

My Lifescape

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When I first arrived in Reno in 1940 I was befriended by a most wonderful family. They have had enough tragedy to fill a soap opera but so much strength and love that it spilled over to the rest of the community. My dearest friend, Louise, was the youngest daughter and Maurya, her big sister. In order of age I was in the middle of the two of them.. Maurya was in Reno High School with me and brought me home to become attached to the family. Later, our children spent part of their summer vacations in Winnemucca with Maurya and her husband, Quiffy. Their five children traded visits in Reno with us.

It was Lou, who was still attending Northside Junior High, that I spent more time with and loved dearly to the very end. Tragically she died in her thirties, leaving her husband, Bill, and four beautiful children. Her life was slowly squeezed out by an unrelenting brain tumor that took not only her beauty but her dignity as well.

Only this month we received a phone call from Larry, Bill's son. We got two jolts. Maurya had died in Las Vegas and Bill was given only four weeks to live. We packed our suitcases and drove to San Lorenzo, where over the years we had spent so many happy days. We visited with Bill and his wife, Mary. Bill's body had puffed up from all the kemo therapy. He was dressed in loose white clothes and instead of shoes he had on a pair of fuzzy white sox. I told him he looked like an Easter Bunny. Bill tried to present his sturdy old self to us but the morphine he was taking couldn't stop his terrible pain. We went back to our motel pretty much knowing we might not ever be able to spend another day with our wonderful friend.



George with Betty Lou and Maurya.

Lou and Maurya's family home by today's standards was tiny. and with its miniature hot water heater very inconvenient for the seven people who

lived there. The living room had a large rectangular table which always had places for the soldiers who were stationed ten miles away at Stead Airbase. Many great smells came out of the kitchen, a miniscule space actually, but filled with memorable stews, meat loaves, soups, cakes and biscuits.

Our friend's mother, Patty was the center piece of this ensemble. She stood on a pair of lovely legs attached to a chubby body which made her unhappy when she had time to think about it. There wasn't much time with four children, a husband and his eighty plus father who occupied a large morris chair in the living room reading steadily but saying nary a word. However, he did tell Bill lots of great stories about growing up in Virginia City. Patty worked every day at the bank but , of course, that was only the tip of the ice burg compared with her duties at home.

Angels do exist, Patty is proof as she took in any and all of the miscellaneous friends and acquaintances her two daughters and two sons brought home. One outcome of her connection with the airbase was the use of the stables located there. Somehow it happened that the stables became available to Patty and by serendipity to her family and friends.

Some people love horses almost automatically. They don't even have to be exposed to them. Myself, I had no interest in horses and regarded them as creatures from another reality. Until I met Express. It was love at first sight. Express was an ex-circus horse, a thoroughbred with a magnificent body, the world's most beautiful brown eyes and two white hearts spaced on his forehead. He was five gated and to gallop on his back was to ride with the wind.



Betty on Express.

Tragically your first love sometimes brings with it your most embarrassing experience. Oh yes! Express was always to be ridden at the base with a full contingent of soldiers. So the occasion when the small forgetfulness of leaving the zipper on my levis open remains something that haunts me still. But my love for Express lives on through his pictures in my photo album along with a curled up hair from his gorgeous tail.

I had finally graduated from Reno High which was not a happy place for me as I was poor as a church mouse and knew not a soul. One of the

happiest times of my life was enrolling in the university. There were hundreds of people who had no cliques to surround them and were looking to make new friends just as I was. My job at the bank became the project that filled a third of my time. The rest being unevenly divided between classes, study and having fun. The wonderful thing about working in the addressograph department of the First National Bank was that it was a family affair. Patty reigned as the mother of the group. Maurya, Lou and some other girls just chimed in when needed.

My department was the stock room. I was the only employee and in charge of sending supplies out to every branch of the bank scattered in twelve cities in Nevada. It says something about the small size of Nevada in those years to think one girl working part time could supply forms to all the branches of the bank.

Mr. Thorburn, who was the head of both the addressograph department and the stock room as well as lots of interesting processes which took place up stairs in the head office, decided that wrestling large cardboard boxes of supplies was too strenuous for a mere girl. Although I had been doing it for several months and really with the aid of my trusty cart had no trouble. Unfortunately no one could ever accuse me of being a fragile flower. The person Mr. Thorburn picked out to be my helper was a sweet shy boy who was still in high school. He was over six feet tall, kind of gangely and very attractive. I remember asking him "Some people call you Bob and some call you Bud. What is your name anyway?" To which he answered "My name is George". Little did I know that would be the most important name in my life for over fifty years.

The basement of the bank was a combination of friendly and not so friendly atmospheres. You arrived there either in an elevator from the first floor or by steps leading from a hallway in the main area of the bank. At the foot of the stairs sat a red coke machine. I count this definitely friendly as I put lots of coins in it and the coke provided energy to keep me hard at the task of filling requisitions. Around the corner stretched a hallway along which were lined up the addressographs. These were Patty's department.

Then turning right at the center of the hall was my domain the stock room. This consisted of three rooms all lined with forms and stationery. But at the west end of the second room was the locked door to the unused basement. This basement was fine as long as I had company going into it but when I was alone it, to put it crudely, gave me the "willies". Especially after I saw the movie "The Uninvited", a very cerebral ghost story. The most terrifying scene showed the heroine alone walking into a room. She stood still and tense, seemingly startled at a fleeting feeling of unease. As

she watched a flower in a vase it drooped and died before her eyes.

Now there were no flowers in the basement but for some reason the scene played itself over in my head. Very few items were stored out there in the dark, mostly janitorial supplies. I was glad I seldom needed to unlock my door and make my way through the winding pathway to the closets and cupboards that lurked there.

The other member of the basement personnel in the bank was a well set up man of color - a dark brown color, Rayfield. He was always dressed in very unimpressive garb as his business was janitor. His working tools were stored in the basement so we shared the area. George and I became very friendly with Ray and he invited us and the other addressograph staff to his house for dinner. Ray was an operator. He had been a chauffeur for George Wingfield, who was the sort of unofficial prince of Reno. Ray had picked up ways to obtain things like beef steaks that were not plentiful during the war time rationing. Ray and his wife had lots of black friends and in addition to dinner we enjoyed listening to them perform lovely harmonious singing.

Mr Thorburn, my boss, quietly warned me that I was being too friendly with Ray because people like him might be inclined to misunderstand my friendship. I took this under advisement and forgot all about it. Until one day I had some reason to walk down Virginia Street with Ray. As we passed a group of sailors they looked at me with such expressions of disgust and loathing that I felt my face go red and my shoulders stiffen as though I'd been struck. Ray saw what was happening and excused himself and melted away. I was almost frightened. I still had great affection for Ray and talked to him about all my hopes and plans. But the memory of the visual beating I had received from the sailors remained.

One other incident awakened me to what black people had to endure because of their color. After I had taught school for one year I had a summer vacation with money coming in and three whole months to spend it. So I borrowed enough money for a round trip bus ticket around the country



Betty and her mother.

to see some of the cities I'd heard of and read about. One stop took place in the South. I got off the bus and headed for the nearest rest room in the bus station. As I stepped into the rest room all the women became silent and turned around to stare at me. They looked very shocked as though I had inadvertently walked into the mens' room. After I washed my hands and hurried out, I looked up at the the sign over the door and realized I had entered the black women's rest room.

.My years at the university were very happy ones. Just getting away from the overpowering feeling of not belonging that had been my main reaction to Reno High School. Anyhow I loved it on the campus and thought it was the most beautiful setting for an adventure. Excitement was all around me in the air and in the classrooms and halls. The teachers were so interesting and the people who surrounded me in the buildings were all new and different. My Mother and I were settled in a little apartment on Sierra Street , now buried under the freeway. We had no car so we walked everywhere and life was good. Our dear family friends lived directly east of us on Center Street, which was called much more poetically University Avenue.

My class schedue was pretty much oriented to fitting in with my job at the bank. My choice of classes was chosen with the idea of taking engineering classes and getting just enough training to go and capture one of the jobs that were available in war plants. They were begging for employees because most of the available man power was being used in the armed forces. Later I was part of a seminar where several of us who had attended the university during the war years were asked questions. One question was "How did I get into the engineering department, there were no women in it at the time?" I told them I had fulfilled all the prerequisites. I didn't ask anyone's permission I just stood in line and signed up for the classes. This plan didn't make it to fruition. Mercifully the war ended and a plentiful supply of young engineers appeared on the scene.

The classes were mostly filled with female students as the war had taken a good share of the male population. That did not mean the campus lacked the male element. The University was the training gound for the army and there were platoons of young men being readied to become engineers and pilots. Needless to say since these all were stationed on the campus in the dormitories there was a lot of interaction between the groups. There was a ritual during those years called rushing and girls were encouraged to join sororities. I joined the Gamma Phi Beta Sorority and made many good friends. There were a lot of socials and the men in uniform were invited to dances and parties at the sorority house. I met lots of people that way but I also kept up with my friendship with George even though he was still

in high school and not going to the university. If I did go to a show or out to eat with him I had to put up with being called a "cradle robber".

One bad spell took place when George had to go his senior prom. We all talked it over in the basement. We decided that Lou, who was going pretty steady with Bill, one of the army engineer trainees that I had introduced her to, should go with George. George hadn't found any special girl in high school. Looking back on it I can see why he might not have done so.. I took up a lot of his time and money, poor guy. Anyhow they went to the dance together. I was pretty much eaten up with jealousy even though I never thought of a future with George, believing that he would end up with someone his own age. At that point in my life three years seemed like huge block of time.

Bill kept up his friendship with Lou and enrolled at the university to finish his education. He took journalism and eventually become the editor of a paper in Oakland. Lou and Bill got married and I got to be the bridesmaid. When it become obvious that I wasn't going to be hired in a war plant I started to think about how I would support myself. During my Junior year my mother suddenly become ill and we were terrified. We had no insurance and a doctor had told us my mother needed an operation. I remember meeting with the doctor who was to do the surgery and telling him my mother was very superstitious and could he please not operate on her on Friday. Well the dear man did not operate on her on Friday but it didn't make any difference because she never made it out of the hospital.

I remember that time and I think I was in shock because it all kind of runs together. George, my dear friend, was at the hospital with me when I was told my mother had died. I remember getting very loud either I was laughing or crying and Sister Seraphine slapped my face to bring me out of it. Later she asked me if I would like to become a nun. I guess this seemed to her to be an answer for me as now I had no one. I thanked her for making such a suggestion to me but I told her I wanted to be a mother not a sister. Anyhow my father arrived on the scene and offered to pay for my room and board at the sorority house until I graduated.

Being the only female in the engineering department had its ups and downs. The up part was finding a friend with a car who



Betty's father.

picked me up for classes and returned me home. There were also some happy times spent at the "Wolf Den" watching him play the pin ball machines and having a coke.. I don't think the teacher liked having me in his class. He didn't do anything overt but I definitely got that unwanted feeling again. I guess I was the first female to sign up for classes in the department and was a pioneer without really thinking much about it.

Things moved along swimmingly until I hit differential calculus. The classes leading up to it were pretty simple and didn't interfere with my social plans but all good things must end. The professor took me aside and told me if I wouldn't keep up the homework I should go over to the home economics department where I belonged. This made me angry enough to march across the campus. I discovered there were so many lab classes in the home economics curriculum requiring hours of time that I would have to give up my job. Unfortunately the opportunity of Millinium Scholarships hadn't been invented. So I skipped home economics and settled on an English Major and a philosophy minor, no lab work required.

The future was coming up real fast with a pressing need to find meaningful employment. As I had graduated, I scrambled around and enrolled in education classes. At that time it was possible for a graduate to get enough classes by attending both sessions of summer school to earn an elementary teachers certificate. That summer was the most laid back time of my school life. I had resigned from my job at the bank. My father was paying for my room and I had saved enough to pay for books and tuition. I was living in Manzanita Hall, a beautiful old brick building situated near Manzanita Lake, one of the loveliest spots on the campus.. My room mate was a dear girl from high school and she didn't like to get up early so she gave me her "gow house" punch card to eat breakfast. Breakfast was my main meal with an occasional hamburger to fill in the gaps. The people who attended summer school were not the real serious types. The whole scene was ideal. It included a lot of swimming, going to movies and even being invited out to dance and have a drink in a night club.

Bobbie was in Reno to establish residence for her divorce. She was the most beautiful brunette I have ever seen complete with a flashing smile and a southern accent. We became fast friends and the summer went like the wind. Bobbie returned to Chevy Chase, Maryland and we kept in touch.

As soon as I completed summer school and got my certificate I got a job teaching junior high school English in Minden. The scenery there was breathtaking. The little hamlet rested beneath Jobs Peak and was surrounded by thriving ranches. The teachers were in demand as dates for

the ranchers and business men as the incoming females got married off pretty regularly. I picked out one of the ranches with a good looking rancher attached but it didn't work out.

Happily I found myself with an income and plenty of time to spend it as teachers got paid over the summer. I decided to take a teaching job in Las Vegas for the following year, as the pay was better. So borrowed enough money to buy a round trip Grayhound Bus ticket to all points East. I saw wonderful stuff on the way including Yellowstone Park and the president's faces on Mt. Rushmore. In Chicago I got tickets for my first big stage play "Oklahoma". My excitement was overwhelming I laughed and cried all through to the end. I had made friends with one of the Airforce cadets who had attended UNR. After I got registered into my hotel I called him and we saw some of the big city. Then I went on to Minneapolis and visited my friend Clare who had taught band in Minden. She took me to her folks' place on one of the Great Lakes. After that I went on to Niagra Falls, Boston and Cape Cod .

When I got to Washington, D.C. I looked up Bobbie who had returned to Chevy Chase, Maryland. We renewed our friendship and I followed her around happily for six months until she married her true love, Jack. I had resigned from my contract to teach in Las Vegas because I was just having the proverbial "too much fun" working in Washington and buying board and room with Bobbie's family. I couldn't really expect the family to put up with me forever after Bobbie left home. So I moved myself to downtown Washington which was called Foggy Bottom. It was near enough to my job at the Foreign Service Institute that I could walk to work. For about six months I lived in the various rooms that were abundant for government workers. Finally it dawned on me that I didn't like this life. I was lonely. I headed back to Reno.

George had gone into the Army while I was in Minden and I hadn't kept up with what he was doing. I reconnected with the Minden rancher but that fizzled out. Patty and her family picked me up as always and welcomed me to visit their home. I lived in the hallway of a house that had been divided into rooms for rent. All the rooms were occupied but they did have this empty hallway with a single bed so I rented it. George had returned to Reno after his eighteen months in the army and he too had renewed our mutual friendships. My engineering training, skimpy as it was, did get me a job with the Soil Conservation Service drawing maps. Their office was located on the top floor of Morrill Hall, which is the oldest building on the campus. This made it handy for George to see me as he lived in the Phi Sigma Cappa Fraternity house near the campus on University Avenue which is now called Center Street.

George and I proceeded to enjoy his college life. After a couple of months he asked me to marry him at a spot located just south of the Bartlet Ranch, called windy hill. Later whenever we drove past this spot we had to tell our children about the momentous question that was asked there. George had only eighteen months of G.I Bill to pay for his college tuition. That was used up so now he needed more cash to finish his college work. I hate to think this was the only reason he wanted to get married. George's mother convinced us that we would regret it if we got married in the registrars office of the court house. So we had some announcements printed to send to our nearest and dearest. George's mother and our friends arranged a wedding at the Phi Sig house. Our wedding pictures show the beer mugs on the Phi Sig mantle. For our honeymoon we stayed with George's sister, Mary Lou, and her family in San Fransisco. We saw all the beautiful sights there including listening to the Mills' Brothers at the top of the Fairmont Hotel. We still love to hear the Mills' Brothers they seem to sing just for us.



Wedding photo.

After a couple of months the university veterans and we got a trailer in the Street. This trailer was a real antique it had seen service in the army and was pretty primitive. We were lucky the bathrooms were right next to our trailer. Being newly weds we thought it was marvelously wonderful. A home came up very soon. We moved to the real housing, an old army barracks on the campus. Such luxury, two rooms with a kitchen and our own bathroom. I was in heaven. This lasted for two years during which I left the Soil Conservation Service and got a teaching job at Orvis Ring School.

Next George graduated with a degree in Range Management. He got a job and we were sent to Stanley, Idaho to take a salmon survey. This is a job you dream about. We were stationed in Upper Stanley in a motel where we

could listen to the radio for one hour each night. They had their own generator and I could only iron one hour on Saturday. I hated ironing anyway. We drove around meeting fisherman and asking questions and George filled out forms .

We met Jack who lived in a little shack at Sunbeam Dam and could catch salmon when no one else could. This meant tourists would pay him to take their pictures with the salmon, then they would give him the fish. Jack had a very traumatized childhood his father had murdered his mother right in front of him. He was a genius of sorts and had figured out how to break into laundromat machines. Instead of having him arrested the owner of the machines had provided him with a college education. He was very intelligent and interesting but he had little or no desire to be tied down to a five day forty hour work week. So he lived with his lovely wife and adorable son in a shack. When he got one of the large salmon we would pay the five dollars to have it smoked in the little store and we'd get some beer and have a feast. Believe me there is no better way to enjoy fish.

Every American family has a love affair with the automobile. Our family is no different. My first such affair took place during my months at summer school before I graduated. It was with a long green convertible driven by a dashing young fellow from Saint Mary's College. This turned out to be one of the "you have to kiss a few frogs before you meet the prince" situations.. Put him in the first row of frogs. Then one of the students from Fallon had an old hearse which he had painted pink. Never mind the driver the car was great. Lots of us coeds piled in and the fun just went on.

After I became part of my very own family, George and I bought our first car. It was a small green Chevy coupe of the year 1931. We bought it in 1949 so it had lived quite a life before we got it. I had been taking driving lessons while I worked at the Soil Conservation Service and just at the beginning of summer vacation I got my licence. It was kind of an ordeal by fire. As the very day I got the licence I drove up the two lane Highway Fifty to Lake Tahoe. Mike and Terry, the youngest of our dear family friends, were driving with with me to spend a few days with us. We were starting our summer job as fire watchers at Zephyr Cove lookout. The Chevy gave it her best effort but by the time we reached the summit and could pull over there was a string of cars about a mile long wanting to pass us.

The summer at Tahoe was beautiful. We had the most complete view of the whole lake. Our job was looking for fires and one of us had to be at the lookout at all times.. Friday night was our only time off together and we enjoyed every minute of it. We drove to the Cal Neva Club which was the place to see all the wonderful acts like "Spike Jones", "The Andrews

Sisters" and such. We let the valet park our Chevvy and thoroughly enjoyed our one beer apiece. We paid \$10.00 for the Chevvy and sold it for \$25.00. It was the only car we ever came out of without a loss.

The reason we sold the Chevvy was because it could never have made the trip to Stanley, Idaho for George's first job. We bought an old Pontiac coupe. It had a large comfortable back seat. That is where I spent a lot of my first pregnancy as we traveled up and down the the Salmon River taking the salmon surveys. Our daughter, Wendy, was born at the end of the summer without any trouble at all. In fact the doctor told me I was singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" while I was under anesthetic for the delivery.

At the end of the season George was sent to the Hagerman fish hatchery. There our daughter Wendy was born and George had one half of a day off every two weeks. We decided this was not the way we wanted to spend our lives so we packed up Wendy and all our possessions and returned to Reno. About this time we met Bruno and Edna, an unbelievably attractive couple. Their life stories entitle them to be poster children for the American Dream. They obligingly had their first two children two years apart and only one month after we had each of our first two. So we worked out a schedule and traded baby sitting for as many years as baby sitters were needed. Additionally, we formed a friendship that has lasted into our mutual old ages.



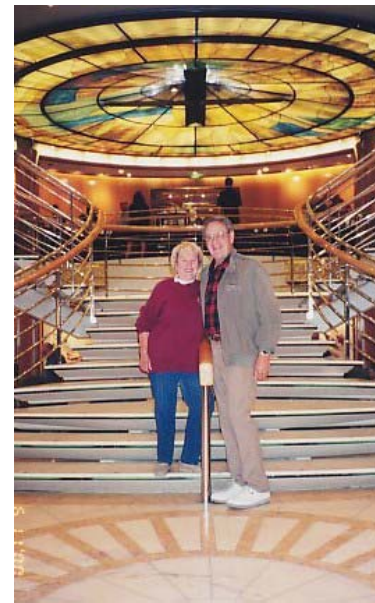
George's mother.

George divided his time between several kinds of work, mostly carpentering. George's mother loaned us a thousand dollars and we bought our lot on Comstock Drive. George planned to build our house himself but we ran into a snag. The Sierra Pacific Power Co. would not give us access to a power line until the outside shell of the house was completed. This meant George had to build our house with a hand saw. I believe our house is so well built it will be here when the rest of Reno has fallen to dust. We are still living here with the memories of our children

growing up. Our oldest daughter, Wendy, was only two years old when George finished the house and we moved in.

When Wendy was a baby and George was busy building our house Wendy and I drove around in a precious baby blue Studebaker convertible. It remains my favorite of all our cars. After a series of Ford station wagons we decided to try our luck with a brand new car. Our first car with that genuine new car smell. It was a magnificent, mellow red, Pontiac Station Wagon. It had two bench seats plus room in the back for the kids; we now had all three, Wendy, Wes and Joan; to roam around freely. There was even room for Bimbo our large, wonderful, black dog. That was the end of our colorful car romance. We deteriorated into a long series of little brown sedans. Much to the disgust of our children

Fitted in with our many blessings was the opportunity to see some of the wondrous places in this world. When our kids were small we saw mostly the camping places in nearby states. Later we reached out and saw New Orleans and from there the countries of the Carribean. We traveled to see the ruins in the jungles of Chichen Itza and hear the stories of the Mayans who built them. We also got to fly to Europe and see the London Bridge, Shakespeare's Home, the Eifle Tower, the Swiss Alps, and the unforgettable sights in Rome and Madrid. We ranged as far as Alaska to the North and China to the East with a stop in Hawaii. Hopefully our travels are not completed and we can look forward to seeing more wonders.



*George and Betty on
Alaska cruise.*

Mostly I was blessed to be able to stay at home with my family. Except for four years as a teacher after our three children, Wendy, Wes and Joan, got in school. Following that I worked part time for five years as the Program Director for the Y.W.C.A. A job I loved and was successful at until all the teachers I hired got taken into the just completed Community College faculty. Now I some of spend some of my time trying to be helpful to my favorite political party. George and I attend many of the senior dances in Reno, Sparks and Verdi. Occasionally we love taking the winding scenic mountain road up to the "Bucket of Blood" in Virginia City to listen and dance to the music of Comstock Cowboys. My fullfillment is to keep close contact with my children, their spouses and my grandchildren; and to improve my mind with my Lifescapes Class.