



The Chronicles of Martin

Martin R. Adams

Cover Photo:

A late afternoon visit to Little Round Top; Martin looks out over the Gettysburg Battlefield.

Photo by M.H. Adams

"The Chronicles of Martin," by Martin R. Adams.
ISBN: 978-1-62137-464-0 (Softcover); 978-1-62137-465-7 (eBook).

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014933467

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	1
INSPIRATION	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
PROLOGUE	4
BOOK ONE: MY BEGINNINGS.....	7
MY CHILDHOOD	9
ALBERT, MY FATHER	24
LETA, MY MOTHER.....	34
MY GRANDMOTHER, SARAH ADAMS (Grandma)	45
ROBERT EVERETT WILKINSON, MY UNCLE.....	52
ROBERT MCCLURE, MY COUSIN	56
DOWN IN THE RIVER BOTTOM.....	60
SCHOOL	66
FAMILY VACATIONS.....	71
WORK.....	77
MENTORS.....	84
JOHN WAYNE STARK, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY.....	86
LEE ROY STANDIFER, COLONEL U S AIR FORCE.....	88
GUY V. MALLONEE, HUMBLE OIL & REFINING CO/ESSO/ STANDARD OIL OF NEW JERSEY	91
JOHN (JACK) ANDRESEN, ANDRESEN & COMPANY, NEW YORK.....	115
POSTLOGUE ON JOHN ANDRESEN	130
NOTES ON MY LIFE AFTER ANDRESEN	136
SAVED BY GRACE.....	139

NEW WORK.....	144
BOOK TWO: MY DRINKING LIFE.....	169
MY DRINKING LIFE.....	171
BOOK THREE: ESSAYS	183
INTRODUCTION	185
THE CHALLENGE OF BELIEF	189
FAITH.....	191
ALONE IN GOD’S VAST UNIVERSE	193
AMERICA, BLESSED IN ALL GOD’S UNIVERSE!.....	195
GOD REVEALED.....	196
RIGHTFUL PRAYERS.....	198
BARNEY AND RUFUS WON’T BE IN HEAVEN	200
SAP AND BLOOD	202
WHAT TO SEEK FIRST	204
SOLITUDE	205
I NEEDED THE QUIET.....	207
HE WILL BE WAITING THERE TO RECEIVE ME.....	208
THOUGHTS ON THE RAPTURE AND EVERLASTING LIFE.....	210
HE GOT MY ATTENTION.....	212
HOW TO BE HAPPY!.....	214
GOLDEN RULE PEOPLE	216
KNOWING AND DOING GOD’S WILL	217
ETERNITY.....	219
PRAYER	221
TRILLIONS OF SOULS!.....	223
CONSTANTS AND VARIABLES.....	224

SATAN AND EVIL HAD TO BE.....	225
MANAGING EXPECTATIONS.....	227
CHARACTER.....	229
RESURRECTION	231
RESURRECTION 2	233
CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?.....	238
THOUGHTS ABOUT FAMILY	240
A MORNING PRAYER.....	242
THE MIRACLE OF COMPOUND INTEREST	243

DEDICATION

The memories, thoughts and ideas contained in this work are dedicated to my two children and step-daughter and to their children ---- and to any others desiring to learn about my journey, experiences and beliefs.

To Sallie Lesue, Samuel Mason and Heather Ellen and to my grandchildren:

Martin Albert, Anna Sage, Jack King, Daniel Scott and William David.

INSPIRATION

Born in the flesh January 27, 1936, I lived a natural life until being reborn in the Spirit by the Grace of God through Jesus Christ, April 14, 1974. Twenty years later May 28, 1994, on the occasion of marrying the love of my life, Margery Temple Hughes, God began His work of Redemption and Sanctification in me, which continues to this day. It's no coincidence that my determination to no longer consume alcohol of any kind began then. Now I have accumulated twenty years of sobriety.

God has seen fit to bless my life in many ways, including the gift of children and their children; reasonable mental and physical health; great friends; and enough material substance to live reasonably well. Praising God and thanking Him for His grace and mercies, my life with Margery in Jesus Christ has made all the difference. She has been and is His answer to the prayers of my life.

Margery is the very essence of the ideal wife described beautifully by King Lemuel in the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 31, verses 10 - 31..... "She is far more precious than jewels...the heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain...she does him good and not harm, all the days of her life...she rises while it is still night and provides food for her household...she girds herself with strength...she opens her hand to the poor and reaches out to the needy...she makes garments and sells them...she opens her mouth with wisdom, and kindness is on her tongue...her husband says 'many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all'...charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised"...

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Help. Technical Help. Understanding the interface between my computer and my mind. I am thankful for the help and support of two specific people. First, Anna Cronberg of Brazos Valley Computers for technical assistance. Second, the efforts of Carroll Hedrick, Copy Corner in College Station, in providing formatting and fine tuning to make this book possible.

PROLOGUE

You are about to begin a journey with me down my particular road in life. I want my children, grandchildren and others to read, understand and perhaps reread my story, learning more about me and hopefully about themselves, life in the fast lane, and the miracle of God's love and grace. This work consists of three parts---BOOK ONE, My Beginnings, is my life's story. BOOK TWO tells you about my drinking life as an alcoholic, and my recovery. BOOK THREE is a collection of Essays I have written over the years.

BOOK ONE discusses three distinctly different parts of my life---1) Before I knew Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior---2) After He became my Lord and Savior---3) Then Redemption and Sanctification, moving me to a closer, more intimate relationship with Him.

The first part of my life spanned about 38 years. It was marked by successes, sometimes confusion, occasional heartaches, and some unfulfilled dreams. It was characterized by self-striving and after my considerable successes, failure.

The second part covered about 20 years, after I came to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I continued living in the world, occasionally drinking to excess, sometimes womanizing, and striving harder than ever to achieve my goals. I still wanted badly to have my own way. Some would say this part of my life exemplifies "carnal Christianity". Others would question whether I had met Jesus Christ at all twenty years earlier. Regardless, I absolutely knew in my heart and believed totally that if I died, I would be in heaven-- in the arms of Jesus Christ. The old question about whether one can lose his salvation was settled in my heart. I had never committed that unpardonable sin as I understand it, declaring overtly or covertly that I reject and renounce Jesus Christ as my Savior. I was satisfied knowing I was saved for all eternity, certain beyond all doubt that Jesus Christ was and is my Savior.

Twenty years passed before events in my life conspired for the Lord to begin the process of Sanctification, in which I was drawn into a much deeper relationship with Christ Jesus than I had ever known or imagined. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to realize I'm that person Christ changed.

No, I haven't emoted into Mr. Goody Two Shoes by any means. But my entire outlook has been changed by the hands of God during the past twenty years. I sometimes wonder if this Martin would succeed again today as a businessman in the cutthroat world in which I've lived. The short answer is "yes", because I am led by the Lord whether into success or failure. God changed my desires when I got out of His way.

Finally I wanted Him to have His way with me. I wanted to walk so close to Him that I would KNOW His will for me. I knew alcohol had stood between me and my desire for that fuller richer fellowship with Him. I wearied of analyzing everything to death and just finally decided to rest in His will for me.

Joy and contentment generally characterize my life, joy beyond anything I knew during those first 58 years. I don't want to disobey the Lord. Sins of the flesh no longer please or fulfill me. In fact I want to avoid committing sin, looking daily to the Lord to help me.

Thank you for letting me share my story with you. It's a long personal journey, from my provincial upbringings ultimately to my life with Christ Jesus. I think many who walk in the ways of the world, eventually coming out the other end, will identify with my experiences. This is meant to be a source of encouragement to you. If sometimes it seems to you like all is lost and there is no way out, my story is for you.

During the last 20 years, I've written many essays covering a variety of topics. Many are spiritual, some are philosophical, and some are simply my analytical way of looking at things. I've collected those I believe you'll enjoy into BOOK THREE--ESSAYS. Please read them slowly and thoughtfully-- maybe only one or two at a time. Think about what you've read afterwards. Maybe some light will shine on things you may have wondered about. Reread them, and see if they help with riddles in your life.

Martin R. Adams, September, 2013

College Station, Texas

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28 (NRSV)

BOOK ONE:
MY BEGINNINGS

MY CHILDHOOD

She never let him forget that he missed the blessed event of my birth.....

It was a cold snowy day in East Texas that January 27 morning in 1936. He was making his way back to Longview after delivering a prisoner to authorities in Dallas and he was caught in a snowstorm.

Her best friend, one of my namesakes, Rachel Owens, comforted her that morning at Markham McCree Hospital in Longview, while Dr. W. P. Farrar delivered me. I was an 8 pound 11 ounce 'bouncing baby boy,' and Dr. Farrar immediately christened me "Right Tackle for the Longview High School Lobos." Of course, I don't remember the events of that morning; all I know is the lore that I was told over the years.

I was named Martin in honor of my dad's mentor Martin Hayes, the Gregg County Sheriff and my dad's old boss, and Ray for Rachel, my mom's best friend and my dad's stand-in at the birth. They would have named me Sunni, if I'd been a girl. In light of this, they hung the nickname, Sonny, on me. I absolutely hated this moniker, finally leaving it behind in favor of Martin when I started school. My mom and dad were exceptions, never calling me by my proper name. They both insisted on calling me Sonny all the way to life's end!

I inherited physical traits from both parents, nothing unusual about that. Like it or not, many physical traits pass on from generation to generation. Over time, some disappear through breeding. I got my 6-foot 4-inch height from my dad, who was the same height.

His must have come from his father, Wylie, because his mother, my Grandma, was a short, dumpy little thing. I also inherited dad's dark eyes and a tendency toward darker skin tone, especially brought out by exposure to direct sunlight. My dad had trim, muscular legs and a chest so thick a special setup was needed for his annual chest x-rays.

I, unfortunately, inherited my mother's tendency for a large belly, bottom and legs. These were difficult characteristics for me to deal with in organized sports like football and baseball. I was simply too slow, too bottom heavy and clumsy to become a viable footballer or baseballer. How I wanted it to be different! Unfortunately, I also got

my mom's bad feet, bunionated and hammertoe, causing me grief in adult life, requiring considerable surgeries. Mother, in turn, inherited these unfortunate traits from her mother Zona's side of the house. I will always regret passing on bad feet to my dear daughter, but mercifully my son was spared. Balding by my twenty first birthday was another characteristic of mother's family, and showed up prominently in her brother Everett, my uncle.

Hopefully I inherited a good brain from both parents.

Dad was the newly minted Chief of Police in Longview, Texas, our prosperous hometown in East Texas. Mother helped make ends meet working as a long distance telephone operator for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. She worked in that capacity for forty years, retiring in the mid 1960's as a pensioner.

All together, I suppose we had a strange household. My dad's mother, Sarah, and my mother's mother, Zona, both lived with us under one small roof. My parents employed a live-in, Virginia (Ginna) to take care of me in exchange for room and board. She was attending school, planning to become a nurse. It must have been terribly cramped in that small two bedroom house with only a single bathroom and a living room converted to sleeping space for Virginia. The two grandmothers shared a room. My mom, dad and I bunked in the same bedroom.

It was 1936, and America still struggled with the ravages of the Great Depression. There was no money to be had anywhere, and just about everyone had a hard time making ends meet. But the big oil boom had propelled East Texas into the limelight as one of the few bright spots in the nation. Hoards of people rushed to East Texas, living in tents and any other kind of shelter they could find, just to get a play in the oilfield. Some adventurers like the Hunts, Murchinsons and a few others had hit a bonanza, so many others hoped to hit it rich too.

Somehow our modest kitchen met the needs of our six-person family. It had an ice box, really and truly, keeping things cool with a 25 pound block of ice dad loaded in every day. I have no recollection of whose job it was to empty the water collected from the melted ice. The kitchen had a four burner gas stove with an oven. Meals were taken around an enamel kitchen table. We must have eaten in shifts, the grandmothers waiting their turn on the back porch where they could enjoy dipping snuff and shelling fresh peas. My dad kept them supplied with

“toothbrushes”, twigs from a sweet gum tree with the ends frayed. I fondly remember Lou the red rooster, always perched on the back of my chair at mealtimes, no kidding. One day Lou didn't show up for dinner. They all said the “Appetite” had gotten Lou. In my childhood mind I thought Appetite was some kind of cruel ogre that ate innocent chickens and maybe even little children.

It was hot as blazes in the little house on Park Street. We never heard of home air conditioning in 1939, and comforted ourselves with several whirring electric fans around the house. They did little more than beat the fetid air around. The grandmothers fluttered old straw fans, blotting sweat with hand towels. Soon we would have the luxury of an attic fan, drawing air from the outside through open windows up through a large grill vent in the ceiling then expelling the air back outside. Sometimes mother sprinkled beds at night to put a little moisture on the sheets while the outside air was sucked in through the windows letting evaporative cooling do its magic. Crazy as this might sound in modern times, it gave us respite from the torrid Texas heat of the day when temperatures could exceed 100° for weeks at a time.

One hot afternoon, I dreamed a large black sedan was flying down Park Street about treetop high. It spread an unbelievably foul odor in its wake. All these years later I distinctly recall the dream. Soon the car was out of sight, but the obnoxious smell remained. I awoke wringing wet with sweat, naked as a little picked chicken. I decided to sneak out the front door while no one was looking and check out this strange thing, wondering if it was real. Dirt streets were topped with a heavy coating of oil-- there wasn't much in the way of concrete or asphalt in residential areas. Thinking I was really getting away with something, I stepped barefooted and naked onto the black oil surface. I didn't realize the street was like a hot plate in the blazing sun and the goopy semi-melted oil would stick to the bottoms of my feet like blazing glue. Mother had been taking all this in, watching from the front door. She laughed as she carried me in to soak my burned little feet in kerosene, dissolving the goo, then drying me off lovingly. The black gumbo was gone. She said the foul odor I smelled was indeed real and had come from a neighbor's kitchen where they were pickling cucumbers. It wasn't from the mysterious flying black car.

Park Street ran North and South for a quarter of a mile, parallel to and alongside the city park, thus the name Park Street. I was endlessly fascinated by the big road graders and oil spray trucks plying their

way up and down our street once or twice a year. I loved the smell of oil sprayed down on the plowed up road so it could be worked in with the big fork and grader blade. I thought those big machines going up and down the street were about the coolest things imaginable, hoping someday I might be driving big machines like those. I was equally attracted to the large grotesque looking street sweeping machines that made their way around the city in the middle of the night, headlights shining like two eyes in the dark. I thought they had a neat smell too, but then again I've always been told my sense of what smells good is unique. I guess I've always been a little weird in my likes and dislikes.

Old Mr. Woodall's house was next door. He was an old time fiddler, hosting dances most Saturday nights to the tunes ground out by his little band. He charged a quarter (two bits) per head, and no booze was allowed. Mr. Woodall was the paternal head of the Woodall clan scattered throughout the area. There must have been nothing in his wardrobe but old faded blue overalls, a long sleeved khaki shirt and a floppy old sweat stained brown felt hat that had seen better times. He was a kindly old gentleman who said few words and walked or took the bus everywhere he went.

Directly across the street from our house was the commodious home of Mr. and Mrs. Pete Campbell. The size and style of the Campbell's place definitely was a misfit in our modest neighborhood. Mr. Campbell had been successful in the East Texas oil business. They enjoyed the luxury of a live-in yard man (Tom--no last name) and a full-time live-in maid cook and housekeeper, Nanny. The Campbells were in their 60's and, with no grandchildren of their own, they literally took me in. My guess is they had owned much of the property up and down the street and had sold it off bit by bit. Their house had beautiful hardwood floors adorned with fine Oriental rugs. I enjoyed playing on the Orientals as Nanny pushed the vacuum cleaner around. I was fascinated by its sound and how it sucked up everything in its path.

Old Tom lived above the Campbells' garage in a small apartment. He used the stairs outside the garage to get to and from his place. The Campbells' big black Chrysler dominated the garage below. Mrs. Campbell was the sole driver, as Mr. Pete was chronically ill and usually bedridden.

A goldfish pond, shaped like a giant's footprint, was the centerpiece of the back yard. The sides and top were natural East Texas porous red

stone, smelling peculiarly metallic, like iron ore. Stones like these were plentiful in East Texas and often used to build facades and porticos. They always emitted a characteristic metallic smell. A large willow spread its shade over the pond. This was really a great spot for me on hot summer afternoons as Tom worked nearby, keeping an eye on me. One afternoon I leaped into the pond and was startled, suddenly imagining killer goldfish were nibbling my legs. I jumped out screaming at the top of my lungs that I had been attacked by a swarm of goldfish. Tom, Nanny and Mrs. Campbell rushed to my rescue and, relieved, had a big laugh, wiping the tears from my eyes. Those vicious goldfish bites, while preposterous, won me a dish of Nanny's delicious homemade ice cream. I must have decided that afternoon that the stunt of "crying wolf" can bring rewards I hadn't counted on.

Martin Hayes, the oil rich straight arrow Sheriff of Gregg County, owned our house and other houses in Longview. He rented the Park Street house to his protégé, my dad, for a pittance. By 1939, he began prodding my dad to stop paying rent and invest in a home. Mr. Hayes wanted my parents to buy a house he owned in the same neighborhood, one street over, on Harrison Street. Finally dad relented, agreeing to a price of \$3000, believing it to be a better fit for the family. Mr. Hayes held the mortgage and gave my dad liberal terms. The \$3000 price was a little more than a year's wages for our family. Buying 235 Harrison St. was a huge step, as they had always "thought poor", while in fact they might have actually been considered middle class, at the lower end of the spectrum.

Harrison Street ran north and south two miles, parallel to Park Street a block over. Both ends of Harrison were totally black neighborhoods. In between, along the length of Harrison, was strictly blue collar. Everything was segregated then—schools, city playgrounds, public restrooms and drinking fountains. Blacks rode in the rear of buses, and in upstairs balconies at movie theaters. Prudent white movie goers always sat towards the rear, underneath the upstairs black seating to avoid being hit by unsavory missiles from above. Integrated sports hadn't been thought of, and black-white boy-girl relationships were unimaginable except among the "trashiest of people."

Our neighborhood was home to several police officers who worked for my dad. I never understood why so many of them clustered in the Harrison-Park Street area, but they did. Like shoe stores clustering near one another in a city, police officers in Longview seemed to do the

same thing. Buster and Zellie Calloway, Marvin and Irene Woodall, Mr. And Mrs. Spiller, Glen Bean, and others. Mr. And Mrs. Spivey Eubanks Sr. lived next door in a large house. The Eubanks family were house painters and wall paperers. Sons Richard and David, their wives and children all were neighbors. The brothers worked for their dad. Our neighborhood was definitely considered one of Longview's safest, with my dad holding down the fort.

Lots of foot traffic traveled Harrison Street, mostly black, traipsing from one end to the other. Harrison Street to the south dead ended into Nelson Street, the length of which was known as "Niggertown". It's horrible to remember that term was widely used in reference to people of color. Nelson Street was a big draw for blacks-- there were grocery stores, cafés, barbershops, hair salons, churches--just about everything needed by the segregated black community. The once famous East Texas Cotton Club where Billy Eckstein and Fatha Hines once appeared was at the heart of Nelson Street.

Clyde Whitfield, an adult white man, walked back and forth the length of Harrison Street every day, constantly clenching and unclenching his fists as he walked, turning his head from side to side with a toothless grin. He never spoke, yet he was absolutely frightening to us kids. I'm sure he was harmless, but "you could never be sure what someone like that might do". The floppy brimmed hat and red suspenders holding up old faded baggy pants made him even stranger looking. Mother was sure she knew the source of Clyde's problem, and by telling me about it she hoped I wouldn't do what Clyde purportedly did--he "played with himself when he was a little boy, and became that way. He will never be normal." That scared me out of my wits and made me want to "be a good boy" in spite of my budding awareness of the opposite sex.

Nelson Street was a lively source of business for the Police Department on Saturday nights, as there were fights, shootings, stabbings, drunkenness and general rabble rousing. Once in a while there were killings. But on Sunday mornings the churches along Nelson Street were packed to the rafters all day long, and picnics covered church grounds, as congregations visited and prepared to return to evening service.

The Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks ran alongside and parallel to Nelson Street, before reaching the depot near downtown. MOPAC, as it

was known, connects San Antonio and the southern corridor of Texas with St. Louis, Missouri to the north by way of Longview. Our town was an important rail cross road because the East-West line, Texas Pacific, also came through Longview making our town important enough to justify a roundhouse and major repair shop. Two passenger trains passed North and South, East and West, four in all every day. I often rode my Western Flyer bike down Harrison Street to Nelson, even though it was on the edge of taboo territory. It was a thrill to watch the mighty locomotives pass. Engineers always waved and blasted out a loud honk. During the war, giant steam locomotives pulled long strings of black passenger cars on these tracks. Some of the trains pulled by the steam giants were called Sunshine Specials, and were rumored to hit speeds of 80 or 90 mph on long straightaways in West Texas.

Soon after the war ended, the giant steam locomotives were replaced by fancy blue and cream colored diesel engines, called Texas Eagles, each with a large silver eagle adorning their noses. The sights and sounds of these magnificent machines blew me away whenever I saw them, and engineers always blasted the air horn, waving as they passed. I loved the speedy, sleek looking diesel streamliners, but it just didn't seem right that they continued to pull a string of the same old black passenger cars. Once in a while, a shiny new car that matched the fancy blue and cream locomotive showed up. I was thrilled at the thought that some afternoon I might see an entire matching set of locomotive and cars speeding by. I didn't realize it was all just a matter of economics, having nothing to do with aesthetics.

Mother and dad knew how I was really excited by the new breed of streamlined diesel locomotives. They got me a Lionel electric train set for Christmas, complete with switches, lights, transformer, the whole works. It was styled after New York Central's Century Limited, running from New York City west. The Limited was actually powered by a streamlined high speed steam locomotive, not a diesel engine, but that didn't matter to me. It was one of my favorite toys of all time, and I played with it for hours on end. But my introduction to the train was marred by having to lie uncomfortably on the living room floor, on my stomach, to operate it. I couldn't sit on my butt because I had suffered second degree burns on my rear the night before, Christmas Eve. I accidentally sat atop a hot gas stove warming myself after a bath. I had to lie on my stomach the rest of the Holidays. I never had to be warned again about touching hot stoves.

My dad blew me away when out of nowhere one morning he invited me to ride with him to Dallas on the new Texas Eagle to attend the State Fair of Texas. Visits to Longview's rail yards, roundhouse and repair shops had already boosted the grandeur of railroading in my mind, and I fantasized that someday I would sit at the throttle of a streamliner like the Eagle. I was awed by the powerful roar of its diesels and blasts from its big air horns—oooowah, oooowah---so different from the toooot, toooot, toooot coming from steam locomotives.

I hardly slept the night before our trip. It was early October, the sky was blue and the morning air was crisp. The Eagle was scheduled to depart in the early morning, and mother served us a good breakfast, sending us on our way to a great adventure. As always, my dad looked like a million bucks in suit, tie and Stetson. I was thrilled to be on that train with him, even if I was disappointed that all the passenger cars were of the old black vintage. Once inside, I was surprised our car was very clean and comfortable. As the Eagle rolled out of the station, I imagined it sprouting wings as if to fly.

Along the way we met an oncoming Eagle traveling at high speed as was our Eagle— whoosh--our car swayed from the sudden burst of air pressure between the trains. Experiencing such power gave me a thrill!

After an hour or so, I started getting sick at my stomach, probably because I had gotten so excited. I tossed up breakfast. Dad was very comforting and, once in Dallas, we took a taxi to the Medical Arts Building downtown to get help. Soon a doctor looked me over, gave me a sedative and sent us on our way to enjoy the fair. I was touched that day by my dad's tenderness, thoughtfulness and how this gentle giant had taken care of me. It felt really nice.

We had a fabulous day at the fair, generally steering clear of the enormous midway with its exciting rides, except for bumper cars which were safe for my sensitive tummy. I rode a couple of times and had a blast, ramming as many cars as I could. The highlight of the day was taking in a Jimmy Durante show with Harry James and his big band.

We rode the late Eagle home, pooped but joyful. I got to be with my dad up close seeing through that impenetrable veil that often covered him as the chief law enforcer in our town. It was one of the best days ever with him, just the two of us out on an adventure. The only other experiences that came close were our times together in the woods.

By the time we moved to 235 Harrison Street, mother's mom had passed but we still had Grandma with us. I was four and had outgrown my babysitter Ginna. My parents hired Annesta Myles to look after me and keep house. My mom helped Ginna move on to nursing school in Dallas, training at Parkland Hospital.(After the war, she married Tex Braun, a war veteran turned rancher, and became a successful nurse in New Braunfels,Texas).

But it was an odd setup in our house—at least I always felt funny about it—I didn't know anybody else whose home ran like ours. Grandma's room was the choicest in the house, up front with windows on the side and front, a door to the front porch and a doorway to the living room. A short hallway connected Grandma's room to a back bedroom, intersected in the middle by another short hallway to the one bathroom in the house. Closets were few—many houses had only one or two good ones. Grandma's room had the best closet in the house and a smaller one was in the back bedroom. Our bathroom included a small closet. I don't know how we made it all work, but we did. Behind the back bedroom was a screened porch. It was also adjacent to our kitchen. We had a decent sized dining room adjoining the kitchen, and the living room up front adjoined the dining room and Grandma's bedroom.

Now the odd thing was how we used space. With Grandma up front, my mom and I shared the back bedroom. She had a double bed, and my little bed was next to the two windows. Dad slept on the back screened porch. In winter a rolling tarp dropped over his window screens and in summer, the tarp was up. Fresh air rushed in through screens and windows, drawn by the attic fan. Our dining room was used for meals when we had guests. At other times, dad often studied law enforcement materials and lessons from Texas A&M at the dining table. We usually took meals at a small table in the kitchen. Grandma rarely ate with us--she prepared a bowl of oatmeal at four o'clock every afternoon, which was supper for her. Hobbling to her bedroom, cane in hand, she studied her old family Bible before going to bed with the birds.

An RCA console radio sat in a corner of our dining room, with a pair of rocking chairs nearby. Most evenings dad and I listened to our favorite radio shows including Gabriel Heater, H.V. Keltenborn or Walter Winchell reporting the latest from the war in Europe and the Pacific. Occasionally we'd tune in a "short wave" channel that beamed

broadcasts all the way from Europe...we never got Japanese broadcasts. More than once, we picked up speeches coming out of Nazi Germany, maybe even the rants of Adolph Hitler, but of course we didn't understand German.

Then we'd tune in Dagwood and Blondie, Fibber McGee and Molly, Twenty Mule Team Borax's Death Valley Days which often carried a scary supernatural story, or my favorite show, Amos and Andy with Shorty the Barber struggling to get past severe stuttering—the Shorty character especially brought us lots of laughs. Then there was scary "Inner Sanctum" with its trademark creaking door slamming closed...this created such a frightening aura I was glad my dad was there to protect me!

We had to rely on our imaginations, since there was no such thing as television screens to convey the stories.

Summers were really hot, the only air conditioning was in a few stores downtown and in our two movie theaters. Shopping malls hadn't been invented. We used oscillating table fans which really didn't cool--about all they did was stir up hot air. The whirring sound made you hope a little bit of cooling was happening. When I was five an attic fan was installed. This thing was a marvelous improvement over the old oscillating fans. It sucked air through the windows then up and into the attic, expelling it back outside. So strong air movement through the house could be like a virtual hurricane blowing through the windows. Often before bedtime, mother would make the rounds sprinkling the sheets on each bed with a stoppered bottle sprinkler. The cooling effect of the airflow through the windows was wonderful. You could slip between cool sheets and drop off into dreamland, even on warm nights. You had to be sure windows were open when the attic fan was running because its strong suction could strip wallpaper right off the wall.

My mom used a hot weather trick to squeeze into her tight fitting girdle--first chilling it in the icebox, then sliding it on over her talcum powdered torso.

We eventually graduated to an electric "Frigidaire", as refrigerators were commonly called. The electric was sheer magic, making ice cubes in trays. My dad no longer had to stop by the icehouse every day on his way home, tying a 25 pound block of ice on the front bumper. The

icehouse was central to everyone's life. They had a local monopoly on the magic of freezing water. Everyone had a "food locker" at the icehouse. The summer's harvest of fruits, vegetables and meats could be frozen and stored. We literally ate out of our lock box through the winter, supplementing these goods with home canned fruits and vegetables. Most of our meat and much of our produce came from my aunt and uncle's farm at Omen, forty miles away.

Our ice house was a virtual cornucopia of wildlife every fall, as all the hunters hung their deer and other large game carcasses in a special freezer vault before processing. Strolling through the vault, examining legal tags along the way, oohing and aahing at who had shot what and where, was great fun. Local hunters kept taxidermists busy every fall and winter, mounting heads of prized animals and creating rugs from their hides. One of the biggest thrills of my young life came when my first deer hung among other trophy kills in that cold vault—a magnificent eight point from deep in the woods of East Texas.

Kids found relief in the city natatorium (swimming pool) afternoons during the summer heat. We were in the water until supper time or later and sometimes grabbed dinner at the soda stand. Mr. Stamper, the park superintendent, made delicious ooey-goey grilled cheese sandwiches in a waffle iron contraption. The sandwich, a bag of chips, and an RC Cola, all for a quarter, and you were in business. Maybe a Moon Pie for dessert. Not the most nutritious dinner, but it filled the bill. Then back into the water for more cool fun as the sun went down. We'd made it through another hot summer day in relative comfort.

Saturday was off limits for us "white kids" at the city pool. It was the only time available for "colored kids" to enjoy cooling off in the big pool. They could swim until late Saturday afternoon, and then the pool was drained, washed down and refilled overnight. Locker rooms were off limits to them. Sunday afternoon after church, we "white folks" were ready to go again, and the pool would fill with shrieking, happy kids.

Saturday afternoons with the pool unavailable to us, we sat in in the air-conditioned comfort of the Rembert or Arlyne movie houses, taking in "shoot-'em-ups" starring Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy and others and catching up on our favorite serials like The Green Hornet. It cost the grand sum of ten cents to get in and a nickel for a big bag of greasy, buttered popcorn that squeaked when chewed.

Wartime in America saw the kids in our neighborhood throw our lot in with our brave fighting men -- digging trenches and caves and building forts to make our war games as realistic as possible. Sometimes our battles would last for several days, as we'd be crawling around fox holes, hiding out in treetops and trying to surprise the make believe enemy, inevitably the "Germans or Japs". Our weapons for the most part were homemade "rubber guns". We made various sizes and shapes, carving them from pieces of wood scrap. Our ammunition was bands of stretchy natural rubber snipped from rubber inner tubes. Automobile tires were held up by these inflated natural rubber tubes. Salvaging them was a very important part of scavenging, as stretchy natural rubber could be put to many uses. The band of rubber was looped over the end of the barrel and stretched back to the rear of the gun and pinned. When the trigger was squeezed the band released and flew like a missile to its target. If you got hit just right on your bare back or chest it would register a good sting and could even leave a welt.

We organized patrols to stalk out our neighborhoods, searching for suspicious looking spies. I don't know what we'd have done if we ever came across a real one. Still, our war games made excellent fodder for a bunch of kids trying to do their part for Uncle Sam during the long Second World War. Wartime Texas ran rife with rumors that Nazi U-Boats had landed spies along our Gulf Coast, and we were on the lookout in our neck of the woods.

Longview was the wartime home of Harmon General Hospital and an incarceration facility for German Prisoners of War (POW's). It wasn't unusual to see a band of gray uniformed POW's, under military guard, making the rounds in downtown Longview. A few liked the town so much they decided to stay on after the war. My mom regularly visited American boys undergoing rehabilitation at Harmon. She grew especially fond of a young Army Capitan, Shelby White, who had been seriously injured when the glider he was piloting, loaded with troops, crashed in Germany. Shelby and his wife, Dena, grew up in South Texas. They hit it off great with my mom and dad, becoming frequent guests for Sunday dinner at our house. Shelby couldn't get enough of my mother's fried chicken, mashed potatoes and cream gravy or her incredible pot roast. I sat captivated by Shelby's stories about the fierce war in Europe. His fascinating tales just added to the wartime sentiment felt by all the kids in our neighborhood. Shelby White landed a great job in law enforcement after the war as the chief immigration officer for Texas' border with Mexico, based in San Antonio.

We made most of the things we played with every day, including coasters and scooters, rubber guns, periscopes which, crafted out of shoe boxes, mirrors a little glue and some ingenuity, could be used to stealthily look around corners and over fences, undetected. We also developed skills in the art of building scooters. For the most part, parents didn't have money to buy such toys from Sears or a local store, even if they were available. Metal was scarce during the war, and scrap collection was an important part of the homefront's efforts to help win the war. We needed to be creative and resourceful to have many of the kinds of things kids now take for granted. We built scooter frames from scraps of wood scavenged from shipping crates. We cannibalized wheel sets from roller skates, bolting four or more to the bottom of a wood frame. A vertical piece, bolted to the horizontal riding board, provided a strut to which we fashioned a wooden cross piece at the top that served as the handle bar. We found that a nice long hill at the north end of Harrison Street was great for coasting, the downside being the necessity to hike back up the long hill to start all over again.

We discovered that kite string stretched taut over a couple of hundred yards between two cans, one can attached to each end, gave us a sort of walkie-talkie, not anything like as good as a real one. But it passed for a decent homemade toy.

I was the master kite builder in our neighborhood. We learned to make and fly a variety of designs and sizes. A nearby open field was our airport. Kite string and glue were easy to come by. Moms' old bed sheets made excellent kite tail for ballast. We had to be a little creative to come up with other materials. Using a sharp Xacto knife, we slitted bamboo poles to get sticks. Archie Tubbs, our nearby grocer, kept us supplied with brown butcher paper, just the right thickness and weight. We painted colorful designs to dress up the brown paper. We flew at night sometimes when there was a good, steady wind, with a small pocket flashlight dangling beneath the kite. My favorite was a seven foot tall two-sticker which required a gale wind to get it off the ground and maintain flight.

East Texans speak with their own strange dialect. In fact, Texas is so immense and multi-cultural that visitors can tell the difference in how the English language is spoken from one part of the State to another. But for sure, East Texans have a dialect all their own. I grew up thinking "barbed wire" was actually and more correctly "bob wire". That in the past tense, we "clamb trees". That "well I swan" was about

as declarative as my mother could get. That “winders” was the proper word instead of “windows”. That “well I’ll be John Brown” was almost like swearing. Many called the old Sabine River a “ruver”. Some of us even thought a “chest of drawers” was more properly called a “chester drawers”. My dad called someone a “scannel”, more properly a scoundrel, meaning a really bad dude. “Shet the door” instead of shut it. One of my mom’s favorites was “well fiddle de-de.” “Fixin’ to do this or that” is woven throughout the East Texan’s lingo, meaning “I am starting or I am preparing to do something”. I grew up hearing bicycles called “wheels”. The list of colloquialisms is long, these being only a few examples.

I give my high school English teacher, Miss Ruby Phenix, credit for having the patience and persistence to correct us and to prepare me for college level English and grammar. Any good writing and speaking skills I may have resulted in large part from Miss Phenix’ excellent coaching and training.

The outbreak of that dreaded disease polio, infantile paralysis, spread across America like the Plague. The public pool was off-limits to us for almost two years, as it was believed that public swimming pools were a source of contagion. Ultimately and thankfully, Salk vaccine freed us from this terrible scourge. The nationwide polio scare and epidemic led to the March of Dimes held annually across America. Proceeds helped fund research in prevention of diseases, such as polio. I don’t know how it was done in other cities, but the approach in Longview might have been unique. Dimes, thin ten cent pieces, were placed touching each other in a row along the length of downtown city sidewalks. For example, a contributor might find four dimes in his pocket change, placing them in line, extending the existing line by four dimes. A line of dimes stretched all around downtown Longview’s sidewalks, becoming our city’s contribution to that year’s March of Dimes. These events were on Saturday mornings when shoppers were plentiful, coins jingled in pockets while Lions Club, Kiwanians and other groups policed the long line of dimes. The sight of all these dimes was unforgettable.

Dad strung outdoor lights in our backyard, removed the grass and smoothed out an area for neighborhood washer tossing events, helping everyone pass the time on warm evenings. The game of Washers is played the same way as Horseshoes, but instead of stakes driven into the ground at each end, the player tosses two inch washers trying to

sink them into a two + inch hole at the opposite end. Dad was a skilled tosser and taught me his underhand tossing motion, similar to pitching horseshoes. Mr. Eubanks, Mr. Rose and other neighbors joined dad and me for games. Everybody knew the games were on when they saw the lights aglow in our back yard. Washers, the "red neck" equivalent of horseshoes, is fun and challenging. Rules and scorekeeping is much the same as horseshoes.

Dad enjoyed tossing baseball with me after "supper", as cooling shade crept across our back yard. As he prepared to "toss", I lifted my new Rawlings first base claw-style glove on my left hand. Baseball was my dad's favorite game, and he threw a mean knuckle ball, seams hardly moving as it streaked across sixty feet and stung into my glove. He had an unusual delivery I can best describe as an overhand "push". In spite of his awkward looking form, his knucklers were blistering. Too bad he never pitched a real game with his wicked knuckle ball.