell drinks in restaurants. In the same north-south block as the paper's office but two streets to the east of it on what was then Wilmington's main street two Greek refugee brothers named Tarabicos had the Presto Cafe where I ate. One brother, Tom, became a good friend. Shortly after "repeal" when I was lunching there I saw a number of women sipping cocktails. I discussed that with Tom. He told me that many of the women had switched from tea to cocktails. I saw a "feature" in that. I wrote it and handed it in. That night Carl Wise called me over.

"Son," he said. "Mr. du Pont would not like this."

Pierre, one of the feuding du Ponts, owned the papers, morning and afternoon, the state's only dailies, through his Christiana Holding Company. Pierre was also strong for repeal of the Volstead Act.

When Carl saw how crestfallen and disappointed I was he said, "Why don't you take it up to the *Sunday Ledger*?"

The Philadelphia *Ledger*, then a fine old paper whose ancient offices were near Independence Hall, had a Sunday supplement that as I now recall, was syndicated to more than 50 other Sunday papers throughout the country. Its then editor, a man named Miner who had been an Army major and was referred to as Major Miner, was a kindly, fatherly man like Carl Wise. In retrospect I now wonder whether that was true of many reporters and editors in those days, whether they were men who welcomed to the craft brash, imaginative kids.

For that story the *Ledger* paid me more than I made in a week at the *News*.

Excited, I submitted other feature stories and while a kid became a syndicated writer.

Of the stories I sold the *Ledger* I remember one other: I predicted that Japan's expansionism would lead to its attack on Pearl Harbor about nine years in the future.

I was led into an interest in foreign affairs by a Russian refugee on the University of Delaware School of Agriculture, Dr. Artemy A. Horvath. Horvath was one of the world's pre-eminent experts on soy beans. I met him in reporting on that school. Agriculture was basic in Delaware's down-state economy and soy beans were an important crop there. From him I learned of the magic in soy beans and I wrote one of the earliest stories reporting their nutritional and industrial potential for the *Ledger*.

Horvath was a cultured man. He and his brother, a mathematician, were "White" Russians, opposed to the Communist revolution. They fled Russia when the revolution began. His brother fled

west. In Berlin he became a friend of Albert Einstein long before Einstein came to the United States. Artemy flew east. He became the equivalent of an undersecretary of agriculture in the Chinese government. When he was able to come here, among what he brought with him was a copy of the so-called Tanaka Memorial, a blueprint for expansion presented to the Japanese emperor by the Baron Tanaka.

And it really happened as Tanaka had recommended, as I proved later when I was a Washington magazine correspondent.

When Carl Wise knew he could not use that to me innocent feature on women free to sip cocktails instead of their traditional tea I began to learn that freedom to write, our Constitutional guarantee, is not always that free. For it to have meaning writers must be published.

That was not the only such learning experience when I was quite young.

It was disillusioning but it was the reality. Pierre du Pont did not have to visit his papers and lay down his law. Carl Wise knew that if he published my to me innocent feature it could cost him his job.

Another youthful introduction into the realities of what then was called "Big Business" is an element I refer to above as "the feuding du Ponts." There had been a bitter internal struggle for control of the vast du Pont operation between Pierre and Alfred I. Pierre won. Alfred I went to Florida where with the wealth he began he was soon a Florida tycoon. However, he neither forgot nor forgave Pierre's besting him for control of the family corporation. One way in which he could get small vengeance was to prevent whatever Pierre wanted enacted by the state legislature from passing. How he managed to fix upon the ideal agent to accomplish this for him I do not know, but he did, with the most unlikely of men. He was Jake Hill, a landscape gardener from Blackbird, a small town south of Wilmington and near the center of the state.

Jake was an amiable, good-ol'-boy type, shrewd and wise in the way of state politicians. But incredibly to me, he could neither read nor write! Yet all the time I knew him and for some time before that Jake controlled one vote more than the majority in the State senate wherever there was an issue of importance to Alfred I.

If I ever knew, I now have no recollection of whether Alfred I. told Jake what he wanted done by phone. But I do know he wrote Jake long letters, in longhand. When Jake got one of those he looked one of us on the paper up, believing, correctly, that he could trust us. He would take whichever one of us he found to a restaurant, treat us to food and drinks, and listen attentively while we read Alfred I.'s letters to him. My recollection of the few I read for Jake is that Alfred I. was a politically wise and sophisticated man. He spelled things out lucidly and with detail for Jake.

I believe that Jake preferred those who were older than I to read those letters, as he should have, and that he asked me to read them to him only when he could not find Wentworth Emerson Wilson, a history buff who in time became one of the paper's editors, or Bob Curtin, who had become the du Pont Corporation's public-relations director when he died at a rather young age.

Whose idea it was that Jake use reporters for his employer's brother's papers to read Alfred I.'s letters to him I do not know but it proved to be good judgement. We were better able to answer any questions Jake might have and we were trustworthy. Good reporters do respect confidentiality. While the Jake Hill operation was probably well known if only from his activities in the State's capital, Dover, not a word ever appeared in the papers about it. On any issue if the word had appeared in the papers that operation would have ended.

Most of all Pierre wanted, with repeal, to be the State's first liquor commissioner. He did want some record of public service, too. Jake did keep him from becoming liquor commissioner, exacting

that vengeance for Alfred I.

And so I learned at a rather young age that legislatures can be controlled and how that can be done and of the willingness of those of means to do what is necessary for them to accomplish political purposes important to them.

Working for Pierre du Pont's paper and coming to know what I did about his feuds and shibboleths was, of course, an educational experience.

One of many while I worked for the *Morning News*.