

GUNTHERVILLE POP: 19
(A Story of Two People's Love)
by
THEIR OLDEST SON, JOHN

This book was created as part of *Lifescapes*, a cooperative project of the Washoe County Library System, the University of Nevada Reno English Department, ElderCollege and the Nevada Humanities Committee.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Tales From...”

This notebook of experiences is my narration of our family history, not necessarily in chronological order, but the story of the love and the crazy incidences that have evolved and are remembered by me, the oldest of the seventeen children.

Rather than writing a long story, the idea for “The Tales From...” occurred during my writing class with the Washoe County Lifescapes program in the winter of 2006. The first two chapters are autobiographical sketches of my parents. Each chapter following would revolve around the homes that we lived in. The Christmas and Thanksgiving chapters are in the middle of the stories. This idea

was generated one Christmas Eve at my folk’s house in Templeton, California. While dining with my mom and dad, and my oldest sister, Mary, her daughter, Deborah, and my wife, Barbara, the subject was brought up about writing the “Tales” of the Gunther children. The idea germinated in me two days later when I arrived home in Reno, Nevada. I began writing this story about mom and dad and their seventeen children.

This notebook will be many different stories. “The Tales From ...” are the stories that I have heard from my mom and dad over the years. When in doubt about the facts, I attempted to verify the details. I’m excited and feel a sense of real accomplishment from telling the *Guntherville: Pop: 19* story.

So begins these Tales of the Gunther family in the small town of Ranshaw, Pennsylvania on September 12, 1922...

CHAPTER 1

“The Tales from...”

”The Autobiography of Andrew Casper Gunther.”

On December 7, 1992 my father wrote the following autobiographical story for this book. I will quote it unabridged and in its entirety:

“The events or memories as they come to mind may or may not be in order, so bear with me. As a young child I can remember going to school across the main street and up the hill for a block. I cannot remember any of my young friends, however. My memories of high school are more vivid, the bus stop by our house making it very convenient. Before I go on about high school, let me tell you an interesting event in my earlier life. Coming from a family of 12 children we had our moments and in this case the boys had the upper bedrooms. One for the bed wetters and another for those that did not have that problem. Bill, my younger brother by one year, decided that he would like to join us. Yes (4 in a bed-maybe 5). So since none of us boys had been circumcised we had plenty of foreskin. I took a piece of string and proceeded to tie his foreskin. About 2 a.m. in the morning he began screaming waking up everybody including Dad and pointed to his penis which was the size of a small balloon. Dad cut off the string and got showered with- you guessed it – urine. I got yelled at and I believe I was restricted.”

“Some of the things that I remember in my youth are as follows: When I was fourteen years old I remember helping my grandmother prepare her garden for planting. It must have been a ½ acre to dig up and then I collected the grapes from the grapevine. I killed her chickens when they were needed for a meal. I would

stretch their necks between two nails and chop their heads off, throwing them in the weeds to finish bleeding.”

“I remember smoking dried grapevine leaves wrapped in toilet paper. Then I remember when I backed the car out of the garage and pushed the fence (the neighbor’s) down and my mother got blamed for it. I never told her it was me. Bill and I had to dig under the front porch to make a cellar to keep the apples and milk cool. Every week the farmer came around and delivered them. I remember mother baking once a week about 25 loaves of bread. It was so good hot bread and butter! I remember once a year we would make and bottle root beer. Also, Mother would make the best doughnuts-yearly. She would make various soups once or twice a week and with homemade bread- what a treat!”

“I remember dad working as a plumber and he fixed many a leak. He was a man of many trades and good at them all. To think that he only finished grammar school and he did so well. But in those days very few had the opportunity to continue their education. I might add that all of the Gunther clan were born at home. I worked at J.C. Penny’s on Saturdays selling goods and cleaning up after closing. (I told the kids that I had walked for miles to school even in the snow-now you know the truth.) The first two years of high school were in Springfield, Pennsylvania, A town approximately 5 miles away. I can remember getting my first bicycle then and then one night I decided to spend it with a girl I met at high school. I did not get home that night until 1 a.m. and did I receive a reception. Both dad and mom were waiting for me and dad said we were worried about you. Before I could open my mouth dad hit me squarely in the face with his fist. Mom was screaming to leave me alone. dad took off to the bedroom and went to bed. Mom took me to my bedroom and tried to console me. (I survived and deserved everything I got).”

“Back to High School---I never did join the football team as mother did not want me to be put in harm’s way, but I did escort the girls and enjoyed doing so. At the time my hair was very curly and I

got the nickname of—Foozy. The first two years went by very quickly and the summers—well the summers were spent in doing projects around the house. Such as going to an old brick factory nearby (out of use) and picking up a load of bricks, cleaning them and hauling them home by way of a large wagon which Dad had bought so we may haul the trash away once a week. Then we (Bill and I) installed them in the sidewalk around the house, which was an area approximately 150 feet by 5 feet.”

“We never did go any place as a family, Dad was too busy and it seemed mother was just as busy. Sundays we went on our own to the park to go swimming. We built a pool in the mountains (about 4 feet deep) and went swimming in the nude. Also, I can remember catching frogs with our hand, and boiling them to eat.”

“The last two years of high school were spent at Coal Township close to Shamokin (a town approx. 40,000 population). As a student I did manage to get B’s and as I remember I worked hard to get marks above 90. Subjects were two years of Spanish, two years of Latin, two years of Algebra-biology-physics-English-literature-and many more. I went to the school dances- I remember picking up Betty Schroder with my Model “A” Ford. Ralph Long was always along although he didn’t have a date. Incidentally, the car was bought for \$50 Dollars and I sold my bike for \$20 dollars. I can remember dad putting it into shape. He was a good mechanic, plumber, electrician, insurance salesman, and a man of many talents. He was a hard worker, a good husband, a good father, and I loved him as I did my mother. Dad never had the advantage of high school and I remember I was trying to solve this algebra problem and his logic figured it out.”

“I remember when he bought Bill and me “bb” guns. He came home from work one day and found Bill and I shooting at one another. He collected the guns and proceeded to smash them with an axe.-never again will I buy you kids guns. Getting back to the dances (which occurred bi-monthly)-it was a time to improve your dancing skills. I can remember going to the American legion every Monday

night for dancing and after the dance, I remember buying a quart of milk and pretzels and having them at home. There was a place for dancing in Springfield and I can remember I picked up this girl at the dance and took her for a ride and I let her drive. Afterwards I tried to get fresh with her and she jumped out of the car and joined a group of midnight hikers. I was ashamed of myself! One time I went to a school dance (formal) at the American Legion Hall and when I went to pick up my date her folks told me she had to be in by midnight and that she could not dance. Holy Cow! I picked a religious nut but I made arrangements to meet with someone else. Ralph Long and I had a strong friendship during those school years. Ralph was an A student and he was my best man at my wedding.”

“On graduation I decided to join the Marine Corp and that was in 1940. I got to boot camp on Parris Island and I could not figure why I joined- was I crazy! It lasted about 2 months and we were well trained. I can remember taking cold showers in the middle of winter, getting up at 5 a.m. and running before breakfast. I had to repeat the firing range because the front sight on my rifle was loose and every time I would fire the sight would move which resulted in Maggie drawers (misses). Fortunately, I changed platoons so I could fire the next day and I made sharpshooter and missed mess duty for a whole month. Our USMC swimming lesson was to climb the swimming tower and with uniform, rifle, pack and helmet we had to jump off a 20 foot tower and swim the length of the pool. Some men refused to jump and stayed there two days until they did. I jumped and floated for ten seconds and then I began to swim for my life. I managed to keep my nose above the water until I got to the end of the pool and then I heaved my guts out. Unfortunately some of the men sunk out of sight and they had to be rescued. They had six life guards standing by and were they busy- they could of have used six more.”

“Also, on my trip to Cuba (Guantanamo Bay) my first experience on board ship and the Atlantic Ocean made me seasick. They told us we should eat even if it didn’t stay down. One marine

when on the fantail of the ship and was heaving his guts out. He died from internal hemorrhaging and never made it to Cuba. I finally arrived at Guantanamo, Cuba and had further training-Morse code-forced marches- semaphore flags-and yes “shit on the shingle”, beans and corn bread—our breakfast delights. After 3 months I decided I had enough of this and on the advice of my brother Al (a Marine Sgt) I took the test for telephone school at Quantico, VA., and passed—on to Quantico-thank God. The school lasted 3 months and at that time Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and I was transferred to the 1st Marine Division and trained some more. It was there in the dead of winter we went on a march and slept in the woods with snow on the ground and no sleeping bags. However, we did have a fire to keep us warm but you turned around like a chicken on a spit. One side frozen and one side hot! I must tell you. “

“We boarded a destroyer for maneuvers for two weeks and we had the privilege of sleeping on deck. We left the ship at night to make a landing and as you stepped into the boat, or tried to- the boat would drop (due to the waves) about 10 feet and you had to time your step. One marine had a radio strapped to his back (he was suppose to have the straps loose just in case he went into the water). Well he didn’t and disappeared into the ocean. We put into port in Florida for liberty after maneuvers and as we left the ship there must have been 20 prostitutes passing out their calling cards. No, I did not join most of the men in this pastime. But a friend of mine and I went on a tour of the city.”

“I got orders to report to the teletype school in Chicago, Ill. A buddy of mine (we went to telephone electrician’s school together) suggested I give a young lady a call while I was in Chicago. His name was Bill Fulton and he knew her well. Bill and I were the only ones in the barracks that would get up on a Sunday morning to go to church as a result we were good buddies. When I went to Chicago I met an Army friend that was going to the school. After a couple of days I happened to clean out my wallet when this telephone listing dropped out. I mentioned to Chuck about getting a double date and

go dancing. He agreed and I called Marianne Fritz and set up a date. I also told Chuck that if they were a couple of bags we would ditch them and look elsewhere. I needed not to worry because Marianne was a knockout and her friend Marge was good looking too. Marianne had a white dress with red beads and I realized that I had struck gold when I discovered that she was Catholic, which was an added plus. We went to the Aragon Ballroom dancing and had a wonderful time. We made arrangements to meet the next day-we went to the park and spent the day there. I did kiss her on the first date and she was so inviting. After school everyday we spent the time together and I met the rest of the family and fell in love with them. The last day and night I moved into the Fritz home-spent the night on the back porch and almost got into some serious love making. I knew I loved this girl very much and made plans to marry her when I returned from the war. The next day she joined me on the subway on my way to the train station. I had my sea bag, my rifle and my girl!”

“In Hawaii-more training- and we were ready to go to Guadalcanal. We didn’t know where we were going until we got there. I must make a note here-after Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (when I was in the first Marine Division-Col. “Red” Edson’s Raiders) fortunately for me they needed my expertise in the Marine Air Force and I was transferred to the 1st Marine Air Wing. We split the group into two echelons and we were the second to leave Hawaii. This is just in case the first group didn’t make it to Guadalcanal. They didn’t. Evidently, the ship was blown up and many were killed. We had to set up our communications system on the island. I remember General Geiger was the commanding officer and I was with him all the time in case he had to send out communications to various outfits. Incidentally, I didn’t forget my loved one but wrote her practically every day (V mail). Getting back to the war- a couple of the marines and I were at the beach when suddenly a Jap plane strafed us and some of us managed to dive into a bomb crater and barely missed being killed. Another time we were by our tents when

the Jap bombers came over and dropped their bombs. I looked up from the foxhole and at a forty-five degree angle and saw the bombs drop. One landed on the left side of our tent and blew it to bits and covered us in the foxhole. When the Jap planes left they pulled us out of the foxhole and took us to the sick bay as we were shaking and gave us a couple of shots of whiskey to settle our nerves.”

“We ate only two meals a day – breakfast and dinner. The bombers made a habit of coming over at lunch time. Incidentally, when we first got on the island we had enough food for two days as the Army was to relieve us and because of a big naval battle going on they never made it. As a result we had Japanese canned peaches and hardtack (hard crackers) for two weeks. There was bombing during the night and it was Washing Machine Charlie that’s what we called him-his plane would come over every night to disturb our sleep and drop several bombs. I’ll never forget one Marine from the south. As we heard the plane coming we would run to the fox holes and wait for him to complete his bombing run. This one guy would sit on his bunk and cuss the Jap plane putting on his shoes, taking his good old time even though the bombs were exploding. When it was over and we came back to the tent he’s still sitting on the bunk-never did he make it to the fox hole. Often you would hear the cries of pain and suffering. Every night there would be a new password and you didn’t dare move around at night for fear of being shot at even by your own men. The Japanese infiltrated every night so you had to be on the alert. One day the Japanese wanted to take back the airport and made a big push to do so. All of our planes were damaged and gas drums were burning. The General had me send out an SOS for more planes, etc. In the meantime he had a PBY plane at the edge of the airport warming up. I dog tailed the General all night and in case he was leaving I was leaving too, even if I had to hang on to the outside of the plane. Fortunately, relief came so we did not have to leave and Colonel Edson’s Raiders held the perimeter of the airport”

“I visited the Raiders (my old outfit) after the battle and not very many survived. Finally, the Japanese were pushed off the island

and we made preparations to advance further north to the Russell Islands. We worked hard to get everything set up on the island-telephones and radios. It didn’t take the Marines long to take over the island and we were preparing to leave. At that time I was a Master Sgt. and had some twenty Marines working for me. I turned the communications setup over to the Army. My commanding officer put me in for Warrant Officer. We sailed for Nouema, an island further south for a rest, but didn’t stay long as we were due to head back to the states after 18 months. Thank God, I never had malaria and was never wounded. However I was shaken up quite a bit after the bombing at Guadalcanal.”

“I couldn’t wait to get home to Marianne! I made a promise that if I survived the war I would go to Mass every day and say the Rosary daily. Well I did and I have gone to Mass before work daily and have said the rosary. Since I’ve retired I continued to say the rosary daily and have added the Stations of the Cross, besides reading the Bible. God- has been good to me and I cannot talk enough to Him and thank Him for everything. My wife, my children, my job, my health and I have been blessed with 17 children. Can you believe it! Sometimes I look in wonder- talk about miracles.”

“Well, as I said we headed back to the USA and when I reached California I put a call into Chicago. It amazed me that the operator knew Marianne and got the call through. How happy I was to hear that beautiful voice and couldn’t wait to get my arms around her. We got leave and I was on my way to Chicago. She met me at the train station and I remember the first thing she did was to take my hat off. She heard that most of the men lost their hair, but fortunately mine was still intact. Never will I forget that first kiss, the closeness of our bodies it felt as if we were one. I couldn’t stop holding her, touching her. That night in her home I asked her to marry me- yes, yes, she said. How sweet that sounded. I asked her mother’s permission and she agreed. Then we made plans to go to Pennsylvania to get married. Her mother decided to stay, so we got on the train and headed to Pennsylvania. I forgot to mention that

Marianne was going to my childhood home, when I was overseas and she had quite an experience with my brothers. Can you believe it, this is the girl I met for two weeks, went overseas for 18 months (written many letters), came home and married her. How well it has turned out.”

“Well, we got married in Pennsylvania and had a reception at home. Marianne and I spent our first night together in one of the bedrooms and I know I enjoyed the evening, but it was Marianne’s first time with a man to top it off I suggested that we take a bath together and it must have seemed strange for her. But we did wash one another and she survived that day and night. However, after the first night I made sure she enjoyed the relationship as much as I. We then headed back to Chicago where her mother had a big reception. I know at the time we said we wanted 12 children or was it thirteen? I guess the people thought we were nuts. Marianne had intended to say home until I could find a place to live, but we couldn’t bear to be away from each other. I know her mother was disappointed that she was leaving so soon. But she packed us a large lunch and put us on the train. We enjoyed the lunch (no food was available on the train) and we ate under a blanket as we didn’t care to share with the whole car full of people and because it was also cold and we could cuddle each other.”

“We finally got to California. I think our tour of duty was the Marine station at Goleta, Calif, right next to Santa Barbara. What a duty, since I was a Master Sgt. They had no duties for me so I would check in the base about 8 a.m. and leave for the day. This went on for quite a while and it was like a honeymoon. We enjoyed our friends-played cards-miniature golf-ate out most of the time. We moved three different times when we lived there. Finally our friends were to ship out on a small carrier and I didn’t go because of my rank. Later I found out most of them were killed (God rest their souls). Before I go on I must mention that Marianne was about 4 months pregnant with our first child and she had a miscarriage and we saved the remains to show the doctor. She had lost so much blood

he couldn’t believe it and rushed her to the hospital. They wanted me to sign a paper saying it was ok to scrape her insides and I didn’t like the sound of it. But they insisted it was necessary to save her life, and then I didn’t hesitate. Fortunately she survived and the doctor said she couldn’t get pregnant again. She insisted I go to another doctor and get checked out-me-the doctor laughed and told her nothing was wrong and that she would have many more pregnancies. He was right.”

“Next tour of duty was at Brawley, Calif. The Burzinski’s were with us and we could not find a place to live. For one night we found this shack-one room-and a double bed-and a screen door with no lock. Since the couples hadn’t had the chance to enjoy each other, Steve and I tossed a coin to see who would leave for an hour. I think I lost, so when I got back to Steve and his wife left. When they got back we went out to get something to eat. Afterwards it was four in the bed. The girls slept next to one another and Steve and I would meet with our hands. The next day the girls managed to get an apartment. (If you can call them that-More like one room with a hot plate). Our room had a small bed with a large mattress and we had to support the mattress with the suitcases. I can remember one night a siren went off, I jumped out of bed and tried to crawl under it. I thought I was in Guadalcanal- thank God it was a dream. I put in for radio material school and the primary school was in Dearborn, Mich.”

“I dropped Marianne off at her mother’s house and went on to Dearborn, Mich., to primary school. I met John Fredrickson (Chief Petty Officer) and being of the same rank we bunked together and made weekly trips to Chicago to see our loved ones. We all became good friends and socialized with the Fredrickson’s. This went on for 3 months. Marianne was pregnant with John and had the baby at Evanston, Ill. We packed up for Washington D.C. and the secondary school (Naval Research Labs). This course was to last 6 months. At first we lived with a girl named Marie (shared an apartment) and she constantly had men visiting her. It didn’t take us long to find another

apartment. Marianne had quite a scare one time. I was not home and this drunken man kept insisting his brother was there and was pounding on the door. Finally he left. There were so many rats in Washington, D.C. and we were lucky to be on the third floor. On the first floor babies toes and dingers were being eaten by the rats. Another time I remember the mattress was so full of bedbugs we had to soak the mattress with a spray (bug killer). John's buggy had the wheels soaking in DDT to kill the cockroaches. At that time it was the only place we could find. Then after finishing school, the NR Labs wanted me to stay as an instructor but the living conditions in Washington were terrible so we decided to go to our next base, which I believe was at New River, North Carolina."

"I remember at one point my tonsils were giving me problems and I had to have them removed. The doctor operated in a matter of a few minutes and he was amazed that I didn't mind his working on my throat (My mother made us stand still while she was swabbing out throats). Boy! Was I hungry but had to eat soft foods for a long time. Anyway, the war was over, and my enlistment was up, and we had to make a decision to re-enlist. The Marines needed someone to take over the transmitter as the warrant officer was retiring. They promised me the rank of warrant officer if I would stay. But we decided to get out of the service."

"Which we did, and we headed for Chicago, IL. We stayed with Marianne's mother for awhile, I can remember Marianne and I use to say the rosary at night before going to sleep. Aunt Ann who was in the next bedroom couldn't figure out what in the world we were talking about. Now I had to get a job! Fortunately for me I spent over 3 ½ years going to electronic schools in the service and television was in its infancy. I took a test with the telephone company and the RCA service company. RCA offered me \$5.00 dollars more income per week, so I went with them. Our family was growing-Steve was next in line. Marianne's grandmother offered us

her two apartment home for \$6,500 with no money down. We moved into the lower apartment and rented out the top apartment."

"When I was in the USMC- I managed to save \$2500 which helped us when we moved to California. I worked for the Radio Corporation of America (R.C.A.) in Chicago installing antennas even in the most severe winter conditions and sometimes on very high buildings. Finally I got to be a TV serviceman (after some schooling in Camden, N.J.). Our family was growing- Donald joined our group. They had a contest for RCA technicians and I remember I won the first TV set for completing the most service calls with no callbacks. I was sent to the Wilmette branch as chief bench technician."

"We began to make plans to go to California. Marianne's mother decided to go, too. She left after us. RCA did not want me to go at first until I told them I would quit. I decided to go San Francisco so it would be easier getting to Los Angeles area. I was a serviceman and covered the San Francisco peninsula down to San Jose. I would go into the city and pick up my jobs, then stop off in South San Francisco to have coffee with Marianne. Incidentally I traveled across the country myself and Marianne flew out with the four boys (Gregory was just born). I think it took 16 hours and the plane had no heat. She was bushed and when I took her to the home I thought she almost fainted. The furniture had not arrived. Greg slept in a box-the other boys on some army cots as Marianne and I did. I had a weeks worth of laundry to do. We went to the drive-in theaters at that time for recreation. Finally I got transferred to the Hollywood branch in Southern California. I did so well they made me a field supervisor. From there to the Lynwood branch as service manager and made the move to Torrance and paid \$10,850 for the home-put \$2,000 down and a 16 year mortgage. I believe our payment was \$90 including the insurance and taxes. We moved in at night so our neighbors wouldn't know the

size of our family. We didn't want to scare them. (Mary had joined our little group). We lived there for 12 years and the kids went to St. Catherine Laboure School. We had fourteen children by this time. We have been on television with them five different occasions. I changed jobs to NBC (owned by RCA). More money. One time I had two jobs working at NBC and doing TV servicing on my own. I was spending too much time away from my wife and the kids so I decided to do away with the 2nd job. Money was tight then- I remember I got these coins (that my Dad had collected) from my mother (rare coins worth a lot of money) but we needed money for food and the collector gave me \$35 for them. They bought a lot of food so away went the coins. Yes, we were struggling and Marianne's mother had this \$20 bill bouncing back and forth until payday. In order to cut expenses I bought a motor scooter (very small) for transportation to Hollywood. My gas bills were outrageous with the car. 120 miles to the gallon with the motor scooter –but I almost got killed a few times and I decided to give it up. These kids- No father-no way. Every Sunday was a family day: picnics; museums; parks; etc. Every vacation was a family vacation. Every Sunday was first Mass and then our trips- no work on Sunday. I can remember that every payday I would buy small presents and the kids would put on a talent show for prizes. We lived as a family- we loved as a family – we had fun as a family. I've had many joyous moments, many sad occasions, and many wonderful moments. We started to say the rosary after dinner but Marianne would get the whole family laughing, so we decided to say only one decade of the Rosary.”

“We moved to Granada Hills (John and Steve were gone). The home was \$39,500 and had five bedrooms and 3 bathrooms on a

½ acre of land. We lived there for 22 years. Worked-taught CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine)-had many family gatherings. And yes, we had 16 tortoises in the backyard- we had ducks-dogs-chickens-rabbits-pigeons (55) and 250 canaries at one time. Even in Chicago we had grass snakes. Now Don was leaving for the Naval Academy-Greg for the Navy-Mary for Hawaii-Rose to Jace-Nancy to Dave-Andrew to Rosanne-Tom to the Air Force-Bob and Tim to the Air Force and Paul to Paso Robles with Mom and Dad and their new home in Templeton, the price was \$98,000. We have been on Trips-Alaska-Panama Canal-across country for 3 ½ months-camping-China-Mexico-Europe-Weddings-and many more places I can't remember. I've really had only one disappointment in life and I won't even mention it- you already know. ”



*Dad Marine
Guadacanal 1942*

CHAPTER 2

“The Tales from...”

“The Autobiography of Marianne Martha Gunther.”

This autobiographical story is unabridged and as my mom wrote it:

“After bearing and raising seventeen children I have almost forgotten my name, Marianne. Yet, I did have a life before and am enjoying a life after. So as you read this I hope you can picture me as someone other than mom.”

“I was born on June 11, 1924 at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, Illinois. My parents were John and Catherine Fritz and they lived at 6618 N.Ridge Ave, Chicago, Illinois. This was the home of my grandfather, Peter Malget. He built this house for his bride, Barbara Nee Jaeger, in June of 1891 when they were married. We lived downstairs and my grandparents and Aunt Ann Malget lived upstairs. My father was a butcher and my mother was a stay at home mom. I remember that when I was about 4 years old we moved to an apartment house on Hoyne Avenue. It was about 7 blocks from 6618 Ridge Avenue. While living there I remember riding my tricycle with a little boy (probably my age) named Billy. His uncle, a priest, visited them often and we liked it as he would talk to us about angels and he was very loving. This young priest became the very noted Archbishop Fulton Sheen. We only lived there a short time and then moved back to 6618 Ridge Avenue. As I was the only child and grandchild (on my mother’s side), I was slightly spoiled! Jack arrived August 10, 1927, followed by Marcy on October 17, 1928, Jeanne on November 6, 1930. This was our family when on August 8, 1940 Larry was born.”

“We had a wonderful family life and lived in a neighborhood of German and Luxembourg families and a few Italian families. It was a very stable neighborhood as most of our grandparents had lived there, and as in our case our great-grandparents also. We knew we weren’t wealthy, but on the other hand we weren’t poor. The Schenk family was our next door neighbors. I loved to go over there, Phyllis and Marcella were like my older sisters, and I remember Marcella taking me to St. Henry’s school and sitting in her classroom. Her father, Uncle Vic I called him, was one of my favorite people. He was always smiling and joking and baked the best beans and homemade bread. When I got older, we always had salami (which hung on the back of their kitchen door) and limburger cheese sandwiches.”

“As I was growing up Rosemary (Rosie) Kiel and Janice Hart were my closest friends. Marge Lombardi and Luck Blake hung around with us, but they were a few years older. So they didn’t always do the “dumb things” we did. Summers were the greatest months of the year. Early in the morning we would get together and plan our days. It usually started out with games of jacks and we all had our own favorite set of jacks and special gold balls we played with for luck. Jumping rope was another sport and as we got older we used cut-up wash lines and played “double- dutch” which is using two ropes at once. There were always chalk marked hopscotch diagrams in front of each home, and you would spend hours looking for the right stone to use as a marker. We were never smart enough to save the rocks from one day to another. Remembering those days I can still feel the peace and tranquility, and how wonderful to be a child and have no cares or worries. We used to love to lie on the lawn and look up at the clouds and share what we saw. Isn’t it strange that we all liked the same clouds, but one saw a horse, another might see a boat, etc. Yet once you said what you had seen, everyone else saw that too, and you saw their pictures. It must have been the innocence of childhood.”

“My mother was always a busy lady and baked every day besides caring for all of us, but she always had time to read to us, even played jump rope and always welcomed our friends. From early memories I can see her ironing while listening to the Chicago Cub’s baseball game, or sitting in the shade reading a book or magazine. Our friends loved to come over as she never seemed to mind all the noise we made and never complained about the mess we’d leave. She was the best cook and her french fries would be shared by many, also her doughnuts and cakes. She played bridge once a month with seven other ladies and we loved it when it was held at our home. They always served some fancy lunch, dessert and had candy in bowls. You guessed it, we loved the left-overs. The same ladies played bridge for over 20 years together, and all were very dear friends.”

“My dad was my special friend as he knew how to talk to us, how to heal our broken hearts, and his gentleness and love was special. He worked very hard at the store as it was open 6 days a week, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. He worked in a butcher shop on Sheridan Road. For many years, his boss was Oscar, who impressed us as he drove a Cord automobile and was always going to the horse races. Sad to say, in the later years, he lost his store, his car and Florence, his wife- she divorced him because of his gambling. When I was about 10 years old, my father opened his own meat market, The Devon Market, on Devon Avenue. It was about a mile from our home and at last, the store was only staying open 6 days a week, only until 6 p.m. Daddy was a very hard worker, and would only take a few days off a year. He, his best friend Lenny, and our brother Jack would go up to Minnesota to go fishing. My dad’s brother, Leo and his wife, Tess, owned a fishing lodge at Ely, Minnesota. My dad was also an avid bowler and played golf a few times year. I’m sorry he never lived long enough to know his grandchildren as he would have been a wonderful granddad, but I’m sure he keeps his eyes on you all these years. We never owned a car, so whenever we went someplace

it was usually on the street cars, buses, and now and then a taxi cab. Usually once a month in the summer, mom and he would take us for a ride on the upper deck of the bus-it traveled along the shores of Lake Michigan to the downtown loop and then back home. We always ended up at Walgreens drug store slurping up chocolate sodas.”

“Other early memories I have are with my grandparents. I have an early remembrance of them taking me to the Corpus Christie procession at Church. Gram had made me a white dress and I wore a crown of white flowers. My grandfather carried the picture of me in that outfit in his watch fob until the day he died. Grandpa was a teacher of carpentry at Angel Guardian Orphanage, which was about ½ mile from our home. He walked to and from work every day until he retired at the age of 80. He was a very well read man and had the gift of remembering what he read. We would go upstairs to see him and before he gave us any candy, we had to eat some apple, pear or some other fresh fruit. As we got older he would make us read some pages in the National Geographic. This is when I first became interested in China and I am so happy dad and I made that wonderful trip a few years ago.”

“My grandmother was always busy sewing, cooking, painting, cleaning, etc. My grandfather was very European in his thinking and believed that the woman should do all the work around the house. I have memories of her standing on a ladder painting the ceilings. Also, putting up screens and storm windows (she had to use a tall ladder as it was on the second story). Many years later gram was to 60 years old, he hired some of the orphan boys to do the heavy work for her. As a little girl of three, I could sit by the hours playing with the buttons she had, since she was a seamstress, she had thousands of buttons of all colors, sizes, and shapes. An early memory is of helping her fill the beer bottles with her home brew, it wasn’t until I was older that I realized those were prohibition days. She always gave me coffee in a china saucer and I can still see the reflective image of Jesus, Peter, John and Judas at the last supper

reflected there, from a picture on the wall of the kitchen... Her patience was limitless- as on rainy days we'd gather all our friends in her attic and put on plays. Jack was always the drummer- using a large metal potato chip can and a small stick- the rest of us did dramatics, so called dancing and the more noise we made the better we thought we were. Gram used to send me to the store, about a block away, to pick up unsliced Mai-Roe rye bread with seeds. On the way home I'd always chew the crust off an end and then stick that end in the bag. Never did she say anything and let me go on believing I was outsmarting her. When I got to be around 10 years old, I nicknamed her "Daisy" and would sing the song to her. My early memories of going to church are when she would take me to daily mass. I don't remember doing it, but she told me I'd always knock off Mrs. Schmitt's hat, the lady who sat in the pew in front of us. When I was 15 years old, Gram and I went to see the same lady at an old people's home and she reminded me of how many times I knocked her hat off."

"As young children we ate Sunday dinner at gram and grandpa's-at 12 o'clock sharp. My grandfather was very strict about table manners and woe is us if we put an elbow on the table or used

"Aunt Ann wasn't married until I was about 11, so she spent a lot of time with us. I used to love to go to the office with her on Saturdays. We would ride the train and she'd always buy me spearmint gum and the Jack and Jill magazine. She is the one who got me interested in crossword puzzles, as she was a whiz at them. The neighborhood kids loved her, for during the summer at least once a week, she'd stop the Good Humor man and treat us to ice cream bars. My favorite was the coconut covered bar and she'd always see that I got it. She took me to the circus, the zoo and often to the movies. I loved her very much and as long as I can remember she was part of my memories. She loved playing cards and use to amuse us with many card tricks. Rosie and I loved Sunday evenings as we'd go upstairs and she'd make us the best scrambled egg sandwiched on Mai-Roe rye and for dessert we'd have black cows."

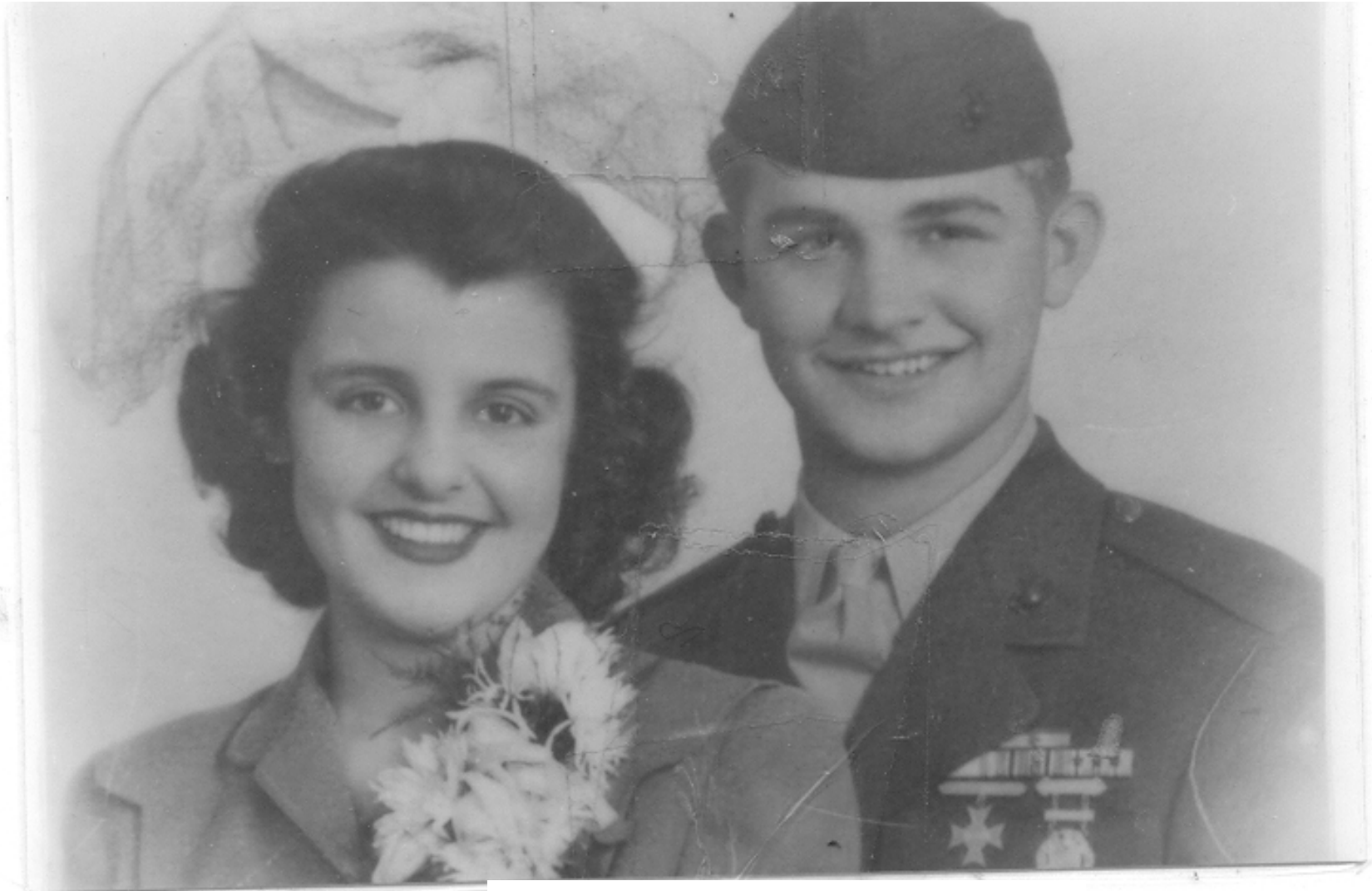
our fingers to put food on our spoons or fork. Holiday dinners were always there and even as little ones we got to drink wine on these happy days. Gram was a marvelous cook and baker and made pies that would melt in your mouth. She made the best kuckens and coffee cake and I would get to help her make the bread in the bread mixer (one of the girls have it now). She said we would say one decade of the rosary and then we'd know that we mixed it properly. She gave me my first paying job-10 cents for polishing her furniture every Saturday. You can't imagine all the penny candy that 10 cents could buy. I would go to the local store and look for the best deal: bull's eyes were 3 for 1 cent; green leaves were 4 for 1 cents,; paper with candy dots were 1 cents; banana flavored cherries were 2 for 1 cent; but my favorite was a pipe shaped candy of hard anise flavored red stuff covered with chocolate for 1 cent, and who can forget malted milk balls, licorice sticks, wax bottles filled with weird liquids that I always thought smelled like perfume."

"On summer evenings, I'd walk with Gram to the cemetery and she'd tell me all about the different families and how they died. It might sound morbid but really it was very peaceful and she always made me feel they were the lucky ones as they were in heaven."

"As time went on I attended kindergarten at age 4 at Stone St. School and then when I was 5 I got to go to St. Henry's (our parish all the years I lived in Chicago). I always loved school and things came very easy to me. My mom and dad were very proud of my report cards as I'd get A's. I was in the Girl Scouts just long enough to go on a camp out (which I hated as it was during the winter and all I can remember is I was always cold!). Then my girl friend Rosie and I climbed out of a window during a meeting to meet some boys-that ended my Girl Scout career. But I never stayed home much- always going to the library, browsing in the 5&10 cent stores, meeting friends at the park, etc. Summertime we would go the beach early morning until dinnertime. Mom would pack our lunch and I would take Jack and Marcy and Rosie took her brothers and Lucy her sister and brother. We would walk both ways and what

mischief we'd get in! We'd pass the Chinese laundry and we'd sing our famous song- Ching-Ching Chinaman-Be wow wow-Stick them in the oven- and make Chow-Chow."

"Then Lucy's brother would go in the bakery and ask for day old goods for their family (as they were on relief-another word for welfare) and then we'd take it to the beach and share it. Also whenever we came to the block where the Jewish Synagogue was located we'd cross the street and run as we just knew they'd attack us because we were Catholics."



*Wedding
Marianne Martha Fritz and Andrew Casper Gunther
January 20, 1944*

CHAPTER 3

“The Tales from...”

6618 Ridge Avenue
Evanston, Illinois

A two bedroom, one bath house, with gray siding, in the suburbs of Chicago. Dad and mom purchased this house for \$6,500.00.

On January 20, 1944, my parents, Andrew C. Gunther and Marianne M. Fritz were married in Pennsylvania and the reception was at my father’s parent’s home. They had discussed having thirteen children, and my mother told me, years later, that the idea to have a big family was hers. They did in fact have more children than Andy’s father’s twelve children.

On July 1, 1945 at St. Francis Hospital, Dr. O’Connor delivered their first child, John Andrew.

Soon, World War II nearing an end, my Dad decided to leave the military and return to Chicago with three and a half years of electronic training from the military. The television industry was in its infancy, and he got a job with R.C.A. (the Radio Corporation of America). His weekly salary was \$55.00 per week.

On June 2, 1946, at St. Francis Hospital, a second son, Stephen Joseph, was delivered by Dr. O’Connor.

My dad was installing antennas for the RCA office in the Chicago area, even in the most severe weather Chicago had to offer. Soon, he was promoted to television serviceman (after being schooled in Camden, New Jersey). They had a contest for all the servicemen. The one completing the most service calls with the fewest callbacks would win. My dad won a television set, and shortly thereafter he was promoted to Chief Bench Technician at the Wilmette branch for RCA.

On March 1, 1949, Dr. O’Connor delivered Donald Lewis into our family.

Now the small house was getting smaller with five of us living in the rooms. Mom remembers coming home and, to her chagrin, she came into the boy’s bedroom on a hot and humid day to discover that we had found the butter and had waxed the entire bedroom floor.

One day, dad had babysitting duties and decided to take his three boys for a nature hike to the empty field across Ridge Avenue. Steve and I, like the grown ups, walked on our own and dad pushed the buggy carrying Donald, the newest addition to the family. During our excursion in the wilds of the vacant lot, dad happened to spot a harmless grass snake and captured it with his bare hands. Steve and I became excited with dad’s nature find. While explaining the natural order of things, he put the snake in front of Donald. Donald, thinking that dad must be offering something to eat, took a bite into the snake. Fortunately, Donald had not grown any teeth at this age. Dad reacted quickly and pulled the snake away from the hungry child. But to this day we are not sure who suffered the most, the bewildered snake or the hungry child.

One particular morning in the quiet of Evanston, mom and dad were awakened to the sound of a car horn honking. So naturally, being suspicious, dad checked our bedroom first, and to his amazement, found the beds of the two oldest boys empty. Looking out to the side of the house, at first he saw no movement, but suddenly saw two blonde heads bobbing in the front seat honking the horn. It seems that we had crawled into the car from the empty truck compartment, and with the battery still intact, the horn was functional. Abruptly, our first driving lesson came to an end, and later our condition made it difficult to sit for awhile. To add injury to insult, he nailed our bedroom screens shut.

Steve and I, in our usual way of creating new adventures, decided to cross the major barrier between our house and Grandma Fritz’s house, the two lanes of Ridge Avenue. Crossing the street

carefully with our tricycles, we went to the house, up the stairs and knocked on Grandma's front door. When the door opened, Grandma looked in total surprise at her two small visitors. We then told her that mom had sent us over to get two pieces of candy from her candy dish. It did seem very inventive, but the adults never seemed to realize it. Grandma, wondering what was in mom's head, called her and asked why she needed to send the two boys across the intersection, for two pieces of candy. Mom responded, in total surprise, and stated emphatically that she had never told us to cross the street. Grandma then escorted us back across the street, while simultaneously giving us a verbal scolding. Suddenly, we saw mom coming down the street towards us, and our adventurous spirit disappeared. Quickly, we disengaged ourselves from our tricycles and took off running post haste into the nearby field and hid. I usually got caught first, but Steve, being quicker, would out run mom and stay hidden until hunger and the cold weather brought him home.

It seems that Steve and I were playing in the kitchen, teasing one another, going at it with the vigor of two young children. Steve kept putting his finger in between the open door and the door jam. When suddenly I slammed the kitchen door and his index finger got slammed on. The blood came out and his finger was severely damaged. Mom was thrown into a frenzy with Steve's screams and my amazement at what had happened. She quickly placed a kitchen towel around the bloody finger to control the bleeding, and with purpose, grabbed Steve, and told me to follow her. She then ran out of the house into the front which bordered Ridge Avenue. Fortunately, as fate assisted my mom and my brother, an ambulance was driving south on Ridge Avenue at that very moment and the driver was confronted by a woman in panic. Medical aid was given, Steve's finger was saved, and to this day the scar of this incident remains.

One warm day in the summer, dad was doing the laundry across the street at Grandma Fritz's house. He was garbed in an old

green bathrobe, with only pants on underneath. His hair was a mess and he hadn't shaved that day. After washing the clothes in the morning, he then put them on the clothesline to dry. Later, he pulled one of the boy's red wagons across the street and he took down the dry clothes, folded them, and placed the stack in the red wagon. Pulling the wagon across Ridge Avenue, it suddenly spilled the clothes on to the street. As he began to pick up the clothing, a passing motorist noticed what seemed to be a lady in distress. He stopped his car, and approached the scene of the spill and said, "Pardon me, can I help you Madam?" and to his surprise, my dad stood up, tightened the belt on the bathrobe, turned around and said a definite "NO!" to the embarrassed motorist.

I remember the television set that dad had won. It was a very large cabinet with a small screen placed in the center of the cabinet. I remember watching the "Adventures of Thunderbolt, the Wonder Horse" and "Uncle Archie" usually with a plate of graham crackers loaded with peanut butter and jelly, along with a glass of milk.

Two events marked the family's last few months in Evanston, Illinois. The first was the birth of a fourth son, Gregory James, on July 1, 1950, on my birthday. The second was dad's transfer with RCA to San Francisco, California.

Mom and dad made a plan how to get the four boys out west. Dad would take the black 1950 Ford sedan, and drive to San Francisco, find a home, and then when the furniture arrived, he would have mom and the four boys fly west out of Midway Airport. Well, Dad got to San Francisco alright, he also found a new house, but missing mom and his children, he told a fib. He told mom that the furniture had arrived, which it hadn't, and said they should fly out. Dad did go to a surplus store and purchased three army cots, just in case the movers were later than expected.

So, to have the four boys tired, mom got to the airport around midnight and loaded the boys on the airplane. The plane left that early morning and to mom's surprise the three boys became

alert, and bothered most of the passengers the entire flight. Probably, very few sleep on that flight.

Arriving in San Francisco, mom soon discovered that the Allied Moving Company had not arrived. So our first night had special sleeping arrangements. Greg slept in a bassinet, Don in a drawer of used furniture, Steve and I shared a cot, while the folks shared the other two. Wow, was mom relieved when the moving company showed up the next few days.

A final note, the house in Evanston sold for \$8,500.00.

CHAPTER 4

“The Tales from...”

720 S. Commercial Street
South San Francisco, California

Our stay in San Francisco was short as measured by the family adding no new children into the family.

Our new home was a light blue, two bedroom and one bath home having 1100 square feet. Dad and mom purchased this house for \$7,500.00 in 1950.

I remember starting school in a kindergarten class and I can see mom and I crying as I was left in the care of a stranger, my kindergarten teacher. Later I remember getting graham crackers and milk in the afternoon and taking a nap on mats on the floor. All seemed well.

After school each day, I had my first experience with conflict. As a five year old I had to choose between two evils, both involved my journey home from school. One choice was the street route, a trip infested with two barking dogs of enormous size that liked to chase me. (I had a fear of dogs since an earlier experience in Chicago when a large German shepherd dog had jumped up and knocked me over). The other choice was to travel via an alley, where a group of older boys would chase me, and that too frightened me. I would usually choose the lesser of the two evils, and let the dogs chase me until their chain link fence would stop them.

This is my first memory of getting involved more with my two younger siblings, Steve and Don. Often, we would come home in pain as we stubbed our big toe on the cement sidewalk in the neighborhood. Mom would nurse us, and then give us the lecture on the benefits of wearing shoes. Then, even before the scab had time to

fully heal, we would come crying home again with the same injury, but on a different toe.

Once, during our short stay in the Bay area, our Uncle Jack came to visit us during the summer. On a cloudy and cool Sunday afternoon, he decided to take the three oldest boys for a hike up to the “South San Francisco“ sign overlooking the area where we lived. As the afternoon progressed, the hike came to a climax. Atop the sign’s location, Uncle Jack looked down and suddenly became aware of the steepness of the hill that we all had climbed. He became nervous as us boys scurried around the sign and taunted him to come down faster. He did come down, at his own pace, and to our amazement he made it. He was relieved when we got home. For hours, we told the folks, and retold them, of our great adventure. Occasionally during the peak of the story, Uncle Jack would look over and just grin.

We did experience our first drive-in theater while living in San Francisco, only to come home before the end of the movie, because of the dense bay fog rolled in and obscured our view of the screen and the end of the movie.

One of my fondest memories of living in this house was when mom and dad helped us boys to pick a healthy peach seed. With the seed in hand, we all proceeded to our small backyard. We selected a soft section of earth, dug a hole a few inches down, and planted a lone peach tree seed as a memorial to our stay. For the last three weeks of our stay, the boys nurtured and watered that hollowed ground, half expecting a full peach tree to emerge from the ground at any moment.

Mom and Dad sold the house after six months for \$9,500.00.

CHAPTER 5

“The Tales from...”

2048 W. 41st Street
Los Angeles, California

Our new home was white in color, with a porch in the front at the entry way and a detached garage in the back. It had three bedrooms, one bath, and a large backyard. Mom and dad purchased the house in 1951 for \$8,500.

The children were in perpetual joy because this house was two houses away from Grandma Fritz, Aunt Ann, Uncles Jack and Larry, and cousin Barbara (we always called her aunt), who lived at 2024 41 Street. Grandma’s candy dish was never empty, and she always made us feel so welcomed when we came to visit.

Our first sister was born on November 10, 1951 at Queen of Angel’s Hospital in Los Angeles. Mom and dad named her Mary Catherine. This happened just a few weeks after our move from San Francisco. Now we had a girl to contend with, and we had our favorite relatives just two houses down the block, what at time of extreme joy in my life.

Grandma Fritz’s house was a haven of safety for me. The house seemed large, at least to a five year old. The entry porch was painted red, and had a large outdoor swing on it. It was always fun to sit there and swing with our relatives. As you entered the house, the first thing I noticed was the candy dish, which seemed never to empty, no matter how much candy I took from it.

In the backyard was an incinerator in one corner with a built in brick barbecue next to it, and a detached garage in the other back corner. Many times the families of our friends and relatives would get together socializing around serving food in this large backyard.

Hamburgers, hot dogs, chips, salads and drinks and many other dishes were available for all of us.

The kitchen, another important room, was where I feel that the concoction called a “Black Cow” was created in my memory. Grandma would take a large glass, place two heaping scoops of vanilla ice cream in the glass, and then slowly fill the glass with ice cold root beer, a special treat indeed.

This environment was great for adventures. Often, I would play in the long closet between two of the bedrooms, having fun just surveying the multi colored clothes hanging there. They would spike my imagination with great new mental worlds. Also, inside the garage, up in the rafters, I encountered monsters that I would defeat with a wave of my hand.

The breakfast nook and the kitchen were often the scene of gorging myself with Grandma’s homemade bread heaped with gobs of creamy peanut butter and jam. Peanut butter and jam, butter and jam, black cows, ice cream with chocolate syrup, and homemade cookies were the delights that my palate enjoyed during this time in my life. As a special note, I often saw a bottle of prune juice, but did not understand its purpose until years later.

I remember one incident; I believed that it involved Don at age 3. He wanted a sandwich, so I fixed him a peanut butter and jam sandwich spiced with Tabasco sauce. Don’s first and only bite of that sandwich was a great sight to see by us older boys. I don’t think he allowed us to make a sandwich for him for quite a while after that.

Searching through Grandma’s house one day I came across three firecrackers and became fascinated with them. I took them into the adjacent alley, placed all three in a small hole I had dug and lit the fuses and stepped away to await the explosion. In a few seconds, nothing happened, so I reached towards the hole to find out what was the problem. Just as I got there with my hand, the explosion took place. My thumb and forefinger of my right hand were numb for over an hour. To this day, I have lost my fascination with firecrackers.

I guess fire fascinated me, for I lit a pile of newspapers on fire in the back of our house. Mom told me years later, that while living in Evanston, I had started Grandma's drapes on fire. I am lucky I never became a fire bug or worse.

I also became fascinated with the alley behind our house. At around 9 p.m., my stalking urges would take hold of my mind, and I would slowly open the gate and venture into the dark alley in pitch blackness. I would always have a visual picture of my destination, usually the back of Grandma's garage fifty feet down the alley. I would slowly check the points of familiarity: the mound of dirt behind our fence, the apples on the tree across the alley, the neighbor's dog barking at the unseen intruder, and finally, the two metal trash cans behind Grandma's garage. I would take a deep breath, retrace my steps, and quickly close the fence to shut off the alley way.

The year was 1951 and I started first grade at Transfiguration School. On my first day of school, being a first grader and unfamiliar with the procedures, when I heard the lunch bell ring, and seeing everyone leaving the classroom, I sensed it was time to go home. So I proceeded to walk the eight blocks home and came running cheerfully through the front door. I told mom I had fun at school. To my surprise she wanted to know what I was doing home, so I recounted the events of my first day of school. Well, to my chagrin, ten minutes later I was returned to school and got back to class just in time as lunch ended. I didn't know that I had just missed the lunch hour. I remember that there was a small room in the school yard that students sold cold drinks during the lunch hour. I vividly remember seeing a health movie in class, where the red or white blood cells attacked the invaders in the body. At that time it was like my first war movie.

Random memories of living in Los Angeles: I remember watching Grandma and Aunt Ann playing separate games of solitaire in the dining room; visiting with an entire list of relatives on the major holidays three times a year, people like Uncle Joe, Aunt Clara,

Uncle Bill, Aunts Caddy and Lene, the Trauschs, for large BBQ's in the backyard; a baseball signed by the 1928 New York Yankees that was stolen; helping Uncle Gordon paint a small section of his green car with household paint and it didn't match; remembering Uncle Larry's large collection of model airplanes, that later burned in a fire in the den; and a Madonna hanging in a small shrine on a tree in Grandma's yard.

The time a fire started in Grandma's garage, and it wasn't me, my dad being helpful directed the fire engine into the alley, only to discover that the fire hydrant was on the street side of the house.

Grandma Fritz's was a wonderful woman and great person, all 95 pounds of her. Her smile reflected the love and warmth of her heart. It's amazing that she raised her family of five single handedly since the death of her husband John, in 1944.

Often, smoking her cigarette and drinking a glass of red wine, she would sit and talk to us children, or try to explain to us the intricacies of playing solitaire. Years later, we would sit with her while she listened to Vince Scully and her Dodgers. Mom told me later that she had the same passion in Chicago, listening on the radio to the Chicago Cubs.

Near the end of our stay, two events occurred: Mom telling us that we were moving to a new house in Torrance, California and a second girl was born on Mary's birthday, November 10, 1952. Rose Marie came into the world at Queen of Angel's Hospital.

Just prior to leaving our neighborhood, we all moved into Grandma's house, as the escrow had not been closed. For six weeks, the eight of us enjoyed living and dining at Grandma's house. It was crowded, our eight and the five in her house, but we all survived. At the time of our leaving, I could hardly understand why Grandma was so elated when mom and dad came to her house and told everyone that our new home was ready for occupancy

The home in Los Angeles sold for \$10,000...

CHAPTER 6

“The Tales from...”

Thanksgiving Feast (1950-1964)

This story is a compilation of many memories of this special day.

It was 4p.m. on Thursday Thanksgiving day at the Gunther’s house. The smell of oven cooked turkeys, two 20 pound toms, filled every room in the house. Other smells mixed in were the marshmallow covered sweet potatoes, fresh baked rolls (from Grandma Fritz’s age old recipe), and the sweet smell of the cherry and blueberry cheesecakes. Mom did most of the cooking for this special day. Different sounds filled the air: mixers whipping the boiled potatoes; carrots being diced for sautéing; and coffee brewer’s dripping their liquid into two coffee pots.

The house, all 2400 square feet, was full of the seventeen Gunther children, one grandmother, Catherine Fritz, two uncles, Jack and Larry Fritz, two aunts, Barbara Hoffert (she was a cousin), her mother Ann Malget, and other guests and sometimes friends with their spouses.

The yard had two ping pong tables and the games were fast and furious. Croquet games and a volley ball net was set up for the more aggressive players. The sounds of laughter and loud conversation caused a din throughout the neighborhood. Wine, soda, beer and coffee filled glasses to different levels were found all over the house and yard.

As the hour neared 5p.m., dad told Paul, the 15th child, to get the dinner bell and start ringing it to gather the crowd. I am sure all the nearby neighbors knew it was dinner time at the Gunthers.

The dining room had two six foot wooden picnic tables set and the living room was set up with two ping pong tables.. All the tables had tablecloths on them, with plates with silver setting, cups for drinks, and a small name placard on top of each plate to designate the person who sat there. Soon, the hungry gathered at the tables, and a quiet was sensed as dad stood up.

Then, he said the “Grace before Meals” prayer, and no sooner had the Amen been said, then the meal frenzy began. Serving bowls filled with yams topped with marshmallows, California fruit salad, green salad, jellied cranberries, mashed potatoes, brown turkey gravy, carrots and peas, butter, stuffing, and the sliced turkey from two large tom turkeys. It was a maze of movement as all began to fill their plates and their stomachs. Conversation went in many different directions, there was laughter and loud playful bantering, and some of the serving plates were refilled and brought back to the dinner tables.

Nearly an hour later, much of the feast had been consumed and mom and dad assigned the older children to begin the clean up, including the pots and pans in the kitchen. At the same time, mom announced that the dessert table would be in the kitchen. It would be self service when the coffee was ready. The desserts included cherry and blueberry cheesecakes, pumpkin and pecan pies, Mary See’s assorted two pound candy box, whip cream cans, decorated cookies and hot tea if necessary. The crowd amassed around the table and soon the desserts began to disappear.

Usually by 7p.m., the younger children were already making turkey sandwiches, the dishes were almost all cleaned and put away, and some of the senior members of the family were saying goodnight and returning to their homes. The older children were going for seconds on the dessert table and besides the turkey and the dressing, very few leftovers made it to the refrigerator.

After 8p.m., the Gunther tradition of Christmas name drawing was started. As it was difficult to buy all 19 members a Christmas gift, it was decided that every Thanksgiving or thereabouts we would draw a name and it would be that person's responsibility to purchase a Christmas gift. Soon, a dollar limit was placed on the gift, which did keep up with inflation, and then the person would place his name in the secret drawing with a list of the top three gifts she or he wanted. Then in four weeks, the gift would be placed under the tree with the gift card stating "To: with a name and from: stating "????". Later, the person selecting your name would confess to the secret Christmas gift.

Well, back to the ending of Thanksgiving, the children would stay up late as the next day was a holiday, and usually by 10p.m., the family would all turn in for the night. The doors locked, the lights extinguished, and another successful Thanksgiving feast had been completed.

CHAPTER 7

“The Tales from...”

4119 W.176th Street
Torrance, California
Frontier (FR) 4-3718

The new house had 3 bedrooms, 1 1/2 baths, and an attached two car garage. The house was painted a light green with white trim. Dad and mom purchased the house on a sixteen year mortgage for \$10,850 with an interest rate of 4.5%.

The sleeping arrangements placed the four boys in two bunk beds in one room, the two girls in another bedroom, and mom and dad slept in the bedroom in the front of the house. Our home having only a bath and a half posed many interesting situations. Washing up in the morning or before bedtime became a system of give and take, using a brief time in the bathroom wisely.

I had a brief stay at Prairie Elementary School just two blocks from the house. I was then enrolled at St. Catherine Laboure School. It was about one mile of walking each way, but soon the cadre of friends I met at school, made the journey easier. So much to do within that mile journey: culverts became great places to play; fields became great hide and seek areas; ponds became frog catching areas; or just exploring the new housing construction sites where I found many lead slugs punched out from electrical boxes, and pretended that I was a wealthy man. Wearing salt and pepper corduroy pants and white shirts every day seemed strange at first, but all the boys at school wore the same uniform.

Things at home were getting organized: daily chores of trash dumping,; dishes; or sweeping the floor, was assigned and expected to be finished. Discipline was handed out fairly and quickly if you

didn't do your chores. Also, all of us four boys were getting used to the idea of having girls in the family.

The first two years passed quickly and upon my acceptance into the third grade, I soon discovered that I had a constant companion going to school. Steve, my brother, entered the first grade.

Often, during summer vacations and after school, we would play in the farmer's field adjacent to our backyard, only to be chased off by the irate farmer. But the produce always tasted better than the same item purchased in the grocery store, especially the tomatoes. We played with Duane Lyman and Bill Whitlow in the neighborhood. Hide and seek, and tag were favorite games. Near the end of my third year at St. Catherine's, on July 21, 1954, a third sister was born into our family. Nancy Marie was brought into the world by Dr. Thomas Downey at Daniel Freeman Hospital. When she entered the world, Dr. Downey initially said to mom, “Marianne you have another boy...oops...that was a finger, you have a beautiful baby girl.

Our home was getting smaller, considering the seven children and two adults living in a three bedroom, bath and a half home. I understand today why the folks never encouraged us to have pets, because we were utilizing every inch of living space. Yet, the house never seemed crowded.

Often, on Sunday, after attending Mass earlier that morning, the family would take early morning outings to Griffith Park in our blue and white 1954 Ford station wagon. Dad would fix us a breakfast of eggs, bacon, potatoes, and toast and it really tasted great. Soon we would be playing croquet, improvising a game of baseball with a whiffle ball. Also the area was great for hikes and new adventures. Grandma Fritz, Aunt Ann and Barbara, Uncles Larry and Jack would join us for breakfast, and the days spent with these special relatives became a ritual of joy and happiness. Years later, we were at the park when a group of young boys appeared with baseball

bats, and one of us said, “They are going to have a baseball game.” When dad figured out that a gang fight was possibly taking place, we packed up and left post haste. Another time dad took us children hunting for crayfish, and we loaded up a bucket full of crayfish and took them home. We attempted to duplicate their living environment, but soon they all died.

It was fun living with all nine members of our family, crowded yet comfortable living together. Dad and mom were always willing to spend time with us whenever we needed it. It might be a hard math problem, or helping mom find a difficult piece of a jigsaw puzzle. They were always willing to sacrifice their time when needed by us, and their love was a smile or hug given freely by these two loving people.

Over the years many interesting domestic situations occurred. Once, a window got broken during a “round the world” yo-yo demonstration. Don, I believe, tried to kill a fly on the sliding glass window with a roller skate, and broke the glass. Once, a prank occurred when someone put a frog in a pan of water on the stove top. Dad was a prankster from his early years, and continued this activity as an adult. One story gives you the flavor of his mind. Dad had taken the four boys to the beach for the afternoon. While scavenging the shoreline I went to grab a shiny object and cut my thumb on my right hand on a shard of glass partially buried in the sand. Well, after dad wrapped my t-shirt to stop the bleeding, the lifeguard administered first aid. So on the way home, dad set up a scenario about my injury. You have to understand that mom and blood never mixed well together. When we parked the car in the driveway, one of the boys went inside and told mom that I had been injured. Dad had wrapped the bloody t-shirt around my forearm with the blood stains to the outside. He lifted and carried me into the house. When mom saw this scenario, she ran to the bathroom and locked the door. I’m sure mom was furious later when she discovered this was a prank.

One rainy afternoon, the four boys, Steve, Don, Greg, and myself, were bored with the usual games we played: monopoly and the card game “War”, so we put our heads together and started a new game. The bunk beds were separated by four feet across from each other in our room, and we tied the ends of a large blanket to each corner of the bedpost forming a floating blanket suspended between the two beds. Steve and I were on the top of one bunk, and Don and Greg on the top of the other bunk, with the four of us pondering what we could do with this arrangement. Suddenly, one of us jumped onto the blanket and to our surprise it held. Then another boy jumped in it and again it held. We were laughing and enjoying this adventure, when suddenly, both Steve and Greg jumped simultaneously together, the beds leaned over and the four of us hit the floor with a loud thump. The noise of surprise and excitement went out into the living room, and dad came running in to find us laughing with the two bunk beds leaning against one another. Well, the end of this adventure came when it took us boys a few hours to clean our room as per dad’s specific instructions. And as suddenly as it had begun, the suspended blanket adventure came to an end.

Over the few years of living in our home in Torrance, we all adapted naturally to the ever changing situation of more children being added to the family. The concept of being overcrowded never existed for me. Each additional child was just another change in our space allotment. Time continued its course and so did the family.

On September 14, 1955, Susan Marie was brought into the world at Daniel Freeman Hospital in Inglewood, California by Dr. Thomas Downey.

Taking an assessment of the 11 years since mom and dad had taken their wedding vows, the scorecard of children totaled this: John, Steve, Don, Greg, Mary, Rose, Nancy, and Susan. So as the size of the family increased, so to the house must follow.

During the waning months of 1956, dad decided that it was time to build an addition onto the house. So with the hiring of a local contractor, a large addition was built to the existing structure. It was

divided by a wall, on one side was a large room used as a family room with a fireplace, and the other side was a large bedroom with 3 trundle beds(triple bunk beds). Opposite the beds were large closets and drawers for our clothes. One drawer was full of loose socks, and hopeful before going out we found a matching pair. One event took place during the construction that excited us children. During the pouring of the cement for the foundation of the addition, dad had the construction crew pour an extra yard in the northwest corner of our yard. In this corner, on April 10th, 1956, dad had each of us put our handprint into the newly laid cement, and then drew with a lollipop stick, our first names directly below our handprint. Years later I returned to that house to acquire that piece of cement, but to my dismay it had been removed

The “dorm” as I aptly called this immense room, was our new sleeping quarters. It was okay to a point, until we found out that the “dorm” did not have a television set, as in all the other bedrooms. We complained and dad wired antennae for television reception, but dad also mentioned that the boys now had more square footage per person than the girls in their bedrooms, so everything seemed alright. This seemed to make things better, even if we couldn’t figure out how to measure the square footage of this room. We did have one unanswered question regarding the “dorm,” that was why we only had four boys in a room that slept six? Well on January 25th, 1957, Margaret Mary was delivered by Dr. Downey at Daniel Freeman Hospital and the answer was before us.

That particular year with the eleven of us living in the same house brought a new awareness for me and the role of my parents, an awareness that increased with the passing of more years. For example, mom and dad would be approached by four children to assist with our math problems, and they had the patience to help us individually, until each of us understood the solution to the math problems. They were always ready to engage us in diagramming sentences or writing compositions. Both were good, but mom excelled in English, dad in math.

Mom had a favorite game she loved to play with the children. She would hide a sewing thimble and each of us would ask if we were near it, she would answer with temperature clue words: “You’re getting warm;” or “You’re getting cold.” The prize for the victor was usually some cookies from the cupboard.

One aspect of our family life that always amazed me, even to this day, was that all of the children were always ready to play a game, or take care of a younger sibling or just spend time together, and we all seemed to enjoy the experiences of being together. As the years progressed, the family structure, modeled by mom and dad, seemed to become a very close knitted one. We never needed to ask for love, to us it was there and we felt its hands and warmth through mom and dad.

Then later in 1958 we were told that we were all going to be on the television show, “Truth or Consequences,” with the host Bob Barker. (Side note, he just announced his retirement from the show in 2006).

Some time before this event, dad and mom took all of us to Mount Baldy area to spend a day playing in the snow. It seemed like hours to get there in our 1957 blue Ford station wagon. After hours of playing in the snow, dad gave his usual unique call, using two hands cupped together, and all the children came back to the car, so we thought. After a quick count of heads in the back seats of the car, dad drove off and headed down the mountain road. One of the children, Greg, I think he kept trying to ask dad a question, but dad’s response was to tell him to keep quiet as the road was curvy and dangerous. Finally, Greg said again, “Dad, are you mad at Donald?” “No” said dad, “Why?” Greg said, “Because you left him back at the snow.” By the time we turned around and returned, Don had a crowd around him and was happy to see us all.

At the television station in 1958, the eleven members of the Gunthers family were lead from behind the set and told to stand on a small tier set of bleachers and told to be quiet. Some minutes passed, and the curtain remained closed. The host, Bob Barker, and a female

contestant were on the other side of the curtain. The lady had failed to answer a question the host asked, so she had to pay the consequence. Just then the curtain opened and we were in front of a large studio audience. Some of the younger children were getting fidgety, but dad whispered, "Shh." The contestant's dilemma was she had to pick the members of the Gunther family from the people in front of her. Our family had been joined by two strangers from the audience. She spent a few minutes pondering her dilemma and then she picked three of the younger children from the group before her. Bob Barker asked her, "Do you feel that you have all the members of the Gunther family?" She hesitated for a moment and then said, "Yes." Bob Barker then said, "Will all the other members of the Gunther family please step down." It was great, when dad and mom and the other six children all stepped down. After a moment of shock, the audience then began to applaud. Bob Barker then did a couple of minutes of asking mom and dad questions about the family. Near the end of our television debut, after hearing about the child left behind in the snow, Bob Barker look at Donald and asked if he was the child left behind on the outing, as he still had snow behind his ears. Mom and dad received an enormous freezer plus a supply of frozen television (T.V.) dinners for being on this show.

On October 1st, 1958 at Daniel Freeman Hospital, Dr. Thomas Downey delivered the 10th child, James Andrew, into the world. Also, at this jointure of time, we had five boys and five girls bringing the count to an even tie. I was amazed with our parent's insight in building the "Dorm."

Also, during 1958, we had six members of the family in school at St. Catherine's Laboure. I was eighth grade; Steve in the sixth grade; Don in the fourth; Greg in the third; Mary in the second; and Rose in the first grade. The school seemed almost as crowded with family as did our home.

Also, during 1958, dad did some more remodeling. He built a bedroom and step down closet in half of the garage. I was never sure if he did this to give us more space, or as a foretelling of future

additions to the family, as if ten children was not enough. This extra, small, bedroom had a large built in study table, a closet, and was framed in plywood. So Steve and I took it upon ourselves to decorate the room with posters. Posters were removed from telephone poles, any poster we found, and we covered the walls and ceilings with many different posters.

During this time in my life took place the great donut caper. For many years we had watched and later ate the great homemade donuts that grandma Fritz had made in her kitchen. So, one evening, Steve and I were given the task of babysitting the other eight children, while mom and dad went out. Well, sitting in the kitchen, we would occasional peek in on the other children. Suddenly, one or both of us had a craving for grandma's homemade donuts. It only took a few minutes to figure out a scheme to get the other kids into one room, so that we could make, fry and devour these delectable donuts. We escorted all the children into one of the bedrooms, a room with a large television, and we locked the door from the outside and went into the kitchen to make the donuts. Just to make sure we had no interruptions, Steve changed Jim's diaper, and put him to bed with a bottle of warm milk.

Finally, we went into the kitchen, our attempt at duplicating the recipe didn't work, so we decided to be creative from the little we could remember from watching grandma. We mixed the ingredients, made round forms of dough and punched out the centers with our fingers. The dough was done, so we began the search for the deep fat fryer. We guessed about the oil depth in the pot, and put the heat on to heat the oil. What we didn't know was that the oil had to reach a set temperature before the donuts could be fried. Anxiously, with hungry stomachs and big eyes we placed the circular donuts in the oil, and to our surprise the donuts sank to the bottom of the pot. We looked at each other, but with a smile we passed it off as unimportant. In a short time, we had made and decorated two dozen donuts. After a short cooling period, we poured some milk and got ready for the sweet feast.

My first bite and I immediately spat it out, the donuts tasted like pure lard, not donuts. So rather than dumping the donuts, we had a brainstorm. After putting more sugar and cinnamon on the donuts, I went to the bedroom, unlocked the door, and told the children that we had made fresh donuts for them. They ran into the kitchen, each got a glass of milk and devoured the donuts, and didn't mind the greasy, oily taste. For a moment I wondered if I had tasted a bad one, but with a repeat taste I thought, "No!" Two hours later that evening, the folks returned home, and found a mess in the kitchen and a handful of children with belly aches.

Another time babysitting, after watching the Olympic reruns on television, I decided to have our own Olympic events in the house. First things first, the rules were explained to the older children, who were very excited, and then Steve and I arranged the course. We chose teams for the events to follow. The events included the two room run; arm wrestling; leg wrestling; and other forms of improvised sporting events. After nearly an hour of competition, the two teams were almost tied, with one event to go, the long distance steeple and obstacle course. The contestants had to run under the two six foot kitchen tables, over a row of the four benches, over a kitchen chair, then enter the living room and jump over mom's new coffee table, and finish by hurdling a series of two end tables. Each team chose a runner, and the winner would be selected by the best time over the course. Steve ran the course with a few minor setbacks. Don's turn came next on the course. He got a great start, but when he attempted to jump over the new coffee table, he came up short and landed on the table and a leg came off. Suddenly the game was over and everyone went in different directions to watch television. I, being the instigator of these games, used a small nail and fixed the leg, permanently I hoped. Later that evening the folks came home, and finding the house in order, they put the remaining children to bed. I went without sleep until I heard mom and dad go to bed, figuring that tomorrow would bring a solution to this dilemma.

The next morning I ran into the living room and the leg was still holding and all seemed well. Then, that night after dinner, the folks retired to the living room for their evening cup of coffee and mutual conversation to catch up on each other's events for the day. Well, Don had forgotten about the events of the previous evening, and in sight of all, he sat on the end of the coffee table, and the leg separated from its attachment. In the interest of self protection, I yelled out, "Don, you broke mom's new coffee table!!!" No sooner had my words died out, then all the rest of the children turned and pointed at me, saying in unison, "Mom and dad, it was John and Steve's idea!!!" The next few minutes seemed like a lifetime, and after dad checked the leg and saw the inept repair work, he looked around the room with the look that only our dad had. Suddenly, all the children were talking about the Olympics of the night before. Disciplinary measures were handed out to the sponsors of the sporting event, and it was a lesson that Steve and I remembered for a long time.

Dad often added spice to the family environment with his collectables, be it birds or fishes. Once in fact, on an excursion to San Juan Capistrano, we captured and placed in buckets a number of small octopi and put them in an aquarium at home. Unfortunately we couldn't recreate the proper environment, and they all died. Dad also collected canaries or maybe parakeets. What began as two mating pairs, ended up in a large cage in the garage with maybe over 100 birds. Another time it was a 50 gallon aquarium, populated with a few black mollies and guppies, and finally the population exploded, and the aquarium was removed and the fish sent to other people's aquariums in the neighborhood. Also, dad during many trips to the ocean, the mountains or the desert, would often amaze us with his ability to catch snakes, lizards and other fast moving creatures.

The family situation in Torrance was never static, just because of all these people living under one roof. Events of many dimensions happened daily. Imagine for a moment, a household having five bedrooms, one and a half baths, a small yard, a large den,

and a kitchen area mostly occupied by two six foot picnic tables. Now add to this, two adults and ten children of different ages.

I entered high school in 1959, and at this point in time, the four oldest boys and the four oldest girls were in school, and mom had three young children at home. Dad was commuting to North Hollywood and was driving a motor driven moped 70 miles each day to save on the cost of gasoline.

Now, I would like to give an overview of a typical day in the Gunther household. It's an accumulation of many memories and I synthesized them into one day.

The day would begin with dad rising early and going to Mass at St. Catherine's church. After church, his arrival home would be the alarm clock for each of the children to arise and begin another day. He would hasten with his toilet needs and then make a direct line to the kitchen to assist mom with breakfast and packing lunches for all the school aged children. More often than not, the bathrooms had more than one occupant taking care of the needs of the morning. By 7:30 a.m., mom would have either a cold or hot cereal on the table, and the eight children attending different grades in school would eat a hurried breakfast, and we would talk about our activities during the day. Then, dad might drop off the younger children at school, while the oldest would walk the mile or so, meeting their friends along the way.

The clock was nearing 8:00 a.m., and mom's day was just gaining momentum. She would clean the dishes left after breakfast by the family, and put the kitchen back into some semblance of order. Then, after changing the diapers on the two youngest babies, she would give potty lessons to the third. Then, and only then, after feeding the three hungry children, she would take a short coffee break. Finishing the last of her coffee, a drink she still enjoys today, she would go to the laundry room and begin the first of nine loads of washing and drying that would take up a large part of her day. The amount of clothes she washed and dried daily only kept her even with the heaps of dirty clothing that the children would put into the

laundry. By eleven o'clock, she would find time to call and invite one of the neighbors to come over and share a cup of coffee and conversation, while the three youngest children napped. The balance of time until 3p.m. was taken up with cleaning the house, picking up after all of us, answering the phone, caring for the three children in her charge, washing and drying clothes, and preparing for the evening meal.

By 3:30 p.m. mom's pace would increase, with the arrival home of six of the school children. She would assign each a different task, from taking out the garbage, to setting the dinner tables, to caring for the babies as they crawled around the house, and then we were told to get started on our homework for the day. As all of us were in Catholic school, we had homework every evening, but none of us complained too loudly. Dad would arrive home during the 6 o'clock hour, and after washing up, would get us to sit for dinner at the two large tables, say grace before meals, and dinner would begin. (A side note, in the winter months, us children would sit in the front of the dining room window, and take numerical guesses as to which car would be dad's, while we waited for him to arrive home).

Dinner would consist of, as an example, five to seven cut up fryer chickens, eight pounds of potatoes mashed, two pounds of kernel corn, three loaves of day old bread from the freezer, one pound of butter in the cube, two gallons of powdered milk, three heads of iceberg lettuce cut up with five sliced tomatoes for the salad, and two gallons of ice cream and sometimes a large sheet cake with vanilla icing.

Mom cooked many different meals: Beef stew with carrots and potatoes; fish chowder with potatoes; macaroni and cheese with small elbow macaroni; fried liver and onions (dad's favorite, not ours); rice casseroles; and no matter what she cooked, the meals had plenty of food and were healthy.

At the end of the meal, dad would select one child and a decade of the rosary was said by all. Then came the conflict of the day, dad would assign chores and state loudly that none of the

television sets (five in the house) would be turned on until all the chores were done and dad and mom had checked that all of our homework had been completed. Around 7 o'clock, the younger children would begin their trek to bed, while the older ones finished their homework and would enjoy a few minutes of television. Every Thursday, though, our television choice was dad's favorite, The Firestone Hour. It was boring but dad really enjoyed it. As the clock neared 9:30 p.m., the balance of us children would finish up our chores and head for our nightly place of slumber.

Around 10 o'clock mom and dad would have some time to share their day with each other. Their passion for their family and each other was constantly rekindled. Soon, mom and dad would be off to bed. With the rising of the next morning, the pace would begin again.

On December 19, 1959, Dr. Thomas Downey delivered a girl, Catherine Marie, into the family. That Christmas we had a special gift of another sister in our midst. This brought the count to five boys and six girls, and by Christmas day in 1959 we were all elated with the gifts from Santa Claus and the joy brought on by our new sister.

Our family began taking family vacations around this time. One of our first was a trip of many hours to go camping to Big Sur State Park in Northern California. Dad had just purchased a new station wagon, a Ford, I do believe, and had planned to pull a rented trailer with all the necessities for two weeks of camping. Sometime in August, we were all packed and the car loaded with the entire family, the trailer had all the gear and food for the trip. Our trip took over 10 hours of driving. Initially, all of us were singing, talking, and all excited about the new adventure. The first surprise came about 30 minutes on our journey, for dad suddenly realized that he had left his wallet back at the house with all the money needed for two weeks away from home. Well, about an hour later, after a number of toilet

calls and a few last minute items from our closets, we were again on our way.

Soon, the miles we drove put much distance between our home and our destination, Big Sur State Park, just below the Monterey coast. Hours later, traveling north, I remember that we came into and left just as quickly, the town of San Luis Obispo. The children were getting irritable and dad was getting sleepy. I can hardly remember mom driving, but I'm sure that she did. Finally, dad found a drive-in, as fast food restaurants didn't exist, and spent a small fortune, as the family dined on hamburgers, french fries and cold drinks. In a short period of time, the meal had disappeared, and so we reloaded the car and continued the journey north on Highway 101. It was well after midnight when dad took the turn off from Highway 101 and we headed south on Highway One, a very curvy and narrow highway. Mom and I were nervous in the front seat, as dad's head would nod off to the right and then to the left. Yet, he kept telling us that he was okay. At this point in our trip, everyone was either asleep or getting ready for sleep and anxious to get settled in our campground. During those last few nervous miles, mom and I kept looking at the drop offs aside the highway as dad's head nodded side to side. In the back seat most of the children were fast asleep, in the most uncomfortable positions, but all were surviving.

Suddenly, the park entrance to Big Sur State Park was in front of us, and everyone awoke anxious to get settled in our campsite. But alas, the sign on the camp kiosk said that all the campsites were filled, and we would have to return in the morning to get in line for a camp. To mom and dad's chagrin, they decided to find a roadside stop where we could all sleep for the long night, in the car. During our first night camping in the car, occasionally one of the children would have to make a potty call, and half of the occupants in the car would have to move around or get out of the car to accommodate the needy person.

The morning sun brought complaints about body aches and hunger pains, as dad and mom, I'm sure, wondered what we were all

doing here. After a hasty moment to freshen up at a roadside drinking fountain, we headed back to the park. Soon, after waiting in line, a campsite was assigned to us, number 109 (as I recall), and we could finally leave the confinement of the car. After a few minutes of driving we reached our new home for the next two weeks, and began to establish our camp. Our first meal consisted of hot oatmeal, toast from the camp toaster, and powdered milk from mountain stream water to everyone's delight. After all were satiated with breakfast, dad gave out chore duties to all of us: help clean up the younger children, wash and dry dishes, take the trash to the dumpsters, help mom unload the trailer and so on and on. We were all working with smiles on our face.

Later that morning a park ranger came to our camp to inform us that this campsite was not a group camp. So dad cupped his hands together and whistled all of us back to camp. As we lined up the ranger soon realized that we were one family. Now, the fresh mountain air, the tall evergreens and the giant coastal redwoods, the sound of running rivers and the sunlight filtering through the high fog put all of us in a happy mood, and the traveling and the accommodations of the night before were forgotten. That evening in the car would be reminisced and laughed at for years to come, especially the words uttered in the middle of the night, "I have to go potty."

Steve and I were soon exploring the upper recesses of the Big Sur River, and a few of the younger children went swimming, just below our camp, and under the close scrutiny of dad. The younger children and mom stayed in camp with the soft blue colored Stellar Jays and the gray squirrels offering entertainment for them. The winged scavengers would swoop into camp looking for scraps of food and fly away to a distant branch to enjoy their feast. The gray squirrels would scurry across the camp, find a morsel of food, and scurry off in the direction they had come from. I can remember to this day, mom and dad sitting at the camp table, watching their

children at play, and can feel the love and satisfaction that they shared.

The memories of these years we camped and returned to this beautiful state park blend together, but a few adventures still stand out in my memories. The first memory was on one camping vacation when an older gentleman taught me how to use cheese wiz and Bisquick to make fishing bait for the hook on my fishing line. I had gone down river and finally had hooked and landed my first fish. I ran back to camp in excitement and yelling as I entered our campsite with the prized fish on a stringer. Mom took a picture of me and my first fish, it seemed so big back then, but in reality it was only four inches in length, even my smile was bigger than the fish.

Years later another incident occurred that was an adventure. The campers in sites adjacent to us thought a bear had come into the vicinity. It was late at night and cold, and I had the need to use the toilet, which was located about one hundred feet from our camp. I discovered that the cold mountain air was too much to "bear" in my night clothes, so I arose and began walking to the restroom with my sleeping bag wrapped around me. A yell broke the tranquility of the night and the campers around us began picking up large branches to fend off the bear coming into their camp. I fell over trying to avoid the campers and they quickly discovered that a person was inside the sleeping bag. After a lengthy discussion, all went back to bed and dad escorted me to the toilet.

Fishing, hiking, great meals, card playing, cleaning up camp, keeping the tents swept out daily, doing dishes, chasing after the younger children and the nightly campfires with the park rangers were some of the activities that consumed our daily routine for fourteen days. Every evening just before the campfire program, us boys would go off and start yelling, "Elmer, where are you?" why I don't remember.

Sometime during our camping stay, dad would take the entire family for a hike into the surrounding forest; he enjoyed hiking when he was a child. Very few of us, even to this day, possess his

energy level. On one particular hike, he happened upon a green snake along the trail. He picked it up and turned around to show the family, but to his amazement, mom and the girls had moved back away on the trail. He would briefly discuss the snake to the boys, and then gently return the snake to its natural environment. These hikes were interesting and enjoyable, because mom and dad took time to be with us.

The two weeks flew by, and our time camping was coming to an end. After a large breakfast of chocolate chip pancakes, scrambled eggs, powdered milk and orange juice, prepared by dad, we were given instructions to break camp and to make ready to return home. All of us children, including myself, reacted slowly, hoping that it wasn't true, but alas, the tone in dad's voice told us that it was a fact. Tents were dismantled, dishes cleaned and packed, sleeping bags shook out and rolled up, and the trailer was loaded. Soon all was in readiness for our departure. Dad, in his usual manner, told us that we had fifteen minutes before leaving. All of us headed in different directions. I went down to the creek and pondered all the fish still in the pools that I hadn't caught yet. Each of the children went off into their own private areas, all remembering the new adventures and the experiences we had been exposed to and all of us thankful for the wonderful parents who had given each of us the opportunity to see, feel, and become aware of something new in our lives. Dad, when the time expired, cupped his hands and gave out the call that meant we had to return to camp. Roll call was taken, Don got counted twice, and soon we were on the highway heading south towards home. A few of us said out loud they would like to camp again, yet all of us would be thankful to sleep in our own beds later that night.

Our adventures were many with the family. I would like to list a few that I vividly remember: Huntington Library where the original paintings "Blue Boy" and "Pink Lady" are hung; the Arcadia Arboretum; Griffith Park Zoo and Park; the San Diego Zoo; Knott's Berry Farm, before admission was charged; Disneyland in it's

original year; Redondo Beach; Lake Arrowhead and Crestline; and many more that I have forgotten.

On April 6, 1961 Dr. Downey delivered the twelfth children into our family, Andrew John.

On the 19th day of May, 1962, after a football mishap, I collapsed on the football field at Serra High School in Gardena, California. I was taken to Daniel Freeman Hospital, and at the same time the school notified my mother that I had suffered an accident during football practice. Mom remembers coming into the hospital room and my face was contorted with the left side having paralysis, tubes in my arm, and a Catholic priest administering the Last Rites of the Dying. I'm sure that the shock took quite a toll on mom. On May 31st, I finally awoke from brain surgery, and through the masterful techniques of Doctors Orr, Hanna, and Udall, I am alive today because of these three doctors.

Dad was the one that set up a semi-schedule of chores, and this system worked. The system was an easy one, and most of us understood it and complied with the rules. This is only a recollection on my part. Children from seven to eleven had to wash and dry the dishes not washed in the dishwasher; twelve and thirteen washed and waxed the linoleum floors; at fifteen you took care of outside chores like lawn mowing and pulling the weeds and you helped mom with the ironing. Of course, chores like taking out the trash; making the six gallons of Carnation instant milk; babysitting and other odd jobs were just given out to those in the vicinity at the time or those under the yoke of disciplinary action. I still remember certain chores. When the carpets needed cleaning, mom would have us fill a bucket with water and Tide laundry soap and add a hint of white vinegar. Then taking a stiff hand brush and using only the suds of this mixture, you would scrub the carpets. Also, a potion of water and white vinegar was used for cleaning the windows, and you would dry the windows with newspaper. Both techniques were very effective.

The day after Greg and I celebrated our twelfth and seventeenth birthdays on July 1st, 1962, Dr. Thomas Patrick Downey

brought Thomas Patrick into the world. He was named after the Doctor that had delivered the last eight children. Also, because this was the seventh child born at Daniel Freeman Hospital, the hospital charges were not billed, and the parents were given a free ride. Tom entered the world and cost mom and dad nothing. It was like getting a free baby.

With the birth of the thirteenth child, a change in the sleeping arrangements took place. Steve and I now slept in the room addition in the garage, while mom and dad slept in the front bedroom with the baby in its crib. The six girls split the other two bedrooms, while the four boys slept in the “dorm” room in the back of the house. After a few minor scrabbles, all of us settled into this new pattern.

Steve and I worked as janitors the summer of 1962 at St Catherine Laboure School and Church, hoping to save our money and buy a car. That summer, Don and Greg played with their friends in the neighborhood and had a great summer. The five eldest girls: Mary; Rose, Nancy, Susan and Margie helped mom around the house and in the afternoon they left the house for hours of playing with their friends. The balance of the family: Jim; Cathy; Andrew; and Tom were at home most of the summer getting involved with the activities of children: climbing into closets; pulling dirty laundry out of the clothes hamper; tugging at mom to be fed; or going out with the older children for a short romp in the surrounding environment of our neighborhood. Dad worked during the day, and at night he would spend considerable time with each of us. Mom, besides her many usual chores, would drink her coffee and spend her time between baking dinner and sweets for us and spending time with dad.

In August of 1962, the family again traveled into Big Sur State Park, but this time the lessons of the past were remembered all went smoothly. Our last years camping trip made us feel like genuine campers, and for the cost of a questioning look from a neighborhood camp, we would freely offer our advice on camping etiquette. This yearly trek into the natural beauty of this California State Park made

all of us aware and appreciative of these new experiences that mom and dad had given us. With the conclusion of each of these trips, all of us were grateful for the time that was allotted to each of us to enjoy the world outside of our home. Our time was used to explore new environments, to seek and amass new feelings, and to discover a world somewhat alien to us. One particular new experience on this trip was the newly founded ability to differentiate poison oak from the other foliage in the park. Once, dad walked through an area full of poison oak, telling us he wasn't sensitive to it, but near the end of the camping trip, he caught a bad case of poison oak rash.

On August 18, 1963, Michael Andrew was born into our family, bringing the count of the sexes to six girls and eight boys.

At this point the five bedrooms were ample in our home, but the bath and one half posed many unique situations. Yet we all coped over the years living in Torrance. (A side note, if you divided the house space in square footage, divided by the number of members in the family, there was approximately eighty-five feet per person).

In the summer of 1964 dad announced we were moving to a larger home in Granada Hills, and it had 5 bedrooms and 3 full bathrooms. The excitement of the family was contagious.

I would like to add a few additional memories of our time in Torrance.

I remember that the older boys captured many lizards and put them in a wood box that we had constructed, but soon they all escaped, and soon the neighbors made comments on the number of lizards in the neighborhood.

Occasionally, my dad's parents would visit from the east coast. Albert and Esther Gunther were wonderful grandparents. I remember grandpa telling us a story about a race, parts of it went, “the lettuce was in the head, the radishes were bunched up, and the toilet paper was bringing up the rear.” Grandpa died in 1958, and I remember dad traveling to the east coast for his funeral.

Later, Grandma would drive her big car and visit us in Torrance. She was a robust woman with a warm smile and loved to

give healthy hugs. She would often take over the kitchen in the mornings and cook fried eggplant and eggs for us all, along with her homemade biscuits. Usually all of us children would pass the eggplant along to the other end of the table, but we would devour the rest of the breakfast. But before we finished, dad and mom would pass the eggplant back in our direction with explicit instructions to have some.

Together or alone, this was another pair of great grandparents that made our time with them special, for they brought to our home a new form of living and loving that filled a child's world with love and enrichment. Grandma Gunther had 12 children and sixty-five grandchildren, and in August of 1977 she died in Florida. I know that her life and love touch us, and that she had many blessings in this life. Yet, I have one final story about one of her visits. In the summer of 1962 I had just been released from the hospital, after having subdural brain surgery. I had been home for a week, when one evening I bent over to get a pot from a lower cupboard, while Grandma Gunther had opened an upper cupboard directly above me. Upon arising, the cupboard corner and the top of my shaved head collided, causing a stream of blood to flow down my face. Grandma began yelling that she had killed me, while mom put a cold compress on my scalp and drove me back to the hospital. Grandma survived and so did I with a few extra stitches in my scalp.

The last Torrance tale is one of my favorites. Once, in a moment of weakness, Uncle Jack proposed to take the four oldest boys to the Redondo Beach pier for a day of fishing, an exciting idea to us boys, as we had heard that Uncle Jack was a great fisherman. So on a warm Saturday morning the five of us left Torrance, riding in Uncle Jack's 1955 green Mercury heading towards the Pacific Ocean and the pier, a 14 mile journey. Each of us was quiet on the journey, and my thoughts went to the great expectation of catching a big fish. Once at the pier, the sights and sounds of the Redondo Beach Pier were enough to fill a year of experiences with smells, colors, the ocean mist, and all the other fishermen. During the few

precious hours at the pier, Uncle Jack spent most of his time untangling the fishing lines attached to our four rented poles, settling arguments, giving us nickels for the pay toilet, and I wonder if he even remembered what had motivated him to make such a generous offer to take us fishing. The big event of the day was when a 14 inch Pacific Mackerel was caught, with all four boys claiming possession of the fish. All four of our fishing lines were tangled up with the fish. Yet, during all the day and on the ride home, I remember and can still see Uncle Jack's smile as the four boys piled onto the back seat of his Mercury, all holding our quarter share of the one fish we caught that day.

Our home in Torrance sold for \$27,500 in 1964.

Chapter 8

“The Tales from...”

Childhood’s Christmas Memories as an Adult.

These memories are a compilation of many Christmas’s, synthesized into one story.

The house was as quiet as an empty church; the chimes of the wall clock went off 5 times to yell the fact that was 5 a.m., Christmas Day. Little, did we children know that mom and dad had just finished stacking our Christmas piles, had eaten the cookies and drank the warm glass of powdered milk left for Santa Claus. The air outside was still and the sky black, and in the background a quiet rustling began to stir. Christmas excitement was in the air, and in the five bedrooms in the green ivy colored stucco house in Torrance, slept 14 children, and mom and dad. Of all the days of the year, this was the apex of excitement, of family sharing, and of all the love we shared throughout the entire year.

Mom or dad just before going to sleep at 4:30 a.m., whispered near our room that Santa Claus had arrived at our home. A murmur is heard in the older boy’s bedroom; soon two and three voices began to blend together about the adventure in the next room. The room in the garage had two beds and led into the younger boy’s room, so the adventure to get into the middle of the house led the four boys: John, Steve, Don, and Greg slowly moving forward to see if Santa Claus had indeed visited their home that night. Even as they thought they were quiet, there was a stirring in the girl’s bedroom, and Mary, Rose, Nancy and Susan joined the procession down the hall. Each of us had subtle doubts about the presence of the treasures of Christmas, as each of us wondered if we had been good enough to be rewarded with the gifts of Christmas.

Sticking his head around the darkened room, John began to get more excited as he noticed the piles in darkened silhouettes, and going to the wall he flicked the light switch on to a sight that took all of our breaths away. The sight was often referred to as the “Mattel Toy Factory” scene. Throughout the living room and the larger family room, were piled fourteen stacks of toys, games, bicycles etc, with the name of each of the fourteen (14) Gunther’s children on the top of each stack. Well, by this time the quiet whimper of excitement became a roar and all of us children were going to our designated gift piles and examining what Santa Claus had brought us this year. In just a few minutes, a tired looking mom and dad in their bed clothes came out from the front bedroom, and lo and behold, they smiled and the love and joy for all of their children was evident, and they began to share our excitement. They walked around and shared our new items. One year one of the boys announced that he didn’t believe in Santa Claus. Well, that morning of Christmas he found no pile with his name on it, so Dad told him to look throughout the house. Lo and Behold he found his pile in the kitchen, and his belief system changed, at least for that day.

Years later, I checked with mom and she said most of the Christmas gifts from Santa Claus were stored at Kitty’s house two doors down, and some were placed in the attic in our house through the trap door in the hallway. The year some of the children received bicycles they were parked in Dewey and Beulah’s house across our street, and early in the morning Dad and Dewey, around 2 a.m., rode them over to our house.

The excitement of the first hour of our Christmas day was to last throughout the entire day. But I’m getting ahead of myself, so let’s return to the early morning hours of Christmas day.

It is now 6 a.m. and the entire family was awake. The remaining children, Margie, Jimmy, Cathy, Andrew, Tom, and Michael had entered the magical environment that my parents created for us every Christmas. After a couple of hours of playing, sharing, and excited conversation with each other, dad announced it

was time to get ready for breakfast. So each of us, restacked our piles, put our name plates back on the stack as our claim to the gifts, and got ready for a great breakfast feast.

Dad began cooking breakfast, consisting of homemade cinnamon rolls, eggs, and a variety of fruit with juice and powdered milk. After eating our first meal of the day, dad came into the living room and announced that we were to begin taking the gifts to our rooms. Simultaneously, mom began preparing for the dinner that was to later that day.

The games were to be locked up, and when we wanted to play with them, only one was allowed out at a time. Then, when returned, Dad checked all the games to make sure none of the game pieces were missing. If a piece came up short, all of us would search throughout the house until we found the errant piece. Then, after the rooms were cleaned up, the preparations for Christmas day began. The tables were covered with table clothes, the plates, silverware, napkins and hot pads were all placed in their proper place. The ping pong tables were set up, and we were told not to go near the Christmas tree where all the wrapped presents were stacked underneath it. A large number of gifts, considering all we had already received from Santa Claus.

Soon, most of the preparations were done and we all were told by dad to get ready to go to church. At church, St. Catherine's of Laboure in Torrance, California, we would enter and take up two pews. Soon, the children would begin to whisper and get excited about returning home to their treasures. Dad would just look at us, and our attention went back to the service. Soon, mass ended, we loaded up in the Dodge Van, and headed home. All of us children were excited with anticipation to get back to our presents.

For us children, the chores were nothing compared to the joy of Christmas, a day most of us still cherish to this day. The ritual was duplicated year after year, and the traditions formed by mom and dad gave us much to rejoice about. The rest of the afternoon consisted of visiting our friends in the neighborhood to see what they

had received and sharing our gifts, helping our parents get ready for the guests and our Christmas dinner, and playing with one or more of our new gifts. As the day wore on, the excitement just continued with the arrival of the relatives and their gifts added under the tree. We wondered what else we would get from our parents and the relatives this special day.

Around four o'clock in the afternoon, dad or one of the children would announce that Christmas dinner was ready. Paul usually rang the dinner bell to announce dinner. Usually the guest numbered around 25-30, with the Fritz's, the Malget's and their children. Grandma Fritz would bring her world famous (our world that is) dinner rolls, bananas and fruit. The fruit, she felt, was a way to offset the candy and desserts calories we would consume. The older children had chores of setting the food on the table, and making sure that the adults got seated. The meal was a culinary delight consisting of baked hams, California fruit salad with no pineapple (Grandma was allergic to pineapple), marshmallow covered yams, green peas, Grandma's homemade rolls (an annual favorite), and then dad would give the blessing of the food, and the feast would begin. It was truly amazing how fast all the food was consumed, with excited conversation and the anticipation of more gift openings. Soon, second helpings were passed out and some of the children, finished with dinner, returned to playing games. The older children were asked to clean up the tables, wash the pots and pans, and to get desserts ready to be served. The desserts were usually cherry and blueberry cheesecakes made by Mom in large metal baking trays, pumpkin pie with whipped cream, and the Fritz's always brought a 2 lb box of See's candy, plus various fruits. Soon some of the adults took naps, others played ping pong, and others wanted to see what Santa Claus brought us children.

Finally, the dinner and dessert plates, silverware, pots and pans, glass baking dishes were cleaned, and it was time for the ritual we all enjoyed.

Dad announced that everyone should sit in a circle around the Christmas tree which was surrounded by many colors of Christmas wrap, bows tied neatly, and name tags on each gift. First though, we had to sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus, which dad led. Then he got two large grey trash bags to put the torn Christmas wrap, ribbon, bows, and empty boxes into after being ripped and removed from each gift. Finally, he looks around, gave a nod, and it is time to start. Dad picks one of the younger children to be the person to pass the gifts, specifically one at a time. Then, the name was read and the person was given their gift. When the recipient opened their gift, it had to be passed around the entire group before the next gift was pulled from under the tree. If the gift was clothing, the family would start chanting, “Put it on, take it off,” for about a minute. That never happened in all those years. Years later I discovered that most of the children’s wrapped gifts were clothing: one special thing we wanted, or winter wear. Somewhere in this process of gift opening, the surprise gift from a family member was announced from the list that was created at Thanksgiving. Everyone was happy with their gifts, but this process took hours to complete, and most of the younger children were asleep before it was finished. I think some of the older adults followed in their footsteps.

Finally, around 8 p.m., the gifts were all opened and the trash was picked up and put outside. Dad then announced that the movies of the family history would be played from the 16mm projector in the family room. I do believe that he had over 1200 feet of movies, and before it begins he gets as many as he can of the guests into the den. At this time, some of the relatives decided to leave for their homes, some of the younger children went to beds and the balance of the Christmas crew get comfortable to watch the movies we have seen many times before. Many fell asleep during this ritual.

After a long day full of joy, laughter, and feelings of being thankful, it was getting near eleven o’clock. Mom and dad had a very long day. The leftovers are put away, the desserts were almost

gone, the trash bags were out for Tuesday’s trash pickup, and all 14 of the children were asleep in their beds. Another Christmas was successfully orchestrated by our parents, and their feeling of satisfaction had to be a great moment for them to share.

CHAPTER 9

“The Tales from...”

17541 Flanders Street
Granada Hills, California 91344
(818) 363-1488

A large, light green, ranch style house, trimmed in white. It had five bedrooms with three full baths. A large two car garage was attached to the house. The property covered half an acre in the beautiful San Fernando Valley of Southern California. This house was purchased for \$39,500 in 1964.

The year of moving found myself in my first year of college at Loyola University of Los Angeles, and working full time at a Chevron service station at Winnetka and Ventura Streets to help support myself. Steve had graduated from Serra High School and decided to enter into a religious vocation with the Marianist order. Don and Greg were both in high school, and would be transferring to Alemany High School in the San Fernando Valley. Mary, Rose, Nancy, Susan, Margie, Jim, and Cathy were attending St. Catherine's grade school and would be transferring to St. Eurphasia's in Granada Hills. The other members of the family were still at home, Andrew, Tom, and Mike.

A blessing occurred with the move to the new home. Dad was transferred to a new location which was miles closer to our home. If we had not moved to the San Fernando Valley, the eighty mile drive to and from work would have taken a heavy toll on him.

After the birth of Michael in 1963, mom didn't get pregnant for almost two years; a state we often thought was natural for her. So the older children figured that the population of the family would stop at fourteen children. In fact, just after the move, Steve and I left home, so the family for the first time in years experienced breathing

room in terms of space and size. The family actually got smaller that year.

The new Gunther homestead was beautiful. It was nestled at the base of the green foothills in the north San Fernando Valley, at least green in the spring and early summer. It had a sloping front yard that led into a home of nearly 2400 square feet (an average of 160 square feet per person). The backyard was level and led to a gully just north of the house, which dropped into a section in which easement rights were granted.

The new house was an instant success. The biggest element that made all the children happy was that there were three complete bathrooms, and the trundle and bunk beds were still used.

Well, fourteen people moved in to the house, and soon all the children had been successfully transferred into the local Catholic schools. I am sure that the administrators of the schools felt that their school districts had been invaded by the Gunthers. The amazing thing of all during this period of transition is that any major adjustment was really minor as the family spirit, kindled by the love of dad and mom for us all, put each of us into caring and concern for each other. What seemed important was that the family was together.

A new change was brought into all of our lives on November 8, 1966. This day our newest brother was born into the family, Paul Andrew. He was born a Downs Syndrome child. From his birth, we all knew that he was a Gunther, by his spirit. Within a short period of his birth, he had surgery for a blocked intestine and then survived double pneumonia. He soon came home a full member of this family, and mom and dad often remarked that he was a special gift from God; something I do believe is true.

At this point in time, twenty two years after mom and dad had exchanged their wedding vows, and fifteen children later, we thought that mom and dad had stopped thinking about bringing more children into the family. But like usual, we couldn't second guess the folks.

The final birth into our family seemed ironic, as on April 29th, 1968, mom gave birth to twin boys. Robert Andrew came into the world first, followed a few minutes later by his fraternal twin brother, Timothy Andrew. This event seemed a fitting tribute to the end of the child bearing years for our family, with the final count coming in at eleven boys and six girls, for a total of seventeen children. My dad and mom had indeed done better by 4 than my father's parents. They often called the last four "bonus" babies.

In 1968, the family was asked to appear on the television program Truth or Consequences for the second time. At this point, two of the boys were out of the state of California: Steve in Hawaii at Chaminade College; and Don at the United States Naval Academy. I was married and living in Glendale, California. It seemed we would be short two family members on this television program.

Mom dressed the children in their Sunday best and dad gave us all explicit instructions regarding our behavior on the television set. At ten o'clock that morning we loaded into the family car and headed towards the television studios in Hollywood. When we arrived at the studio, we were told to wait behind the set until the appointed time to go on stage. The only one failing to follow these instructions was dad, whose professional curiosity and familiarity with television sets led him to wander behind the sets. Suddenly, to his surprise he came upon the two boys missing from this event, who had been hidden behind the stage. They had been flown in by the television studio and put up in a hotel in Hollywood, California. Dad returned a few minutes later just before the show began. We were all standing on a three tier riser, and then the curtain opened.

The master of ceremonies, Bob Barker, made his entrance from the left. The audience applauded and introductions were made. The purpose, we were told, for our appearance was to talk about our family life and to watch ourselves on two small video monitors near the stage. Bob Barker began interviewing different members of the family, and then while they were talking to Michael, the video

monitor showed a live picture of Steve. The anxiousness of the surprise went through some of us, until mom saw and let out a gasp of surprise. She said, "That's not Michael, that's Steve." Bob Barker then announced that the two missing Gunther boys had been flown to Los Angeles, and suddenly a curtain opened and all nineteen Gunthers were together. Tears flowed and hugs were given to the two boys by all the family.

After the final applause of the audience, we were directed to exit and were soon on our way home, all together for a short three days. In celebration, dad hired a professional photographer to take a family portrait. This was the last time we were all together as a family until the death of our father in 1998.

It was difficult for me to realize the historical significance of this family reunion in 1968. The family started with the random meeting of two people in 1942, and with their love came all of us children. Mom and dad had no awareness of their destinies in 1944 when they got married, after meeting by a phone number on a piece of paper, and now over four decades later they had brought seventeen children into the world.

CHAPTER 10

“The Tales from...”

485 Golden Meadow Drive
Templeton, California 93446
(805)434-1138

This home was purchased for \$98,000.00.

A three bedroom, two bath home nestled in the foothills of Templeton, California. It was painted tan with a beige trim, and had room in the garage for two cars, even with boxes unpacked from the move.

Dad had the lawn manicured and sprinklers installed and mom had things in the house that she could never have in other homes that they had occupied. Mom became a collector: Ron Lee’s collection of clown miniatures; a doll collection by Maud Humphries (Humphrey Bogart’s mother); other collectible knick-knacks were on the shelves in the house. Paul had his own bedroom and was very happy, especially with his drum set. It was a great place for their retirement.

The Christmas of 1992 was at mom and dad’s house in Templeton, and the joy and love we all had shared as family members, was brought together again. Dad allowed some of the children to sleep at the house; others were boarded just down the street at a motel on Theatre Drive. Barbara and I stayed at a bed and breakfast in Templeton.

That Christmas was full of activities: eating a great meal; game playing; sincere sharing of past stories; cleaning the dishes; touring the surrounding area; and just being with each other. It was a busy and hectic three days, and we were all sad at the end of this Christmas holiday. The event was full of childhood memories, renewed feelings of the importance of family, and enjoying the

company of our brothers and sisters, the in-laws, and many nephews and nieces. Mom and dad really enjoyed having their family home for that Christmas.

A note from mom dated Sunday, Oct. 8th: “Dear John and Barbara. Enclosed is the list of how we named our children. It brought back many memories. We were undecided on naming baby number 3 (That would be Don), so we put names in a bowl and decided that if it was a boy, he would be called Ron. Well, I was still under the ether and when they asked me, somehow Don came out*.”

Sources of the children’s names:

John Andrew -named after mom’s dad and dad’s father

Stephen Joseph- named after mom and dad’s close Marine friend Steve Burzinski

Donald Louis – *read above note

Gregory James -Grandma Fritz was reading a book and thought the name was manly.

Mary Catherine – named after the Virgin Mary and Grandma Fritz

Rose Marie – named after mom’s girlfriend who died at age 27 giving birth to her second son

Nancy Marie – named after mom’s girlfriend Nancy Judae

Sue Marie– named after mom’s grandmothers mother

Margaret Mary – named after Aunt Gretchen

James Andrew - both mom and dad liked the name.

Catherine Mary – named after Grandma Catherine Fritz

Andrew – named after dad

Thomas Patrick – named after Dr. Thomas Downey who delivered 9 of the children

Michael Andrew – named after the Archangel Michael

Paul Andrew – both mom and dad liked the name.

Robert Andrew – named after Dr. Robert Becker who delivered the last 3 children

Timothy Andrew – both mom and dad liked the name



*Back row: Rose, John, Greg, Nancy, Don, Mary, Sue, Steve, Margie
Middle row: James, Andrew, Dad with Bob, Mom with Tim
On floor: Cathy with Paul, Tom, Michael
1968*

CHAPTER 11

“The Tales from...”

The Amazing Family Statistics

Can you imagine the monumental task involved in raising 17 children? I wrote this chapter to offer information about our family. I begin with cloth diapers.

64,600 cloth diapers were used and worn by the Gunther children from July 1, 1945 to the final potty training of the twins, Robert and Tim, sometime in 1970. You take the 17 children, times the average diaper time of 18 months, taking an average of seven diapers a day, more in the first nine months, fewer in the last nine months, gives a total of 9,180 days with 7 average diapers, equals 64,260 diaper changes and that's without Pamper disposables. That does not include the pounds of Desitin cream and baby powder that was smeared on and sprinkled on the baby's backside. A side note is that the diapers were rinsed out in the two toilets in our house. Then think of all the safety pins that were used to hold up these diapers, some had blue tops and others yellow tops, and still others had pink tops.

Then ponder the gallons of milk that was delivered through the baby bottles. I remember the big pot on the stove used for sterilizing all the parts of the bottles: the plastic nipples; the rings; the stoppers; and the bottles themselves. When we would remove the parts to put together the bottles, we would first add a small amount of Karo Syrup and then the milk to fill up the rest of the bottle. Finally, the milk would be tested for warmth on the inside of the elbow, before the baby was served.

101,000 wash machine and 101,000 dryer loads were done in 34 years to keep up the demand for clean clothes. Moving to

Granada Hills, my dad built a laundry box approximately 4 feet, by 4 feet, by 4 feet, for the dirty laundry. Mom would average 9 loads of wash and 9 loads of drying, six days a week to maintain equilibrium with the dirty laundry. The family lived in Granada Hills for 22 years, times 50 weeks (two weeks of vacation a year), times an average of 54 loads a week = 59,400 laundry and 59,400 drier cycles. Then, if we add the time we lived in Torrance, living there for 14 years would add 14 years times 50 weeks a year = 700 weeks times an average of 50 loads a week, adds up another 35,000 laundry washing and drying cycle.

28,392 meals served by our parents from 1945 to 1986, until they retired at that time. A total of 39 years, times 364 days a year = 14,196 days with 2 meals a day (sometimes all three meals during the summer vacation) = 28,392 meals. This does not take into account the tons of potatoes and bread that we devoured. During our time in Torrance, mom and dad began going to the Oroweat day old bakery store and bought 70 loaves of bread every two weeks which converts into 26 shopping trips to Oroweat store a year, times 70 loaves per stop = 1820 loaves a year for over 20 years = 36,400 loaves of bread. Then if you add Granada Hills at the same rate of bread consumption, that adds another 40,040 loaves of bread, which equals for bread consumption 76,440 loaves of bread, and that's not accounting for the hundreds of large jars of peanut butter and jelly, the hundreds of cans of tuna fish, or the vast numbers of jars of mayonnaise and pickles.

56,700 gallons of powdered mix was mixed at home. We averaged 12-15 quarts a day, some with dry lumps in the mixed container. Take that times 360 days = 5,400 quarts yearly times 42 = 226,800 quarts, divided by 4 = 56,700 gallons of milk, and that does not included the gallons of Kool-Aid, the times we were treated to whole milk and the occasional milk shakes from periodic trips to McDonalds or Clanceys for burger runs.

I can only imagine the pounds of chicken, fish, pork and beef that we consumed. To this day, I say facetiously, our family must have kept the major dry cereal companies in business during the raising of this family's children.

What cars do I you remember?

1950 black 4 door Ford sedan
1961 blue Ford station wagon
Green and white VW bus
Dodge van
Ford van
Honda and red citation
Caprice and Chevy Blazer
1992 Dodge van
Dodge club van

Finally, let's talk about mom's time pregnant. From early 1944 until April 1968, a total of 24 years, mom was pregnant a total of 11.9 years or an amazing total of 50% during her child rearing years.

CHAPTER 12

“The Tales from...”

Where they are now...

John and his wife Barbara live in Reno, Nevada. They have three children: Steve, Jim and Jacqui. Also, they have five grandchildren: Remi, Ryan, Jason, Tayo and Remi who live in Reno, Nevada. Barbara and John operate their own business, affiliated with the Nikken Wellness Company, out of their home.

Steve and his wife Marianne Gunther-Murphy live in the San Francisco Bay area. They have two daughters, Catherine and Christine. Steve is a service manager for the delivery of information technology for a group of hospitals, clinics and home health personnel. Marianne is a Marriage and Family Therapist, and she specializes in group therapy.

Don and his wife Sherry split their time between their homes in Houston, Texas and San Juan Capistrano, California. Don is the Senior Director of Safety for Continental Airlines and is a B-767 captain. His wife Sherry spends her time between their two homes and with her grandchildren. Don's children are Jennifer, Julie, Sarah and Ben. Their grandchildren are Kylie and Shyla.

Greg passed away in September, 2000.

Mary lives in Southern California. After 26 years with ABC Channel 7 Television in the On-Air Promotion Department, she took an early retirement. She is currently working as a vendor supervisor manager at a small medical and computer repair company. Mary has two children, Joshua and Deborah. She has three grandchildren: Zeev, Savannah and Hannah.

Rose lives with her husband Jace in Thousand Oaks, California. Rose is a 5th grade school teacher in Ventura County, and Jace is a Senior Manager for Supply Chain Management for

Raytheon Corporation. They have four children: Andrew, Patrick, Michael, and Megan. Andy is currently engaged to Caryn to be married next year.

Nancy and her husband Dave live in Northridge, California. Dave is a consultant/project manager for IBM, and Nancy runs the business office for a catholic church. They have three children; Matthew, Rachel, and Jessica.

Susan lives in Thousand Oaks, California and is employed for a physical therapy software company.

Margie lives in Las Vegas, Nevada and works at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas in the Dean's office doing all the budgets and accounting for 5 colleges within COS. She has two children: David and Deborah.

Jim lives in the Bay Area near San Francisco with Jamie Cherry. Jim is currently unemployed and Jamie works as Business Manager for Advent Back Office Services.

Cathy and her husband Phil live in Ventura County. Cathy is a CPA and Phil is a Dentist. They have three children: Stephanie, Jacqueline, and Jonathon.

Andrew and his wife Roxanne live in Santa Clarita, California. Andrew is in sales for a roof structure company and Roxanne is a stay at home mom. They have three children: Deborah, Rebekah and Josiah.

Tom lives in San Diego County and is a California Park Ranger at Heber Dunes. He raises three Shiloh German Shepherds and also a number of cats.

Michael and Steve Hopkins live near San Luis Obispo, California. They both own their own companies, one is Collaboration LLC (Business Growth Specialist) and California Coastal Real Estate. They are going to purchase a second home on the East Coast in the future.

Paul lives with Mom and the Dave and Nancy Gillen family in Northridge, California. He does attend workshop and loves everyone in the family.

Bob lives in Pasadena, California and is employed with Los Angeles County as a Hazmat Static Fireman. He is engaged to Samantha.

Tim lives with his wife Abby in Indiatlantic, Florida. Tim works as a technology consultant, helping businesses grow their operations. Abby is a stay at home mom and they have a son Ethan.

Dad passed away on April 1st, 1998 and left a big gap in the family.

Mom lives with Nancy and Dave in Northridge, California. She travels overseas and spends time in Las Vegas. She looks great, and to this day I have never seen a gray hair on her head and she is still the glue of this family.

CHAPTER 13

“The Tales from...”

Just when I thought that this book was finished, I found two emails from Dad with a few final thoughts about family and issues important to him. So it seems fitting that Dad should have the final word...

“I have to list some of the funny moments we had with the family:

1. Granada Hills- It was raining hard that day and I noticed in the front bathroom that the walls were wet. I went to the attic twice to inspect the roof but could not find the leak. I happened to get a smell of the leak and it was urine. Three of the boys were trying to see how high on the wall they could reach with their guns (the ones between their legs) they had in their hands.

2. Granada Hills- I've always had a lock on my bedroom door and went to bed early for obvious reasons and here a couple of the girls were knocking on the door – we know what you are doing – enjoy yourselves – we were. I wouldn't dare do that to my parents.

3. Torrance – One night in the process of love making our bed collapsed and we couldn't stop laughing. It was a big joke with our friends.

4. Torrance – Marianne went to a church meeting (a couple hundred people) and as she stood up her skirt dropped (she was pregnant) and she heard laughter and looked around at fingers pointing at her.

5. Torrance--We went camping and 10 miles on our way I realized that I forgot the money—wasn't funny at the time.

6. Chicago—We were at a wedding and the orange juice I was drinking was so good and I was thirsty—BINGO—I collapsed

on the table drunk- it had vodka in it. Hal (Marcy's husband) and a friend walked me around the block several times trying to revive me. They took me home and put me to bed. When Marcy brought the kids home I greeted them in a short undershirt only. Saying that I was an unfit father, I think Marcy was a little embarrassed. I couldn't understand why my knees were in such bad shape. They dragged me for 2 blocks.

7. Granada Hills – On my way to ABC one day I traveled 15 miles before I realized that I was on the wrong freeway.

8. Paso Robles – I used the ATM at the bank and Dave Gillen was with me. On the way back to the car I got in and said let's go. Dave was driving and his voice changed and I looked up – I'm in the wrong car. This woman and I had a good laugh and so did Dave watching me act this way.

9. Torrance – Grandma was babysitting so Marianne and I could go away for a few days. She made cookies for the kids and they locked her out of the house and finished eating all the cookies. They would call her to the front door and when she got there they would lock it and call her to the back door. This continued until Dot, the next door neighbor, demanded that they let her in. They broke a window and the children had damaged the fish tank. When we got home, Grandma picked up her suitcase and said I'll talk to you later. She never baby-sat the children again.

10. Granada Hills – I went to one of the bedrooms and found the AC outlet smoking. One of the boys showered it with urine.

11. Torrance— the family made a trip to Mount Wilson so the kids could play in the snow. After several hours we decided to head home so I had one of the kids make a head count and we started down the snowy mountain road. After 15 minutes of driving, Greg called out—Daddy-Daddy-Leave me alone I'm driving and have to be careful. 15 minutes later, I heard Daddy- Daddy—what is it I said. Are you mad at Donald – No- Well you left him behind. We turned around to pick up Donald. We asked him what he thought about us leaving – Well I thought you went for more food.

12. Paso Robles – My tennis partners (Marv-85, Bob – 72, Dick -75 and Myself- 70) just got finished with a long rally. None of us could remember who had served last – what was the score – or what game it was – can you believe it.

13. Paso Robles – I wanted John and Clara to see the book of memories that the kids made up for my 70th birthday, but they were not at home. The next day, I looked for it and I spent hours looking. Anyway, it seemed like a long time. I looked everywhere, even in the trash can that I had put out, not wanting to lose it. I found it in the TV cabinet and was really relieved. Next – will be a bracelet with my name, address, and phone number.

14 – Hollywood – I was on the way home one day and I see two people waving to me. They were pulled over to the curb so I knew they wanted a push as their car seemed to be stalled. I get in behind them and pushed for a hundred yards and they were frantically waving their hands. I stopped and approached the car. The lady hit me on the arm – Mr. – I didn't want a push- I was waving to my friend. You know – I was only trying to be helpful.

15. King's Canyon – I hear a voice from the sky and I looked up and there was Nancy (five years old) and she was 60 feet up in the tree. I was so nervous until she reached ground level. Bob did the same thing years later.

16. Crane Flats, Yosemite – We just finished breakfast and all of us left to go on a hike except Marianne. She wanted to clean up after breakfast. She heard a noise and there was a bear eating the left-over potatoes and the rest of the breakfast. She sat in the car until the bear finished his breakfast.

17. Big Sur – We ran out of money and food except we had two large cans of mashed potatoes and gravy. Don ate so much he got sick and none of us could eat mashed potatoes and gravy for a long time.

18. Big Sur – We were camping in a thick grove of trees – not much sunlight. Marianne – just washed the diapers and needed to get them in the sun. I found an open area and had one of the boys

climb the tree with a rope and secured it 40 feet up. Then found another tree 20 feet away and looped the rope around a branch and after lowering the line, I pinned the diapers to it, and then pulled the line 40 feet up in the air and had plenty of sunshine. The ranger went by in his truck and took a double take and couldn't believe his eyes. He said we were spoiling the scenery.

19. Chicago – Our family was staying at Grandma's Fritz's (I believe that we had two boys at that time). Marianne yelled to the boys that someone is on the back porch and I ran out trying to find the intruder, but could not see anyone! I got back to the house and all were laughing at me. It was for the benefit for the boys. It was St. Nicholas day and he left goodies at the door step for those who have been good all year.

20. Granada Hills – The families had a picnic at Northridge Park and I went to the car to get my tennis racket out of the truck. Before I realized it, I slammed the truck door down with my keys inside the trunk! Tom and I took the back seat out trying to get to keys inside the trunk, but no luck. We managed to get inside the car and I had Tom get his battery cables and he could not imagine what I intended to do. Luckily, the glove compartment was open, I had Tom connect one of the cables to the hot side of the battery and then I touched the other side of the cable to the wire I exposed, that I connected to the electric door opener. Presto – the trunk opened. I think I made a big impression on Tom on my capabilities. McGyver – He yelled.

21. King's Canyon – On one of our first camping trips to King's Canyon I had quite an experience with the Bears, It was later evening and I left a box of canned goods on the table. Before I realized it a bear proceeded to the table and bit into one cans (he was so quiet). I picked up a rock and being 15 feet away I hurled the rock and hit the bear. He charged at me and I was frozen – I could not move – he stopped in front of me – suddenly, he turned around and went back to the food. This time I went 50 feet away and made connection with another rock. He looked at me and charged again-

and again I couldn't make my legs go – I froze – this time when he saw that I didn't move (not that I didn't want to), he took off for the bushes. The ranger said I was crazy to take such a chance. The older boys decided to sleep in the middle of the tent that night, and left the little ones on the perimeter – just in case the bear came back.

22. Los Angeles – We were living with Grandma Fritz and one windy day I decided to clean out her garage. I found an old vest that I put on. I had many safety pins that I hung from my vest (two feet of pins hanging from the vest). A deck of girly cards that I put in the vest pocket – put on an old hat that I found in the garage – all in all I looked like a bum. Then I proceeded to burn the trash and lo and behold, the garage caught fire. I ran to the house and yelled for someone to call the fire department and by the time they got there the fire had a good start. All of the neighbors were there. The firemen were through, but I insisted that there was a possibility of a flare up. The firemen said ok buddy, it's your garage and they really tore into it. My Big mouth.”

Dear Barbara and John,

Sunday 30th, 1994 6:30 a.m., I find myself doing my usual walk in the tract of homes which is Country Oaks. The walk entails about a 2 mile distance and gives one time for meditation and prayer. Especially, with the change of seasons—the trees are changing its leaves to various, beautiful colors, and makes you appreciate life. Even trees have a time when they have to give up their leaves but do it in a majestic way. So, we too one day have to do the same.

I've lived such a full life but still contemplate the day when I give all this up. One cannot believe that this is the end. I hope that I'll have many years to come to enjoy the family. But when the time comes I expect to spend eternity with the **Almighty**. One should look

forward to this great occasion but it is the unknown that gives food for thought.

I feel that I have an immortality with the family I leave behind, even though I'm not here physically I'll be here as part of my family. I promise not to haunt you.

I want each and every one of you to know that I love you all deeply and only wish the best for you. I pray that you will keep in your hearts the memory of me---the good things. I pray that you will never forsake—never forget—never abandon **Christ**. I feel that I leave a little of something with each one of you and it will be for the betterment of yourself—of your soul.

This is not to sound as a sad letter but just a reminder to all that life does not go on forever. It would be nice when I'm gone that I could communicate with you all—say through a computer. You know, writing on the tube. Of course I don't think you would like that very much—I can hear you say not again—not again as Paul would say.

Paul—**God** love him. I know now there was a reason for him to live, to exist. He has given us so much to love—so much affection. Knowing him as we do today I don't know what we would do without him.

Time flies by so quickly that one does not have a chance to catch one's breath. As I look back at the last eight years in Paso Robles—it seems like yesterday when we first moved here.

The reason for this letter is in response to your letters, your cards, your show of love and affection. I feel that I wish to try and express myself as strongly as I can what you all mean to me.

I know Marianne feels as I do.

Affectionately Yours,

Dad.

THE END.