Title:

THE LOCO SQUATTERS;

MYSTERIES & MEMORIES

By: Mary L>W. Midden, D.M.

Jacket :

Chance played a part in finding this mystery. The rudiments began at our children’s Halloween Party. One mother recognized the barn as on from her grandfather’s favorite story. The first Land Grant was awarded to Delos Brown and was 3 counties large.Brown was a fraudulent horse thief and nearly caught but escaped. He told his wife to sell it all and follow him. She hated that he was caught! She discovered the grant had to be parceled to sell. It was too big. She did the legalities avoided incriminating herself. Her hate grew -not that he had been caught- he was a good cheater. She hated his being discovered. She cursed the Land Grant so that nobody would ever have joy there.

Her words rang true. The whole area seems plagued with woe. The Henry E. Midden farm got the worst - Demented Children that fought viciously. Henry was a miserly old goat that valued money in his hands. He assumed his son Charles’ family was worth slave wages, we ought to sign a legal agreement to that effect. The demands were outrageous. We held off signing. He evicted us to rent our house. The mailman had smelled a big rat at the Middens and saved us. Bob fell into his own trap and Old Mr. Midden’s plans came to ruins. The Delos Brown curse was just getting started. Mr. Midden found Bob intolerable so Bob married: Let a woman keep it neat. However the creepy demented lifestyle freaked her out and the fighting began; the house was ruined by their maniac boys. She lost constantly; with child number three she fought diabetes but lost. This was the curse at its very worst.

Back to the mailman and our eviction.

Once alerted the Town-ship helped. As I was packing for life on Highway #97 a beautiful car pulled in my drive. A stranger told me to stop! They had a ew lifestyle for us. He learned building houses and became a good contractor but while I kept God; Charles became his own God! The police were always on call for vandalism and hazards. He assumed his Demonic maniac act and kept it until he died. He was completely hated by the people who knew him, while others saw his business face. He treasured 5 books of letters telling him how wonderful he did their work. Yet the police knew things were amiss often. He had a great business face, Damned Curse ill such suffering.

The Loco Squatters;

Mystery of the land

By: Mary L. W. Midden, D.M.

One spring day I stopped in Waldrop Park. A short Native American came to stand by me. His garments were in greys even the fancy beadwork on his shirt. His hair was center parted and he wore three feathers In his hair. They were fastened with three beads, a turquoise, a white and a grey. He said the Tribe that used to be there was friendly. Some became addicted to Peyote and whisky and lost their minds. They were called Locos. As there was no controlling these Indians the tribe decided to move them. A sleeping brew was added to their whisky. When they were sound asleep, the tribe moved them by sledges and horses to a timber. This was a great area for their sustaining themselves. It had fruits and nuts, herbs, wildlife for hunting, mussels and mushrooms. Their teepees were setup but they could not leave without horses. The timber was about four miles west. It was good there. Later the Government moved the tribe to the Reservation. This was heartless and many of them died. It was named, The Trail Of Tears. But the Government did not know about the Locos and they were left behind. The Locos were all male so in time they all died. The Storyteller continued relating the lore of these spirits living on and wanting to have bodies and be alive again, especially attacking children.

His story made me ill at ease. He noticed and asked why. I was quite sure that my Father-n-law, Henry E. Midden now owned that timber. The Storyteller and I compared personalities of the family and yes, the owner was a cruel miser and the sons hated each other and screamed rather than speaking together. It was a big disappointment for me; I thought I was getting a wonderful family. I told him about happenings - just the things I knew about that happened on the farm and along West Jefferson Street. He listened and advised that we leave the farm. He said the Locos were entrenched. The actions of the men were proof of this. He listened to the deathly accidents that happened along West Jefferson Street and shook his head. They remain active; the children have been claimed from childhood. The Locos were living in them. The Storyteller’s advice was good but at the time there seemed no way to break the curse. Leaving the farm seemed impossible. My husband Charles wasted every penny of his army savings to make his dream appear. It had not. We could not pay utilities. Even after we had to sell our cows and bull he was blind to reality. He exposed a rude despot and this disposition ruined our lives in the home. Our pets were attacked by a fox and died. We were losing everything. Charles bought foolishly - toys he had wanted as a child then he demanded more children. We had no money for any of these things. He tended his brother’s stock. Bob did not work he was the gentleman farmer; his work was clean he was an electrician for Shoup. Charles showed demented behavior constantly. The Loco had him and I was frightened. He seldom returned to normal. By the time our children were all in grade school they completely hated their father, Charles. The six of them made a pact.

“OK we know we have these genes but we can choose not to use them. Let us vow to never raise our voices.” This was most difficult for The Magdalene; she had a loco and had to fight it down. But the kids chatted: “ Look even the guys who work for him -do you hear them talk about him? They stay for the good wages. He treats them like family! Poor guys. Mom was talking to a cop about the vandalism to the house.-What vandalism? The eggs for one - He fired that guy that came in Monday drunk and his family has been buggers ever since. They even hit Patrinellis’ car. Mom gets stuck doing the cleaning and dad has those front windows in so tight you can’t remove them to wash anything. She’s so darn good. Remember dad chewing mom out about calling the police about that wet TV that was on the porch? It was dripping wet and he was not using his head at all: Electricity and water! Dad thought it was a gift! He slam banged about it. Later mom checked to shut him up - they thought it was dry enough and plugged it in, It exploded and ruined the office. The policeman is at the burn unit! - And dad did not believe her. They have been notified so often they have our telephone number in red. We are not alone, kids; people that know dad do not like him. Oh he has letters from satisfied customers-yeah, that’s all feel good.” Hate to say it, but as soon as I can, I’ll get out of here."

Lives ruined

The good Doctor Sommer died in 1912. He left a goodly estate. The drugstore was sold and the money divided but Lula was the one who could have run the drugstore, but the laws were against them. Without income, Lula found work at a friend’s fur shop. She learned all the techniques for making the collars and fancy furs that the ladies wore. She often snickered, she owned some herself but now she never had the dresses to wear them. Woman got the right to vote but it was not big to her. It was to her cousin Hank, Frank’s older son. He gathered the ladies to the voting polls! He was proud of them. Hank was the kindest most outgoing person alive. He was devoted to helping others. The farm was a miserable place. There were always accidents and illness. One of his brothers was knocked off a peaceful horse and suddenly it stomped him to death!

1938 Stor closed, need to move

1938 the grocery store was caput. Henry E. Midden needed a home for his family. He sold the mansion and Julia Wochner had to face the change. At first they lived in one of his houses on West Cook Street, but with no store he looked to the farm. So Frank and Teresa Sommer’s family lived there; he would buy out Frank’s shares and evict them. Lula was forced to dig up all the receipts relating to the moneys that Dr. Sommer had shoveled out to his spendthrift sons and Mr. Midden went legal. The three brothers lost their shares in the farm. Frank and his family were paid off. They left the cursed area and their lives began looking up. The Middens moved in unsuspecting the craziness that awaited them. The Locos stayed. This was their stomping ground. They found new tenants to occupy. It took little time; the changes were obvious. The children became unruly. Mr. Midden said, “Boys will be boys.” This encouraged them to fight each other. Surprisingly their father said, “Good! They should learn to defend themselves.” Soon they were fighting hard, bloodying each other. The girls hung back to their mother but secretly sided with three of their brothers. They all hated the namesake, the brat, Junior the snitch. As the years passed the boys brutally fought until one was nearly unconscious and unable to move. They all hated Jr., their father’s namesake. He often got the worst of it and began hanging out at the gym to build his muscles. He discovered the brothers attacked him again if he snitched.

The only activity the boys shared peacefully was trapping. The traps were super dangerous and getting hurt would spoil the activity for everyone. There were mink, muskrat and raccoons. The boys learned to prepare them for gifts and for sale. The raccoon were edible but the others had a lingering odor. Many arrowheads were found so they knew Indians had lived in the timber. Nobody knew that the Indians were not of sound mind or that the spirits still roamed the area and searched for children to leap into so they could live again.

It was not enough that there were spirit phenomena plaguing the area but Mr. Henry E. Midden was no farmer and was too stubborn to ask the how when and where of doing things. Also he was filled with resentment that his life as a quality grocer had gone belly-up. He hated wearing a straw hat and blue jeans. So the new owner was not in love with his new line of business. He had made these great plans for his life and something always interfered. He loved visiting at the Second Street Mansion- he had his eye on it, He would marry Lula Sommer and then by law it would be his. Her mother was old, maybe she would die and then she would not be in the way. The First World War interfered. He was drafted. He kept the writing going and survived three of the worst battles. The horror changed him completely.Hewas unmarried so the changes were not evident yet. The government granted lands to the veterans but it was a sham offering sry rocky desert He had to work back home from that. Now he was not only greedy but became a miser. He must live sparsely, no sugar, no condiments no fancy foods. Oh he would partake when invited somewhere but otherwise it was not evident but sparseness was his new mantra. He returned a hero with medals and photos and all the local hoopla. In 1919 he married his monied lady, Lula Sommer and provided her with a life of hell.

The law of 1919 stated that the bride sign over all her property to the groom. This delighted him; he owned the Second Street mansion, and could imagine all the money in his hands when he sold it. There was a share in a farm - oh somewhere but that was tangled in litigation with her brothers In due time he would tackle getting that farm. More interference: His wonderful future was held up by Lula’s mother - that was her home. They had to lived there. But he was the man of the house and clamped down immediately. He fired all the help - even the handyman and forbid female gatherings. Women must do the women’s work! But these were ladies of social standing not scrub women. Now the mean hard beast showed its true ugliness. Women had no status; everything favored the man. People did not show their problems to the world that was a disgrace! These had been wealthy women so they would get little sympathy from the common people. Help agencies did not exist. They lived under an ogre’s thumb all their lives. Catholics with children did not dream of divorce that was going to hell first class! If things were discussed with the good pastor, they got a hand pat and told to obey their man aSelling the drugstore caused the ladies money problems. It had been their income. Lula had to get a job. Their friend hired her at his fur shop. She learned the trade.

Things were not legally settled about the farm. Frank continued as was. The three spendthrift sons had to learn to make their last drugstore provide a living for them. Their sick children suddenly all got well. Only Frank and his family on the farm were not in any change. Frank had a larger share of the estate because he was never refinanced by his father and farming was a poor hard life. Henry E. Midden cared not for pity-parties- he wanted Frank out and his greedy hands on the whole farm. It got legal with all those receipts and the three spendthrift brothers being in their minds - jilted of their future freebee. Mr. Henry Midden pushed Lula and their attorney and got got it all settled. Frank Sommer’s family was reimbursed with a free ticket out of the Loco-filled farm. The Henry E. Midden family had to pay for the privilege but he assumed the aire of winner! the money her brothers had fleeced from their father and then claimed those 3 shares. Her brother Frank had one share and lived on the farm because he knew he was not a businessman. Frank took his money and scouted the area. He chose a farm with a rather tight house in Riddle Hill. This removed them from the Land Grant Area by three lanes. They hit nothing but good and soon were debt free and liked by the neighbors. Even today everyone knows Frank Sommer’s Place.

But miser Midden reaped only a troublesome trap. The man became more controlling of his family’s futures. He adored his first son, his namesake. Henry Jr. was called Eddie to avoid confusion. Eddie got the attention and the best of everything. He received hate from his siblings. Mother and grandmother, mere women were helpless. They had become slaves in their own home. The children were attacked by the Locos and the family knew only fighting, screaming, accidents and death. Their mother and grandmother could only pray. Was it enough? The Delos Brown curse is strong and when it is unknown everyone seems to have gone lunatic. The farm bore no friend in Henry E. Midden. He hated being a farmer and acted like a zombie - living but dead in his heart and soul. As he looked at nothing; he did not see that his property was falling to shambles while he grasped that money in his hands.

Upkeep was not in his vocabulary. Beauty did not make money and money was his God and his goal. His wife planted flowers and saved seeds. Her daughter Louise had spells of light-headedness but she loved beauty and also kept the hollyhock seeds. She had her eye on a triangle of their land that had been cut off by the highway and the railway.. Louise sprinkled her seeds along that ten acre fence line. They were beautiful and seen by everyone. Drivers honked a thank you often. Her sister, Mary Margaret had a liver disease her bed faced those flowers across the road. Louise did it for her sister.

Mr. Henry E. Midden realized he needed workers to do the field work, cut the corn out of the grain crops and he needed workers that slopped the hogs and fed the cows and that. Who better than those two imperfect sons! They were not good to appear in the business world like his namesake. His son, Robert was husky he could lead the two others. Louis was certainly imperfect; he had an ear problem after a sun-stroke and Charles was imperfect; he did not pronounce his ‘L’s. They did all right in school but he would send them no farther than the law demanded. He decided they were likely mentally deficient. Yes, these two would be his workers. But neither son was mentally afflicted! Each had special talents in undeveloped fields. Charles could speak and understand French without ever taking a lesson. He worked with Louis. Louis was a mechanical tech and inventor He wrote for and received several patents. He sold one and had a nest egg. Charles assembled the new things and showed his mother. She was delighted with her two boys. This was not fitting their father’s agenda. For his children - it was no College. Louis was to be the one to slop hogs. Mr. Midden needed subordinates to do the dirty work. By refusing college the old man had his flunkies. His name-sake could never lower himself to being a farm hand but he had no college either. His mother financed him to an electrical class he wanted. Let her sell her old antiques. She was always wasting her money for those kids. She bought all those Christmas presents and now a school for my name-sake. The Locos were busy at this farm. Soon the deaths began.

The youngest sister had a liver disease, the mother had heart trouble and Louis was in a depression after he finished High School. Old Mr. Midden was neat, but he velieved in work. Work in huge billboard sized letters. Thee kids were looking for excuses to get out of WORK! He was a true miser and heartless. He avowed they were all avoiding their work responsibilities; “putting on for attention.” They were healthy farmers; they didn’t need college or doctors or amyy hospital. Doctors didn’t know anything, they were just taking money. No doctors and no hospitals. The work Ethic was deeply ingrained in Charles, the youngest son. His last period that year in High School was a study hall. He skipped it and walked home from Petersburg to work.

Often he arrived and joined the others in the field but two times he found his mother in a heart attack. He’d gather her in his arms and to the grey ’35 Ford and drove her to emergency. He faced his father’s wrath when he returned home. Charles saw true grief in the faces at the hospital and he came home so such a heartless father. But the demonic Locos were too busy to stop. Within weeks his youngest sister, Mary Margaret was painfully ill and she scream “HELP” when she saw him turn in the front gate. The others were haying and paid no attention. Charles carried her to the car put her in and locked it. His father heard the engine turn over and dashed up trying to jerk open the door but the young man kept driving out and zooming to town. Midden was yelling to stop this foolishness. But Charles was on the way. Mr. Midden would stop this! He jumped in the dump truck and followed them. They were already going down the hall with her, damned! He rushed after the gurney but was constantly thwarted by busy personnel. She was in the bed. He would get her out of it! He dragged at her arm but she was so frail, she thought he came to comfort her and called to him in her sweet little voice, “Father,” and died in this angry man’s grasping arms. But for a moment her word went to glory. This hit their father and he cried. He cried like nobody had ever seen him. Lula Sommer-Midden grieved into a fatal heart attack. Again Charles was the one to find his loved one. They got to the hospital but she died in his arms. Louis was in a deep depression over being appointed hog slopper. He could not live with that. And to see his adorable little sister ide and then his mother the depression was powerfully severe. His father said, “It’s just the dumps. He’ll get over it. He’ll be all right once he gets in the field and starts working.”

Louis had been a special joy to his mother. His little gismos were such out of this world fun! But this depression hit him at his High School Graduation. He needed college and his father refused. This made a future slopping hogs on the farm a life not worth living. Depression was not taken seriously then. People just got in the dumps but they got over it. Louis went out to the barn. The family thought he was working. When it was time for breakfast Charles went out to call him. Louis had hung himself in the old barn. Charles was super aggrieved. He had found them all - was he cursed? It did not feel like a blessing. These deaths were his father’s fault; every bit of it. Henry E. Midden was no father; he was a miserly excuse for a human being. Charles followed his father quietly upstairs. He was at his desk with his sock. Counting money for a funeral; the service and a cloth covered paper casket. A wake was another twenty dollars - forget that nobody knew him. But the old man was foiled. The whole school knew Louis. He had all these trick gadgets and displayed them for the kids in science class. He sold some - one to a big company! Some guys spent an over-night. In the morning, they went into the timber to flush rabbit and squirrel. Most of the guys just found vipers: rattlers you could hear but not copperheads or black snakes. Those last you’d take for a big fallen stick. We named the place Snake City. Gee, he was fun too.” The family was overwhelmed at the tremendous turn out for Louis. He was cute the girls all followed him. He was a brain! Lost because of … oh say it loud -because of that damned cheapskate father; such Loss.

If these words shook Mr. Henry E Midden no reaction was evident. At least he knew that his father was, he had him pegged. The man was filled with whatever devils were on this farm. So his dad had his future all planned for those two imperfect sons. They were his chief hog slopper and dairy farmer. Charles bought dairy stock so he was hooked; no problem there. But the dictates of the old man were not acceptabale. How could this chang? There didn’t seem to be a way. But Charles did not have to stay long. World War II was starting and taking men in the draft. Charles was called. Old Mr. Midden was in a panic. He had lost one of his planned farm help! Didn’t the army see this man was mentally deficient? He tried to stop it with a hardship case but it did not work. Bob was there. Supposedly, B**ob had a slow heartbeat.** The gentleman farmer had to move butt. Junior his namesake with his fancy electrical knowledge joined the army. He was in the Phillipine Islands stringing wires on telephone poles. His wonderful namesake was risking his life. Those two years off the farm would be the best thing for Charles. He witnessed how others spoke with each other and exchanged ideas. There was no bloody fighting and screaming. The generals even spoke in normal tones when giving orders. Something big was wrong at that farm. When he would return, he wanted to hear no more hell.

HERE

Fiancee mets Charles.

Charles truly wondered why God did not spare him. He had seen every one of his relatives die in his arms. He never got an answer. Charles left for service. Korea was heating up. As strange things happened: CHB, my first fiancee’ was on the same troop-ship as Charles J. Midden. They were in the same tornadoes and sick bays together. They became friends because their names were so similar. Charles Howard Brittin and I were a nice pair until a girl from a wealthy family wanted him. There was only the rabbit test - and it had not been taken because both parties must be present. She was wearing a full swing coat- the style then. The coat was convincing to these bank execs. Without proof she was taken seriously. CHB was given the ultimatum -We cannot have any scandal in this institution: marry her of you are fired! Her lies ruined our happy little lives. Believe me, girls this is not the way to get a man. We were engaged but no one heard that: it was all her and she hit the papers with their engagement notice the next day! Mother and I were leaving for church when I stopped a moment to look at the social section. Imagine my shock! My fiancée is engaged to another girl! My God,  *just saw him Saturday morning at the bank. All was OK then. I was woosite* . Mother said “Well he wasn’t good enough for you.” But mother did not want me to marry anyone; she had her money agenda. Church! He sermon was about true love conquers all. And I tried to hold my composure but the tears spilled down my cheeks. When mother noticed, she pulled away like I was an insulting piece of scum. Finally, I walked out. But the car was locked. I chatted with the other priest outside. Mother acted like I insulted her and would not speak even after we got home.

I went to the bank the next morning and to CHB’s window. I shivered and then said quietly, “Well congratulations, I guess.” He turned away and nearly heaved. His teller mate quickly explained the whole thing adding: .”Everybody’s against him and he is innocent.” I was so confused. I walked away and started my work routine for the day. Maybe this would clear up a bit later. When we realized we were not ready to marry and it looked hopeless otherwise, I began wakjung other ways so he would not see me on the streets.

We talked ourselves in as much consolation as possible but the whole thing changed my life. I was engaged to CHB; when I was visiting my pseudo-family the Pilchers. And after being ignored and rebuffed by Ares - he turns around and proposes! We were just there for each other; we had never dated just promised each other with a kiss. After nearly six years this romance was falling to nothing. His army term was up and he has no job -I am starting a good one and he proposes! This does not sound promising. I refuse. Have I lost my pseudo-Family? I had to refuse. CHB was really my style and Ares was a Greek God Playboy. That same weekend, this wealthy girl shows up at the bank after speakin with his parents lying to the parents and his bosses that CHB has to marry her because she is “in a family way”. Now I am out of both guys I love and and need to recup. Boss says no time off, I was feeling dreadful so I quit.

Leaving my office, I see Bill, Hugo and Harvey and realize this is my work family and I won’t be seeing them either. I tell Bill my personal life is in shambles and I quit my job and feel…” It breaks me and I collapse into Bill’s arms. It was a nervous breakdown - that little Dr. Kirlin diagnosed. Hugo locked the offices and Harvey got Bills’ big Buick. Bill carried me down to the car and Dr. Kirlin came too holding his little cup of water for me. Harvey began driving dast and wildly through town and then said, “Where am I going?” Bill rattled off my address and Harvey asked how Bill knew. Bill said I know where everyone in the building lives except the business college - they are not regulars. Harvey banged at the front door and Bill brought me inside and laid me on dad’s side of the bed. I was in and out of consciousness but once on the bed I was out.

*She said, “Well we didn’t know how long you’d be like that and so we took them to the bank and Piosstal* I stayed unconscious three and a half days. When I awoke only the little dog, Nellie was home. I pet her and we went outside into the garden. The Hydrangeas that my Grampa Jul gave dad were blooming bright blue. We walked about and a bonus tree in dad’s order was blooming. The flowers were off-white and looked like crushed mums. The neighbor recognized it as a Chaste Tree also known as a Monk’s Tree. She said it was unusual for this area and promptly told her friends. It became a site to visit. I felt a bit like an innocent child and learning new things. I may as well check the mail on the parlor table. There were two things: A letter from my pen pal’s mom asking me to visit. Her daughter, Jamie, was being unruly. This girl bounced from boy to boy and was not keeping with her music. A weekend in St. Louis sounded like fun Jamie was always light and slightly screwy. I d*ashed a note accepting and quickly caught the mailman for the day. The card was a last call for a job clerking at Allis- Chalmers .I set it on my small chest of drawers. That’s right I quit the Lab. Well that was good.*

Savings and they would not cash them out! The nerve, your own parents!” I was glad the rule my favor. Iwas silently angry:Money! That’s all I was to them. Well. I had it.

weekend lasted through University. .My parents missed the money and disowned me - I thought that was funny- the estate was a three room shack on the wrong side of town. I met Charles at a club potluck and we went to a square dance with Bob and my friend Catherine. We saw a movie and he left for overseas that night. He wrote and sent flowers big time, but I did not like him. Can’t *I was not on the street with deliveries where CHB could see me and get upset again. I feltOK*gettingover this nervous breakdown and the mess with all the people did not seem so important. This mess lost its punch; yes I was surviving. I thought I’d check the things in my cedar chest but was confused. My letters and savings items were not in order. Everything was there but untidy. I checked the shoe bag; my bank book was in the wrong pocket. Was mother glad to see my up and awake after this ordeal. Not at all. Her words were: “Those nice men said you quit your job. My heavens, what are we going to do? We need our money. Daddy needs a new hearing aid. You just go back there and get that job back!” I had the newspaper, they hired a young man to learn the trade and make the deliveries. I was just worth money to them, O.K.

*“You tell daddy to gather up all those five hearing aids that |I paid for and take them back.* They are all under warranty and should be attended to without cost. That goes for my buying materials to fix the house. It is not my house. My name is not on that title. And what about you’re nosing in the cedar chest? My money items are out of place. That is private and I resent it. While we are at it, something else you better get straight: My hard earned money is MINE! It is not your money. Your money is one third of my weekly earnings for room and board and a lard sandwich is not food. n her about the items and did not like her answer

dump a guy overseas - We wrote 2 years and I knew the weather and his work schedule only -oh and that hw wanted to be a dairy farmer…I thought gentleman farmer but it was not. I found out that dump farm was where he lived. It was unpainted, unloved, not repaired, not weeded, fence lines overgrown. The shabby buildings just held stuff or maybe the stuff was holding up the buildings. As my parents took little rides before dad went to work; when we drove that way nothing was ever moving. There might be a ’35 Ford on the drive but it too looked abandoned. We always thought the place was caught up in litegation. But it was just a strange bunch that became weird once you knew them. To the residents, the buildings had no historical value. History was just stories and stories were akin to entertainment. The Middens had no time for entertainment -their ethic was work! About the only pleasure they shared was about the big old barn. The family always wondered why the builders made big barn door on the Highway side. Old Mr. Midden found those were perfect for his weekly listing of available farm produce. He had his two handicapped boys paint them black - but be careful; there was a funny little bit of artwork in one corner and he liked that. He would not have if he knew what it was.I loved the library non-fiction. One time I was looking in the foreign languages and thee was a book of hobo sayings. I noticed the funny little artwork that was on the big old barn. It meant: “The lady is nice, but the man is hard.” They hit that right.

# HERE

Finally Charles realized we needed to buy coal and could not. He wondered what other farmhands were earning and checked the newspapers. Now he was curious and wrote his sister about the work in that area. Bad move. Julie telephoned her father so see what was going on with Charles. What was going on is that we were starving. His $100.00 wages were $150.00 under the normal going rate. Charles felt confident asking for $50.00. The greedy miser blew a gasket! Julie must drive up and from Florida and talk some sense into Charles. “I built them that new house!” True, stipulating - with no wage increase ever! Now that our family was hurting, Charles saw it! How stupid he had been. All he saw was that he could stay on the farm and be … It was dumb to accept that but he heard “Dairy Farmer” and they hooked him.

How did the new little house happen? We had two children but couldn’t afford school books and tuition for the Catholic School. My sweet friend, Joan Tumulty recently remarried and was living across the street. She said her husband was taking a test for policemen- why didn’t Charles? He took it on a blind run and scored 13th out of 15. He was in! He promptly bought a new car -I hear a big production and I am saying be cautious - car-pool. He had to have his own! He bought a Ford Fairlane. I remember the color was “Buckskin Tan” The sun hit it and it looked like peach. The names went in the paper. The Middens did their war hooping. The Farm was at risk. They needed their flunky. They all had clean jobs and wouldn’t dream of handling a poop scoop. The Middens decided their dad would build a house for Charles-if he refused it their dad would live in it. Every family member knew the red brick Summer Mansion old Dr. Sommer built in 1875 was standing without mortar. When this family “discussed” things the bricks actually shook. The walls were puffed wallpaper that was filled with mortar. They told Charles about the house and restrictions, but all he heard was: ”Dairy Farmer!” He would not have to drive the dump truck each day from West Cook Street -he’d be right there at the farm. I kept saying we need money not house with no more money. This was not better at all. His mean temper flared. He began slamming doors and hitting furniture so violently I feared he would kill me. If I could do some work in the music field but he had been against any higher education. I faced a roadblock. The angel said that in time all this will change… but this was not the time to spring my music education on him. Never was still the right time.

It always amazed me that both my parents and Charles held strict control over me. I could see it as a teenager but after legal age? When I wanted to spend a bit of my own earnings and stop the fleecing by my parents; I began leading two lives. It was self-preservation. I though Charles would be a helpful companion boy was I wrong swindled again…. Catholicity teaches to respect authority - Aaack! I led two lives at home and now I was doing it again. Mother, Helen ruled with an iron hand in a velvet glove. You did it her way! She insisted I wear pastels, petticoats and ruffles - Charles must have thought I would stay in the house and not talk to anyone or go anywhere-like those orders he barked before he slammed the door. What age of serfdom was he living in? I was worth more than that. But I was so startled I stood dumb, he pulled away and I cried like a child. This went on each morning and sometimes when he came home after work for three months. I told my angel that I did not understand what was happening or why, but it had to change.

The angel said that leaving was not the best for my spirit. I must toughen up. My family cried to get their way. “It won’t work with these Middens. First sponge the face to reduce redness and swelling. From this day, you will not cry -ever. “ My eyes felt strange. The tear ducts dried and closed. The angel was correct; I never cried again. I choked up now and then, but never cried. I do eel moist when an American flag is carried prone by bearers. This burst of temper is abnormal. I did witness that scene of screaming at the Red brick house - and the hired hand said I married into that and may have to take it, but he didn’t and he quit. I should have walked out with him. Charles is exhibiting these crazy traits. He doesn’t keep a conversation just screams this foolishness and runs out. This is no marriage, this is nonsense. I spoke with the neighbor, Mrs. Sweigert . She could do nothing of course, but at least someone knew things were not right. She was a good person and did watch over me. She kept an eye on her landlord that he not sneak in while I was downstairs or upstairs. He was sneaky and miserly.

Garments do not fit.

Is he protecting me from the outside world? ME! That is a laugh; I have lived circles around him. I think it is an abnormal control - a dumbing-down; can’t go anywhere, talk to anyone, and outrageous stuff like that. After our child was born - nothing fit. There was no way I would ever see my 21” waist again. I called in the Lemon girls and they took everything. Oh lands - now I have no evening gown! Oh I need one! Musicians come through and leave tickets at the radio station and they call me. Do I keep wearing maternity clothes? I had some crazy print for kitchen curtains. It had a bright turquoise background. I made a dress out of it. I wore the damned thing thirty-one years! Someone gave me twenty dollars. I knew it was to use this baby…but the gifters were out of State. I walked to town with the baby in the buggy - taking a chance leaving the house -don’t need Charles in a tantrum but he was on that farm. I avoided Rep. Bill Horsley’s office on 4th Street, maybe stop after- if all goes well. I was on my way to Westenbergers on 6th but saw a new fabric outlet store had opened on 5th. I found a very dark green silk shantung. I had a pattern that I could adapt into a fishtail gown. That would take a circle of fabric. I opened my pattern in the store, got out my tape measure and then made my determinations. . Wow this made the circle nearly 54 inches! Oh, the shantung was 54” great! It needed black net to make the fishtail flare, but more kind cloth for the edging. Net would tear up silk stockings in a flash. The Outlet sold by the bolt…there were 8 yards in this bolt, OK no problems there and the shantung was only $1.00 a yard. I was elated. My beautiful gown was less than ten dollars. I came back and stopped to see my friend, Bill. Good thing I did. He was having a problem with his daughter’s marimba. The thing was so heavy it was hurting his back. Iasked, does she date anyone? Oh yes, biggest guy on the football team… There’s your answer. He will be delighted…Nikki was delighted that her boyfriend was eager to help…after college, she married him. It was too lete to sew that afternoon but I was very pleased with myself and put dinner together. In a few days it was complete. My sngel told me to place it between my fur coat and my old swing coat. *It was never noticed.* Once The gown was finished and looked really good, I put it in the closet for “sometime”

Charles decided devils were on this farm and many were inside his father. Who might die next? . He cut the rope and let Louis’ body down carefully. Then went into tell the family the terrible news. He looked at his father’s reactions. It was as if a worker had died not his son. The others went to the barn, wailing and grieving, Louise was calling the sheriff but Charles watched and followed his father. The man went upstairs. He reached above the wardrobe and brought down a sock. He fondled this money, mumbled and sighed: “Another casket - cloth covered paper’s O.K. and no wake, not paying twenty dollars out for gawkers. Nobody knew an impaired hog slopper.” Charles had excellent hearing and these words popped his eyes open. His father was on the bed his mumbling sounded aggrivated. while counting outhis precious dollars. What am I going to do for the dirty farm worker without Louis? This leaves only one impaired and Bob. He is husky though. - Charles thought “One impaire!” Is that how he thought of his sons as impaire? Mother was truly an angel to put up with this monster.” She did not tolerate she was surviving.

The funeral- the wake- Henry E. Midden was only partially correct about their being gawkers to see the late son. He never knew Louis for the wondrous kid he was. He imagined a lesser person - Almost a non-identity nearly worthless to humankind. But Louis was a wonderful happy fellow who made these out of this world gismos and showed them to the science classes. He sold some and even sold one to a big company and it started a little nest-egg. His mother shared all his fun experiments but it was a secret from the greedy fathe;, he would grab everything! If mother wanted anything - it would appear for her. He was generous in many ways. The gawkers also knew that his father refused to send him to college and this was one person for whom college would have benefitted the world. The greediness of that wealthy father was well known and deplored. Sure his friends wondered how the body would look after the violent death. The whole school wondered and it had been national headlines because Louis was a prominent inventor. No wake! Who was that old man kidding. The city was inundated with international visitors. Locally all schools knew Louis and after the articles in the newspaper everybody knew about this wonder boy. When the siblings arrived at the funeral home they were greeted warmly but when the father walked in he was solidly jeered! That horrible monster valued his money more than human life. Mr. Midden was unaware that all these people were paying their respects to his son. He thought someone prominent was in the next area and all this was overflow. There were many groups of Sacred Heart Academy girls there because Louis had been as cute as he was popular. eaaaaaaaaart Academy girls, because Louis was as cute as he was popular.I did not need to go to the wake although I knew a cousin of his. When my mother, Helen worked at the unreal home, T waited there in the foyer and watched the pretty secretary use a voice recording machine. Often Mrs. Isobel Vancil would aske me to come see a child they had done. One little boy had an accident and his lower leg was cut from knee to ankle. His little white coffin was completely open. There was a beautiful net and lace veil over it and the child looked asleep and the leg showed no signs of trauma. Most of the children she took me to see were in a twin bed with lovely bedding and a comforter. They look like they were sleeping. So I did not need to wonder how the young inventor would look. He would look natural and peacefully asleep.

MOVE

they were finished having children. The laundrymay told me he knows when I leave because the dog barks constantly. I decided to snap jis little chain onto the handle. Bebe looked so upset at being home, that I snapped her cuain on the other side. Teddy was ready to go but Bebe stepped on the platform, lifted The Magdalene’s petticoats and laid down there. She could see everything, but nobody saw her. Off we went. Teddy started pulling the whole thing and we only halted at curbs. Often kind gentleman from the State House would lift the entourage’ up pr down curbs. Once a fellow was too close to the baby. Bebe smelled tobacco breath and peeked out barking in his face. He pulled back and when he saw this ferocious three pound Peke broke into laughter. “Are ther any more under there?” I laughed too and shook my head. The menagerie was fetching and we were allowed in every store. If we saw Mr. Horsley we stopped to visit. Bill always went into reverie and as usual I was his wife. He said my my cheetahs shrunk and turned white.

This is at Riddle hill -1962.

A lady that liked Charles to do repairs for her, visited with her kids at Halloween. The gorgeous lady was a dirt covered tramp and they all carried hobo sacks on sticks. It was but a few days and Charles was called to her tack room. She never said her “R”’s -“Challie come here. I am changing my wardrobe and I thing Mary is my size. Take my last year’s wardrobe for her. Whatever she doesn’t like she can give to someone.” Everything was top quality! I was in Heaven, but everything was dress-up and dry clean… I chose one dark gold and black weave dress to wear daily. At last that kitchen pringt dress could be set aside and then discarded. Some were college dresses from her daughter and large. I packed the car and went to visit my pseudo family. Judy just had a baby and was a bit weighty. She was thrilled with them. It was so pleasant having nice garments… the children thought dad bought them for me…

In the dead of winter we finally settled the waiting period for the house we bought aaat 2334 South Adelia St. The Senator was delighted to help with the paperwork as at last I would be back in Springfield and he could tell me all his troubles more easily than over a party line in the country. The house had loads of old fashioned flowers, daylilies, lily of the valler, English Ivy and paths of flagstone that never went anywhere - just stopped dead. There was a flagstone wall about 18” high at the alley and only half way across to the garage. A vehicle could enter carefully. There was a Wild Cherry tree buthald the area flooded after a rain and did not drain anywhere. It would freeze for hockey but was not smoothe enough for figure skating. One time it turned green. That did it.I did not need mold around. I knew how to make a dike - those classes were mandatory. One must take but seems like they will never be used. With a trowel I scooped the crock soil away from the wall and made a tunnel about 5 inches deep. It slanted towards the free end and deeper there, I turned the little tunnel into the alley. Now I got some pebble rock and heavy aluminum foil. First the foil then the pebbles and then I replaced the rocky soil. Here was my dike and it was invisible. But when it rained the water did the right thing and went into the alley where a few sewer outlets were. Perfection! Over the years the wall was removed but the dike remains. My husband used the area to park his construction vans and trucks. It is also where he was mugged in 1974 Thanksgiving Week. The neurosurgeons all said he was lucky; he could have been a vegetable instead he was just his Loco filled self; with a headful of pains.

That was the Thanksgiving my mother, Helen did a very stupid thing. The pains from the mugging hit Charles hard. He had just had a hole drilled in his head to release the fluid buildup from the mugging. There had been a report in the Police Beat column of the newspaper. He was down in bed groaning. Mother and dad came for Thanksgiving dinner and I fixed a tray for Charles. All the children were sitting at the table each at their place. Mother, Helen got on her high horse and was insulted that Charles did not come out and welcome her to the house. I explained but she made a big thing about being mortally insulted. The children were wild eyes at her behavior but said nothing. I could not believe she could be so crass and selfish. Then she really ruined her future with the children: She put on her impudent aire and said she would have no excuses! She would never step foot in this house again. She gathered herself out of her chair and said, “Come on Joe, we’re leaving.” Poor daddy he was befuddled. While she was grabbing her coat, I whispered to my daddy to come back later. He said, “OK.” Mother kept her word but daddy came back often . He said “I have to get things from the store a lot!” Mother had my daddy drive past our house a lot. She tried to see in the huse. The kids on the block knew the little green Nova and began following after it on their bikes. One time daddy slammed on his brakes and Phil was thrown over the handlebars and hurt. Dsd felt it was not nice being followed and would not pay to have the bike fixed. This boy was my son’s best friend! It did not set well. Derek rejected my dad. He would not even go to their house for Christmas Eve gifts opening. Some of those cold Midden genes had surfaced and I certainly understood my son’s feelings.

Gardening at 334.

When we moved here, the back-yard was forty by about forty. It resembled a forest with flagstone paths that went nowhere. There was a Black Walnut tree that the squirrels carried nuts from across the electric wires to next door. There they swung above a little terrier until she jumped up at them barking. Then they would drop the nut on her nose and hear her yip. Poor little Tricksy went through 15 summers of this abuse. We got rid of that messy Witch’s Black Walnut Tree but the squirrels just went to the convent grounds and got nuts from there. This place had too many trees including a Seedling Black Walnut along the neighbor’s drive. Charles removed young trees and the old orange day lilies. The ground was poor and even crabgrass would not grow. Charles and I planted and replanted grass seed and flower seeds but finally I went to bulbs: Narcissis, Species Tulips and Crocus. I used wire cloth over all the bulbs for safety. The squirrels attacked the crocus first flipping out the hardware cloth. They spread the crocus bulbs on the sidewalk. The nest day they replanted them all over the front yard They wanted to see it pretty too. I planted som blue hydarageas in the shody North, like my sweet grandfather had in St. Louis but they were greenhouse variey and would not bloom the next year without special attention. I gotmum-style begonia bulbs. T had them at the farm with Gloxinias but I would not buy gloxinina bulbs here and I had not found my magazines after the move. Those and Epesia were mail order stuff. I did have the Schultz fertilizer for the befonias though: seven drops to a gallon of water! Every three months. That is great stuff. Ace has it.

In 1983 we still had access to the Midden Timber then. Sadly the Estate was still not settled, Bob was the Executor and Junior found legal fault with him. The case was in Probate Court, the Honorable Judge Harvey Beam was presiding. I once knew Harvey Beam, He was just setting up practice and used Bill’s telephone. With Junior’s retained family of lawyers, the court was privy to a costly show for Junior’s benefit. With so much going for attorneys it looked like stones and plants were the only thing we would ever see out of that Estate. Bob was executor and greedy to siblings but generous to his friends.

We were able to do some target practice from the first timber and shooting at a small target we placed on the levee. I had read all those books and magazines about shooting when Ares was in the army and it all came back easily. I checked the Sun, the wind velocity, the trajectory and all kinds of neat stuff. Charles did not understand my method nor I his stiff stance then pounce and shoot method. He said I never aimed but just swung my gun back and forth and shot the target to smithereens. He was tired and stiff and I was invigorated. We had our shovel and brought a few clumps of wildflowers home. Those we knew were: False Solomon’s Seal, Bluebells, False Sage but that clump was a bit weedy. Later something in there dropped a few red opaque berries on the ground. I raked them in.One year several single green stalks shot up in that area and each had a single leaf thing open. It looked like a rack of elk horns and actually spectacular. I searched garden books -nothing. I checked with the Master Gardeners - nothing. When I was able to use the State Library freely, I read every gardening book they had and finally in a book of unusual plants would it be there? Once I opened the book I was prepared for disappointment because the first entry was a Coconut Palm. What was unusual about that! But as I had checked out the book I went through it and there was my myster plant. It was called a Green Devil, oh whoopee I would call it that myself…wait it was in the family of alums and it is poisonous from top to roots. The Green Devil was a member of the Alum family which includes the Jack In The Pulpit. It grows from a shallow planted bulb. Once established increases in size to about eight feet and establishes easily. It is grown for the spectacular rack of Elk-like horns on a single stalk. The small North area has moist soil year round. This plant loves this. It is so unusual, my sonMarshall says the bulbs sell for $13.00 a piece in Minnisota. So I gifted them here and there and took special careof this special plant.

Well it has taken over the little NNorth area. And I replanted the bulbs to a slightly dryer area in baack. And they agres and grew and found I was overrun with Green Devils so now I am yanking them out each spring and setting them to dry in the garage. I get them to Lincoln Memorial Gardens at the Lake and let them sell them for planting in the Gardens. I do like bright impatiens in that area. A neighbor gave me a weathered statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I used some patching cement and fixed the lady up. When she was dry I used outdoor garden paints to freshen her. Charles was not too pleased that the plants were called Green Devils. I did not like iteither. We are out on the name. I remember taking some to Sahron, but in the country the hogs chase snakes and eat them unless they escape into poor Sharon’s garden. She is terrified of all snakes and had developed a ighty hog caller’s scream. The green Devils seem to attract the snakes but She keeps them for the rack and had nice gifts of the bulbs. I told Charles the plants were protecting us from all the loco devils that may be with someone. He accepted that.

Flow this together

HERE

ecided devils were on this farm and many were inside his father. Who could be next? . He cut the rope and lte Louis’ body down carefully. Then went into tell the family the terrible news. He looked at his father’s reactions. It was as if a worker had died not his son. The others were at the barn or calling the sheriff but Charles watched his father. There was nothing human in him. The man money with a sigh. A casket,cloth covered paper would be good enough. Nobody knew a hog slopper. But he was definitely heartless. He went upstairs. He was on the bed mumbling softly while counting out

Is such a Holy person I am sure she doesn/t mind being surrounded with a few dozen Green Devils.

My dad had the worst luck with plants. Every Spring he would buy and plant things but they never succeeded. One year he bought a lovely Rhododendron and was planting it when I visited. Next I knew he was at my house with the pot. There was a one stem plant and he did not want to bother with it. The ground was too hard where it should go so I left it in the pot and dug a hole on the north side and sunk the whole thing for year. In the spring, the front yard had new concrete: A porch and tall white columns. The big Spirea and Rhubarb did not like the concrete and died. Only two small Azaleas were left. Their soil was acid. Here was the little Rhododendron. I acidified the rest of that area and then put the tiny Rhodie where the big Spirea had been. The hand me-down shared the area with other cast-offs. Across the front yard were all the castoffs: There was a Tangerine Artemesia that had a straggly growth pattern cuddling a Belgin miniature fir hidden by 5 self-started English Boxwood clipped from the plants of the Springfield Library dishes; the two white Azaleas an empty space then the little Rhodie. My father dropped by and laughed at it and then said his lovely one died. In hindsight, there was a Walnut tree on the other side of his fence. Ad they give off toxic gases, I think that might have been his problem. My castoff kept growing. The second year it had a fist-sized pink bloom. It developed a trunk and kept growing. Charles loved taking care of it. It was low to the ground. He would crawl under there with a five finger tool and loosen the soil carefully and spread cottonseed meal on it. It developed three large branches but it is soft wood. He duct taped the large heavy branches and it grew happily. It was the neighborhood showpiece. Strangers came to take wedding and graduation pictures in front of it. It was nine feet tall, twelve feet wide and six feet deep. The neighbor loved it so much she checked nurseries until she found that variety, She planted and fed like Charles did and it was three feet tall when Charles was diagnosed with cancer and familial epilepsy.

He kept with the plant for eight years after the diagnosis. As he became ill the plant began to fai a branch each two and a half years. The October he died - so did the Rhododendron. Our neighbor sold her huse and took her Rhodie with her. My younger son brought some perennial hibiscus and filled the space: A white with red eye; a pink on pink and a red. They are very good at starting from seed and bloom all summer. After blooming the seed pods are lovely in vases. My friend has some and a large tortoise. It is 39 years old now. She said it is great at gulping the fallen blossoms…I need a tortoise.

Our first trip to California

In 1983 the Henry E. Midden Estate was settled. Immediately he had to see Cosima and that grandson he loved. Little Jonathan loved Star Wars. Charles bought every character of it and packed it in a big suitcase for him. It is wonderful and then the little fellow looks at me and says:” Did you bring your gun?” He was with me in the car that night of the fight at the farm, saw me give my .25 to Charles, and that thankfully it jammed when he fired it. He saw the Sheriff and heard the discussions and we stayed to see Uncle Bob rehang the wall cabinets that he was taking. Young Bobby and Pat’s friends were there helping with the move. It was noisy and could have been a lethal night. We were glad the sheriff stayed. Now I wondered how much that child remembered!

Neither Cosima nor Charlie were working long enough to have free time so we saw them Saturdays and Sundays. Earlier we attended a Pen Women Conference and used a B&B; he liked it. Charles suggested we use a Bed and Breakfast. We were directed to one on Highland Avenue. The lady, Irene Treson would be home after five pm. We drove the few blocks. All houses had walls between them and fragrant Gardenia bushes in bloom. All thehouses were impressive and had older Rolls Royces or convertible sports cars in the circle drives. Our B&B looked like a clay box. There was a seedling pear tree and a row of blue lilies. Highland was a court with a row of tall palm trees along it.

We saw lights go on so we parked our rental compact on the street. A lady came out immediately and asked us to pull I into her drive the street was too busy. The drive would park 4 cars easily. The plain exterior hid a lot of beauty inside. She just got her 3 dogs from the groomers. The old brown Standard Poodle knew he was beautiful. Pierre’ stood like a very old king. Charles was cautious dogs never like him. She was very light hearted and said the dogs are harmless; the Jack Russels are just fast. They were a mother and daughter. Daughter was named Trouble and that’s what she caused. Yhey’ll show you to your room, and at that they skittered up a 1 ½ round stair case and into a large front bedroom with a ‘50’s bedroom set. Thry dniffed the luggage and then flit downstairs. We began hanging our good cloths but my dress needed a light press. I had a travel iron, It got warm and blew a fuse! I used what hear was in the iron had and then put it out of sight. There were no screams or yells, when a different circuit. We saw a few sites and spent a nice restful evening.

Breakfast was at eight and we came down to find Irene flustered. She wcouldn’t get her coffee maker to start. She said that the can opened did not work when she wanted to open the dog food but she thought the opener went bad. Charles said may I look aaat your breaker box? She did not have one, she had a fuse box and she led him to it. He opened it. “Oh yes, a fuse has blown. There are some new ones in a box here. This is fine. There you are all fixed.” She brightened.

“Listen the coffee maker is going! Oh, I am so greatful.”

I said, “No problem, he is a General Contractor.” Charles smiled. She wanted us to see certain unusual buildings and the Spanish district and food area across the way from there. Their Million Dollar Theatre was still lovely but fallen to Spanish movies and greasy hot foods. It was just a half block. She had to spend the day at the theater so we should use our car to go other places. We saw all these places ad their 1920’s etchings on the elevator doors and many cast iron rails and bannisters - The Ferguson building was memorable. We went past the Spanish wedding dress shop; so very ornate dresses and laces. Then it was on to the theater. Our had been Lincoln oriented; this was all California flowers. Ours had been scrumptious beside this but least it had not been razed. We stopped at the B&B and adjusted the shades in the west windows against the sun, and then were on our way.

That evening Irene’s head full of ideas for places we must see. These things were in view of the Big Hollywood sign. One was the Hollyhock House. She was docent there one day a week. I asked about her accent and she told us her story over coffee in the kitchen.

People have a way of reminding me of others that I knew in my Greek life. She reminded me of my Greek Mother. She was so bustling and talkative Always doing things for others. Irene had never married. She was engaged twice; to soldiers during WW2 but both were killed. The wedding gown that is on a manikin in my bedroom I got for the first man but after he was killed I liked the dress so kept it for the second one. Now it is just beautiful. You noticed all the travel maps in your bedroom. Those under glass on the blue table is where my two men were killed. I traveled to those places to feel near them. The other maps; I love cruises and travel this way: Unpack once and everything is handy from your trunk. I go mostly to be with other travelers especially at the mealtimes. They have interesting stories and then too the Captain’s dinner is always special dress-up time. They hire young men to dance with ladies that travel alone. It is perfectly safe and Dancing wears off those extra pounds.

One morning we heard about her childhood. She and her brother, Telly were Russian-Jewish refugees from WW 2. All the children she, Telly and her best friend all wore felt yellow stars sewed on their coats. But her mom was marrying an American. The felt stars were stripped off us and American Flags sewn on for me and Telly, but not for my friend. I had a bad feeling about this. I never saw her again. The Nazis were mean to the refugees but the little flags saved us. We traveled on a nice ship but it was bombed and we were taken on another vessel. Ah, time to leave. I will see you there. Irene was a docent for Hollihock House their Frank Lloyd Wright House. It had been a USO Club during the war and lost most built-ins and custom chairs. It made us realize what a reeasure the Lawrence Thomas House is. One morning Irene was telling us how to get to Mc Lawry House for refreshments. She was explaing that we passed under a certain mainbridge the then turn left immediately and then - Oh,, Get in my car, I’ll take you there. Irene’s car was a classic ’39 convertible Oldsmobile. She said it was rented often for movies.

It was a very centralized area. Highland refers to the hill at the Hollywood Bowl. One block east is the street where the houses are so cute each has an opening scene for a TV Sitcom. One Block west of Highland are the Tar Pits, a wonderful strange site. Oh, and there is the beanery we first stopped at for a Greek Salad while we waited for our first sight of Irene. This beanery was wallpapered with movie star photos all signed to the owner that he knew them when… . The ladies on the benches were starlets just out of the beauty salon their hair glistened and they assumed striking poses to be noticed. Across a wide junction was the Korean Community.

Cosima and Charlie took us to Century City. We saw all the fine stores and then took them to see our bed and breakfast. It looks like the worst looking building on the block but inside Charlie said (in 1983) at least a million and a half. It had two full ceiling stained glass windows. The one in the en was back lighted but the one in her bedroom was a skylight. Each piece of small furniture set in its own niche and was highlighted by a half oval of stained glass. There were Monterey style openings in several walls downstairs, the hall had three with shapely ironwork to ornament them; one into the dining room one intothe parlor and one into t The parlor had an open shelved storage area for a collection of Moser a pattern that had the large “A” on the center and an stylized shape dish…and she let those Russell Terrors run loose in there! Oh Saints preserve us! From our room the adjoining closet was an open Spanish balcony with a large colorful fringed shawl cast over it. Its window was covered with a curtain made of large flat shells. The shower/bath tiles wer difficult to coordinate for linens. Aqua blue and medium green. At my surprised look she admitted she had a time finding anything to go with it.

Jonathan wanted to go to the beach, I grabbed my long beach cover-up and Cosima grabbed a long dress. Our guys were splashing about five minutes but Charles got an awful burn. The other two were already brown. Only my one toe got it. I used vinegar right away but Charles had to have the best on the medical shelf - then others and again others with no relief. Finally I told him you’ve spent over sixty dollars being Mr. richy-rich, now try the vinegar. It worked. After our time with them we went back and bought some great Shoes at Johnson Murphy and an ultra-suede blazer for Charles and a leather belt and handbag for me -I wore that bag forever and still have it. He still has the shoes and blazer.

I had piles of red auburn hair and I knew how to dress it. That was one of my best features. We would see movie or TV stars and often they would come up to me and hug and and even kiss my cheek. Charles would step back a step in surprise. At times these people were just starting out, sometimes kids and now I did not recognize them. I never made any money on these but hey, a kiss on the cheek ain’t bad. There is nothing reserved about California. But these were Musicians on Convention and I was a spontaneous attraction. There was no need to feign Agnes Moorehead of the “Bewitched” show; it was me! I rather enjoyed being in public. My work kept me in the backgrounds but I did love looking good and stepping from a plane and hearing: “That’s not Agnes Moorehead -THAT’S Mrs. Midden!” I was a background person but well, if the stars saw me that was OK. It was someone mistaking me for Agnes Morehead of the Bewitched show. We went to California a few time after that and once Derek and Kim were with us. He was not expecting any such happening. One guy from a TV Series Derek watches was there and Derek asked him to take a picture with our family. He came over and saw me in a wheel chair sitting. He gathered me in his arms and said, “Oh, my God what a pleasure to meet you!” Well, that shocked Derek out of his hour but it was kinds fun. All I could think was what Franke Carl said: “This is the lady that makes the stars shine so I thanked him adding, I guess I still have the same old face. He scrunched his head into his shoulders and giggled before Derek could say anything. When the Star left I told Derek, “He probably thought I was Agnes Morehead.”

Even at these times, Charles never questioned my life before I met him. I kept the music secret to be married. I was 23 and there ws only one other girl still unmarried - oh, some divorced though even though they were Catholic! I don’t recommend keeping secrets. They do will out. If a guy can’t handle everything about you he does not belong in your life. Eventually, Charles learned about my degree and was he happy? Not a bit. Accused me of marrying him under false pretenses: That went both ways, I did not know he and his family were Loco Maniacs. Silence was not golden, but better than a Midden Tantrum. I was dead broke after I returned from overseas. My coffers were down seriously or I would have shot out of there and back to good people. He was more hard-nosed than ever. He put so many restrictions on me I detested th see that red-orange truck swing in the drive to pop check on me 5 times a day! I was breaking down again. Truly I began to wish and wish completely that someone had hit him harder in that ’74 mugging and freed me of the monster. He caught wind of my music affiliations when contemporary music was heading for the dumpsters in favor of Hard Metal Rock. Our people were dumped, there were suicides and “ heart attacks” learned about the music then the contemporary format was changing to Rock and all our musicians were in a bad place. That happens when you are trying to live two lives and please everybody. It does not work.

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but fought it because it ruined his control over a nobody woman.So I had a double life, don’t most of us? I did programs, lectured and sang. There were write-ups about me in the aper yet he would never come to one performance; he would not even hear me lector in church! He knew I did it all. Yet, he never heard me play, but all the kids learned music in our house. I sang but I helped musicians without playing an instrument. Often she would place her two forefingers to her lips in thought a moment and then came a word or a gesture and to see the musician, you’d think Heaven had opened. She did so much to youngsteers for free. put me where he thought a subordinate woman should be, dirt and never apologized, never changed his mind and was always right. As you see that philosophy had a huge hole in it. The insecure fool screamed like a maniac every morning and the laater he changed it to every afternoon after his cres came back aafter work. The last member drove off and the fault-finding craziness began. I was to go nowhere, speak to no one, know my place , he was master and etc. and then he would look for things to scream about even that a corner of a book was out of line or I was using the wron part of a spoon rest…Stupid but that voice was terrifying. Then he would search for the children to find something to complain about. what’sa wrong here; slam bang and maybe hit the boys. the door every morning for 56 years and 10 months. Two months I was out of the States or in an apartment, sick of him. …Often they had a sleepover at a chums house and come hom and say: Mother our place is not normal. And I would agree. All of us thought: “What’sa wrong? You are!”

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He never wondered how I came by free tickets to see great music stars or why they left the podium when they saw me and hugged and kissed. My specialty was finding that special something in a musician that would make them a star. My voice was three and a half octave. I was right beside Caterina Villiani! Once I sang with a car radio and he told me to shut up. I should have said, “Oh wait a minute, I forgot something. I must go in and find it. You go on home and do not come back. I quit.” Why did I take it? Marriage! That was not worth it. I should have found myself before marriage. I was too convent-trained and innocent.

I never sang for twenty years. Then I met Muriel Andersen. She became my older sister who talked a lot. We did things together, seeing operas, hearing recitals and concerts I joined a few Morning Etude groups and did a few programs in the area and lectured. But between then was harsh and sparse.

When Charles and I announced our engagement his family saw my address and the judgements began. Of the most comical was I had my eye on the farm; I was a gold-digger from the slums; I dressed too well;. Everyone assumed. They did not know I had a Swiss Bank Account and anyone could deposit into it. I dressed too well- -nobody asked they assumed. My parents were mum but plotted to keep me unmarried forever. I learned to be secretive - during my first 50 cent an hour job. I had a local bank book. I thought my things locked in my cedar chest were private. No way she found the key. Every time I saved fifty-five dollars they presented me with a bill for dad’s this or that saying; “You have the money pay it!” This was not fair; I gave them 1/3 of my wages each week and now they were digging into the live on a third and save a third. They needed my money. What did they do with theirs? They both worked better jobs than I did. So I learned well. I got a safety deposit box and kept the key on my keyring.

I

I was driven weekly to St. Louis to take singing lessons and spend the day with the Cartwrights while my parents shopped. Music was more serious than I thought with Mr. Cartwright. He wanted Jamie to be a good concert pianist. I interpreted her new pieces and the arrangements. Mom and dad were getting paid for bringing me each week. Jamie was boy-crazy and fun. I was in that arranged engagement with CHB when things started going haywire for us.I loved Ares family and so kept him as a fareiend - but he was a playboy so he was out. I think because he made dad important and honored. Both were no lovin’, no kissin’ and no dates just sort of well OK she’s mine now I can relax… CHB ‘s trouble began before I met him. He took a girl to his prom and she milked a crush for over 1 ½ years. His family moved and she lost contact; he was glad. But she found him and proceeded in the worst way possible. Wearing a full swing coat and lies to both his folks and his bosses that: She was ”in a family way” and wants him to do the right thing. Nobody counted to nine and the mess ruined his reputation and our happy little plans fell to nothing. She plastered the engagement notice immediately. I knew nothing of this, open the social section and discovered my fiancé is engaged to marry Sweet and Canterbury who own most of Cantral, IL. She had not approached him. They did; He denied everything but was ignored. He had joined the National Guardd thinking to get a college eduction but Korea was heating up and his unit was first by then he was so angry he thought he may as will lay the girl and she did get pregnant and then the truth was out but too late. He put it off until December but gve in so that they could all celebrate Christmas.

During those months we talked and consoled each other and tried to pull back, but it was too much for me and I asked my boss for some time off to recollect myself. He refused. I was failing so quit. I saw Representative Horsley, my special friend. I usually counseled him. This time I mumbled that my life was in chaos and I quit my job. He caught me and I did not fall onto the hard tile. He yelled: Harvy help me, my wife fainted. Harvey said, “That isn’t your wife, that’ss the girl from the lab.” But Bill was not deterred. Little Dr. Kirlin brought a tiny glass of water, Bill told him what I said. Dr. Kirlin said, “Oh dear, then she has had a nercous breakdown. We must get her home. She must rest completely for several days and then she will be all right.” I was in and out of consciousness. Bil l reached in his pocket and got his keys. Harvey, go get my car. Hugo take these keys and lock the offices. Dr. Kirlin come with us. Bill picked me up and carried me; Harvey had the car and everyone else got me in and all settled. “Bill said, “OK. Harvey drive.” … “Yes. Yes, but where am I going?” Bill gave him my address. In a moment Harvey askes, “How do you know her address?”… Bill says, “I know where everybody in the building lives - except the students at the Business College, they aren’t regulars.” Harvey banged on the screen door and Nellie Dog came to the door. He jumped but mother was right there and thelittle doctor started talking and leading the way to the bedroom. I was laid in Dada’s side of the bed and little Dr. Kirlin gave mother all the instructions that she must follow to the “T”, handed her the little glass of water and they all left. She did not know he was a dentist. I was out three and a half days.

When I wakened I felt good. I went outside with the dog and saw blossoms on the tree. Then inside, I thought to check the cedar chest and things were not in order but all there. I asked mother when she came home. She said,” Oh, you’re up. Well, we didn’t know how long you’d be like that and so we took those things to the banks and the Post Office and they refused to cash them to us- your own parents!” I was shaken. I never said a word. I just stared at them. That’s all I am to them -MONEY! And that’s is why I became ultra-protective of my secrets.

Sweet Little Pete

Evey Friday Dad drove us to the A & P on north 5th I made mother shop for 6 dollars worth of grocery . It was my room and board. That was the only way that woman would spend money on food. Each week I would stop at the meat counter and buy 5 slices of spiced ham for my sandwich each day when I was at the Lab. Quintin worked the produce area and taught me how to choose ripe fruit and veggies. I mentioned that Pete was such a happy person. Quintin said, yes, but do not cross him. I thought that was odd. But one day the bag boy and I were chatting over carrots, I had the neighbor kid’s Easter Bunny. We laughed, but Pete left his counter and said: “I warned you.” And then went back. The kid said, “Oh, I’m leaving in a bit. I got a job in my hometown, at the Farmersville Coal Mine. And I did not see the kid next week so figured he left. Then I talked to a big guy maned Harold who had a new girlfriend and we laughed about it. Next week I did not see Harold after that. Now, Harold was planning this jjob as a career. Why would he leave?

Nobody worked late. The store closed at nine pm. But one night a fellow that had some clout and checked if anything looked wrong went by and saw a light in the very back storage area. There was a shadow -someone was in there. He unlocked the side door and sneaked in quietly. He heard a machine whirring. It was the grinder. He peeked in and saw Pete. He was feeding a human arm into the grinder. There were other body parts and the watchful man was dumbfounded. He backed out of the building quietly, locked the door and called the police. They caught Pete.

He was not upset at all by being put in schackles. He said,, “Well you caught me well and good and I admit I did it. I killed him…. But if I am going to jail and prison for this one, you may was well know. This is not the first. This is the twenty-eigth.” The press were there having checked their scanners and His quotes were in the papers. Sweet Little Pete was a seria killer.

HOLD: IS WORK AT A-C

Not the good stuff, that was for spontaneous travel, room and board if necessary. but on the day to day job at Allis Chalmers. this from happening. Everybody found fault with it. I was wron of tracks for Rita and Eddie Junior. Charles was anathema to my parents. My work friend gave me the heave ho when the priest said she wasn’t Catholic enough -Greek Orthodox. I worked with men. I only knew men. I had all the ushers and stand-up men in the world but who the dickens will be my maid of honor: My sweet cousin that I seldom saw. So many things went wrong and all the parents were sour in the end. There had been so many red flags. I trusted everybody and should not have. Hindsight is good to kick yourself with. Here I was with five kids and a dingbat father-in-law that snatched the car keys and refused to let us take the kids to school. He can get in jail for that. A neighbor volunteered to take them.

God we needed food, but the miser sold everything but the culls.Pullet eggs are so iffy. Will there be a yolk or two or none? Will the tomatoes have seeds or worms sme with cherries. Those are the worst maggot in each one. It ended that I tossed all of them. In 1958 he gave me a box of jars of sweet pickles they were from his wife’s time - she died in 1946. I thanked him and opened the box. The pickles were black. I grew 150 tomato plants from seed. He took every one of them for his own garden and never offered us one tomato. When he went to town, I took a dish pan into the garden and filled it. Good God, now I was a thief. Maybe I was not immune to that old Mrs. Brown’s curse. My oldest daughter was already unruly and a screamer. She was so difficult. Had she been attacked by a Loco? Possibly, she never changed.

Money! Money in his hands was more important than family. Mr. Henry E. Midden had his attorney draw up a work agreement. Charles was a farmhand. The agreement was feudal. Serfs had it better. We talked to both my attorney friends, Mr. Tisckos and Rep. Bill Horsley. They set us straight as to the ramifications of this. Both forbid us to sign anything but you will be evicted and have to move. Each shook their head. He is even binding your children to him. What a medieval outrage. We held off signing and were served with an eviction notice. We contacted for other jobs even wrote his sister about their area. They talked with Old Mr. Midden and Bob a brother. Bob thought the agreement was a good idea… He was an electrician. Then Julie and her husband Norm drove to Springfield to tell us how good we had it. Meanwhile the postman checked on us with each new letter from that Attorney Hodges. He would sound encouraging. When I told him our Eviction date, His words changed from “I get around” to ,”Don’t you worry little lady; Everything’s set!” I smiled indulgently. Those were sweet thoughts.

The Loving Midden Family

Many things happen on farms, terrible accidents but this area is more prone than most. When I discovered Charles came from a large family I was thrilled. I thought it was like my pseudo family, the Pilchers. I expected to have a wonderful family of brothers and sisters but they were cold and judgmental. Was from the black side of town but I dressed nicely to meet them. I wore my fur coat( a honey muskrat) they decided I was a gold-digger and had my eye on the farm! I almost choked.

If anything I would prefer Charles have another job but he had cattle. Oh, that bleak place. Did they ever drive past that farm? It was awful. Then I find the siblings began despising each other by way of their father’s adoration of his first son, Junior. Soon they all fought each other. They had been raised hating each other. The mother was beaten if she tried to straighten their thinking. She did ok with the girls but the boys were crazed. This was strictly “in house” and never outside the red brick small mansion. They were not mentally deranged but were at the line. They presented pleasant face in business. I was luckless enough to marry into this very holy Catholic family. I came as a bride to the youngest son. There were 3 deaths in one year, he said. But the old saying was deaths come in threes. I blew it off. Up the road a farm wife was maimed in her own kitchen, and across the road two men met with serious strange accidents. You shiver and think everybody goes through rough stuff.

A Spooky Revelation

By chance we grew this large pumpkin. We were on the farm living in the 56 house; Bob had butchered and kept the bones in a couple caldrons. Monday they would go to the food locker to be cut and packaged. Party! Did you say Party! Bob was right there to make it fun, He bought dry ice for the caldrons of bones and set off an area for his displays. Those cow stalls were cleaned and the cut-out of Halloween devils set around and spotlighted. The cows were free outside the corrall but all watch from along the fence. Kurt our bull was very happy that something special was happening. He loved people and aside of his size 20# less that a ton) he was like a child. He nudged the door to his outside pen and was in and out looking everywhere. What perfect timing. We made a flier on Bob’s mimeograph with a map and stuff about the party. The kids were in The Magdalene’s and Marshall’s classes. We had no idea how many to expect so got the ice cream mixer and cookie baking going immediately. There were freezers in the triple garage. The guys staged a Halloween walk-through in the new barn. We asked the kids to wear play cloths cause they’d be going in a barn. The mothers were staying most did not know how far from town the farm was. Two mothers admitted the deciding factor on the invitation was wear play cloths…they did not own party dresses. Only a few mothers went to the barn. Thr others stayed chatted, ate cookies and got the recipes! Mrs. North entertained us with her Grandfather’s story about his stolen donkeys being sold illegally in our barn!

The children rode the hay frame from the barn to the hot bed where the pumpkin was in the garden. It did not turn orange but was greener than grass. The kids saw the huge pumpkin become a Jack O’Lantern and they clamored for seeds to take home. It was brought in like a Prince and sett on the table. Charles put several small flashlights in it and it glowed more wickedly than any orangeone could have. Wonderful! While they were gone Mrs North told us a story about our big old barn in front by the road. While everyone was eating ice crea and cookies, Mrs. North told her story for those who were in the barn.

The recipes I chose for the oatmeal cookies were just right: Raisin cinnamon and golden raisin, butterscotch . I had many dozen figuring we like them best. The children were in The Magdalene’s and Marshall’s classes. Bob and Charles stage the new barn for the spooky walk through, Bob was right there for a party! He got some dry ice and staged the caldrons of bones -a fire was simulated with red and yellow cloth and a fan. In the Midden stash of stuff were many decorations and sets of spooky devil paper dolls. Those were set on various hay bales near the back, they looked bigger and the and with a flood light. One mother had a story about our barn. She had the barest of essentials but just enough to make us curious. Her grandfather’s mules were stolen. Now these mules only worked together. and he discovered them for auction in our big old barn. Other farmers stopped to see the auction and found their missing horses and mules there. The auctioneer was dubbed a horse thief. And the Sheriff was called. He formed a posse and the auctioneer ran for his life. They hang horse thieves, ya know! He told his wife they were on to him - to sell everything and follow him to Mexico. Debbie did not have names other than her grandfather but the story did arouse our curiosity.

Our findings about Delos B. Brown

Being open to all history of the place my husband and I first asked his father and Bob if they knew who owned the land before the Wochners bought it. Bob said yes, he was going through Gramma Sommer- Midden’s old trunk of papers and the name was Delos B. Brown. His was the first Land Grant of the Government to anybody. We had a name and told Bob and Grampa Midden the story about the horse thief. They were not all fired interested but we were. I told Charles let’s try the archives building, There might be an old newspsper article about the events. We went to the State Archives. The articles were confusing. We deduced that the wife was angry that her shifty husband was caught! My friend Debbie Ross’s story was that the Sheriff and posse came but the horse thief ran for his life. He ordered his wife to sell everything quick. She was not ready for this. She was a plain country woman. Oh, she knew he was shifty but he was always good at it. This thing with stealing mules and horses; she was sure he bought all those. She didn’t like facing police-type authorities. She was as guilty as her husband and deathly afraid of being put in jail herself. She helped in her husband’s work. Now she discovered that the Land Grant was so large that it could not be sold unless the thing was cut down into several parcels. She must be careful and not get herself in jail for fraud. She got the land divided and sold but by this time she was doubly filled with rage and revenge. She did what women do - curse! When her stuff was packed on her wagon she started her hazardous journey. My God! A woman alone in uncharted, unsettled t erritory. There were Indians and robbers she might be taken hostage and tortured. She stopped the team. ”Damned those honest people. We had a great living. We built that Stagecoach stop, our homestead from that timber . It was going good. It was a good living. Then he was left withthose overworked horses from the stage and sold them for plow horses. That money was tempting. I got lace curtains with it! He was good to me. drove her team and her belongings to Mexico.

The curse

Goes here

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This is the storyteller

left behind her was overly potent. She had tears and muscles from the hard work of building that homestead. It was not going to be left for others to enjoy. She stopped at the west edge of her spread and wished no joys ever to anyone who lived on it. The area seemed joyless at every turn.

As farmers talk they realized there was a horse thief in the area. Seeing the barn spurred the granddaughter to tell the story of her grandpa’s mules at a Halloween Party there.. The sheriff was alerted. Soon Delos Brown was running for his life …history and the chance meeting of a Native American brough the Locos of the friendly tribe into the picture. How and where they were moved for the safety of the tribe. It was a lovely timber -the very one now owned by Old Mr. Henry Midden a grasping heartless miser. His family was affected by the spirits of the Loco Squatters and peace ended.The troubles never ended on the first Land Grant.

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The Area of the First Land Grant

Did you ever wonder about old farmsteads that you pass when you are driving? This is a story about the earliest land grant in Springfield, Illinois. The grant began at the edge of Springfield which was Walnut Street and Jefferson Street. It extended west past Bradforton on each side of the road to Petersburg, IL. It included Capitol and Gardiner Townships and ending around Stone Seed Company on Rte# 97 and went south on Bradforton Road to the first lane “Frassee’s Lane”. It did not cross that lane.

Now just across that dirt lane to the south, people lived happy pioneer lives. The opposite side that was part of the first Land Grant and this area seemed to get the worst of everything like it was plagued. This is how these differences came to be and why they exist to this day.

Delos Brown, First Grantee

The first land grantee was Unbeknownst to all was that he was a crafty businessman; overly crafty. Naturally he and his wife inspected their land and chose a spot for their homestead. They figured this was a good area for a stagecoach stop and would provide an income in the future. Between three and four miles was the distance a stage could travel. It was along the main dirt road to Petersburg and New Salem, Route #97 now. They planned their house to serve this venture. It would be double; half for them and half for guests. The barn was a necessity to provide fresh horses for the stage. The owned a timber beyond the good tillable acreage. Between them the Brown’s cut and stripped the trees and set up a crude saw to make planks and then when cured sawed into boards for all these building needs. The Browns planned and built a barn at the roadside. They added a granary and storage for hay, stalls for several horses, coaches and repair parts. The barn opened to the road so that the stages and horses could drive right inside and the travelers could disembark under cover. The Browns added a lean to the West and another to the East side of the barn. It was a massive building and easily remembered. The business was needed and it became a gathering place. Refreshments were available at the house. Mr. Brown found himself with several tired stagecoach horses and auctioned them off for plowing. This went well, so he bought work horses and mules to auction. But now he was tempted. Some farmers let their stock graze in open fields with nobody around. His wagon had high sides and he loaded a few and later sold them at auction. Now when farmers gather, they chat. One and then another mentioned that he had a horse or a pair of mules missing. Soon the unofficial word was out - there was a horse thief in the area and word got to the sheriff. Meanwhile Mr. Brown washed, brushed and at times dyed attractive markings on his ill-gotten animals. He lacquered their hooves black. They were eye-catching beasts. When they were auctioned even their owners did not recognize them. Delos Brown was not caught at thieving but by pure chance.

How the thief was discovered

Years passed; the Browns story fell lost in history until my friend, Debbie North, brought her child to the Midden Farm for a Halloween Party. Debbie was the grand-daughter of a man that was swindled by an auctioneer right IN THAT BIG OLD BARN! Debbie and I only saw each other at school function s or at Pen Women Club. She had never been to our house. She was to turn in the gate where a big old barn seemed to be falling onto the highway! When she saw the barn at the gate, she knew where she was! Her grandfather’s story popped into her head. Some mothers decided to stay and chat and eat oatmeal butterscotch cookies. Debbie is very vibrant and exploded with the story!

“My grandfather dropped by a sale that was held in that barn. There he found one of his mules being auctioned off. His pair of mules had been stolen from his farm! This was one and the other of the pair was still in the corral. Those two mules only worked together! Grandfather called the Sherriff and old Delos Brown got wind that the sheriff was rounding up a posse and coming to lynch him right there in that barn! He quickly told his wife to sell everything and join him. He was escaping to Mexico. She was very riled that her husband was caught.

This next is how I suppose Mrs. Brown handled things and her thoughts.

She was just a country woman and found herself deep into changing legal papers and yet not be jailed as an accomplice. The more she thought about the struggles they had building that homestead and living off this scrub weed land…the more she was filled with rage and hate. It was so huge an acreage that it had to be parceled into four pieces to sell. Mrs. Delos Brown was also aware of her future - traveling by wagon across country by herself and vulnerable to Indian Raids maybe death! She knew her husband was an under-handed gambler but he was good at it - until now. She tried to appear calm but deep inside her rage for revenge was growing. This great story really made our Halloween Party a success! I was unhappy that our giant pumpkin had not turned orange. We had this big dark green pumpkin on the table. But Charles had cut faces on each side. When the kids came up from the barn they were loaded with scary stories. Sets of witch-like paper dolls had appeared real in their hay-bail background. Dry ice made the caldrons of bones look real in the lantern light. He had taken them around the back and through the corral. Kurt the almost ton bull was thrilled at the little people and followed them by moving about his pen and came inside when they did. His huge face filled the area beside his alfalfa trough. The children had no idea that this huge animal had a heart of gold and love and he terrified them just walking about his pen. The twelve cows and young stock were free and were in the timber until they saw activity and then they came to watch along the corral fencing. City children had never seen bovines.

The mothers ate butterscotch, golden raisin, oatmeal cookies by the dozen while the kids were duly frightened in the barn. and were bursting with stories. Debbie North was encouraged to retell her story about the old barn scandals. Our huge pumpkin was lighted and the faces glowed a pale yellow making it spookier that if it had been orange. The kids loved it, the mothers and adults loved it. This was a party to remember.

After hearing the story about Delos Brown, my husband and I began our search at the State Library and checked old newspapers. There it was in the Illinois State Journal-Register, the same newspaper and style headings that we see in today’s paper. The newspaper reported that the posse said they hung him in the barn, but this was not so. It was hearsay to make the posse look good. The follow-up article read that Delos Brown got away on a white horse stolen from a nearby farm.

Mrs. Delos Brown was filled with rage; her life was ruined by these awful people accusing her fine husband of stealing their mules and horses. She was certain he bought them, well, hadn’t he? No he had not. She set about selling the place. Their land grant had been extremely large and had to be divided in order to sell it. Had this involved only one trip to the courts and lawyers perhaps Mrs. Brown would have been less secretly volatile. But with these divisions it hurt terribly. Mrs. Delos Brown saw the loss of all their work gone and to be fined and face the shame! And the future was terrifying to contemplate. To join her husband she must cross unsettled territory, alone. Damned, Damned, Damned! She had made it a great farm and now this! Pity-party stage was past, revengews in the planning. Her words would assure that no others would be happy on this land. She drove her supply wagon to the western edge and stopped. She stood and faced her beloved homestead and lifted her right hand. Her voice was steady, angry and serious and intense:

THE CURSE

*“I leave this a cursed place. The earth and soil will be fallow and happiness shall never see the light of day on any of it. This land will know death and destruction at every turn. Let these words ring in your ears! This is my curse and it can never be lifted. I leave here cursing the farmland and everyone who ever lived in it.” She sat down on her wagon seat and shouted a call to her horses. She drove the wagon away and never looked back.*

The Wochner Family

Over the years the large barn continued as a Stagecoach stop. It was run by the people who bought that parcel. The Wochner family Salisbury and needed a better spread. Their friend Abe Lincoln was still starting out and walked everywhere. They looked into his find and bought that parcel. It went well enough. The family consisted of parents, a son and three lovely daughters. One girl helped in the house while the other two tended the travelers. Their father caught the flu, a deadly thing in those days. His fever soared. They sent for the doctor by messenger. Doctor Louis Francis Xavier Sommer was an older man but single and pleasant. He arrived in his buggy. There he realized the patient was ill beyond his help. But when he saw Julia the youngest daughter he was smitten. Julia was equally smitten. This was his miracle! She was from a German family and could speak this native tongue. She was beautiful and she loved him! Now he had feeling that had never risen in him before, about Julia’s safety. She worked in the double house tending travelers - actually strangers. Their father passed and now there were four women on this farm. He spoke with the Widow Wochner and bought the farm. Now he and Julia needed a real house of red brick. Besides, women should do women’s work. He hired useful men to operate the Stagecoach area the bed and breakfast business with so many strangers traveling. Julia and he married, he built a mansion of red brick back a bit for them and made the driveway in a large circle. When the mansion ws finished he had the double house moved to a place away from the road. It was placed so that the stagecoach could enter the drive to the double house and all could disembark under cover. Then the stage could be driven to the barn. They hired men who handled the horses. This was fin until Julia and he had their first baby. Julia and the bay needed city care . He bought a lot on South Second sStreet and fashioned a red brick mansion there for them. The one on the frm would be a summer place. Julia felt the brick was dark because the Lawler’s big mansion next door was blocking all the light. She suggested they paint the place white. White it stayed until the fifties when AFSCAME bought it for larger quarters.

On the farm, the big barn was hit by lightning repeatedly. It leaned north a bit more. The family had it straightened but in the 1950 a doozy of a tornado hit it so hard that even the huge uprights leaned northward so much that the barn was ready to claim Highway #97. In 1981 a small windstorm toppled the barn which was housing six of Bob’s cows were in it. Three escaped. This added to Bob’s woes. He was executor of the Estate. It was in Probate for settlement because moneys were used incorrectly. And it was discovered. The executor was replaced. There was no sibling-love, they had been raised hating each other. Yet, like Delos Brown, in undoing others he undid his own interests too. The Spring Creek flooded at its lowest point - this was at the area of the first land grant now called Veteran’s Parkway and Jefferson Street. A bridge was constructed over this but high winds knocked trees across the electric wires and power went out along the road to the Elevator and residents of Bradforton. It happened often: The residents kept peanut butter and jelly on hand for these times.

Oh, what could possibly happen to be considered a curse? Across the road south lies Shymansky’s Magic Acre. The place burned twice within three years. Where it lies it rounds a corner in such a way that vehicles ram into it repeatedly. One small business there is “Custard’s Last Stand” They keep praying that the cars keep missing them. The restaurant and gas station usually get hit. There are businesses that keep failing right by the intersection, One had a few fires and the fashionable Couture looked substantial and the garments were for dress-up occasions. The basement had animated people for Christmas and Easter. It had a few fires. Only the florist seems to hold on there. There were fires in it but they rebuilt. Just past their driveway is a small grassy cliff-like fall off. Some people built a house there because it is a gorgeous view but the Cliff was struck by lightning and fell off; the house went tumbling after. The next was a couple on the South side also. To lover’s at night Hazlet Lane looks like it ought to continue straight across the junction south. The glare of car lights on the house windows obscure the house and it is constantly rebuilt. It burned twice. Across the road is a nasty Junction to left turn onto the road because #97 dips on each side. Two women have been killed there trying to make a left turn to town. There is a school down that lane - kids rather get chiggers and mosquito bites while going home through the fields that risk the shoulder of #97. Oh, come on; you’re blaming this stuff on a curse? Yep, if you are skeptical keep reading.

The first farm family is next to the little house but along the road maybe three blocks. They have a horrible entrance due to that cliff area. The land dips-rises and the Schlichts have a big gate. They had two sons. The youngest jumped or fell into a hay pile from their red barn. He fell onto a pitchfork and paralyzed. This boy survived by way of his interest in mechanics. He adapted all the equipment he needed to work with his afflictions. The older boy suffered respiratory problems but married and settled a homestead. He was returning the tractor at the end of the day’s work to the shed on his parents’ farm. The Land at the gate had a big dip. It was very rough. He jumped pff the tractor, opened the gate but behind him the tractor slipped into neutral and rolled over him and up the other side. Before he could move away the tractor rolled back down and hit him again. He wore a body cast for a whole year. He was fine until his son needed help and he hurt a leg helping. It did not mend correctly and he was faced with the news of an amputation.. They found he had taken his life by hanging the following morning.

The Midden Family knew this area had been the much sought after historical Stagecoach Stop, but were hamstrung; the farm belonged to the miserly Henry E. Midden, Sr. There are costs involved in setting up and maintaining a historical site. It must be attractive and accessible to the public. This was not to be with old Mr. Midden. He had the money, lordy how he had money but he wanted it grasped in his fist! The farm was so pitiful; that from Highway#97 it looked abandoned. The Farm lay where #97 has a slight turn. People miss the turn and visit our front pasture/orchard. The Bartlett Pear has been hit many times. That wood is dense! Sometimes they hit the fencing east of the barn go all the way through three acres and one hit the elevated tank for tractor gas. No-one ever hit the barn - the weather takes care of that. Also that is the drop-off place for unwanted puppies and kittens. Bob Midden is fast with a rifle but we changed that for the better. Old Mr. Henry Midden always posted his available farm products on the blackboard there. Being extremely miserly he had no feelings for beggars and cjased them off. I noticed a funny mark on the barn. There was a book at the library and sure enough it was a book of Hobo’s Marks. It meant: Lady is nice but man is hard. It must have been there a while. His Mrs. Midden died in ’46. Reputations last.

Our investigation.

After Debbie North’s account of her grandfather’s mules, we checked the old newspapers at the State Library to see if anything might be in print. Yes, there were two sparse articles.

The local newspaper of that time was still active; The Illinois State Journal-Register. Their article reported: “The Delos Brown farm was bought by the Owen Rourke and the Wochner families. Mrs. Brown’s husband instructed her to sell it quickly and join him in Mexico as he fled for his life. The second entry mentioned that a man fitting Brown’s description was seen stealing a white horse and fleeing in that westerly direction.”

Mrs. Delos Brown hated that her husband’s underhanded activities were discovered. It was discovered that Delos Brown stole farm animals and then sold them at his auctions! How quickly had all their land improvements and life style come crashing down. How quickly their empire collapsed and he was fleeing for his life to Mexico. Mrs. Brown curse still harbors the effects. This unreasonable vengeance has since plagued every family that lived on any part of that first land grant. Especially children were affected. There was continual lack of peace and whopping expenses, unusual fatal accidents, incurable illnesses even suicides. These things repeated in every family that lived there.

Dr. Francis Xavier Sommer came into the family after he was settled in Springfield and was well along in his practice. He was an older man from Brackel, Westphalia, Prussia. He did not want to serve as a field doctor in the Kaiser’s war. To escape conscription, he left Hamburg Harbor in dark of night taking passage on whichever ship was headed to America. The ship traveled a rough route. It rounded the Florida Swamps and then landed in New Orleans. From there he took a steamboat north to St. Louis, Mo. The family story relates that he walked to Springfield, carrying his shoes - to save them and thus make a good impression on the people who would be his new neighbors and patients. He rented a room at the City Hotel and bought a corner lot across the street. When his wood and bricks arrived he found willing laborers and worked beside them digging the basement and laying the bricks. When the building was complete he ordered his furnishings from St. Louis and medical supplies directly from his old home city, Brackel, West Phalia. As the building was several storied tall, one floor was for storage and another for his personal apartments. The rest he rented out. The town needed a new drugstore and his methods were up to date. He had plenty of business from the tavern across the street. It was a place no ladies ever entered.

A message was brought to him that he was needed on the Wochner Farm. The ill Mr. Wochner had a fever and flu too far advanced for the day’s medicine. He did his best but the end was unhappy. The new widow had three girls who must manage the stagecoach stop and travelers. He checked on them to see how they were managing but he felt impelled to help them because he had been bitten by a love bug! His eye was on the youngest daughter, Julia. When she responded they courted and married. Julia was 30 year’s younger than him; was high school educated; adept in business procedures and learner quickly to mix his prescriptions and became a skilled pharmacist. He loved her dearly. She was the miracle he thought was only a pipedream. She needed the very best of things and promptly acquired a prime lot on South Second Street in an area known as Big Bugs’ Row. All his adoration did not change this farm girl one bit. She loved him completely. Over the years, they had many children - two sets of twins and one set of triplets. Due to the lack of medical knowledge all the multiples were lost in their first year. The lot at Calvary Cemetery is huge; it is located on the West side of the first right lane by the huge memorial crucifix.

Four sons, Henry, Louis, Frank and Charles and one daughter Louisa (also dubbed Lula) lived to adulthood. Of the men, Charles was the businessman of the lot. He owned The America House, A posh Hotel for International visitors; the Livery Stables, a ladies tea shop and the buildings of both the bakery, grocery store and a ladies novelty shop. He was killed when his open, heavy, luxury automobile hit a soft spot and turned over. Their sister, Lula was as adept at finances as her brother, Charles but women could not run businesses. The law of the day was when they married all their property was ceded to the husband. Many evil critters grabbed wealthy girls to better themselves. Greedy, miserly, sweet faced Henry E. Midden eyed Lula Sommer. She was older and felt lucky that a businessman was attracted to her. His store was a short walk from her mansion home. She often walked there for a few things.

Yes, there were three brothers that each went into the drugstore business. They were best at being good looking and great dressers and charming hosts. Each was funded three times by daddy. Each went bust three times. Lula, being her dad’s bookkeeper, held on to all the receipts for these money grants. Dr. Sommer was magnanimous with his family and loved them equally. They had come late in his life. When he was able he brought all of his relatives to live in the United States. He met a group of nuns who were coming to the United States to start a hospital somewhere. He convinced them Springfield was both rural and city and growing greatly. He bought them a three story house on East Lawrence St and ordered all the medical equipment necessary and up to date. He was single and wealthy before coming to the States so this was a pleasurable thing for him. Later the little hospital needed more rooms for patients so he bought a building on Fifth and North Grand for them.

This insert is a story about my mother trying to help pay bills and ended up making more hospital bills.

This little Memorial Hospital was in use when I was a child of five. My Mother, Helen worked there one week and then caught a cold and had to leave. Our family had a mortgage and I came down with Scarlet fever. Dad worked with food so I had to go in the hospital isolation. My mother wanted to help pay the bills and got a job as maid in Vancil’s Funeral Mansion on North Fifth Street. But, no good came of this job. She was raped by their hired undertaker. He was very good and Mr. Vancil kept him but Mrs. Vancil liked Helen who could recycle all her silk stockings and kept mother. The undertaker discovered Helen was expectinh and came into our life as one awful pest. We hated him and he was never sober. He came one Sunday when my grandmother and Auntie Birdie were visiting and whoa he was sober. She thought he was nice and slipped him her address. They wrote but he wanted my mother. He tried blackmail saying if she did not leave Joe and marry him, he would marry her sister and give her a hell of a life. Mother refused and he convinced Birdie to come to Springfield and they would marry. Grandmother was upset because this man Ed was no good and also she had limited education in English and depended on Birdie. Helen was no cook and her diet was not good during a pregnancy - canned chilli. It bound her intestines and she ended in the hospital the last two months of the pregnancy and then the little boy was stillborn. Mother was never at fault - she blamed the whole mess on me! I was ten years ild and had not sex knowledge, I was still in stork age. My dad was lead to believe this baby was his son and he cast some concrete and chiseled the names on it and wss crying the thing was so pitiful. Guess who went scott free, the undertaker. Not Birdie - he kept his promisethee. This broke mother’s ties with her St. Louis Family. I did not get to see them for eight years. But I wrote to Grandmother and she knew everything always.We had to move to St. Louis to pay these hospital bills and Gramma knew! She sent Aunt Elizabeth to visit me, and dthen whoo-hoo we had a godfather in the family from San Francisco Union of Boiler Workers…Neat guy; great car…’40 Buick Special and bulletproof. Thickest door you ever saw.

Back to Dr. Sommer’s time.

Dr. Sommer had all this money and he was willing to put it to good use. He had several buildings moved for better use and convenience. He and his lovely wife Julia were expecting a child so a mansion was in construction on South Second Street. And enough material and workers were sent to the Wochner farm. Here he had Belton design a summer mansion of red brick. Today this building looks good from afar. It was not kept current and restoration begun but it proven too costly and now lays open to the weather. The double house became storage for old furniture. The circular driveway remains as a large driveway for farm equipment. The summer mansion was obscured from the road by three tall cedar trees and many mock orange bushes. The doctor’s family spent summers there and the breezes were cool and delightful. But there were small accidents and hay fever bouts that cut the visits short. The two sisters, Margaret and ? \_\_\_\_\_ married well; One married Oscar Maurer who owned the ice house and other businesses that dominated Spring and Cook Street area. . The other sister married a Fry from Tremont that operated the Fry Brewery and then started the Boynton bank It is still in operation.. Mother Wochner lived to 97 and lived with Julia and Dr. Sommer. The farm came under Dr. Sommer’s wing. It was leased to different farmers until Dr. Sonner died in 1911. All the surviving sons wanted the farm- they each had a share! But Lula went legal and presented all the receipts showing money reinstating the drugstores and won the farm. Everyone blamed Henry E. Midden because he was so miserly and hard but it was Lula the business woman. Her brother Fred and his family lived on the farm until Old Mr. Midden’s Grocery business collapsed and they had to sell the Second Street Mansion and move to the farm in 1938. This was not an easy move for either family. Fred and Theresa felt evicted and found a farm to work on. Mr. Midden detested the farm and closed his eyes and ?heart? to seeing any of the place. This began its decline because he did no upkeep. He planted out of season and was the Township joke. But he replanted antwice more until the darn corn grew. Across the road the Memkens were friendly. They rented the Owen Rourke house and he lived there. Owen was a gentle soul and walked everywhere he needed to go. Mrs. Memken was handicapped but got around well enough. She raised chickens and sold eggs and the Midden’s sold them milk and cream. When Owen Rourke died, a son-in-law named Paul Shanbacher came into power over-riding his wife Sally Bunn’s preferences. He was a pushy bastard from a family that decorated Catholic Churches inside. He worked at the Bunn Bank and was supposed to be an authority on land use. He sold all the farm buildings but a barn so he could sunbathe there! At first he rented the house to bikers who drove those Harley up the front steps and into the house and upstairs to rest in comfort in a plum bedroom. Soon the house was dismantled. He hired my husband who hired a trucking firm from Sherman, IL. to cart away the refuse…and then the scoundrel tried to only pay for the time the truck was there! We had to pay by the day. Delos Brown was working again. It was a nasty hassle but we got the money…I knew three attorneys!

Getting the Farm.

When Henry Midden’s grocery store failed in 1938, it was obvious that the Sommer mansion would be a costly burden; besides the ballroom and servants quarters particularly needled him. He had grabbed possession of a dead man’s good fortunes without spending a dime or lifting a finger. Stupid laws but felt thusly justified. It was his right as Lula Sommer-Midden’s husband gaining ownership of the wife’s property and that included a share of the farm. It would provide a home and income. He evicted the Frank Sommer family. How we do not know because Frank had a share in the farm. Henry Midden had no knowledge of farming. He had plenty of children to do the work! Why should he worry? He had all that property and he would hold it in his greedy hands forever. Farming, they would play it by ear. The Delos Brown Curse was about to spring into action with this greedy Henry E. Midden.

The curse had plagued the Frank Sommer family. Farming was a meager lifestyle and all hand labor. Their one horse kicked and bucked-off one of the sons. The fall broke his neck and he died. Crops were planted and weeded by hand. Yet this hard lifestyle was all they knew. It seemed to be full of illnesses, accidents and deaths. And now they were evicted. People talk about serendipity and this was such a case. There was a small rental house with some land and although it was snug for his large family, Frank and Teresa Sommer moved there. Their new house and land was a few lanes south of the Brown Land Grant border. They unknowingly were escaping the curse. These people were well liked. Things went so well for them that they could buy their small house and land. To this day, it is still the Frank Sommer Place on Old Salem Road in Riddle Hill. I never found the source of the name but am sure the land falls off unexpectedly near Frassee’s farm.

Meanwhile in town the West Cook Street area had changed over the years. The Illinois State House was completed and ornately had twenty-three kinds of marble decorating walls and staircases. That fearful dangerous climb for horses and wagons fell into the past. Vinegar Hill became a curious old fashioned name for the area. was not a level grassy place of beauty. In time Vinegar Hill became a name only; its origin was forgotten. Houses were sold to the State. It seemed like the downtown area was closer. Automobiles had replaced the horses but old Mr. Midden could not part with his store building and the huge city-style carriage and horse barn with its places for chicken batteries. He had designed it every bit of it! This was his legacy, his dream and his life. He knew it was easily rented and worth keeping. There were apartments and houses with the same tenants for years! The large garage/stables in back -Harwood Auto Supply always approached him wanting to rent it. It was 1938 and the Henry E. Midden family moved to the farm.

New Experiences.

While the extreme hardships on that farm vanished with their move, the evil curse was eagerly awaiting the next family to torment: The incoming Midden family. The differences were apparent immediately. Frank Sommer’s family had tread lightly about religion to avoid being ostracized by the area neighbors. Religion played big in those days. The surrounding neighbors were not catholic. On Sundays the Midden males put-on being “so-holy it stunk.” Beyond this idiot beginning, all their friendly overtures were rejected. They were laughed at for planting too early and their corn crops being frozen and then rained out. However the good hearts of the lady and her girls was well received. They were real people. Hazlett was the name of the country school and kids cut across the fields to it. It was very different from the Catholic School in town. Everybody was in the same room. While some grades recited and used the black board others studied .The teacher was nicer than the nuns that favored certain students and she was not holier than the kids. She had arms and legs and smiled. School was more democratic except for the bias against Catholics. Little Charles Midden made friends with Ed Bosie who was interested in fancy sound gadgets and his life followed that pattern until it became Bosie Sound. Unfortunately, the Middens kept a nose to the grindstone ethic. Charles and Ed were friends forever but Charles was determined to be dairy farmer. He began by joining FFA and showed his best hogs at junior fairs. Then he bought a calf - not any calf but a fine Guernsey and took top prizes with it. However, old Henry Midden only focused on his first son, his namesake. Charles was the fourth son and dispensable like the other children.

Henry Midden doted on his first son, who carried his name. To avoid confusion, the kid was called Eddie. The other children received no fatherly affection. Work was instilled in them: Work was most important! Regardless, Eddie received attention and preference - even to the best piece of chicken at table. To the others, this stunk; they were ignored - as long as they were not in their father’s way! Only mothers bothered with that affection stuff! Therefore Eddie Midden was spoiled and took advantage of it. Eddie became the object of sibling hatred. Therefore when Eddie retaliated - he did it loudly to catch his father’s attention. Now the others raised their voices to a screaming pitch and civility was lost. There was no such thing as a quiet discussion. A sceam became the norm. As the father fostered this the mother’s gentle influences failed. Without a Mother’s firm voice to correct them, these children became demonic maniacs that fought each other like animals. The curse was in full swing: Old Mrs. Brown would be proud!

It did not help that old Mr Henry E. Midden hated being a farmer - he had been a highly respected grocer until the chain stores with its cheap quality merchandise pushed him out of business. He felt like he died and became a walking zombie. He put no effort into farm upkeep - that did not bring in any money. He did tend a vegetable garden, learned the best fertilizer for asparagus and how to keep the stalks white. Those were highly valued. He sold all the good produce. His family had the culls even with the chickens and ducks. The children took care of them but once the eggs were gathered, Mr. Midden candled them and sold the best. From the highway fresh writing appeared on a large blackboard. It announced the goodies available: Cream, milk, eggs, pork sausage, etc. He developed weekly customers who found it a pleasant little drive from town to the farm. The frightening demonic displays were carefully kept under wraps. The farm remained in the “same” family since the Wochners bought it but how it deteriorated under the Middens. How busy the Loco Spirits were in that family. Mrs Delos Brown’s curse was in full swing: These were crazy people.

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The Sommer Reunion

In 2017 the First Sommer Reunion many were interested that my husband had lived in the Second Street Mansion as a child. I sketched the floor plans as he described the place. I could tell that in its day the mansion was absolutely glorious. It had a second floor ballroom with grand staircase leading up to it from the front double doors. There were servants quarters, and back stairs for them. The Butler’s pantry had built-in cabinetry for linens, china, crystal and silver. There was a small pharmacy where Lula mixed the prescriptions. She maintained this after her father died because she had developed a wondrous salve that healed even severed fingers back to place. Both levels had sun porches on the south side. Many bedrooms lined the north wall on the second floor. There was a large area for serving delectable foods when dances were held but open otherwise. The kitchen and dining rooms were adequate for the large family. Even the back porch was outfitted so that delivery persons need not enter the kitchen. The back yard was laid with brick in a herringbone pattern. Charles said he spent many summers digging grass from between those bricks and filling the spaces with sand. The outhouse was for four. It sat at the East edge of the property and may still be there. Cloths-lines were stretched in back for laundry. I hoped the young relatives would read this for the history.

Young Lula’s Lifestyle

As a youngster, it was Lula’s job to walk to the Drugstore at noon and at dinner hour to fetch her father. He became so engrossed in things he forgot about time and food. He played chess with cronies and she remembered one who traveled a lot and always stopped by the drugstore when he was passing through. His name was Wild Bill Cody. He had a Wild West Show. Chess moves were well thought between those two and often took forever. Lula had to cool her heels until the game finished. A little girl has a favorite game called Jacks but the ball bouncing would disturb the deep concentration of the chess players. She avowed: “There will never be a chess set in my home!” My husband said there was a set, but it was kept hidden with a white tablecloth.

Dr. Louis Francis Xavier Sommer died in 1911.This is how things set. The drugstore building was sold but they kept the mansion because this was home and the new widow was not ready to leave it. Lula had been her father’s bookkeeper. She kept all the receipts and ledgers. These included all the money her brothers had received from their father’s coffers in setting them each in businesses which failed repeatedly. Perhaps it would be worth something one day. As women could not own businesses or operate them, so Lula never got any big handouts like her brothers. The brothers had married but getting money from their father was a habit. The excuses switched; the new gimmick was to say their child was sick. By the post cards these kids were sick more than they were well. Louis was always failing in Berwyn, Illinois and Henry failed in Hillsboro and reestablished his third drugstore in Springfield at 6th and Enos Streets. Henry’s wife tried to replicate a healing salve that Lula made famous in the area. The copycat version burned. Mrs. Henry Sommer became adamant when this was pointed out to her and she broke with the family. Henry and his wife are the only members of the family not buried in the large Sommer plot…They are in the old hills that adjoin the valley north of Lincoln Tomb.

A side story: The Henry Sommers on Enos St. had two daughters; both became nuns. Sister Mary Celine was a Poor Clare. Her convent was in Kokomo, Indiana. She was my husband’s Godmother. We kept a correspondence until she passed away. She operated the Art Department, designed and produced the Christmas card designs each year for the convent income. We were still living in a house on West Cook Street when she began describing the convent was being moved to Birmingham, Alabama. She described the convent’s being moved. She wrote:

”Oh the changes are eye-opening. The ladies do not wear corsets or lovely gowns with balloon sleeves and lacy high necks and gorgeous plumed hats with flowers like when I went into the convent. Not at all! They have short dresses that leave everything wobble and their legs show. But they do have a neat silk stocking with a black seam up the center back. . I went by train with a companion Sister. We opened the window and there was no smoke from the engine and no noise but the wheels on the rails under the carriages. The Porter told us that they use electric instead of coal. So the open windows were a joy. Oh, the fresh air! I hate to admit it but I gawked at everything like a child. I do wish they’d let us out at least once every ten years so we can see the changes in things. The new convent is large and open to the gardens and fresh air. Before we were behind closed doors and saw nothing but the interior of the convent and each other in silence. Here we can talk quietly in the gardens and sit on park benches. It is a delight.”

Henry’s other daughter, Catherine was a cloistered Franciscan. These women did their own building repairs. Sister Catherine fell off a convent roof she was repairing, and as she was unable to do this work anymore - the kind magnanimous sisterhood released her of her vows and promptly escorted her out the door. Her cousin, Henry Sommer, the man my husband worked for, who helped us time and again - helped her become a person again. Sisters only follow orders they do not think and make choices. Sisters do not buy clothing or plan meals or shop. He found her an apartment and clothing and helped teach her all the people skills she needed in our everyday life. Even in the Springfield area the Franciscan Order followed this policy. If anyone was maimed on the job and could no longer do the work required, they were shown the door -without compensation! Oh yes they were dispensed from their vows.

Charles’ War Buddies

Before we married Charles was bright and cheerful. He wanted to see his friends from the G-4 Section in Pusan. Most now lived within a few hours driving distance. We started with three in Chicago. Sheref was married. She was fat and he was thin. They were happy and it was a fun visit. Jim Craven was still single and without any family. He was super glad to see a face he knew. Then we visited Zurbo who had a large family. He spent a lot of time in the bathroom setting and combing his very curly black hair. When he did join us he was very good looking -a lot like my friend Lawrence Nudo who worked at the Orpheum during high school days. Charles felt uncomfortable around Zurbo. Secretly or not he had been a notorious playboy. The talk of that day was about a guy named Clyde. He did not make it home. His wifebought a new caar to surprise him and he did get to see it. She missed a sharp turn and they crashed. The hilly area in Southern Illinois is treacherous. One must be very alert. Now the guys would meet in Cottleville, Mo at the Cottleville General Store owned by Fat and his brother, Bob Swinburn.. Here they would all gather and pay their last respects for Clyde. I was with Charles for this hair-raising ride to Cottleville. The things I remember most was a collection of hanging kerosene lamps with colorful glass shades each with shining prisms that hung around each shade. They were so out of date and so beautiful. Fat then took us to a line of about 13 cars in a row. He said,Yes, I wrecked every one of them! My feeling of safe with him evaporated.

The Single Chicago War Buddy Jim, the Swift’s driver, paid us a surprise visit. I had just washed my hair and was drying it outside when he came. Bob was nearby and said he would do the chores for us to go on. We were going to the Mill. ”Party,” caught Bob’s attention- he’d come along later and bring his girlfriend and her sister. This is how Jim met and married his wife, Marita and came to work at the Franciscan Seminary. Unfortunately Bob and his girlfriend broke up because he was not ready to get married. Her family all worked for the Order because one of the daughters was a Franciscan Sister. They were close by and could see her often. The War Buddy had no ties so gave up his job driving a Swift and Company Bologna Truck. He became a handyman with the Order. He taught classes at their trade school and did farm work. The young couple was granted a house near her family and all went well until the Sister had an accident on the job. True to form, she was shown the door. The whole family left the Order and moved to Chicago. Jim got his old job back because he could sell a lot more bologna than other drivers.

On with Lula’s story: 1908

After the good doctor passed away the family faced the will and settlement of the estate. The brothers needed their lifestyle protected and pushed. Mrs. Julia Wochner-Sommer kept the mansion because it was her home. Lula unmarried lived with her. But the drugstore had been the income and here they hit the sex restriction law. Lula was forced to find a job. Her brothers faced the fact that the well had dried and the free money halted. They had make their businesses pay. Lula was lucky; a family friend, Mr. Franke hired her at his Furrier Shop. Here she learned all about the procedures to make the collars and scarves ladies wore. (There is an old photo of her with a few other employees at the furriers.)

The ladies were accustomed to a fine lifestyle and were innocently and open to advantage- takers. They never dealt with people that were not honest. The Sommers always used the Henry E. Midden Grocery after his mother’s store closed. It was only a half block farther and Lula often walked there and then carried her order home. There was one occasion that lived in her memory. It happened in 1908. As she headed for home with her parcel, she heard loud voices across the street (Where the Illinois State Museum is now).An automobile rounded the corner and more noisy men joined the fray. She hurried home along Edwards Street to her home that was just across the street on Second Street. She hurried up the steps. Opened the front door and then turned to look back. A black man had been hung in the tree. She stepped inside, closed the door and fainted. It became headline news immediately and even today the 1908 riot remains the one terrible black in the city’s history. Lula would not read the newspaper accounts of the riot details. She had been devastated enough seeing it.

Henry E. Midden had his future planned and it included Lula Sommer. She was past the giddy age and was fat but best of all she had breeding. With his pleasant public face he attracted her attention easily. And when she smiled - he was in! Now he was not a delivery man who used the back door; he was her guest who was welcomed in the front doors by the maid. He was dignified in appearance and he owned good property, but he secretly slathered at being inside the mansion. He wanted it! Using the delivery area had passed. However, World War I interrupted his plan. He was drafted and the store was operated by his helper, Norbert Lemons.

He had his fish on the line and would not lose her. They exchanged letters frequently. His letters had black areas where the officials had cut out any military movements. To circumnavigate this he wrote about the countryside and the poppy fields for instance. She could check her old geography and see exactly where he was. He survived the three worst battles and received medals and pictures, but the horrors of the muddy trenches, seeing the men go over and be cut down by the hundreds, stepping over those what had fallen into the trenches. Smell of death surrounded and changed him for the worse. So there was an armistice. It did not make the war experience disappear. He could not accept the pleasantry of being home. His home meant hearing constant bickering and his mother wanting him to take his drunken brother as a partner! Many soldiers say, ”It is Heaven to be home.” But he did not feel Heaven in home. He snickered. A drunken partner-what a good investment to ruin a business! Why did not his mother take poor Bill to work at her Grocery Store? Pleasantries were facial expressions just for business. Deep inside him Henry saw no pleasantries. His world had become dark and miserable. How dare these people not know the horrors he knew. He kept the hard-tac the soldiers were given to eat and did not let go of that time. In his real heart was black. He was calculating, shrewd, penny-pinching and negative.

World War I veterans were granted 100 acres of land in the unsettled west. He had not married yet and in Illinois 100 acres sounded like a great freebie. He went west to claim his 100 acres. But it was nothing like any of them hoped for. The land was desert and rocky soil only good for cattle grazing. He sold it to a rancher and took a job on the ranch to earn enough to get back home.. Here he was chided and picked on but his smallness brought a benefit. The wife asked him to help her and saw him being man-handled in the bunkhouse so, gave him a small area inside the house. He was successful . Soon he was back in Springfield, Il.to claim his quarry. His two personalities were completely opposite but were him: Mildly supplicant and demonic ogre . Each personality was the real Henry E. Midden.

He returned to Springfield and resumed working in his grocery store. Norbert Lemon was a great man and promptly was made a silent partner. His customers welcomed their brave and wonderful hero and grocer. Henry seemed the dearest young man, but this was his business face. Once the door closed at home the demonic maniac appeared. This different personality was a shock to Lula. Charles pulled this same thing! I shared Lula’s shock at this daily change of personality. Our thoughts were: What happened to cause this outburst? I did nothing to deserve this. don’t know about Lula but I cried every day for three months after his morning outburst, door slam and drive off. My face was swollen and I was ashamed to call my attorneys because I was pregnant. I certainly did not want to go home to my parents.

Comparing my life to Lula’s

I can speak from experience: One should not be an optimist if one has a negative partner: they do not change, they entrench. Where Lula had brothers with hands-out I had parents that way. They were very against my getting married. They wanted me with them forever - to pay for their “necessities and delights”. They truly believed that the money I earned was their money and were serious about that. Parent usually did not charge their children for living at home. I paid a third of my wages as room and board, saved a third and used a third for daily lunches. Mother searched high and low to find my bank book and when I had about $55.00 they would buy something and say- you’ve got the money, pay it. Even after I married my father came to my house and said, where is my money? I told him those days were over and I was not working. You two are on your own. Yes, they were a trap but Catholic Schools taught you to respect authority and parents were that authority until marriage. But the Midden family was and equal trap of a different kind. I could drive but was never taken for the test. When Charles did take me, I couldn’t back up. Chaarles sent me into the timber to learn there. Thee were many paths and none went very far, I had to back out. When I mastered this I could back to St. Louis. That creepy old man never spoke to me and never answered. I asked my husband if he was deaf but no his hearing was perfect. He did blast a radio beneath our bedroom at 4:30am. This was abnormal! I should have seen my attorney friend , Bill, at least to talk but I was ashamed that this happened so soon. My job became iffy -Allis Chalmers was downsizing and within months I was out and the marriage was becoming cramped and distasteful. Unfortunately, I ’d spent everything on the wedding, so although I was penniless after the wedding but I had no outstanding debts.

A Memory: How I bought all my silver and stored it away.

I bought things on lay-a-way before I married because I could pay for these out of my lunch money.I was use to not eating. Mother just opened cans and some was not tsty. I was supposed to have 1//3 of my wages for lunches but it was not enough for every day. I usually took a spiced ham sandwich in my purse. Once a week I could go to the beanery. And every other day I could get a milk shake at Broadwell’s Drug Store. On my delivery job I saw that there were many small jewelery stores and I thought I’d find a piece of silver, a little gravy boat was first. I paid a dollar and a half on it until it was paid and then got silver-cloth and wrapped it in that and hid it under some towels that camee as a bonus in wshing powder, like Rinso. Mother did not want the towels so I put then im the cedar chest. Then I hid stud under them because I noticed mother snooped through everything, but never bothered those towels! I looked and looked before I chose a flatware pattern. Naturally, the Grand Baroque was overly expensive. I finally chose National Silver, Concerto Pattern. This took forever to pay off because I kept adding eight pieces of this or that until I had everything including serving pieces; 210 in all. Trouble was once it was paid the store said I had to take home my chest of silver. Mother saw the big bag and wanted to know. When she saw that chest she tried to grab it for herself; but I held tight to it.”No you have yours and love it. I have this and I love it!” She went ballistic. All that money she did not get to spend! The chest was too large for the cedar chest so I put my comb brush and mirror in the top drawer pf my chest and set the chest of silver there. “It is mine and I love it. You have yours. You love it. Mine is going here!” I set it on my small chest of drawers and added, “and none of it had ever be missing!” checked it often to see if they had stolen any. I had all my serving pieces, platters and bowls of silver. All wrapped in this large brown cloth under the towels. I never thought of my parents as thieves publicly but they certainly were advantage takers. I did not know others could be worse. Marriage certainly enlightened me.

Lula’s trial was not anticipated just like mine. We both got hood-winked. Lula Sommer and her mother, Julia were as trusting as I was. They too did not suspect this of the man who courted her, to whom she wrote during his army days in World War I and whom she married. My life followed this except there was no courtship. I went to the movies with him and that night he left for Korea! We wrote, but he said nothing about his home, family, friends, hopes or dreams. He just wanted to work on the farm and have a dairy herd. He was adamantly against higher education. I was taking a Russian Class at the time and thought it would be something fun to write about because we seldom learned from the book. It was mostly silliness. There was very little class work. But just mentioning it set off this bomb of, “Quit the class! Stop going! I don’t want a wife that knows more than me.”

Wife! I did not want to be his wife. I did not even like him just wrote because It was not good to dump a guy that is overseas. Also that was very close-minded of him. Did he think people stopped thinking and learning if they married? What was this? I was always learning. I had my degree. What a predicament. I was already establishing a career in counseling musicians, helping thenm find their “Star” I was the background person and I liked it there.

I thought Charles sounded too closed minded . I should have not thought, I should have dumped him but being an optimist… perhaps he will rethink that. But I was to find this was not the case: No! The Middens never changed their minds. They were never sorry and never apologized because they were always right! The Delos Brown Curse was infiltrated in the Midden Family. They were hard as nails and ruthless. Charles was proud that he skipped last period in high school, and walked home from Petersburg to WORK for his father! I thought it was dumb and I was right. He was being groomed to be the family flunky and did not realize it. At times when he came home, he found his mother collapsed with a heart attack and the rest of the family in the adjoining field oblivious. Mr. Henry E. Midden swore that she was just putting-on for attention! The last time, Charles drove her to hospital she died at the emergency room door in his arms. He was devastated at the death of his beloved mother. His sister was dying of Peritonitis, a fatal liver disease and was bed-ridden. She and Charles were the youngest children. Growing up they were always together in the kitchen with their mother. Because Louis had the ear problem and Charles did not pronounce his “L’s” the three youngsters were declared imperfect and and mentally afflicted. Two sons, mentally afflicted and a daughter supposedly dying - Mr. Midden relished the pity of others over this burden on him. The good words were that Louis would get over being in the dumps- the idea wanting to go to college when there was WORK on the farm. His father needed farm workers and time that kid knew he was only good for farming. WORK! Yeah, sure, this kid was not going to be stuck on that farm slopping hogs. He had many patents for his inventions and was a brilliant tech . He must try to convince his father. But his father viewed him as second-hand merchandise. College, he snickered. Other deaths was to touch the Midden Family in 1946.

Had the curse expended its misery? Mary Margaret became deathly painfully ill. Her father again put off taking her to hospital. Charles came home and heard her scream in pain and rushed into the hous, gathered her to the car and locked it and headed for the hospital. When the father heard the engine turn over her was right there pulling on the car handle to try to drag the girl out. He raised a row about paying for it. Hejumped in the dump truck and followed. He was deterred by emergency personnel and followed them to a room. He stalked in and grabbed her arm to drag her from the bed but she uttered, “Father!” in her sweet voice, and died. This hit Mr. Midden in a place that his heart had dried. He wept like the family had never seen before. His middle son, Louis was not a well person but tried to comfort his father. Mary Margaret was their living angel. Louis suffered ill effects after a sun-stroke. He was very close to his sister and mother. Louis went into a deep depression but his father and siblings did not recognize these symptoms.The father began blustering that the boy forget his aches and pains and get to WORK! Louis was very talented with electric gadgets. He could have made a great future in it, but his father… . Louis could not expect to go to college after High School. His father refused. He was imperfect and would stay on that horrible farm. His father fully expected him to be the hog slopper and do field work too.

Charles went looking for Louis to come to breakfast and found his brother had hung himself in the barn. This was the third family member that Charles found. It took a toll on his emotional construction. (An aside here: I had never met these Middens yet but a cousin of theirs joined our class at Sacred Heart Academy to finish there. She looked at me and said, “Oh, you’re the one who is going to marry my cousin.” And with that she turned to her new friends in girly talk. Within a week, she was driving her parents and sister to Chicago a special hospital there to visit another sister that was not quite right. At the top of a hill an oncoming car was in her lane and hit them. She and her sister were killed. Her parents were hurt and hospitalized. The other driver did not survive. Many of my class went to the wake, but I did not go because I barely had met the girl and felt my classmates were nosey to see how the crash victims looked! My mother had worked as a maid at a funeral home. I waited there until mother got off work at five. I saw plenty of dead crash victims there. Mrs. Isobel Vancil would ask me to come and see what a nice job they did on… and they would be in a twin bed with pretty covers and pillows; for the world they looked like they were sleeping. I need not go, They would look great.

I hear about Louis.

One Friday afternoon, I was standing on the bus while these Springfield High School boys were chatting about an entry in their class book. One fellow was a special friend to this guy, Louis. He said, ”Oh, God, he had a hard life, you cannot imagine-- He had that ear problem; it had to keep draining or he’d die. And that place, just driving past it is bad enough but go in there, and that old man of his would make you crawl the walls. The woods look great, but it is like no man’s land - full of snakes. What kind? Copperheads, deadly little things and his brothers were fighting like they were worst enemies. Louis said they were raised that way screaming and fighting. His Mom got beaten if she said anything. Geez, some life! Old man was little and stooped but talked the big shot! Someone ought to shoot the bastard…Oh I know that’s a bad word to say on the bus but from what I saw and heard out there, that old guy should have a 45mm bullet with his name on it. No peace on the home front there. His father was a demanding old bugger always griping about work to do. And that voice! One you’d put in horror movies! You know Louis never saw a movie? He never got to town but to buy work cloths with his mom on Dollar Day. He was stuck in that old barn feeding livestock and he had all this talent I can understand why he did it. After High School he would be trapped there because of his health problems. College would never be and he was so able! Darn shame. Darn shame. It was a lot of talk but surely made me wonder who the poor guy, Louis was. I had to dismount at 4th Street I was going to the Miner’s Building. An Agency loaned movies and slides to school teachers. I would pick them up and take them to Sister Albeus and return them for her. I enjoyed it, even though I never saw any of them. I was not in her class that year.

LLula and her mom are trapped

It was this very sweet-faced, Henry E. Midden, Sr. - grocer whose heart had changed into a secret grasping monster. He viewed people as fools for the taking. And to marry Lula meant the mansion was his! Lula his prize conquest! They married but he got her mother Julia too. Julia insisted on living in the mansion; this was her home. This appealed to the grocer. He could rent out the apartment where he was living and have that money. The marriage exposed his true nature. Lula became a non-person: Her ideas, her words meant nothing to him. She was mistreated as if she was mindless and inept. She had been relegated to sex object. What happened to her sweet Henry? He became a person she did not know .

The changes began immediately. He assumed the place of man of the house but the ladies discovered his changes were not to their liking but were afraid of these angry temper tantrums. He pounded on furniture and screamed demands. “ This place costs too much. You must cut overhead.” He did this by weeded all pleasure from their lives. He did not want people in the house so no more tea parties with idle women’s gossip. The servants were dismissed. The women should do the work! He was money mad! Henry Midden’s contribution was softening produce still edible but not pristine. Loaves of bread that did not sell and hardened; sandwich cookies that softened. He presented these items as gourmet perfection. This was a preamble to her married life. In the 1920’s divorce meant “shame” in capital letters. It was a Catholic marriage; that meant double shame. A lady faced shame plus excommunication from her religion by divorce. One could say: he married up and pulled her down.

She was honored at the stores for she was Ms. Sommer but he was just a grocer. Although Midden won prizes for cleanliness and beauty and his customers were well to do he would never be in the class with the Sommer Family. To Midden it did not matter. He lived in the mansion and swung the orders as he wanted. A case where once the door closed, the ogre emerged. Were these alarming habits the result of his being in the war? War changed men. No, he was covertly mean and stingy. That grocer husband dutifully almost gleefully cared for her mother until Julia Wochner-Sommer died.

He had his eye on the Wochner-Sommer property. Much would come to his wife and by way of law - to him! Before the law was changed, a wife had to sign over all her property to her husband. The will was sorted and settled. As soon as the ink dried, Henry Midden showed his true colors. He put her down, treated her so badly, it was not a marriage partnership - she became a slave in her own home. Henry E. Midden stood five foot two inches and detested his small stature. He had been jeered and knocked around constantly - but not in Service. Service took bravery. But his smallness when working for others made him act slave-like to gain acceptance. It became his ego-personality.

Veterans of World War I were granted 100 acres of land in the unsettled west. He was not yet married and thought this was a good deal. But once there allthe 100 acres was fry rocky desert.

THE RANCHHAND GOES HERE

But as Henry Midden aged the tantrums deteriorated. He was just an ogre. When he married, children came quickly in a Catholic household. There were sons. The first son got attention and anything he wanted even the best piece of the one dinner chicken while the father ignore the others. This lack of equality fostered supreme displeasure. The boys fought him first with words and then physically. By following this example: The boys’ became brutal tyrants and the girls fearful . It produced a family filled with raging hate for each other - but only at home, never in public! When Charles brought me to see the bedroom we would use in his dad’s house he made a curious statement. He said , “Listen I don’t want any of the hell, do you hear?” His father nodded. Charles then added, “Did you keep all my money like I wanted?” His father said, “Yes, I’ll get it for you.” I almost fainted into my shoes, that would never happen at my house. I kept silent.

Charles and I had a CathoIic wedding. Neither family was happy and did not want their child to marry. My parents pulled every trick to keep me from the church. They wanted me to support their lifestyle. I was wrong side of town for his. But even so I was highly mannered. Mr. Henry E. Midden pretended I did not exist. Charles was to be his flunky farmhand -not bring in another mouth to feed. The Midden’s were Holy for an hour in church! The father never spoke to me. I asked Charles if he was hard of hearing but the answer was no. He simply did not accept me and silence was negating my presence. This was so strange to me. I had been like a daughter in the Pilcher family. They loved each other, laughed and joked, hugged and had real discussions .Mr. Pilcher was very learned and shared a thought when he felt it would help you. The Pilchers were more my family than my greedy hovering mother and father. I thought big families loved each other. I was in for a shock. The namesake and wife, Rita visited the farm. There was no greeting. Junior threw out a biting sex slur. I thought, how rude. Charles did not respond but turned away. Junior snapped out another. Charles took my hand and we both went outside. We took a walk in the woods. In a second forty acres, of the woods was a valley of bluebells in bloom. They kept the livestock out of there. But the creek had risen and the fence to Mr. Nicholson’s farm was down. He had seven Black Angus bulls that he raised to sell. They were following each other across the fallen fence and creek carefully. .Charles became stiff and said he was going for help. I said I’d wait there. The bulls were beautiful. Their coats glistened in the sun. I walked towards them. We had Kurt, a Guernsey bull at the new barn. I talked with him and he followed me inside if I went into the barn. I talked and he’d listen and munch alfalfa. All his ladies listened from their stalls. I figured these would be no different. I began by looking at one and when it stopped I spoke mentally to it. I said. “Hello, you are all so beautiful. The old man who takes care of you likes you all very much. He is old and has a bad heart. If he misses you he may try to run down here to bring you all back. He could get really sick. What will happen if he cannot take care of you? That may not be good. Perhaps you all ought to go back home and keep him well.” They stood a moment, as if contemplating. They looked at each other and one by one turned back. They were nearly up the hill when Charles, Junior and his father came rushing up behind me.

Where are they?” Junior blustered.

I pointed. “I just told them to go home. “ (No questions, no thanks. Just a silent put-down.) “Hey! Don’t leave guys! Now the fence is free; you can put it back up.” They looked at each other and then said, ”Let’s put up the fence.” Again! As if I wasn’t there. What Jacks.

After our honeymoon,, we were living in the brick house. Naturally we had dreams like all young couples do. Charles had some savings and thought one day we could build a house by the East fence line along the highway. It would be private there. Charles demonic problem was under control until one Saturday, the cloths had been washed but not pressed. Bob forgot to take them in to the laundry for pressing. I volunteered to iron them. Bob was outside cleaning trash out of his car.

Charles decided this was a good time ask his father if we could buy an acre by the East fence-line to build a house. They went upstairs to Mr. Midden’s bedroom to talk. Mr. Midden did not think the place could support two households. Bob came in overheard them, went upstairs and began screaming that he should have a say! Bob had developed a hate of me that he hid well from the others.. It was that I married Charles and not him! I noticed that he was quite hateful by his actions. Now Bob was against the idea. The screaming commenced. Charles raised his voice and Mr. Midden his. It was a horrible ten minutes. Bothe the hired hand and I were taken back with the exchange. We looked at each other in surprise. The hired hand was sitting quietly on the settee in the front Bay window. We had been chatting about his son’s birthday that was coming. The exchange upstairs shocked both of us. Neither of us had heard anything so loud and vile. The hired hand chuckled and said: “I was going to ask for a raise and Monday off for my son’s birthday but now -- well little lady you married into this and may stay and take it, but I didn’t and I quit. I was waiting for a ride home, but I’m walking.” He got up, tipped an imaginary hat and walked out the door. In a few moments the three men came downstairs straightening their ties and jackets as if nothing happened. They looked in the three rooms for the hired man but he was invisible. So they asked. I was really afraid to answer but said, “Oh, he quit.”

“Oh, you mean he walked home.”

“No, I mean he quit.” They looked stunned and asked, why. Oh boy, now I am in for it. “Well he heard you all talking and was upset and quit.”

Mr. Midden said, “But, we don’t talk to people like that!”

“But, you are people; maybe you shouldn’t talk like that to each other. It really gives a bad impression.” Followed by awestruck silence! “Oh I have the shirts ironed.” That broke the tension. Immediately they chose their shirts and I folded the rickety ironing board.

The new dog

In the morning the family readied for 10:00am Mass and Bod was outside saying, “Shoo, shoo” There was a white and black young dog that had been dropped at the farm. I am a fool for dogs and it cooed -up to me and I said sweet things then I turned to old Mr. Midden and said, “You know dad, we really need a dog that can alert us to things. Whitey is very old … With that Mr. Midden said, “Yes, you are right. What shall we call him?” I thought, Mr. Horsley first called me because I worked so hard at the lab. So, I said, ”Butchie”. And to Bob’s disgust, his dad said, ”Yes! Put Butchie in the garage and leave the door open.” When we returned from church, Bob was hoping the dog was gone, but it was sleeping in the spot where he should park the car. He chased it out and it went to old Mr. Midden. Mr. Midden pet it lovingly and said, I have an old bone from the roast; I’ll get it.” While the men were busy a moment, I showed Butchie how to lean his weight on one paw and lift the other to shake hands. And then sit. Bob cae out and saw the dog shaking hands and this won Bob. “We always tried to get Whitey to do it but he didn’t get it Mr. Midden came out and Butchie became the big hit of the day. They decided he had a soft mouth so he was part hunting stock and the ruff at his chest, maybe a bit Collie. I had never see happiness in that old man before. He took over the care of that dog like it was treasure. Butchie had one fault; he did not bark at strangers. He would go up to them and sniff. If they passed his inspection, OK. If not he gave them a nip. This caused a problem; Butchie was placed in quarantine in the garage for a few days. He never minded quarantine evidently the nip was worth it. Poor old Whitie lingered a few months and passed on. Butchie would have nothing to do with that dog house. He already liked the outhouse. Then he discovered the new roll of tissue and the fun was on. I was riding home from work with the neighbor, Mr. McConnell to see Butchie tossing the roll into the air and pitching it about. He had the lilies covered by the house, the yellow roses by the outhouse and just everywhere. It did look pretty and I wanted to laugh and thought of old tightwad and low, he came out the door and saw my shocked expression. He turned to look that way and saw Butchie’s artwork. The dog was still playing joyfully and Mr. Midden laughed! He laughed so hard I though he’d have a heart attack as he leaned against the house. “I’ll have one of them clean it all up later. He went in the house laughing

We move.

Inside the house was another story. We could no longer tolerate Mr. Middens blasting radio. My job downsized me and he thought I should do the housekeeper’s job, gratis! No educated lady would want to live there let alone clean there. He had a housekeeper that was kept busy peeling Sheckel Pears and canning and or making jelly - He never ate any sweets. After several years on the shelf in the basement - they threw it out. There were many bushes of a terrible tasting curant berry. He had those made into jelly only and Englishman would love. Years later Bob learned to make wine of the things and they earned their place in the garden. In that house there were three generations of furniture and belongings in the dining room plus curling linoleum strips along the walls, these were supposed to cover plain 4” floor boards - fake oak flooring and a large dried curled linoleum rug. Three stoves, one did not work and was finally moved onto the day porch where a pie keeper with old pots and pans and a drawer of the late Mrs. Midden’s recipes were. There was a cream separator and laundry type double concrete washstand. There were two stoves in the kitchen - one electric and the other a wood burning stove. This last he insisted we must use because it had a tank the heated water - a freebie!. He decided I could do the housekeeper’s work gratis. Crafty little devil saving money and getting work done free. No way! Why didn’t Charles speak up and say, no! There were a lot of why questions that I had. It really made me wonder about Lula Sommer-Midden. She was a pharmacist, developed this salve, knew practical things and well as unusual things. How did she end up with old Mr. Midden on this dump farm. It was the pits and I was falling into this accursed trap too.

Did Charles plan this with his father? Did he think I was a nobody that skipped high school classes - like he did - to walk home and work? He couldn’t - he knew I had taken Russian. He knew I had worked in public and had influential friends. Charles had no area friends; he was closed to people and clubs. This about killed me that he would not go to the FFA club dances. I loved the mixers. He was most touchy about his voice affliction. Later he was completely taken back when we visited some of my friends, like Tiskos and Della and Bill, the Senator saying “Oh, they will judge me.” -No these people start you at 100%. You mentally work yourself to your level. When we did go to a night club, he never asked why the band stopped and played “My Music” and then waved like crazy and I waved back. He never asked why the Star Musician left the podium and came down to talk with me-ugh-and him. musicians spoke with me like a friend and bought us drinks. He would never ask a question…hum; in that way he was like my mother. She thought if you asked a question it showed you did not know something - and she preferred to know everything! … Is this what I had in Charles? Stubborn and stupid so faaaaaaaar… I had a man with a whole bundle of hang-ups. I liked my marriage situation less and less but like his late mother, we did it to avoid the shame of marital failure - and because they kept us without funds to escape..

God, That old Man.

I threatened to leave and suddenly, we moved out. Father Jelenic the priest was correct. Living with the in-laws is not a good combination. We rented an apartment on South Seventh Street and began our home. It was walking distance to a strip of stores on South Grand. East and a wine shop nearby. Charles used his dad’s car. It did not take long for Mr. Midden to realize his ploy was costing him gas money. Although Charles was his son, he was never considered more than the farm hand! But a farm hand is supposed to be furnished a house and transportation to and from work! Surprisingly, Bob overheard and agreed! Quite suddenly, one of Mr. Midden’s rental houses on West Cook Street became empty! We had to move in there. It was a two story shotgun house with the bathroom upstairs. We decided to live in the three rooms on the main floor. I noticed a few ladies that worked in the buildings downtown when I was a delivery girl. They had married and were pushing buggies. I was so happy. Charles was not. He was closed to making friends and I was sad to discover he had no fariends. Soon he decided he could put the namesake out by cutting the orchard grass and get that money for himself. I said no, you are already on his payroll, he will not do it; you will just have more work … Knowing everything, he did not listen and bought an electric lawn mower and extension cords. It was a flop as I predicted. Money lost.

Friends out! Idiots In 1952

His dad and Charles decided that my friends seen only by chance - never planned - would have ideas that did not fit their closed lifestyle. Suddenly Charles decided I needed a puppy for company. Well, My gramma had a Pekingese, Queenie that followed her like a shadow. A Mrs. Lawrence had pups for sale and Chaaarles insisted we get a male. It was white and looked like a little teddy bear, so he became Teddy. It was paper trained but outside it marked everything. It was disgusting. Then Mrs. Lemons tells me there is a poisoner in the neighborhood and I couldn’t let the dog out freely. Stuck with these papers in my kitchen! Shortly Charles got the idea of raising puppies. I dom’t want puppies I know nothing about puppies but Charles is now dictatorial. Mrs. Lawrence had none but gave us the name of a kennel. The little female was shipped from Wichita, Kansas; a cute miniature! It was impossible to breed her to Teddy. Charles would not return or sell her to Mrs. Lawrence. Now we had pets- money lost. We really were not making it on Charles’ salary of $100.00 per month plus one pound of hamburger and another of soup bones. After paying the utilities, I could not buy vegetables to make soup. I was buying canned dog food. The moment I missed my period - my sweet thoughtful husband’s temperament changed completely! He became a demented maniac screaming for breakfast things we never could afford and made crazy demand that I know my place and not talk to anyone or leave the house. He was lord and master! The first time, I was shocked numb. Before I could say anything he flew out the door slamming it and was gone. This became a frightening routine and I cried every morning. After three monhs of these unfound rages I was pulling my eyelashes out. My face was swollen and red. Charles did not notice; it was burst in and flop in a chair for a meal. This was no life and certainly no partnership. I should have called the Senator and pregnant or not, gotten out of this horror. But years of Catholic brainwashing tipped the balance. Those fears of shame, marital failure, counseling by young rich homo priests that know nothing of your problems, excommunication from the church these thoughts plagued me. The church and the law always favored the man! Clergy who can’t marry make the church rules, bah

Charles was always tired. Up at three thirty every morning to drive out, gather and milk cows! Bob had done it while Charles was in service but quit when Charles returned and never looked back. Charles had a few army buddies and one afternoon Jim visited from Chicago. Bob and his girlfriend joined us and we went to the Mill a nice club and then Charles wanted something at home - bed! I HAD to come in - he was tired. He lost his good friend who turned to Bob the playboy. - I wanted to too. To Charles play time never fit in only WORK! Charles was doing all the field work too, dumb…and me dumb right with him. I did not know these people did the dirty work. I thought it was like the Tolan Farms - Gentlemen Farmers. HE was the worker. I felt jilted.

No More Tears

The morning demonic scenes never stopped. My tender heart was killing me. I had to get out or change. My Angel decided. It said - “ Then we must toughen you up. Your mother and aunts cry at the drop of a hat, but they get results. Tears will not work with this MIDDEN bunch; they are heartless. First you do not want to cry: No more tears -ever! And I felt a relief but it was that my tear ducts closed. I never cried again for the rest of my life. I cannot make tears. This makes me appear hard and cold. The Angel said, “ Sponge your face with cold water to reduce the swelling. Put on some makeup. What you have none. Get some. Walk to the store and buy some. Then you must start painting again... Pick up a tube of Aliziron Crimson oil paint. This is a most useful color. Get out your paints and start painting again. Just set the things in the closet and say nothing. Turn on the radio.“ I followed all these things but avoided Adams Street getting to Kresges. The Senator now had his offices at 4th and Adams… I felt too insecure to see him. Now I realize I should have. He never told me all he knew about the Midden family. Besides that information, the underlying cause were the Loco Squatters but we did not know this yet. And we did not know there was a curse on the land. At least we were not on that horrible farm but it had infiltrated Charles, what a demon.. The income was dreadful and the 3 pieces of meat was 1 hamburger, 1 bones, and one stew meat. ..at times we got nothing but bones-all packaged neatly. I was thankful for staples- flour, sugar, baking powder and eggs and shorteming. My blender and mixer kept us eating. We ate lots of mousse, cakes and bar cookies . Outside there was no garden space. The yard was set up for cars to drive through and rented for parking. Charles brought home baby animas some in their nests yet. He said the tractor hit the nest. Of all these only one cardinal survived. One day it flew to the screen door and Teddy barked and rand after it and hit the light screen. It opened enough that the bird flew out. In three days, Mrs. Lemmon saw me and said there is a Cardinal in my tree eating all my cherries. She never had that before! I sympathized but kept mum.

# Trip to Chicago

I discovered: The Arthur Godfrey Show and the music was new and performers good. And I did toughen up and that was good. My parents families are emotional. With all this turmoil I figured it would affect this little child I was carrying but when she arrived there seemed to be no problems. There was a problem . I discovered that the Midden women had been built like cows and I was expected to nurse. I was anemic- there was nothing in me but I was bulldozed into it. The poor kid screamed day and night. It was hungry. She would gulp strained pears and did by the case. The telephone rang and I hoped it was not my mother with an hour story about some gal I had never been friends with or seen since grade school. It was a radio station and they had a musical quiz. Name the song and win a trip to Chicago. It was a song that says the title only at the end. I Listened and hoped they would keep playing it. They did and I said, “Under the Bridges of Paris With Me” The announcer said “YES! We have a winner. Do you know how long we have been playing this record? I didn’t think anyone would ever get it. The Weekend in Chicago is for Christmas time. And…then he went into all the gifts and train fare and meals. And Charles said, “We can’t go that weekend, and I could have killed him. We had no plans. “We can go the week after that.” He lied -it was another control ploy. I began to resent this marriage even more. We were allowed to have that next weekend and I was relieved. I would be out of this huse and have some some decent meals. I prayed hard for that kid to act normal. II took many jars of baby fruit for little Mary Magdalene and the diaper bag. Charles got his wedding suit cleaned and pressed - I had that kitchen print everyday dress.I hid it under my blue fleece coat. Finally, he let me drive the car one day. I coordinated all the chores that needed done including a visit to the green stamp store. I parked right outside it. I chose a brass framed full view mirroe. As I was coming out with it, Bill Horsley saw me anc came across the street to help. He said he was coming to the office and ususalllyparks in back but walks around to the front door. We said our few usual exchanges - how good he looked, and how were things; that sort of thing. I then walked to Kresge’s. Up the street I noticed large advertising placards. It was on a new fabric outlet store. They sold by the bolt! I saw a pattern I liked. The bolt had seven yards. It was a white backed lantern print cloth for five bucks! I sewed an interchangeable ward-robe of this. I had beads from working in Kresge’s and beaded some pieces. I dumped that old dress right away. It felt nice. I did have Mrs. Barringer’s wardrobe but they were all dress-up-dry clean garments and nothing one could wear hlding a child on a train. I packed a few wonderful garments to wear at dinners in Chicago. I felt like there was a music connection about this trip besidre the tune nobody knew - and there was. I discovered it at the first dinner.

The train gyrated a lot but the baby slept! The hotel was The Windsor. They bought in a crib. We had real breakfasts at the hotel and lunch and dinners at specialty restaurants. It was a dream for me. There was background music at lunch and then a gentleman approached our table and said.” Well my dear, this was certainly an involved way of finding you,” It was Franke Carle. What the heck is your married name now and where are you living? I passed the baby to Charles, stood and hugged the pianist. “Oh thank you Carle. I needed this so much! I was dieing in that town. I miss working with everybody. Where are you playing?” It was right at the Windsor and he had just been extended and was very happy. Charles extended his hand and Carle said, “Ive known your wife since I became a star!” And then he laughed. “Without this little lady I would still not be a star. She is magnificent. You have a prize.” Charles nodded but said nothing. Why was he not curious? I would have it all out and he could scream whatever he liked but no he buried it. Darn, I was pregnant again, so soon…

I thought maybe the demon died but it resurfaced at home. My mother devoted herself to visiting when Charles was at work. She cuddled the baby and brought gifts. She never gave me warning she and dad just showed up and I was to serve them coffee and cookies while they wasted my day and told stories about Springfield people when dad was there but if he wasn’t it would be about her happy times when she was single… Only with Helen was baby Magdalene cuddly and smiling -only for Helen was she sweet. The nursing shit was the pits for me. The kid was full of pears and water. Finally it needed the baby shots. The doctor wrote a formula so that we could use the milk from the farm. Finally the kid was happy and I got some sleep. But The Magdalene had nightmares often and cried like she did when she was starving. I think these were a replay of Charles’ shouting and slamming his fists at things. The dogs would cower in their beds. He terrified all of us whenever he came into the house.

Middens move butt

My friend Joan K. said her husband was taking a test for the police and said to get Charles to take it. I did. Her husband was police-family; he got third and Charles knowing nothing got 13th. Right away he decided he needed a car. I mentioned car-pooling to the classes but NO! He had to have his own car. We bought a Ford Custom, 1955 with nothing down. Trouble brewed as soon as the names were published in the newspaper. The Middens who all had good jobs and wouldn’t touch a poop shovel, were losing their flunky! The farm! The Farm was at risk! The Dipso Maniacs warbled their war chant and decided. They could build a house on the farm and entice Charles to live there! If it did not work, the father could live there. No salary increase. Salary was what we needed, but “Being a Dairy Farmer” rang bells in Charles ears and he agreed! He personality maniacs increased. The Lord and Master- put me in my place - shit came on full blast. He screamed that I must do as he says, make good meals, could not leave the house or talk to anyone, etc. This sudden demonic blast shocked me silent! What could I cook when there was no meat or vegetables, not even a can of pork and beans. He blew for no apparent reason and he was out the door in a flash, slamming it behind him. Why was this happening again? The same thing repeated the next morning and it followed every morning, I cried daily. How could I call Senator Horsley and tell him things had gone so wrong when I was pregnant? I was so uninformed.

No more of that nursing shit. Oh what a stink those nurses made in the hospital. We’d be using the farm milk once home, I put up with the nursing charade. My, my they had to give him a bottle of water! What a surprise. Marshall was the opposite of The Magdalene. He slept so peacefully, I checked to see if he was breathing. My mother never paid attention to Marshall just little Mary. That kid was being groomed to serve her grandmother. We did not realize it but truth wills out! When The Magdalene was “on her own.” She was between jobs. Horace Mann was a bust and the fashion shop changed her area to shoes. Marshall was working in St. Paul MN for several years.He installed their huge Cray Computer from scratch and was sent arounf the country setting up computers in Colleges. The he was called to Thailand for troubleshooting theirs. He married after he spent three months in Australia to learn the Fairlight musical computer and then married Susan Pagnac. She had a little girl and they had another. All was OK and then Susan got MS. They asked for help and The Magdalene was delighted, rented a U-Hall and packed. She told her grandparents. Helen said, “With all the things and considerations I gave Mary Magdalene I thought she would surely favor my need first! She will have nothing but trouble for this. I curse her!” I thought my mother was - well, full of it but The Magdalene

had nothing but problems and troubles at Marshall’s. The ladies were both “A” personalities and clashed! Ifeel all of it was my mother’s fault. Helen constantly treated Charles shabbily and if I showed her a project I was working on - it would not be a success… I realized this and if I sold a painting, I never told Helen... If I did someone’s portrait, I never told her. If she came during one of my portrait sittings, I would tell the lady that I could not work with my mother visiting and fold away the paints and work. I’d just tuck them in the kitchen - kitchens were anathema to Helen. My sitter would snatch her sleeping baby, and bid us farewell. Hele was very negative. So I became a believer and prayed to God that the curse be broken. What a mother, curses can be real.

Charles used a farm truck to work and one morning picked up a hitchhiker. This guy pocketed my husband’s headache pills. It sent a fear into him and although he hated big dogs he drove to some small southern town and bought a black brindle German Shepherd puppy. He called it Mac. Mac drove to work with him and was leached by the outhouse. But it got loose to be with Butchie. Mac was the same color as the cinder drive. The puppy fell asleep on the drive. A milk customer drove in and hit him. Charles brought Mac home with a steel rod in its back hind leg. He was laid in the kitchen. Teddy claimed his territory immediately and Mac just listened. He’s gone through too much to bother. Finally Bebe the tiny Peke came over to Mac and crawled up on his two front legs and laid down. She pulled her little legs up tightly and glanced up at Mac. He gave her a little push with his nise and she rolled down and popped up happily. They made a great game of it. After a few hours Teddy got possessive and came to Mac yapping. Teddy was a biter but when he got into the right position, Mac pulled one paw back, lifted it and smashed Teddy to the floor. Then he looked up at me as if to say take this thing away. I gathered courage and picked up Teddy yapping, squirming and trying to bite me- did once. I put him in his bed and told him to stay there. Little devil, I had medications upstairs and went to doctor myself.

Charles came home and Teddy came blustering to him saying his peace, but Charles never read dogs and put him back in his bed. Woo-Hoo angry Peke-little lion dog! Charles got his ankle nipped and his pant leg shaken to off balance him. Teddy was then thrown into his bed. The war was over but they were enemies thereafter. Mac recuperated and returned to the farm and Butchie with delight. He did not mind being on leach now. Butchie did not want to be tied. Running loose brought he trouble. He hooked up with a few stray dogs and they ran through the timber. It was ok for months and then the day I was due and waiting to go to the hospital, Butchie disappeared and never came back. I called to him, he always barked and then walked back to me. While I waited for a ride to the hospital - dad Midden was off on a chore and had the only car. They called Mrs. Boyd, a neighbor. Mac went into a frenzy. He cried and yelped and struggled to get free of his tether. He did slip his collar and barked at all of us and then took off to the timber. He wants you to follow him!” I screamed. Bob decided that was a good call and the men went off some of Charles’ roofing crew too. Mrs. Boyd a neighbor that they copied Ma Perkins, and later Gramma of the Beverly Hillbillies from her.Mrs. Boyd drove in and took me to the hospital. I told her what was happening so she came back to the farm after I delivered. The story was: Mac lead them to the back 40 where the guys found Butchie caught in a tangled roll of barbed wire fencing. His leg was broken and twisted from his efforts to free himself. They carried him up and Bob had to give him a whiff of chloroform and amputate the back leg. He said the dog showed so much relief after it was bandaged that he curled up and slept. The loss never fazed him. He healed but never went running in the timber again. Mac and Butchie stayed together pals until the pigs sowed and Mac found great fun he thought in chasing the piglets. The Piglets got out of breath and 2 died. Mac was introduced to a sturdy collar and leach. We were living on the farm in the new house - the no money increase deal that Charles fell for. I did portraits here, the North Light was great in the front bay. Charles was into the I want stage and more children was it, We had five. So I read the children’s page and at times contributed news about the children.

The Old Barn has a surprise. 1957

On Saturday mornings Mr. Midden took his small bucket of chalk paint and a brush and painted his list of farm goodies for the week on a large blackboard that was on the roadside of the old barn. This day he found a large basket. In it were 15 puppies and a mother dog! He was surprised but picked up his chalk brush and added “15 Puppies”. He told Bob and I about the puppies. Charles was back at the barn with the cows. Bob killed and butchered on the farm. He was heartless. He said, we got two male dogs; a female will be trouble. I’ll get my gun and shoot them all. I was shocked but spoke quickly:

“Wait! There’s that lady that writes the children’s page each week. I’ll call her and see if she can help us. She posts children’s birthdays and little notes about the events in their lives.” I told Mrs. Lanham about the 15 puppies and mother dog that had been dropped off at the big old barn by Bradforton. They were free for adoption.

She said, “Oh this is wonderful. It is just what I need to finish this column. Pick out names for each puppy. Children like the puppies to have names.” I told her their size and their colors that the mother seemed to be a Rat Terrier/Corgi mix. She posted all the puppy news for the Sunday column. We chose the hours from 2 to 5 starting Sunday. Low and behold people came to the old barn and Mr. Midden had a Hey Day fondling the puppies and handing them to children and their parents. They were gone in one afternoon - even the mom.

Mr. Midden was laughing that day. “I forgot dog names. I gave away 5 Tricksies and two Princesses- Margaret and Elizabeth; and three Dukes. Bob said he gave away the Three Musketeers to three older boys. Mr. Midden asked how he remembered those hard names. Bob said they were on TV last night -and I gave away several Dukes too and three named Prince. We all laughed. I kept my hildren in our back yard at play and our two farm dogs, Mac and Butchie did not lift an eyebrow to the proceedings. Neither was interested. That was one time we beat the Delos Brown curse!

Mary Magdalene was a child who never listened. She had to experience. When I was ironing she reached to touch the iron and I said, “No, it’s hot!” She looked at me blankly and touched it, pulled back and said, “Ouch it’s hot!” Her hearing was OK. She was tested. “”Don’t run with the metal sand shovel.” …”I’m ok!” Splat. Two stitches on the upper lip. This was the very day she had an appointment to get her last yearly phot taken. Our neighbor operated a photographic studio and gifted each of our children with a childhood memory package. I said, in a moment I will comb your long hair and we will leave for the studio. I turned my back and she got the scissors and chopped off each side of her hair to the scalp! I about died. I took her in that way. Mrs. McConnell looked at her and said, “Come, dear”. They went into the cosmetic area and little Magdalene sat at the pretty dressing table. And then they went into the cameral area and took several pictures. When they came out, Mary Magdalene looked like her hair had been simply pulled back on each side. The photos were lovely. She went through life like this until High School. She came home saying she was going to fail Driver’s Ed because she could not merge into traffic. Charles had the Saturday free. It was before Christmas We planned to see the shops in St. Louis. We went in on I-40 and Charles gave The Magdalene the wheel.

“OK, this is what a cop told Helen Schlosser (Helen dated our master carpenter) Now you are to count to three and just drive off the ramp and into the traffic or so help me, I’ll give you a ticket for obstructing traffic….OK, Mary one, two , three. Mary went down the ramp and merged successfully.

“I did it! I did It!” She screamed and headed for another ramp turn-off. We were now by Busch Stadium and hoping a game was not finishing. We finally got to Northland Shopping Center where the children promptly went to the elevated train. It was mounted on the ceiling and kids loved it. It was here I first saw the china pattern of my dreams, Wedgwood Enameled. We could afford a cup and saucer. This was my first real Christmas present. Usually I got an aluminum pot.

The next class Mary Magdalene was ready for the merge into traffic. There was a problem. It had snowed and iced. Cars were sliding on the brick street. The instructor said turn onto Monroe Street when it is clear... One, two, three and into the traffic she went! Cars tried to stop and the great slide commenced. There is no place less accustomed to snow and ice than Springfield, IL. The instructor nearly had a heart attack and yet, they were unscathed…”OK, where do you want me to go?” …”Ugh, straight. Go straight. Where did you learn to drive like that?” So she told him the whole story.

One day while she was walking home from Springfield High she heard some religious music and the girl who wanted to be a Sister once peeked into the building. There were a lot of kids, some looked strung out others were fine. It was a place for recovering addicts. The kids tried to sing acapella. One knew Mary Magdalene and said they sure wish they had a piano. She mentioned this when she got home and looked at ours - no way kiddo! Since the fun encounter with Franke Carle he kept tabs on my and when there was a really good musician he would send them over to our house. We needed that piano. I had professional pianists visit when they are passing through town. They leave us tickets. Sometimes the kids are home and hear real work. All our kids play. As luck will have it, my telephone rang. It was Mrs. Cannedy across the street. She had finally had enough of her husband’s demands and they were breaking up their household. She had this antique upright. She refinished it but it is just too big to move. I mentioned it to my daughter. She took the phone and in a moment said I’ll make a call and then call you back. It was curious but the calls went fast. “Hi, Mrs. Cannedy, I have some friends with a truck to move the piano, OK? Yes they can come now… I interjected:

“Mary you know a piano has to be tuned every time it is moved.” …”Yes, mother we have a tuner waiting.” It was a small pickup truck and six guys hauled the Upright Chittering out of the house. When that monster set on the truck bed -oh, how it went down. It was beautiful. It had columns and fluted embellishments and glowed with love. I was invited to the first concert because I found the piano. The pianist was slight, sandy-haired fellow with glasses. I glanced at his music and it was 3 to 5 sharps and flats! This kid knows his stuff. I began watching him play. He hit the arpeggios with a bit of difficulty. When the piece finished I showed him how to move his thumb or little finger to continue the arpeggio smoothly. He was thrilled. The next song had me watching those beautiful hands. I mentioned jumping sequence with his left hand. It was taking a big chance, but look what it did for Horst Jankowski. I said it might sound funny at first, but with an orchestra - the orchestra plays the middle field and this way the piano is unique. He played around with it and I mentioned when he was comfortable with that, try the right hand. He was over joyed with his new innovation.

Mary Magdalene was not. “Mother, you ruined out pianist. He plays all over the place and we can’t sing with him. Before I could express a contrite word, she said, “Oh, it’s all right he was being drafted so joined the Air Force to have a choice. He wants to be a jet pilot.”

“Oh, Mary Magdalene, I never asked his name. What is it?”

”Larry Houston.”

“Houston! I have a Houston on my list.” She asked what list I was talking about. “Before I left the other Realm, Old Liszt gave me a list of 53 names of musicians I am to hear and review. Come, I’ll show you. It is in the back of my diary.” I got the book and flipped to the back: “See, Larry Houston and I have to find him a piano! We both laughed. ”They are mostly to enjoy, but one. This “Z” guy. He is good but doesn’t have composing conquered.”

“Mother, you have all this ability and dad is so awful about it. What is wrong with him?”

“I believe he would have been happier if I was an elementary school dropout; someone to lord it over and put down. He is never curious; never asks questions. Doesn’t he ever wonder how we have tickets awaiting us for Big Band Events? I thought I’d write fun things to him about the Russian Classes but it was a time bomb with him. Oh, he was totally against my having more education than him… Well then it was not a good time to mention it. We met already mismatched. The class was just fun; you met Tisckos! He was just back from the Navy and ready to tell the Russians where to go. When Charles made such a fuss, I should have dumped him… But being an optimist…The old Middens don’t change; they entrench.”

Huston left the little church group and shortly they got a letter from him. Mary Magdalene read it to everyone and told me later. He was at the Academy and had some free time so entered the service club. There was a piano and he sat down and had fun. A Colonel was - making a shortcut through the club and listened! Came over and asked: “Where you headed, son?”…I want to be a jet pilot, Sir. … “No you don’t you are going in the orchestra.” Well, he writes that he never saw a jet plane, but he has been traveling flying with the orchestra by plane. They play everywhere in the world, even Russia and the Middle East. He is the featured artist! They visited some military hospitals to cheer the wounded and chose a combo to play for them. He said it was so depressing those guys lost so much - he was very fortunate that music kept him out of Viet Nam. The word was that only a few helicopter pilots survived -and he had wanted that so much! He thanks you, mother for showing him these musical innovations. It is why he is alive. After two years of steady travel and playing he did not wish to reenlist saying he played so much and seen the whole world and it was great but now it was time for something else. He was going to be an Anesthesiologist. He said for two years he been keeping people alert and awake. Now he was going to put them to sleep, one at a time.” The Magdalene brought him to the house while he was on furlough. Immediately, he sat down at the piano and played the Malaguena, just like Horst does on his Evergreens Album. But Larry gave me the compliment I treasure the most. “Mrs. Midden, I did not get to do what I wanted and I thank you. You saved my life.” I was so choked up, but I had no tears and laughed at the same time. We fooled the curse that time and I thank God.

An agreement that benefitted us.

His agreement: $100.00 per month- no pay increase and it was not negotiable. One hour off per month to get a haircut and must take Mr. Midden at that time to a barber on West Allen Street. No vacation; no sick leave the chores had to be done regardless. Sunday, must drive Mr. Midden to church at 6 am. The chores started daily at 4:30am to milk the cows and again at 5pm. Cream separated, hogs slopped daily as usual and field chores. He threatened that he could rent the house and had takers.

We talked to Tisckos and the Senator both were beside themselves with the outrageous demands on Mr.Earl Hodges Stationary. No farm hand need sign an agreement. No son should be treated so despicably. From the tone he would evict them if he did not get his way- property-wise. As a parent he should be horsewhipped and that attorney too for even suggesting such medieval serfdom. Sign nothing. Look for other work. We sincerely did that. Charles answered all the ads in the paper and called Julie, his sister to see if there was any work in her area. Before any answer crossed the mails Norm and Julie drove from Florida to tell us how good we had it. We did not bother talking specifics. It was none of their business really but it showed Julie was not amicable to Charles Their childhood closeness was gone. .

Next thing I knew, the mailman drove up and asked me if we were having problems with the old man. I mentioned that we needed Fifty Dollars a month to pay for coal. He said, “Well I got the letter here from an attorney-Hodges. Now, these things, bode no good so - you will not accept it. Here we write on it, not accepted.”

“But I thought you had to accept all your mail” He said no. In a few days you will find out what was in the letter without ever opening it. Tell me does your husband make pretty good? He listened. Is he adopted? So I told him we just left ourselves wide open.

The postman nodded his head. “That’s him, little guy? I nodded. “ I get around little lady. Do not worry.” The mailman backed his car out of our drive so fast I thought the old man was a goner and he swiveled it to face the exit so fast the old man was sprayed with cinders.

Sure enough, it had been an eviction notice, but now we had some input ahead. Old Mr. Midden chose our anniversary as the date of eviction .We were married ten difficult years. Advice from Tisckos and Horsley both were that in the end we would have to move. We did not know where. But a whole household with five children was headed for the highway so the miser could have his money from renting the ‘ 56 house. The mailman drove in again and asked how things were going! I laughed first.

“May 2, at noon we are headed for the highway, bag and baggage“. He snickered at my interpretation and said all’s set, don’t worry and drove off. I wondered about that dear little mailman. Sunday, May 2 Charles went back to milk the cows and I began packing things. A stranger in a beautiful Cadillac Fleetwood drove in and I was ready for tears that were impossible for me. What else could go wrong? He said he was Ed Griffith, his daughter took my kids to School. Mr. Midden had confiscated the car keys and we had no transportation. I figured they wanted to stop. God no! He asked where Charles was and I said back at the barn milking the cows. He looked shocked. Talk about an ingrained work ethnic! Ed said, I’ll drive back and get him. When they came up, Charles said, “Beings we were evicted my job was included in that so Ed said I was not to do the milking any more. There is other stuff, but you get the kids ready for church.”- He would drive Ed Griffith home.

“Wait! How do you get back?”

So Ed told me about the car to use - that one! The Cadillac! Also there was a house for us. There was more but later. Now he would take Ed Home and I would get us ready for church. When Charles came back he talked in the car on the way to church. There were no nasty words from him.He sounded civil and human.

“Ed said, as long as we are evicted that means I am fired. I do not have to do the milking or scooping or feeding or separating and slopping. And doggone it, I’m not. Those are not my cows or bull; we had to sell ours to live. That put me out of the dairy business but I was blind not to see it. The township is hiring me to clear the brush aside the roadways and provide the house and $50.00 a week. “

My eyes flew open wide. “ That is twice what you were making!” I realized - getting evicted brought us more income, a lovely car to use plus a house rent free! That little innocent mailman! He got around all right and told every living soul about the greedy old Mr.Henry E. Midden and what he was doing to his own son and family! Gardner Township called a meeting. It was decided they had never faced a hardship case before, but this case truly qualified. They would help this family. Hank Sommer was a contractor. His crew would move the family to the big house on the hill just off Bradforton Road. No body knew at the time that the Big House set on the South side of the border of the First Land Grant that had been cursed. They were escaping the Loco Squatters.Hank would let Charles drive a truck to and from his new road work. The Griffiths, Theresa would still pick up the kids and take them to school while Ed furnished the car that his own wife had lost interest in for another he rebuilt. All these people did not live on the land grant land but a couple lanes south of it! This area was called Riddle Hill. Why that, has been lost in history. When the school year ended the children would transfer to Farmingdale School. Only the Bus Company was not elated. They had no idea how they could get the school bus up and down that steep hill and into the drive by the big house to turn around! Why had all these wonders happened? What had any of us done to deserve such good things?

At the Township Meeting the people on Moore’s Lane spoke up. Every year since he could drive a tractor with a plow, Charles plowed the snow off the lane and the steep turn by Germanns’ Dip so the school bus could get through - and never said a word; never charged a dime in all those years.

When Charles heard this he said, “I had to wait for the school bus when we were little - no damned fun!”

The Move

We moved into the Big House May 2, 1962. The Big House was summer shelter only. The two sister s that owned it were trying to sell it and thought it would look better with people living in it. Actually it had bugs in the cistern and termites that were helping it fall apart. There was no mortar between the flagstone foundation stones and daylight shined like starlight through it. There were eleven Rooms in the shape of a capitol I with sun porches on the East and West crevices of the I. The sisters assure me my little portable dish-washer would hook up and work nicely, but I would have to go down the utility steps and spin the wheel on the generator.

Hank Sommer’s crew took the first load over to the Big House. Roy, Hank’s carpenter stomped the porch to see if it would hold the move. To their surprise, a copperhead slithered out. There was a whole nest of them under the porch. The crew cleaned that out, after all kids would be playing there! One of the sisters saw a lose strip of wallpaper and jerked it off. The whole portion of wallpaper fell leaving a wall with a coat of blue. I knew this blue was not a healthy thing. The sister said “oh it is all over - it keeps the bugs away. I remembered a movie - that blue wall was exposing arsenic.

Spinning the wheel for the generator was easy for about a week. I spun the wheel and the water-pipe burst giving me a squirt in the face. OK I got that under control and used Electrical Tape. Next I went down to spin the wheel on the generator and two menacing eyes glowed yellow at me. I stopped! What was that” I came upstairs and thought, looked out the window over that area and decided to try enticing it out with a carrot. If carrot did not work, I would try a meatball. I took a carrot and sliced in into coins and went outside. I opened the right and left cellar doors and went downstairs. Opened the basement door slightly and placed a few coins and then on up the stairs and across to a new wash house! I closed the cellar doors as the bottom had an open space. I went inside to watch. The little children were all playing in the room with their toys. Up the steps with a halt at each was the biggest brown and grey thing I’d ever seen! It lumped and stopped to eat a carrot slice before the next hop. I watched it eat its way across the yard to the wash house. It was afternoon all the children were home. Got them in their coats and scarves, mittens on strings and snowcaps and out to the car. “We are going to the Illinois State Museum to see the little animals.”

This day, the parking space right in front of the steps was open. We headed for the wildlife area. While the children oogled all the little nests of critters and birds, I went to the mounted specimens. My critter was as large as their beaver but did not have the flipper. The only other thing that resembled my critter was a tiny gopher. The face, the coloring the chompy fat cheeks were all perfect. It was the size! What I had as big as their beaver. My eyes flashed from one to the other and then I decided: OK, let’s say gopher and take the children to see the white tail deer display. When we came home the gopher was in the yard sunning itself. Charles drove in. “Do you know you have a huge gopher in the back yard.”

“I do know. We were at the museum to see what that thing is. I never saw a gopher before.”

“You haven’t? They were all over in those two corn bins near the dairy barn. Digging holes like crazy. Hey! Everybody, keep your coats on. We’re going to the farm to see the gophers. Mama never saw them.” And there they were digging like there was no tomorrow and all as big as the one at the Big House. We did love the Big House; we were so happy there - too bad it was in such poor shape. Termites claimed the basement stairs and roaches claimed the water cistern. When you looked down into the good water well, the interior was lined with thick long yellow roots of a Forsinthia as far as you could see. Water tasted terrible. The daily chore for Charles was a hike to the other good well for 2 five gallon buckets of water each morning for us.

The Curse Backfires

After we moved Old Mr. Midden did rent the 56 house. He was so pleased. Things were going his way. His son Bob was conscripted to do all the work Charles had done. But, he had not changed the spotlight. It was still aimed to get Charles going and also awaken Mary. He hated having her in the family. The timer was still set and went on at 4:30am. Bob could see his way better in the yard but it was not O.K. with the renters. By the third day they’d had enough and moved.

Old Mr. Midden contacted the other people that had applied for the house. Every one of them seemed interested and checked the house. But when they left the back bedroom they each made some excuse to decline. He placed an ad and new people came to see the house. These prospective renters each left laughing and made an excuse. All this time and money spent on ads and showing the house and no money! Maybe there was a dead mouse or something. He sent Bob in to find the trouble. There was no mouse, there was a note. On the back closet wall in bold letters: “Hope you like early. This idiot turns on a spotlight at 4:30.” Bob came out laughing too. “Dad it is the closet; it needs a paint job.” Old Mr. Midden and wasted enough time and money. “ Bob you move in there. I know it is a good house.”

Bob moved into the 56 house but he was a slob. The room he left at his father’s house needed a tractor and scoop to make a path. His father was soon fussing that the place needed to be kept tidy. Bob ignored his crabby father. Beings he had condoned the agreement that Hodges prepared for Charles he was now conscripted to honor it. He was exhausted, and he only had ½ the cows to care for. How had Charles done it? Bob consoled himself; His dad was old how much longer could he last!

Old Mr. Midden lost in his money-making scheme. Bob the slob moved into the 56 house. But he was not paying rent, that was lost. The room had an odor like something dead was in there. He hired an exterminator over Bob’s fussing. His father fussed back that the place needed to be kept tidy. Things were costing him a fortune and there was no incom! Not as smooth as he thought. He doubled his fault-finding. Bob ignored him but the thought crossed his mind - if he had a wife she could take care of the house. He was never without a girlfriend because although he was bald, he had the longest curly eyelashes and he was fun. He could get a group together easily. The ladies all tried to get close but then he turned them off. A few of them were wealthy too. Well, that would not fit his needs. He needed one who could be enticed into the strange life-style of the Middens.

Bob really liked the lady he was dating. Her name was Sharon Craycroft. She knew nothing about his family or all the deaths - about Louis or Louise. Sharon intended to quit her job after she married. This was it! She was perfect. He proposed. She was beguiled by his nice-face personality. He pleased her and she really fell in love with him. They had been dating off and on for about a year. She figured all farms function about the same and she knew her parent’s life. This was OK so she said yes. She was 18 years younger and knew nothing about the situations lurking within that family of maniacs. There was a sister in the mental facility in Jacksonville and the extreme power that the namesake first son Henry E. Midden, Junior wield. The old man could never make a decision until Junior’s battery of retained attorneys first approved- this was to assure his future was intact.

None of us suspected a curse on the area; we just chalked it up to normal bad luck. The Midden men kept the Demonic Maniac thing carefully under wraps as was the extreme miserliness of Old Mr. Midden. It was definitely not a regular farm or family. Sharon Craycroft wanted a nice wedding - after all he brother had a very nice on just a few months earlier. Bob was honest in admitting he had no savings in fact he was broke and working for is father but was free to do electrical work when there was some.. Truth was he was a party loving guy and treated his friends well. She considered selling her car and Bob encouraged this saying his truck was newer and she could use that. that after paying for the wedding she and after paying for a wedding Sharon would have nothing also. They would be just two lovers in the mad - mad world. It was just the sort of gratis perpetuating situation which pleased Old Mr. Henry E. Midden. He approved of gratis work and Sharon was stepping right into it.

Meantime At THE BIG HOUSE

After the roadways were cleared, the local Contractor, that moved us, hired Charles as a gofur. Then, it was raining and the sisters told the contractor, they remembered, there was a leak around the chimney when it rained. Charles overheard and said, Oh, I’ll get it, I am good at that! They got him an extension ladder and up my husband went over two stories in the air. I was terrified and stayed inside. How he detected that leak I do not know, but suddenly he became invaluable as the leak man. Charles saw the inside of more attics in more farm houses than anyone. Usually he climbed over old furniture and once he saw an old clock. He remarked about it and the owner told Charles he could have it. This started his first hobby. Farmers were happy to give him a clock - less junk for them. He finished the wardrobe, and a few of his grandmother Middens old wall clocks from her store. There were two wall clocks from the Sommers . He chose an area for his tools and cleansers on the big table. That dining room was 15’ x 25’. Thanks to one of the sisters, the wallpaper was gone on one half of one wall. Under the pretty wallpaper the wall had been painted a bright blue. We were told the blue killed germs. We happened to see a TV movie with a lady being poisoned mysteriously and finally thery sent for a doctor who was shocked and said t he walls ere coated with arsenic. The room in the TV show was small and one window. Our huge dining room had four huge windows and four doors in the dining room. These kept lots of air circulating. We had been safe. There was a small room adjoining the ballroom with a stairwell to the kitchen -servant’s quarters. Like below it, there was a room to the East and another to the West. We used the west for the children’s bedroom and used the ballroom for Charles and I.

East room upstairs room was seldom empty because we always had overnight company. It was a house that people gravitated to. My Grandparents loved coming with Cousin Cathy’s family. Everyone gave-up trying to visit Helen and Joe. Helen began turning them away! She was so negative. Joe was too hen-pecked to set her straight. In the big house, we ate in the kitchen because the views were great. But ordinarily we spent most of our time in the dining room. It was so big that everyone could have a place and the kids could ride their toys around us. Charles had room to work sanding an old wardrobe his dad did not want before the break. I cut patterns for the children’s Christmas gifts there too. So much freedom! For quiet the chess set was left set-up in the west parlor on the coffee table where the Little Infant of Prague viewed it all from the fireplace mantle there. Their games went fast. They played five or six then scooted out to other things. The checkers had a space, but that was too simple for the older two. The little-ones played a lot and then wanted to know how all those pretty people and horses moved on the chess set.

ED Curtin

Meanwhile our move to the Big House had removed us from the land grant area by one lane. The lane was the borderline. Now across that lane north, all manner of things happened. Our old neighbor Ed Curtin a bachelor finally put an ad in a lonely hearts column and married. This lady put on that she was psychic but she had grown up in the area and knew everyone’s lifestyle and illnesses. So when she spoke psychic sounding phrases to her clients - it was just from childhood memories. One day Ed came in from town and discovered wrecking company pushing his family home into the ground with all the furniture, clothing, freezers full of meat and her reason: It was old fashioned. She didn’t like it. She wanted a new place back there so the Seed Company People can’t be gawking in at her all the time… He built a big barn for his machinery and walled off part for their residence. She was not a nice person. All her previous husbands died mysteriously and she collected their life insurance. When I saw Ed at church, I mentioned he just looked sick. He laughed but I was serious. He checked about and found medicines from the hospital where she worked and was giving him that were not good. She was always sprinkling pepper or salt around the big barn. No wonder the neighbors noticed. Ed said she was always batting at spiders that he never saw a spiders or a bug. She was always spreading pepper around her barn-home. One day she thought a spider was webbing down on her and she picked up a hot frying pan and swung it at the spider. The grease caught the heated stove and burned the place and she was taken to the burn unit by ambulance. Ed managed to rally the neighbors and save most of the barn and his machinery. Next a jet plane lost control and crashed on his farmland spreading jet fuel over many acres. The land was not farmable and the reimbursement certainly did not help day to day living. His wife had a heart implant and told him even if she died it would still be ticking and to take proper action then. When it happened he did. As suddenly, Ed began looking healthier. She had been feeding him tiny portions of poison. When the emts got her, he looked so awful, they tested him! He was noe a free man and could visit as he chose. He came to our house and said: “Tthat Lonely Hearts ad was the worst $10.00 he ever spent.”

CATHY AT BIG HOUSE

There was a visit to remember at the Big House. Two cars full came. There was Grampa and Gramma Studenski and Great Aunt Nonie, Cousin Cathy’s husband and two children in her convertible muscle car, great Cousin Annie and her husband Wilbert, Aunt Mary, Uncle Mike and her cousins Margaret and Larry. This was their first visit to the Big House and also the first time anyone saw our new baby boy, Derek. Derek was born with a full head of dark brown wavy hair. I was helping Gramma into the house and telling her that although he was only three months old, I was going to cut his hair. She was nay-naying this saying we should never cut a baby’s hair until it was a year old. Within seconds she sees Derek and says: CUT HIS HAIR!

We had to show everybody THE THING. It was in the kids’ bedroom. Charles had gone to an auction to see if any furniture was enticing. He said the bidding never started on one piece. It was an Empire Style leather covered couch that hid a Murphy Bed. It was a monster, and weighty. Charles thought he would start the bidding with twenty-five cents. Nobody bid against him! It was quiet and finally the auctioneer said SOLD! It took six men to move it to the truck and come along to the Big House and get it upstairs. There was a button on the left armrest. One press and the thing unfolded with a swish into a double bed. Another press of the button and as fast the thing folded into a couch. The children all saw the demonstration and were bug eyed! We warned them:. “At night, it is good to sleep in, BUT Nobody ever press that button or we will never see you alive again!” It was a thing we showed the company. Oh, the laughs it brought.

We were all settled down as best we could. Aunt Nonie took the sofa in the upper foyer but without the cushions. We needed them for the bed that had no mattress, but depended on the cushions of all the sofas so two could sleep on the brass bed frame and slats. The others felt safer on the floor. Cathy and John took the brass bed to sleep on. During the night, Cathy turned over and rolled out of bed hitting the iron wall register as she fell. She screamed and the register fell down the furnace pipe clattering for two stories into the basement. The whole house was awakened. Cathy sat on the floor laughing. Even at breakfast we could not stop laughing. Gramma said, “Oh yes, this is a happy house.” It was a happy house.

Charles had cleaned several old clocks and decided to assemble the walnut stand he had built for my Gloxinias. Those were a past pleasure.. I was not able to start over yet because we were not in a permanent home. Charles leveled the shelving and set the clocks in place. They all ticked happily between the two west windows in the dining room. How could things be so different from one side of the street to the other? The curse had its limits. That land marked its stopping point. We had it good and Ed had a ruined farmstead and dingy wife.

CHRISTMAS PARADE, SEEING SANTA

The first Saturday in October the City held the Annual Christmas Parade. We parked in the new parking building and my family walked to the parade area. It was such fun. The children saw Santa enter the little Santa House and wanted to visit Santa. It was cold. The kids had their scarves over their noses and stocking caps pulled down as far as possible. By the time it was our turn, parents-outside, Derek was sniveling and supping up his sniffles. Santa asked what he wanted for Christmas and this kid in a worn hand-me-down coat and garb say: “I want a hot potato.” Santa askes is that all? And Derek says yes, Santa I really want a hot potato!” We saw the white gloved hand go to his chest in sorrow. This poor kid is starving. “Wouldn’t you like a truck or an airplane? But Derek insisted. Finally his oldest sister stepped p and said, “Santa it is a game. You get in a circle and wind it up and past it from one to another and when it dings, that person is IT!“ Derek is nodding. “Yeah, Santa and the one who is IT winds it up and passes it on.” Santa took a big breath of relief. “Well now, that does sound like a fun game! I will look that up and yes, indeed, you will get a Hot Potato.” Santa needs a rest. He will be back in five minutes! We looked in store windows at the automated displays and then drove around on the way home to the Big House. It started to snow lightly. At home that Big House was so loose that it had snowed onto The Magdalene’s pillow! Charles and I looked at each other.

We needed something that could be had at the Elevator. Hank’s oldest son Henry worked there so naturally I was sent there. On the way back, the snow had turned to ice and as I turned the big car slid across the road and into the gulch at the Haveys. The car and I were OK. Two Havey men came to elp me and of course knew who I was. The older gentleman asked who was going to shovel coal all winter at the Big House? As I looked surprised, he added that it had been his job to buy and unload coal into the basement and then shovel it into the furnace. It is non-stop all winter. Many thoughts hit my mind. I knew we could not afford such a coal bill and Charles had to work. He couldn’t be… They pushed the Cadillac onto the road and I left wiser. Back at the Big House, I told Charles the story. He said, ”We have a house.”

WE MOVE TO RIDDLE HILL

Norma and Paul’s new house on Old Jacksonville Road was complete and they would be moving into it. Their rented house was available. We moved there. Through all these moves our address remained R.R.#6. Only the Box # changed. It was a cramped bedroom for the children. All the girls slept in a brass bed. By then we were given a mattress for it. The boys were bundled near a window. The other bedroom had no heat. We stored parts of our bedroom set, the chess table, the foyer and the play room sofas there. As we had only a handful of children’s books, we stored the two door bookcase too. The wonderful dining table had to go in the basement, only accessed from outside. It remained unused. The middle room had a built-in cabinet. I unpacked my china and crystal there. We used it for the living room. The Little Infant of Prague had a lovely display area. Charles set the walnut stand with all the clocks he had restored but they were a bother at this house when they chimed at night. It was cramped. The area for play was half the large room we used for our bedroom: Too easy for little girls to finger mother’s dresser. The Magdalene managed to spill my only-ever gift bottle of Chanel #5. Regina found my artificial eyelashes, dropped one and it was never found. She was so contrite, dear little thing. That house was tight. The big areas were too dark . I liked having neighbors but not that uncomfortable house.

Winter was different for Charles. He did not know that Construction Work was nearly halted. I was pregnant due mid-March. Charles was inflexible. He had this Midden Work Ethic instilled in him: WORK. WORK.WORK. Men were not men if they were not working! When the men were asked to sign for unemployment it did not bother the others they caught little fix-it jobs to fill in. Mrs. Barringer was constantly building around the original log cabin. She wanted Charles so things were actually O.K . It was just that he was not reporting to Hank’s each morning . In his mind he had to be the important noticed man of the house and chose the demon personality. The kids seemed to never be around. I did not realize they were hiding. When I was due, Charles was into his screaming, slamming fit, flung open the door slamming it behind him. I was convinced he was mentally ill. The darn fool, I needed to go to the hospital. I did not see the vehicle at the Barringers. She usually had something that needed fixed or done. I began notable contractions.

A neighbor Mrs. Wilson drove me to the hospital. I had the baby in March I was under-par from the previous two just lying there. Charles came into the room and said, well, you look good…I was so weak I told the doctor I wanted no more children. He agreed and started me on “The Pill”.

The Riddle Hill house was across the street from the Barringers. They call their place Thirkalo Meadows Farm: A bit of home for the English lady. I thought, “Oh, those are rich people; a neurosurgeon and she is an English nurse. I did not know what she looked like until we moved across the street. She was gorgeous! She wore her greying brown hair in that straight high school do with a barrette to one side but it was never still; it was always in movement and flying. The $ status did not bother them, they had 4 kids. There was one pair of twin boys a single boy and a pudgy girl. One twin had some leg health problem. He was taught at home and was very mischievous - like putting a bubble bottle down a one piece suspended stool that had gold faucets and handles. She always wanted Challie to do her remodeling work, he never questioned her ideas. And she was constantly changing something in that old log cabin. At first she was disguising it and later she was revealing it. She needed a tack room for the horse stuff. She needed a bay window big enough to display her Riverboat gambler’s table… Hank Sommer always had him on hand for her. At times Winnie was sorry she bought a rustic antique and had Challie move it to her back screened porch. Sometimes she just gave it to Challie. The little 5 room house became a repository for Winnie’s discarded purchases. She never seemed to have a temper unless the school bus was late. Then Winnie blew and she blew big time. Our two and her two little ones would be waiting outside and no bus…Out came the convertible rain or shine snow or heat the top was always down. Her philosophy was why have a convertible if you are not going to have the breeze blowing in your face. “Get you all in the car” and Winnie flew down Riddle Hill Road leaving a cloud of dust or a spray of fresh oil from the road in the air and on her car. They were off to Farmingdale School. She was always amazed to find road oil on the sides of her car. It was supposed to stay on the road, wasn’t it? Bill Sommer’s gas station did a famous oil removal service- often. We loved her! Come Halloween she and her kids wore tramp get-ups with a bag of clothes on sticks and dirt all over them. I was shocked - This gorgeous woman in tramp’s clothes! She had one quirk. She never spoke first to anyone in public. They must call her attention and speak first.

MY WARDROBE

I still owned one dress. The one I had made years earlier on Cook Street. I washed and repaired it so often the repairs would not hold any more. Aunt Mary had noticed it at the 56 house often slipped me a ten dollar bill “for cookies” and I was mother enough to get cookies! Now Mrs. Barringer noted it. Charles was coming home after work one evening and Winnie called him into her tack room. She said, “I am changing my wardrobe and I think Mary and I are the same size. Take these for her. Some are my daughter’s that she wore in college and can’t wear again. They would need altered. Anything she does not like she can give to someone.”

Charles came home and shoved the pile at me. “Mrs. Barringer is changing her wardrobe and wants you to have her last year’s cloths. Some’s her daughters. She said you could give those to somebody they are big.“

I set everything down on a round table in the play area and turned on the light and realized my neighbor was from Heaven. The labels were from the name rooms at Myers Brothers, Bressmers, Baurs Dress Shop and Barkers. Other garments were definitely from England. Two wool suits I kept forever. I just love them. One is brown and one is off White. Even her shoes fit me! A red pair - were that wealthy red a bit lighter, I kept for years, I loved them so. But we were commoners and belonged to nothing. The little voices were quiet until I calmed down. Other changes are coming. Everything works out. I was thrilled to set aside that worn dress. I sorted the garments and set aside the ones that were college year styles plus a very big doudy dress from my mother.

Who might use them? Oh, Judy, the youngest Pilcher daughter might. She just had a baby. I did not know the details; just packed the Station Wagon and headed to Mother Vi’s. Judy was there and was delighted with the garments she was a bit weighty and they fit perfectly. These people were family to me! To mother Vi I was her daughter that seemed to have it all together. I only wish she was correct.

Mother Vi always updated me on her children - the girls and Louis but especially Ares - George. It wasmuch later at Vi’s funeral that Peggy - a middle sister, said: Everyone wished you had married George. His many liaisons kept me from it. No lady ever kept him turned on. He married 4 times, mostly because he got involved. Yet we always had that first love feeling. How often I wished that I had. I dreamed of him nightly. Then Peggy asked if I had loved him. I said, “I don’t think it was love; I think it was obsession!” He overheard and decided yes, I was right and smiled. Before Vi was gone, he used the Personal Ad Column in the newspaper whenever there was news he thought was important. Regardless of the message, the ad had a border with flowers and was in bold type. They were signed Ares. After Vi dies the ads changed. It read : TO MY OBSESSION! And ended, FROM YOUR OBSESSION! The messages were short like: Lung needs pumped… like your Cad better than mine…. Painting: wow-like seeing myself at 20… Congratulations: Russian Stamp exhibit?? … I won top salesman. U R right. Pays better than singing…car of my dreams died in the driveway… We’re selling the house. That one shook me. His little house stayed; the wives may change but the house was his pet. He was ill. The lungs were his weakness. When it happened, Charles watched my reaction as I got to the obits. It was a terrible picture I winced. I simply read it. I did not go to the wake - that belonged to Bernice his 4th wife. She was very nice people and an artist like me. I liked her. This belonged to her.

When Ares and I were younger we used telepathy especially when he ushered and later during the army days. To comment on his mother’s news about me, he used the Personal Column of the newspaper. The messages were always potent to what Mother Vi and I were discussing. Later he used: “To my obsession.” A first love stays perfect in the mind and never dies. At the Pilcher residence, I heard Judy’s story. She had divorced her husband and now worked at the State House. Unfortunately, she followed the Free Love Path. Judy was still weighty and was as thrilled to get the garments as I was with my new wardrobe. Both sides of the Pilcher family had heart problems and short lives. Judy was the last of the family to pass away but I do know her daughter, Debbie that connection stirs fond memories.

CREDIT CARD CHRISTMAS

This was the first Christmas that we were not on the farm. It presented a phase for which Charles was not prepared. I was pregnant the 6th time and very under par from the previous three. Although formally there was little report to work at Hank’s; Charles was working regularly at the Barringers house and being paid by Hank. Changed routine and Charles did not mesh. He felt like a failure - it was not work as usual. The rest of the crew adjusted to this slack in winter. Charles’ demon personality appeared. My health was almost non existant. I dragged to make a pot of coffee for Charles and then dragged to get the two ready for school and dragged back to bed. The demon in Charles was totally inflexible. He crabbed in the house but vowed he’d make Christmas for the kids. He had a credit card and used it heavily. He was not too crummy whils spending with the card until the bill came from the credit company. I think it was the interest that hit him; he was not expecting interest. His demonic stage kicked in. He entered the house, slammed the door and suddenly, I could do nothing right in his eyes. Actually I agreed with him and told him what energy I had and that I had no idea how the three little ones were surviving or eating. I dressed them fed them and then crawled into bed. He took me to the doctor because baby Selena needed her shots. My body had not bounced back from the last three babies. The doctor took one look at me and put me on iron pills but too few -they had no effect.

SCAMS

My mother had a little instamatic camera and was forever taking pictures of this pitiful lot. I looked like death warmed over and the children looked like waifs but gramma giggled and pitty-patted around constantly taking pictures. I wanted to throw the useless thing out. I was exhausted and hungry and needed help not snapshots. She did no work and did not know how to cook. She just took pictures. Dad was not working but often they had a different car. Dad just giggled about it. Mother said, “Oh, daddy didn’t like it so we got another one.” I was skeptical because I remembered my dad only giggled if he was up to mischief. They were saying nothing and shortly left. This car thing was not right, I felt it. One day they came in a green Nova with tail fins. My little angel’s voice said: “This one they will keep forever.” And in a little bit Dad’s car was rear-ended by a semi at McArthur and Lawrence which is the worst corner in town. Dad’s driving was erratic, he was always stopping without cause. Mom was sent to the hospital. Dad had a few ribs broken and taped up. The little green Nova was fixed but lost its tail fins. The angel’s words were true. Dad kept that car. The changing cars stopped. We decided they were in the bump and run scam with some unsavory insurance person. They got a different car each time and were paid a goodly settlement. My parents had not changed … get the money. I never knew where their own paychecks went. They did not eat out or take trips. Dad always wanted to be in his own bed at night. The little they traveled was in the Springfield vicinity. Only once did they see Cathy in St. Louis and once to Chicago to see her friend Florence. Dad did his own gardening. Mother visited doctors and dad got her prescriptions and payed all his utilities in person in cash. He never wrote a check or had a checking account. They were always after outside money- just like when I was home MY MONEY WAS THEIR MONEY so they thought.

The last accident was mom’s undoing. Her arthritis hurt so much that she stopped walking. Her legs began having tiny black sores that would never heal. If it was removed it grew back larger until she had both legs gangrous and the doctors wanted to amputate. I accidently met the doctors Steward and Mullendore. I recognized them from the life when she was a cruel Governess in Megara. Greece. I remembered their faces their voices and their wails. They had their legs chopped off for some meager offence I remember our terrible exile in vivid detail. The Senate of Athens declared: “This was Demetrius’ War not ours! We are scholars! While their King was at war the Senate pulled this exile of me, my nanny, bodyguard and my 3 wildcats to Megara. The governess there was the whip-hand, her husband/Governor was weak minded. She hated my husband, Demetrius for freeing the slaves in all his territories and hoping my starved cats would kill me. The men had their stumps wrapped but they were tied to posts and left in a dusty arena. And now this beastly woman was not improved and was my mother! She was facing the very verdict she had so blithely inflicted on these two men so long ago. This was turn-around-fair-play! I could not save her from this … She wat to thnk about this procedure. WI visited the house and she dictated: “You can carry me around. It will be OK.”

“Well now, Mother, no it will not be OK. I am using this cane to walk because I hurt my back. I was using leverage to remove some ild fish pong that everyone trips over and Charles would nor do it. They are building a house at the lake for some carpet company people. I am having adjustments amd thhe doctor said I cannot lift more than 10 pounds. Once her idea to saddle me collapsed, mother decided to brave it out and in her words -“ go in one piece!”

I was heart sick with them. Believe it or not, they had another scam. Mother’s idea was to go to the hospital at Christmas time. She said it was to get some use out of all that premium money their insurance was costing them! The year before starting this scam she and dad bought an aluminum Christmas tree with a rotating color wheel and rotating base for the tree. The children loved it, especially Marshall. I thought it un-Christmasy. Then the children asked: “OK Gramma where is the real tree?”

Mother discovered the best part of this new scam was going in the ambulance and having the neighbors watching. They coddled dad. Nobody could be friends with mother - they weren’t good enough. She had already cut them off- dead. The neighbor cut off was preceded by her mother and siblings, dad’s sister and brother-in-law! They had no idea what they could have done to have her pull away and send back their gifts. She ignored Charles as if he did not exist saying he did not work-(for a company like my father did.) Charles had a crew of 5 and worked with them. They built and remodeled houses.) She bragged that often she invented false stories about Charles so we did not seem destitute! She dwelled on the dark side If it wasn’t bad it would be after she got her story finished. She praised one woman who’s name she remembered from my grade school; Joan Huff. Joan had been in ballet class and did a solo in a recital. What a great life - she was a nurse -oh blah, blah, blah. (picture of graduate nurses was in the paper. And naturally this nurse agreed with my mother’s dictate that only hard candy was preferable on the systems…yesh! She never praised me and I did one heck of a lot more than that Joan Huff, I met her husband at a reunion - he was bombed drunk and asked to dance, but called me something terrible and I stomped on his foot. -Discount that! But this last chat, Cathy decided that Helen was losing it. Mother and she were friendly because mother sewed her drapery. My mother sewed professionally. She told Cathy “Oh, Mary sews well enough but she doesn’t use enough material. Mary got the three widths on sale for $10.00 at Sears. It did three windows with tie backs and ornate valences - well enough, bah I am jealous…

Cathy and I were chatting by phone and Cathy said she thought my mom was losing it. She mentioned an acrobat in the family and doubted it. I laughed, oh yes that is true, I told her. Our Grandmother Mary had a brother Mike who joined the circus when they still lived in New York. His last name was Zatorski their surname. When I was about eight there was a radio program over KMOX. It tried to find missing loved ones. The family kept contact with Mike until Mary met Joseph Jarzewiak and he persuaded them to move to St. Louis as it was a nicer place than the New York tenements. Joseph was working on the railroad and had passes to move the family. The young sisters Rose and Nora found beaus and married them. Rose married John Kowalski a smokestack maker and had John ( later, this man became “The Godfather” of the San Francisco Boiler Workers Union. This is our Mafia Connection. He was Godfather until he died -reining 73 years.

Mary married Joseph Jarzewiak, a railroad man. OK here was the family setup. They all lived near each other and Nonie had a player piano so they gathered there. Joesph played a bass Saxaphone and the cops on the beat all came in after shifts and it was a large group for fun. All the cops were Irish and had a marching band. They needed Joe and his Bass Saxaphone. They all had Irish last names and here was Jarzewiak- so they said,” OK we dub you SHEA”. And that is how the name Shea got into our family. Mother being the way she was, resented her mother remarrying after Joe died. At 14 she applied for a job at Grady’s Baseball Factory. He application was pure fantasy! They asked her name and she put Helen Shea. -figuring nobody fools with the Irish, they are fighters. Age: She put 16.Race: Irish. She got the job but felt guilty lying and told her mother. Gramma thought a moment and called all her children around the table. “From now on your Last name is Shea. It has only four letters and is easy to say. This is how the name stayed in the family until Uncle Mike was drafted. He went to the City Hall and discovered two mikes born on the same day and neither was Shea.

Uncle Mike came home with both names written down and asked his mother. She did not know the first name. The second -oh yes. It had been so many many years. Yes, Mike that’s your father. We used Shea because it was easier and not Slavic. Mike had a choice but decided to go with his father’s name. He visited Springfield. We were still in the new house they built on East Adams St. He was drafted and leaving to service but wanted to tell Helen the news. She was livid! She had made up this whole Irish heritage and he does this. Naturally she disowned him even though she caused the change when she was 14. He would always be Michal Shea at Helen’s house.

Now young Nora married Jim Hall. He was a smokestack worker also as was Rose’s husband. Rose’s husband was killed on the job and Nora pleaded with Jim to find other work. He did and I remember having coffee at their house when I was 18 and met my sweet grandmother again. (There was a big break over Birdie marrying Ed - and mother actually could have prevented the whole thing. but she sacrificed Birdie to get Ed out of our lives. Ed was the cause of everyone’s problems in 1940. I was so glad to have family againg. Mother seemed to accept the reunion. Anyway the family celebrated with coffee. He was still alive when I was married with children! So yes, my mother Helen actually told a truth - she did not tell many. Anyway

back in 1938 Auntie Birdie wrote to this radio program and she finally heard from them. They would broadcast their findings on KMOX some Saturday night. Springfield did not get KMOX so we drove to St. Louis to hear it. Mike was professionally known as Michael Zatorski of the Flying Zatorskis. This was not a family but a group that all took his last name and became known as the Flying Zatorskis. He flew without a net, fell twice and mended but the third time he landed badly and died. The announcer apologized that the story came to a sad an ending. The flyers became his family because he could not find his own. He was well loved and used his income to buy into Ringling Brothers Barnum, Bailey and Zatorski. He was well loved. That was one time a crazy story of my mother’s was true.When my mMom told a truth, it was so over the top nobody believed it. We discovered that my mother never told many truths. She was so wrapped up in her pretend life that only she was good enough for herself and later Cathy. Oh, that’s right, I was disowned 4 times. Ha. Ha. Ha.Disowned but had the responsibilities in the end.

My Mother, Helen did put herself in a bad health condition She over-medicated on Cortisone aned was suffering from an open sosre on her back that seeped the cortisone out. I gave her a bit of cstor oil to rub around it and ithe thing actually healed! But it began causing little black sores on her legs because she would not move and was losing circulation. These were gangrous, She sought relief from many doctors but pills did nothing. I walked in one day and discovered she was actively taking pills from over 8 doctors!aAt that moment. A whirlpool foot bath helped and a nurse came weely to help. Her last timein the hospital they had to move her in a net basket for a bath. She was hateful to everyone in hospice. The staff said she was especially hateful to me. The nurses assured us that she was medicated for pain and this was just when I visited. She had been hallucinating about her old boss at the funeral home saying he had sex with dead children and she tried to telephone him and say she knew! They had to tie her down to keep her from lunging for the phone. One thing, she swore he was keeping the bodies of dead children and dong unnatural things with them. She managed a call but thankfully he was so old he ignored it. She just moved this vial and then that. “This one is pretty good for my fingers; and that one is ok for my wrists. Each one helps something. Joe said,”She has so many that when she wants one, I just get three pills or I’d be broke.” Charles said Helen, you are killing yourself.” She fanned him down. “No, no I know exactly what I am doing.” … Charles shook his head, “That’s what is causing your legs to have those sores.” …”No Charles those sores are from the arthritis - they told me.”

Joe said, ”There is a nurse that comes every other day to soak her legs in the whirlpool you got for her. That helps some. She is definitely not the scrappy negative woman we know anymore.” She seems to be in a dream state.” She looked up and said,” Why don’t you and Charles sit in the front room. Immediately, Charles said, “We have that appointment, honey, we better start now.”

She was a pitiful mess and so full of medicine that there was no getting through to her. you She did not venture out or to open the door anymore. She moved between kitchen and bathroom. She was vane that her condition would be seen and besides those neighbors were such commoners. They had no class; definitely they were not good enough for her!. Joe! Well, he is of simple mind. I use to protect him more, but now I just watch from in the house…

None of these doctors could talk some sense in her, the situation was impossible. Joe kept busy helping the neighbors with fixing little things. People liked Joe. He was a simple man and they felt for him. They classified that wife of his as one screwy woman. She never let him out of her sight. She watched behind the curtains. Joe did take off to Mr. Stokes next door. There the two would watch the games on television. Mrs. Stokes always had goodies to nibble, hot tea and home baked cookies or cake… Helen’s previous thoughts that television had had some unhealthy radiations that would kill them were forgotten once she found the soaps. Joe was pleased, now he could get away and help his neighbors, or cut the grass and see the games unmonitored. It was comical, Helen had cut-off contact with her neighbors she was too elegant for them but they never knew it, they liked Joe. She had previously cut off her in-laws and her own siblings and then even her mother as not living a life in her class. They did not understand why she would not have any contact with them. Many asked me what had they done or said that could cause this. I told them; she is too good for everyone even me. She has disinherited me four times now. It is foolish. I ignore her. So does Uncle Johnny. He comes and tells his comical stories and she will laugh but she offers no friendship. Once he saw that she used one dishtowel and never changed it. ..”Well, Johannas, that is because the dishes are clean when I dry them.” He brought her a roll of paper towels. “Now have Joe get a metal piece and a short broomstick handle and slip the towels on - right over the sink. They are sanitary.” Sanitary she understood.

THE MOVE TO ADELIA STREET

The deal with the house as completed. I chatted with the Senator off and on. He was more thrilled that I was nearby rather than on that demonic farm and how did I tolerate that horrible old man?... “With a strong mind, my dear.” He did not realize we were not on the farm at all but at Riddle Hill and I let his thoughts set that way. But, I was most skeptical about leaving such wonderful people. We had to move on a Saturday when the crew could help us. Charles used Hank’s truck and immediately the new neighbors decided we were the Sommers - but oh lands, they were bringing a truck onto this fair street! There was so much daily anticipation with this house deal and then suddenly it was a time. We were faced with moving our things and all of Mrs. Barringer’s antiques that she felt had been a bad purchase for her home. We put all of her things and some paneling from the old Sommer Drugstore in the dining room aat Riddle Hill to be held back until all the “keep-stuff” was moved and inside 334 S. Adelia St. The weather our moving day set a cold record. It was 17 degrees below zero! Last things moved from Riddle Hill were the things that would be set on the front porch and thought about. We measured and hoped but the beautiful paneling could not be used. The house itself had an over-supply of doors. Open one and run into one on the closet. We removed 5 such doors and then called the Good Will. At that time they had a workshop for mentally disabled people to learn useful skills. The items were a real delight to the drivers and they told us how the items would be refinished and sold. It was a happy-unhappy moment because we really wanted the panels and swinging doors from the old drugstore. We had to dwell on being relieved of the worse old antiques ever invented.

I checked theRiddle Hill house and the cabinets one last time before I said goodbye to my dear neighbors. Some things you hope have been left behind - like Charles slamming the back door: That one time when the pots popped off the wall. And the surprise I had when the iron workers fixed that pot and showed me the super-structure they were working on. How foolish I felt. I sowed my very first flower packet there,sprinkled them around a concrete well cover. There were marigolds, cockscomb and a plant we used to see in gas station gardens that could be clipped like a hedge and of course the chickweed that Mr. Bomke planted for me. We would miss the fenced in yard, but this place on Adelia was very open; any fencing on the south would scratch the neighbor’s car or ruin the green of the north neighbor. Adelia Street was a very old neighborhood - the residents died in their home place. They were in their eighties and nineties. This house at 334 was empty over a year because the couple went to a rest home operated by the Disciples of Christ Organization. We were the only younger family. My children adapted to the 40’ front yard but loved all the old people. Most had porch swings and the girls listened to stories and rocked in the swing. The boys learned mumbly-peg and heard storied from the older men. Cap’tan Crunch was the popular cereal for years. Regina was the spokesperson of the four little ones. Cosima was a mime, she would not talk. She giggled. Nothing enticed her to speak until she was to start Kindergarten. The teacher said, she does not speak very well. I said I think she is doing great she’s only been speaking a week. My boys were slender. I taught them to talk things out. Do not fight at all (they’d be pulp) Talk is the educated way to solve problems. If they won’t talk -just walk away. Marshall followed this rule and baffled a new family of ruffians near the south corner. Derek did have one good friend, Red but Red began choosing a dishonest path. Derek broke that friendship. Red is now in prison for murder.

Although their father set the worst example nightly the children decided they would go mother’s route and speak softly. Derek retired from his first job at The Board of Education after 32 years. He is easy to talk with and had 1202 people from that building attend his going away party. My older son is the quiet one; Marshall in modestly I say, is a genius. He gets bugs out of server programs like Intel before they are offered on the market. All the children did well in spite of their father’s hate of higher education. He would not help them. Five did it all themselves. The Magdalene was a tax expert; To Cosima, Calculous was play - she oversaw the taxes of the County of Ventura, CA. Regina helped the handicapped learn computer, got large screens for them to work on to keep their jobs in the transition there. She attended university full time at the Board of Education, and was a liaison between students and teachers at Springfield in Illinois University. She married a sweet guy who was in charge of the Automobile Driver’s Facility. They met when her brother wanted to get a motorcycle license. They dated, she learned to bike; loved his family. They had no children. She always felt that she had a short life but that she had many things to do and people to help. She packed her life with many helpful projects. She actually did everything she ever hoped to do. She caught a cold and missed a class at University. I tried to console her that it would be offered again, but she pooh-poo’d me saying, you don’ understand. There is no time! She was spreading herself too thin. She went to work and felt weak in the bathroom and asked for help. Her brother worked in another office and helped her to his truck. It was too high, he called his dad and they took her to Urgent Care. While Derek contacted the rest of the family, her father took her home and following the directions for flu by a know it all lady doctor, her doctor was not on duty. Regina died in an hour and a half. It was a frontal heart attack. Her teachers and the students knew all she had tackled successfully and first applied that she receive her degree posthumously and then established a scholarship in her name: Regind Midden Farley. She was 30 years old.

SLENA COMES HOME

Selena is a brilliant girl and she loves people but she did not have the easygoing skills of either Regina or Derek. She encountered problem after problem both at work and with her health. At times she was plain - just done dirty even by the hospital she worked for - even the doctor that took single blood profile tests so he could collect each time with Medicare. This Dr. had no cover Doctor and she had a really difficult pain problem. We took her to Urgent Care. A Young Chinese Dr, took a complete blood profile test and discovered the problem immediately. When he checked her medical records he telephoned the evil doctor and the whole building heard his feelings about letting this girl die for the sake of making money off of Medicare. When she was able to work part-time her job said yes (in office at Hospital) then said no part-time and fired her! As jobs were hard to find then, she started college and gained a Management Degree in Retail. Her health failed back into Rheumatoid Arthritis; she moved to CA. at Cosima’s insistence to recuperate. She actually found men to date but most were inventors or musicians. She wanted someone that also had practical skills. She and Michael Mc Lawry fell into step. She married at 40 happily. People were her thing and she loved working for the Better Business Bureau. She took a class in painting with pastels, mastered the green colors and specializes in tree landscapes. She was inducted into the International Pastel Artists of America, won prizes and was showing at three galleries in Ventura and Santa Clara. And then the roof caved in.

Her husband ‘s on call 24/7 job burned him out. She did not handle this well and her health bombed too. Then, both his parents died within a year. Now neither was working and job prospects were nil. They had to divorce to get the government programs that would help each. He went into rehab directly, but getting the R.A. under control was slow. She bounced from sister to friends but no one realized the severe pain of R.A. and kept prodding her to get a job. She lost weight from 125 # to 92#. Most of her hair fell out and what was left was pure white. She was starving and had no place to rest anymore. But no one told anyone in Springfield of her problems.

Two years into this, Selena telephoned for Mother’s Day. Good grief! What an awful fix. After hearing this I suggested she find a shelter and then figure out a way to come home. At that time Michael and Selena hoped to remarry when all this leveled out. She weighed 92 pounds. People simply did not realize she was not lazy she was incapable of working. Cosima was in the misunderstanding group and they have not spoken since then. Words can cut too deeply.

I did not know what was going on until we talked by phone for my birthday. I was shocked and told her when she can to come home. I got the kids’ room free now as I stored many of the toy collection in boxes upstairs to make room at the time for Charles dresser. We needed that space in our tight bedroom so I could get him up out of bed. That dresser is now empty and the room has shelves on one wall for groceries. My son would not let me climb stairs so everything has to be on one floor. She considered this and began to pack and store her paintings with friends; some in Ventura, some in New Mexico and other States along #66. When all was set and it took months of dong and planning, she had a retired street artist friend drive her Saturn across the country with all her lifelong belongings to Springfield. Although Selena had a special foam wheel cover, she could not hold the wheel. Her friend had never been outside of California and enjoyed driving across the country. Her friend stayed a few days, saw all the Lincoln sites and then When she wanted to go home, Derek brought the Sequoia to seat us all and we drove to Capitol Airport and we saw her take off for home happily. Selena’s homecoming was so enriching. Derek came to welcome his sister. He was stunned at how ill she looked. She looked at all the changes in my home -an easy chair and other things. Then she stepped into the back room and cried. ”My God, a bed, a real bed for me. Oh, Derek thank you for bringing it down from upstairs. And a dresser to move where I want it! Oh My God, this is Heaven! Thank you so much.” She walked back through the house and sat down exhausted. We chatted and unloaded Selena’s car. She was ready to recuperate at the old Adelia Street home-place. When we were alone I noticed that she was really an angry person deep down inside. Actually, this attitude was tightening her muscles and causing pain. So I talked about my mother’s R.A. and her negative ways of expressing everything. Already, Selena’s hands were deformed so that she held her coffee mug with both hands and could not hold the steering wheel of her car even with a protective muff on it. Selena considered a change of attitude and within two weeks much of her pain subsided. Her looks remained fragile but she gained weight and her hair grew back not platinum but pure white! She promptly tinted it platinum blond. Her art was on hold. She could not hold a pastel at all. She finally could swish a soft brush in acrylics and began doing small bright landscapes. These were sold for cubicle offices! One breakfast restaurant has a large collection of them. Now she uses acrylics as base for deeper colors.

As this helped my daughter, I tried to suggest the pleasantry angle on my mother. “Just think of things that make you happy.” In a moment I asked her to tell me her happy thought? She said, “I thought about cursing that damned doctor for giving me this R.A. THAT would really make me happy.” This was not the kind of thought I was expecting. Unfortunately, I said, “Oh, mother, you’ll never get to Heaven that way.”…And she looked at me imperiously and said, “Heaven! I’m not going to Heaven, I don’t know anybody there. All my friends are in Hell.” I was stunned and said, “Well don’t expect me to follow.” She looked at me, ”What!” So I repeated it and she clammed shut. Shortly the visit ended. How do you feel when your mother says she wants to go to hell: Completely disoriented and sad.

ANEMIA

I was given shots and tests yet, “Anemia” meant nothing; it was never explained . After this mortifying morning, Charles turned his attention to the Christmas bill.He knew it was his childish wants that put this bill over the top and that interest was a shark. He never said it but he really worked it off. He worked Saturdays until it was paid. He straightened up about financial necessities. Now he saw that he had not needed a double train set or a movie camera and screen and the projector and all. An $5.00 instamatic would have done the job. He still had to be Lord and Master and his family continued in fear and hate. My health was noted and he treated me better when we were out but at home he was still a maniac. I needed a blood transfusion but the city was only set up to receive, not give. that was very expensive and the Doctor held off but the jackass was not getting the iron pills. Baby needed her shots and Dr. took one look at us He took one look at me and called Charles. “Take the baby! Your wife is the patient. Her condition is deathly anemic.” Still he did not get my iron pills. Baby Selena needed her shots. When Charles left the room I told the doctor I did not want any more babies. He agreed and got me on “The Pill.” As this was a prescription, I got them. But he must have talked with his co-workers or Hank because he found a baby-sitter and we actually went out to dinner! We went to a movie and he did not fall asleep! But the morning maniac was still with us. I always terrified of him. Nothing I could do pleased him and I still had that one dress. Mother finally gave me a dress that was too big for her, a black print thing with a big 1940’s white collar. It wrapped around me but it was a garment.

We were still at Riddle Hill, I washed the ’42 Ford. Mrs. Mc Connell gave us and it wouldn’t start! I called one of the Bean boys. They worked on cars. He simply laughed at the old ‘42 Ford. He said I got the alternator wet and when it dries the car will start. That poor car never drove straight everything was loose. It shimmied.

The gift Ford was getting worse. We needed a car. Charles saw a wagon for sale in the paper and borrowed the $500. From Hank. We got the blue Customline Ford station wagon. However, Charles was not repaying Hank timely and Hank heard him talking about a pleasure item amd Hank put his foot down before the purchase. Charles began working Saturdays to pay Hank back his loan. I thought, good; somebody with clout!

Mrs. McConnell gave us a mattress and quilt for the back so the kids could move around in back (way before seat belts). Her son’s donation car to us had shimmied its last shimmy and died in the junk yard. While we had compliments on our well behaved (Terrified) family of six children we hated getting in any car for church because it was non-stop fault-finding… We loved the wagon and the freedom it gave the children. We took a tall Water playmate with clean soda bottles n chipped ice when we went out for a long ride. There were Villages with story tellers and we had picnics in parks. We kept to Station Wagons for many years.

NON -STOP TANTRUMS

The tantrums increased. So did the slam banging and the little children never seemed to be around…I would look outdoors but no children. One day I found them all hiding under the brass bed. I was still on the edge health-wise. I was dragging to make a pot of coffee and get the two older ones ready for school. Then I’d fall into bed exhausted. That man began non-stop crabbing and pounding . I could not please him at all. Maybe he could do better. I gave up and when he finally fell asleep I dressed and slipped into the kitchen,, got the car keys and unlocked the back door. That click awoke him and he came out to the kitchen. came to a non-stop point and I felt unable to keep trying to do at least one thing to please him. I was so shaken. I could not sleep but he was snoring away. I dressed and got the car keys. He heard the back door lock and came out.

“Where are you going?” He said softly.

I looked at him. “Oh I’m going to the concrete overpass. Sorry to ruin the car but nothing pleases you and I can’t take it anymore” I opened the door and walked out. He stood a moment and then it hit him and he came after me and led me back inside. I have no idea what happened next. My mind is a blank. After that things began to change. The maniac tantrums stopped. He actually walked out the back door without slamming it. He told me he found a lady to watch the children so we could go to a movie. It was possibly September. The movie was, Holiday Inn. It starred Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney, and he stayed awake! He seemed more considerate, but that would need more than a movie to convince me of any improvement.

We planned to go to dinner at the Top of the Arch for my birthday. This was really special. I had never gotten anything but a 4 cup aluminum pot before. I was thrilled. My mother, Helen called. She had never done this before. They always came to the house for birthdays, brought s gift and I had a cake and a vase of garden flowers on the table. This time my mother must be in control; this was her self- glorification. Mother said she wanted ME to have dinner at their home. She found a new doctor for her arthritis and wanted to tell me all…(her trials with other doctors that did what they could and stopped pampering her). I said I couldn’t. Charles and I already had plans and reservations for my birthday. Does she accept my refusal? Is she happy that I am finally getting out for something special? Not at all. She made a big thing, saying It was only right that I spend my birthday with HER! My dad would be relegated to sit in the parlor (She had not asked Charles to come) while she ruined my day and evening in the kitchen I was tired of her fabricated stories of how wonderful Joan Huff as doing being a nurse. I didn’t know that girl in school or now. It was not going to be another mother-pleasing trap. Finally I had to be blunt and told her, another time but I have a chance to go to a great fancy restaurant and I am going…and then I hung up. I did it; I finally defied the damned bitch. The evening was a dream come true with music and dancing- well swaying - he never intended to learn to dance. But we saw the stars outside the glass rotunda and it was perfect. Maybe the horrible tantrums were gone.

Charles brought home a Sears catalog and the children loved wishing. I ordered flannel for nightgowns, a vest and an apron (These last were for school functions for Mary and Marshall. I chose other colors for Marshall’s gift, a cowboy shirt. The children still made group First Holy Communion. Although we left the St. Agnes district and were in Blessed Sacrament, the Sister wanted Mary Magdalene to make her First Holy Communion with her Saturday class. The Sister knew The Magdalene had a vocation. I ordered a white organdy and white taffeta for her dress. It was going to be embroidered with little sprays of violets…later all the girls used it. I was so happy to be able to do all these things

SRAIGHT TALKING ANGEL

And then a funny thing happened. One of my sweet Guardian Angels asked, what was I planning for making the children …and I related things. And for Charles? So I mentioned that I had been saving to get him a tie clasp. Then the Angel asked and for you? I had a pile of old cloths from Mrs. Mc Connell but there was really nothing wearable unles I considered a pair of baby blue silk pajamas. But the angels said, no! You have nothing planed for yourself. My dear, let us go into the bathroom. What do you see? I mean this kindly. Who are you? What have you stopped doing? You set aside your art because he does not like the smell of paint? Your writing because he doesn’t like the clacking and he isn’t even home to hear it! Your portraiture sessions because he said you fell in love with the clients -all women! Your music and higher education have never been discussed. Why, because he is dumb and insecure about it and…louder. The good days will not last so enjoy them. Now you will want your children to respect you for who you are both in profession as well as your being their mother. You will want them to know higher education is a very necessary and enriching endeavor. You have thrown some brilliant children and they need the proper encouragement. I know, I know you had a miserable time with your parents and also this - husband, but remember all those musicians and composers you helped and the list has not been completed, Your greatest composer is still ten years away in the land of your forefathers: Deutschland. My eyebrows shot upward and I laughed. “In Germany! What Germany? It is a shambles.” But rebuilding, my dear; it is rebuilding. And, it is to Stuttgart which was bombed to oblivion because of the tank factory ah Mercedes Benz now, and the oil refineries by the Nekar River. Yes, and then the angel threw back his head in a laugh. You will be going to the worst hit area of Stuttgart and will love it and never want to leave. His words made me remember the sessions of learning I had in High School, I was so Gung-ho about learning German. I knew I would need it. And it was not taught during the war.

The Angel continued with my memory. You have lovely thick hair and know how to dress it well, but is it the color you would feel best in? I thought a moment and said: “I liked it red. There were no hair dyes but some powdered herb and once it turned that lady’s hair almost black instead of red. I used Merchirochrome in a rinse water. It did not do much unless the sun hit it. Oh I saw my reflection once going to the bus from work and it was eye-opening glowing carrot red.” The angel laughed. Things have improved, my dear. There are several reds on the market by the company Preference. They come in the colors named after flowers, like Tiger Lily. They are easy to use and last about a month. I did choose Tiger Lily and was very happy with the deep auburn color. What effect did it have on the home-front? None, absolutely none. I had become such a non-entity that no one saw me anymore. I was an unpaid slave to a loud mouth despot with children that hid from him.

Things were going to change. I had several large sheets of paper and a nice set of hard pastels. For my subject I stuck some plastic lilies in a white vase and propped a child’s toy nearby. I was drawing when the first child saw my few lines. She called the others and they watched me fill the paper. They were oh’ing when their dad came home slamming the door, blustering “OK. What’s a wrong? What’s going on here?” And 4 year old Regina stepped out and said, “Shuss, Daddy. Mommy’s doing a picture. Come watch. She started with a plain piece of paper and look!”

“Yeah, she can do that. She did that girl with red poppies on her hat.” The kids stopped awestruck and then rushed to look at that painting. They asked why it shined and this one did not. So I explained it was an oil painting. Charles listened a bit, smirked and then went in to shower. Dinner just needed to be warmed. I had one pot and one aluminum three cup sauce pan to cook with. I had to get that good pot fixed, Angels do you hear me?

THE POT

There was an Iron Works, Maybe they could help me. I cruised from town west and parked in front of The Iron Works. I opened the trunk and fetched my paper bag. I took my bag with the pot and handle inside with me. A man came out. He was pleasant but really greasy and dirty. He nodded to be excused and then asked if he could help me. I explained that my good copper bottom pot had fallen off the wall and the handle popped off. While he kept his cool I heard talk in the back room and sudden laughter. One by one different greasy clothed guys peeked into the room. The first man said, “Oh, I think we can help. It will be a challenge and took the bag into the back room. I heard talk and laughter. I saw sparks flying and then more laughter.

Soon the first man returned and the pot had its handle reattached. There was a blue scar from the weld and I wondered what it would cost. The pot was from S & H Green Stamps. ‘”He said, “Fifty cents and I hope you really hit him hard enough.” I laughed and then asked what kind of things they really did there.

He touched his nose and then said, “Come on back I’ll show you.” I was a bit apprehensive; maybe they were going to rape me! The other fellows made a path and followed us through the shop. We stepped through the back door and into the fresh air. He pointed to the East and said, “Do you see that crane?”

I acknowledged it as the iron work that flew the huge welcome flag for the returning Vets.”

“Yes. Well, that’s ours - all that stuff there. We are making a building over there.” I was dumbfounded and stood silently a moment. I hadn’t done anything this stupid since Carl sent me on that tiny brass screw hunt.

“I - I am so sorry, I have insulted you. I had no idea…”

“Oh, no, no It really broke up a very testy day. Things were going so badly and here you came and really we are indebted to you.”

I smiled, thanked them, took my pot and still felt like a fool. I used that pot for 40 more years when I forgot it was on high and burned the hell out of it. The angels promptly sent me to a second hand store called Abe’s Top Hat where I found a replacement. Later I was sniffing out the Mercy Shop on Dirksen and they had two in smaller sizes…now I have a full set of really old pots.

You may wonder how I had money for things. Not from Charles. Once My mom and dad got some money from Uncle Mike. To pay for my grandmother Mary’s nursing home. This was left over from their money they got for their little farm in west Missouri. It was left after paying for her nursing home fees. My parents thought he was lying and keeping the big money! They snubbed their noses aat it and gave the “pittiance” $200. to me. Then Aunt Mary slipped me a ten when she visited mostly because I had the one pitiful dress. The kids did not like bulk cookies and wanted oreos but they did not go around a lot. In the end I kept the cookie money. Also we got 2 cents for every soda bottle we returned. The kids gathered them from along the alley but were too good to take them to return. So I did it - and kept the money. Charles snooped and took my little money. Having Ines repay me - she had a hard go in Iron Ridge MN. And I gave my bottle money to her. Now she repaid it! Charles always found use for my little money. This was too much for him to grab. I got a lock box at the closest bank and put all my money and bottle returns in there. Also I had papers for my uncle Johnny who wanted me to take care of his death wishes - those were in with my art pictures. And I did have jewelry so these things too went into the lock box.

THE FRIENDLESS NEIGHBORS

After- paying Hank and that awful Christmas card bill, we were able to save a bit and had an idea to build a house in that area. This did not work out, I forget the reason. I liked the area. I knew nobody but this was Gardner Township and all these people helped our family survive Mr. Henry E. Midden’s heartless eviction from his precious farm. After the Big House we were renting at Riddle Hill and it was time to get acquainted with the neighbors. Yet, it was ironic; I found myself making friends with the friendless…like the tax man, he was the dear lost soul across the street. He loved that I talked with him. At tax time, he admitted that he delighted in really laying it on my father-in-law. Whatever he did, - we heard through the grapevine that - suddenly Old Mr. Midden had no peace with the IRS. Every two years now the IRS audited him. There was the Horrible Bomke that plowed the field next to our house. He always parked his truck to irritate the nearby neighbors and manage to plow one extra row. I had my eye on some little flowering weed and his plow over-turned them. I went out and said I was hoping to transplant those by the house and he said, ”I’ll do it, where at?” Then we chatted about where he lived. It was by the two sisters that bought cream at the farm. “Yes, they still have cream there but not Guernsey rich. Those were my husband’s and we had to sell them to get by. Those sisters made the best caramels. I got to see their log house inside. They told me about whitewashing the logs each year to keep the vermin out- that’s HISTORY! They had a parrot?” He nodded. I told him about my Grampa’s parrot that never said anything until at a card game. The horrible-Bomke howled with laughter. “And the sisters grew an herb called Tansy, smells wicked, but it was to keep vermin away - people too I guess!” We both laughed. Those were his sisters and people did not like them. Thought they were stand-offish. I said, “You know those caramels are so good they could sell them. Maybe they could have an Open House and tell people about preserving the log house and serve some candy and see how things go.” He nodded. The sisters followed through and soon there was smelly Tansy growing at Riddle Hill homesteads. He stopped to tell me and a cat came by and scratched his pantleg. He shook it off.

“Darn cat. A stray; nobody knows where it belongs but it is mean,” Said horrible-Bomke. I said yes, it chases all the birds” I pointed to the top of a nearby tree. “The birds were nibbling on that huge pretty mushroom up there. Actually, I think it is a Deadly Nightshade - poisonous one. I studied some at the museum. ” He was amazed that there was such a display to study. He would go see that. There was a flutter and all the birds flew down from the mushroom and into a bush. I nudged him to look!

“That’s a Seven Sister Rose Bush. My Grampa had one - took 2 trellises to keep it up and thorns like you’d never believe He moved it with an iron pipe…Watch the birds, see they are hiding. There goes the cat.” We heard the most blood-curdling cat screams and rustling sounds then silence. Pussy fell out; scratched and bleeding. It lay there a bit and then, we heard all the little birds singing in the rose bush. Horrible-Bomke threw his arms around me and we laughed together. “This is like the Wizard of Oz- The witch is dead, the witch is dead.” He threw his head back and we howled with laughter. Lots of curtains moved at windows - She’s got Horrible-Bomke laughing! His sister are OK. Maybe he ain’t so bad. And Horrible Bomke lost his nickname.

But the Wilson girls inherited it. They lived on the party-line and irked the neighbors also they lived next to the tax man and pestered him. I told Charles and he told Hank Sommer. Hank’s Democratic friend had two donkeys which he boarded in the shed adjoining our garage. The Wilson girls fed and brushed the donkeys for a bit of fun money. The Fourth of July was coming and there is always a parade in Springfield for that. Hank suggested that his friend buy a sully. That would be a great political gimmick. The girls agreed to try. The Riddle Hill Road never had a lot of traffic and if a vehicle passed them, well it was an introduction to downtown Springfield traffic.. The donkeys took to pulling the sully, but were frightened of people. The neighbor kids were all encouraged to “play in the street” and then to hitch a ride on the back of the sully and sing. Five of my children took part and rode in the parade on the big day. For this, they were all treated to ice cream and burgers. This had a bit of a backfire for me. Senator Bill Horsley saw us park the car and watch our kids in a DEMORATIC ENTRY. He was a Republican. Monday I got a telephone call from the Senator. He had watched the parade from the Broadwell Building where he knew the Doctors Bernard. By then our wonderful old tower building was a massive ruins across the street. Mr. Horsley kept track of “our old building’s family, Little Dr. Kirlin had an office on South Fifth He always parked his vintage Cadillac in front of it. Harvey married that pretty lady Hugo devoted himself to several good will projects. We always hoped he would get his nose out of those numbers!” Then he got down to the nitty-gritty.

“My God! I see you are registered as a Democrat, my dear.” I had to explain the whole Gardner Township People thing... And he said, but I am losing two votes! I said, “Not where it counts, my dear. Oh, before you go, we are considering buying a house in Springfield. It is being sold by the Disciples of Christ Foundation. - If all is ok with the legal part, my dear. It is being offered by Fred La Barre.“ Bill was doubly pleased, “I handle all of Fred’s legal work but I am very pleased that you shall be back in Springfield…what I discovered about your in-laws was too horrible to put into words.” I wish he had. Oh, how I wish he had told me about those screaming maniacs and their wicked work ethic. I was never sweet love and flowers in love with Charles Midden. Ares was my first love; those are perfection. I was perpetually sorry I did not accept that lady’s man and close my eyes to the wandering. Ares was always kind but cold natured and how I loved his family.

The donkey rides continued after the parade day. Summer was ending, Mary Magdalene told me she was getting bored with the rides. I knew that Charles and I were about ready to close on the house; we would be moving. I told her to enjoy this now, because it may never happen again. Being the oldest child, she comprehended.

BOB GETTING MARRIED

Then we got an invitation to Bob Midden’s wedding. The Midden family was the underground portion of the family totem pole. He was marrying a girl from Dalton City, west of Decatur... Charles crumpled the invitation. When he was gone I retrieved it and gave it thought. We knew: Her parents were farmers and she had one brother that had been in trouble but that was squared away. I remember back at Chi Rho I mentioned Bob married late to a girl much younger . And that he had a dark side. I shook my head. He was living in the 56 house. I guess it was a mess by now. That young lady ought to know more than I did and so I wrote to the bride.

I wrote that I did not want to ruin her happy bride-thing, but there were some things she should know about this family. First Bob has tremendous strength. Once the WD-Tractor turned over on him in the timber - he jumped clear but was so angry he picked the tractor up and righted it. The Middens have an ingrained work ethic to an extreme. Worse is their tempers. The siblings hate each other-to the physical They do not understand talking things out. They scream - loudest wins. You must ask Bob cautiously about his sister, Louise. She is an institutionalized Schizophrenic in Jacksonville. She hates the father for his lack of treatment when the mother and sister died. One brother died by his own hand. Louise set fire to the house but failed ... smoke fire in closet. She had a screaming fit and Charles threw a bucket of water on her. The surprise stopped her. Father is hard and miserly. Good produce sold; family gets culls. I did not want to sound like an embittered old biddy. Yet, I want so much to keep you out of this Midden Trap. These people are all loco. I wanted to say mine too, but didn’t.

We accidently met at the Farm Bureau. I was awaiting my order. She said loudly, ”I am Mrs. Robert Midden and I am here to pick up an order.” Then she looked at me and smiled. I must have looked stunned. Then she said she saw my pictures and was fairly sure I was Mary Midden.” We hugged and chatted as long as we dared. She said she questioned him and everything I mentioned was true but she really loved Bob and so went ahead. This is what I learned from her:

First, no honeymoon! They just drove to Springfield in his truck. No they didn’t go out to dinner; they had all this food they brought from their reception! (At least Charles and I had a week in Colorado Springs but he was using some of his army savings.) She had a nice car but sold it to pay for the wedding (She was destitute and now without transportation) He said she can always use his truck (Yes, under his approval). He had her change her savings account into both their names. (She has no direct access to her funds.) She said she was a feisty woman and figured she could hold her own in an argument. I knew better. I had heard them argue. She was an amateur. Her parents were farmers but she had a job at the state House as a Secretary. She said she was glad to get out of there because of all that Free Love Crap that was flying around there and she did not want to end up in some body’s little black book. She said she joined the Altar Society at St. Agnes.

I was in choir at St. Agnes. Everyone knew about those Holy Midden Men. The ladies met early to go over the songs. The ladies had met Sharon at the Altar Society Meeting! Here is what I learned in the choir:

“My God, she married that baldheaded old man!...She is 18 years younger than him!...She knew nothing about that greedy old man or how he treated you and your family! She thought the farm was not making enough for two families…She is an absolute innocent!” The Sister tried to bring the choir to order but the ladies waved her off. Everyone had their impressions of this horrible mess and that afro-headed Italian priest could just cool his heels down there until they told the whole story. It was a bit too bad he could not have heard it. He could have helped Sharon instead of putting her in the slave-server box of normal marriage. It was Christmas time. One of the songs was “Angels We Have Heard On High.” Seems we all love Elvis and when it came to the end, we all simply sang his version. The Sister jumped off her bench in shock. The priest heard the entry music and all the lights in the church went out! 750 parishioners in the winter dark church!

Quickly, the ushers scattered into action, moving about getting candles into the congregation. And then they lit the large monthly votive lights in their red glass containers. The priest heard the entry music, had his candle and started his walk up the aisle preceded by three altar boys each with a red votive candle. The little boys had chosen adult cassocks in the dark and were trying to keep from tripping over them and bumping into each other. We had several of the large red votive lights were brought to the choir loft. The organ was on another circuit. It was weirdly atmospheric.

The priest did his best walking down the aisle but better than the boys, the cassocks their vitive candles of dot candlepower moving , gyrating but being held tightly. The priest finally reached the altar steps and looked up at The Hanging Christ Gift Statue hoping the old ceiling would hold the heavy thing and yelled: “Oh Lord, let there be light!” And as if by magic, the lights went on! He stood dumbfounded a moment and then said, “God if Id’a knew this, Id’a said it sooner!” The congregation was so pent-up that they burst into laughter and applause. Thereafter, this was referred to as: “The Christmas God Gave Us Light.”

During Christmas Week, I told Charles I had met Sharon at the Farm Bureau and that she was really a nice lady. Perhaps it was time that we invited them to a dinner with our family. I was boon-doggled that he agreed. I made grasshoppers for everyone…the children’s had peppermint flavoring and by then each had a peanut butter stemmed sherbet to use. I got out my silver and china for adults and Christmas paper plates for the children. I made a fair roast by then and with it were parsnips, carrots and potatoes. There was 3 bean salad and bean casserole with mushrooms fried and served atop the bean casserole. The dinner went fine. What amazed Sharon was the children’s table manners (learned at the Big House. if they had nothing but a napkin, they could use it correctly. I admitted that I had a very old etiquette book. It still used Emily Post as the narrator.

I bought it at a second hand book store. It was copyrighted in 1929. It has stuff like how to cut a pear at the table and how to handle, cut and eat asparagus. What colors are appropriate for the embroidery on bedding. Sharon and I both laughed at that. Also useless was “How to instruct your maid in answer the door and lead them to a silver plate for their receiving cards. Bob was uptight for a bit but did relax at the sight of the food. Our children were big on using flatware , especially Regina saw to it that the children used their flatware properly; no getting their fingers into the food! They loved that old etiquette book and were completely at ease. Sharon loved putting the right names to each child (I had a rubber stamp made with all their names and used it on the Christmas cards. She loved how they acted so adult they acted with their peanut butter sherbet glasses and pseudo- Grasshoppers. It was a great evening and the children had to show Aunt Sharon their mommy’s pastel paintings. I had done one of The Little Infant of Prague. Sharon loved it so I said I’d frame it for her. I guessed that she would not be able to buy a frame. Not on Bob’s farm salary. When I had it framed Sharon asked us over. She had a hanger in place for that Little Infant. It was the night of the first moon landing. Everyone was impressed but me. It looked like White Flats, New Mexico. Marshall had worked there during several atomic tests. He had pictures and movies of the area. So, I figured this moon landing was a hoax. I decided to check clairvoyantly and see how Horst Jankowski was doing.

I had begun writing to him when his one Album “With Love” was anything but with love. It was a spite filled album of nastiness. I did not know German at all and wrote him this, my intention was to see what happened to him that changed his music so violently. I tried learning German from books and records for three months and the words I needed were not there. I realized this was too long a time and then just opened my dictionary and word picked. It was dreadful but the words I wanted were there. I rewrote the letter in English also and folded that too with my German horror.

I was devastated that I had been so inept at learning German. I was not stupid in music. I cross indexed every word but one “Conservatory” I did not realize it could also mean a greenhouse! He promptly checked his dictionary and saw that I meant Musical Conservatory. Then he noticed a second letter and looked at it quickly. I had written the whole thing in English. Maybe someone there would read English. No, but he immediately called his man (Valet, singer, go-fur, ticket specialist.)He must go to the library. There his teacher read the letter. Horst relaxed and said: “Now that is the kind of English I want to learn to speak.” The teacher’s eyes opened wide. This person was highly educated to write her difficult language so intricately. Horst barely spoke a sentence. His lessons were always interrupted with performances and tours. He slipped the letters back in their envelope and noticed there was no address, just his name a dash and then “The Great Pianist” Stuttgart, West Germany and the zip. There were 2 million people in Stuttgart - and he got the letter! To him it meant that he was getting noticed for his music. He relaxed and figured that this lady must think highly of him to go through so much trouble writing such bad German. He relaxed and laughed. His man, Werner was shocked. It had been so long since Horst had laughed. There were so many health and personal challenges and then these new producers with their harsh sounds…it had soured him completely; he was losing fans but gaining these ruffieans. Mrs. Mayree Meeden was correct. This was not the music of his heart! He went to his desk and began scribbling music. This man did not speak much he wrote everything in music. All of his hopes and dreams, all his thoughts it was all said in his music. “Ah, yes, I must tell her I got her letter.” I feel like I already know this lady. I am writing to tell her …I am in love with her. The new album he named: The Height of Love” When the album appeared the title had been changed to: “And We Got Love.” The work had taken him two days and two nights. It was completely wonderful. All the titles were in English. I remembered the scenes back in the World of Music - how he reached into his pocket for my letter and said I had forgotten to sign my name. If he did not know who it was from , he would wonder. And then he said, I play for you, “I Wonder.” I made sure that I signed my name to this pitiful try at German.

I relaxed and looked with my paranormal sight. The little sign with the date appeared at the bottom of the picture. It was only two days. I saw him move quickly into the studio and began gathering up all the old music that was for the next album and said “Yes, let me have all that music. It is no good, we throw it all out! We do this, call in the choir. It is better music.”… His producers were stunned. “But only two more pieces and we have the album complete”….Then a clairvoyant scene began for me. It was not more about the album; he had just smiled at them. The producers knew they had lost a battle.

The following things happened at least a year earlier. But I requested it to see why his music had taken such a violent and spiteful change. If I must write, then let me not do it blindly. This was the scene I saw:

There is a mountain road and a man is driving an open top convertible. There is Horst asleep in the back seat. The road is twisty and after one turn there is a cow in the road. The driver heads for the mountain side of the road but is going too fast and the car climbs too high. It loses balance and catapults over and down the mountain side rolling over and over. The driver is killed and Horst is barely alive. The scene changes to a hospital room. He has braces and bandages from head to toes. There are staples across the right side of his face. A lady enters. She is very pretty but chokes up at the sight of him and without a word, backs out the door and never returns. He saw her but was unable to speak. He was devastated. … The scene ends. His hands were the only thing unharmed in the accident. When the bones were secure and the cords removed to a natural position, he could be turned. A piano was brought into the room. His album was due. He would do a collection of love songs. He felt like the idea of love was a sham. His mind set changed; love was for fools, It was not real. Every note spit hate. It was the worst recording he ever did. He let his emotions ruin his future. The album flopped. It lost him sales but it gained another rougher audience. This was not him anymore, but he had done this.

But in Springfield, Illinois I had this new album and was devastated. What happened to this happy man? I depend on him to keep me going. My marriage is errible. Charles is so cruel and hateful. He talks badly to the children, like my mother, he looks for things he can imagine as bad. It is not like when he was a child - hide from daddy with the ice cream under the tablecloth! His demonis was non-stop whenever he entered the house. The children would see the work trucks drive in and fly into their bedroom . They turned on the TV and set up the hot wheels tracks. The Barbie Dolls came out and they prayed to be left alone. They could hear the guys bring in the tools and the, depart for the day. At times they laughed, at others they jibed. It was quiet a moment then the door opened and the grouching started with, ”OK, whatsa wrong here?” The door flew open; busy children were frightened of his big hands and voice. Tthey were screaming in terror. Nightly I took the first brunt of this crap. I so wanted to slam him in the head with my cast iron fry pan, but why should I rot in prison for getting rid of a bummer. Law favors the man.

My God! I needed that little man’s music during the day to keep me sane. The children loved coming home and dancing to it. We had oak floors and they slid and had fun after homework was finished. Now this awful album! How can we keep going without Jankowski’s happy music? Oh, God we will be lost. I tried to be calm and think. What are the possible routes? I brought out all the albums and read the little write-up on each one. He was a born German and spoke no English. His entourage was based in Stuttgart. This is a business town and was not on any tourist list. …Ah ha, that was why so long ago I was crazy to learn German. It was for now! I must not plead for my own wants. I must direct my thoughts to his career and love of music. There were no hobbies listed or friendly clubs - just one man with whom he collaborated. There was a picture of them. “Flowers for a Princess.” Yes, I was the Princess, he could not say, “Mary” and so called me his Princessen. …I would come and he would play all these silly bits and called them Flowers. Oh, that is right he is all music; he knows nothing else even how to pick out a shirt and pants to wear. He has others do everything. I am remembering now We were friends, more than friends - he fell in love with me and I him. Then I … Had to leave? What was it? Oh, to start this earth life. God, I did not know the husband was a maniac or that my mother was…that governess from Megara and more than mean,heartless. Ah, I remember, the pianist owns two cars but does not drive. My thoughts are filling in, how wonderful. I must write a letter to him…Oh God How? It will take time unless it is like Dutch! I compare the two in a multi-language book, nothing alike. woe. As lways in a pinch, I call upon my Angels to set me on the right path. They did.

“OK! You need a German-English Dictionary…there is one at the Good Will on Eleventh Street for twenty-five cents…Oops! It is in script …”That is OK I know script, all the books at High School were in Script.” … "Go to the library in the foreign language section and get a few of learning Germen. This way you can choose at leisure which suits your needs best.” … “Shall I go now?” …”No, it is too late you must start dinner; he’s had a hard day.” … “When does he not?”

I continued with the information on the albums. …His father died in the war. He and his mother were in War-torn Berlin. I asked to know more about this: The situation was not that he was a German soldier; not at all. His mother saw her husband shot . He was dragged from his home and murdered like a common rat. The German Soldiers were tightening their grips on the Jewish and now they attacked the Professor of the Royal Orchestra of Berlin! After this his mother prepared to forsake their Jewish heritage immediately to save their lives. She changed their appearances to look German. And then, they walked as refugees without papers South until his mother approved a village that had a suitable piano teacher. Horst was not his name, but he had a hairy condition and it suited him. His hair was wooly and dark brown not blond like the Germans: Blesch and a close hair cut solved that. They had blonde highlights. After “The Happening” meaning his father’s murder his mother immediately gathered all their ID and Awards of her Husband’s and burned them in her cooking pot. Then she scoured the pot clean again. She had finished sewing her valuables in her petticoat before her son came home from Day Camp. Day Camp was the indoctrination of all youth into the Hitler Agenda. Where they learned Hitler was their GOD and that it was right and German to snitch on anyone who was Jewish or practiced another religion! It t was German and right to turn on these people even parents who dared disregard the New World Order. She was so glad that her sewing chores were complete now she must tell her son the Facts of their life! Their stamp collections, coins and Marks. Her femininity engaged and she sewed a tiny bottle of her favorite perfume in the petticoat. It knocked her shins as she walked but the knocking was pleasant. On their travels whenever he saw a piano he sat down and played it. The soldiers -first German, then American and then German again all put coins in his cap and they survived. He had a deep dark secret about which he and his mother never spoke. Behind them in Berlin lay Professor Janlbkoqlb ski, of the Royal Orchestra of Berlin. He was killed in the War; he was Jewish and was murdered in front of their house by their own Soldiers. With bleached hair and music they avoided the Nazi Concentration camps and earned money for food . But often there was little food to be had for the populace; the soldiers took it all. The soldiers whistled a few popular tunes - he picked them out on the piano because he only studied the classics. He played for the Nazis, their girls in taverns, for his enemies and their girls played for the Americans. He wrote a catchy little tune, had it published and suddenly was a STAR! He played for the world. There was an instance when he was adopted as their very own all German pianist. He developed a sweet childlike smile but his private life was expressed in a few sentences: “ I am a born German. My father was killed in the war. We walked from Berlin to the Black Forest.” And then he smiled. No one got past the smile. Mother was private. Her religion was so private she never found a church in the Black Forest. She chose Bishopich which no one realized was the Church of England.

I wrote finally but there had been so many interruptions in my life then that I could not learn much. The books and records I borrowed were first grade words: I need a pen, a paper, a stamp. There was Aesops Fable: Squeezing and pressing grapes but no adult words or adjectives. It was hunt and peck. I was ashamed of my letter. So I took more of my lovely stationary and then I wrote the letter in English and sent both letters hoping that someone there could read English. This was one time my ESP and Clairvoyance was useful to the hilt. I asked to see how the letter was received and thankfully he took it seriously although some of his entourage’ laughed. He had a man take him to the library where he was trying to learn English and had his professor read the English version. Horst was delighted. He was having the same problem learning English - no adult words. He translated it into German and then back into English until he knew the words. His music style returned and although the one spite-filled album set him back, he recovered his audience. The new album was perfection from first note to last and I had to write again or maybe he would crash. I got better overtime but I knew I was doing great when my older son asked me how to say something in German. This was the most difficult language at the school; he had wanted Russian. Marshall was the first genius in the family. The German books were always out, nothing was ever hidden. In October of 1968 I had a clairvoyant experience. I saw the pianist crosswise on his bed asleep fully dressed. I asked my Angels if the guy was on drugs. They said no just dead tired; been working straight through three days writing music. I felt so sorry for him. He was wearing his glasses, shoes, tie, and I wished I could at least loosen the tieand save the glasses . In that second I saw myself in the little clairvoyant scene. It frightened me. When I stirred the spirit popped back into the body and I fell backwards onto the bed - between the feet of my sleeping husband! He awoke but when it was just me, he was asleep I in an instant. I thought about this thing - I saw me in that little picture and it did not hurt at all. How did I do that? I tried it again and Yes, I was in that little picture! I set about removing the glasses. I had no idea that a person could not see without their glasses. I must put them some place so he knows I came. There ws a bathroom. It was very old fashioned but there was a medicine cabinet and a bar of soap. I put the glasses in the cabinet and wrote on the mirror “Horst, ir augenglasses sind herein, Mary.” He was still asleep so I struggled to get the shoes off and loose the tie. I set these things on the floor in a line across the room. There was a silent butler and I got his jacket on that but then he moved and made a noise. I was going to put the soap back but did not want to be caught in a gentleman’s bedroom and ran to the door. The soap flew into the air and I was gone home.

I got into my bed and giggled. Maybe I could check back later and see the results of this mischief. This is what I saw:

He awoke to find his valet talking to himself. “Commenting of the garments strewn along the floor and his musical papers scattered about. Horst awoke and saw everything blurred and reached for his glasses. They were not on the side table. He called to the valet: “Werner, my augenglassses!” Werner dashed about and finally looked in the bathroom.

“Oh Horst, you muss dis sehen - Oh, let me help you. They both read the message on the mirror. “I did not know the lady was visiting?” Horst answered, “But no. That would not be proper. Oh, open it.” He put the glasses on and they read the message together. ”How can this be? Is it a ghost?” He said, “ I do not think so.” Werner said, “My wife will not work in a house that has a ghost and if this gets out, no one will want to buy the house.” Horst sighed. “You are right. Let me look at it again then clean it all up. I will be down in the library.” Horst had a large collection of paranormal writings. This was his hobby. He read everything about Astral Projection but there were no instructions on how to do it. Finally he sighed and said: “All right, Mary, I know you can come but why did you come when I was sleeping?”

There was a seven hour time difference. It was difficult to find a compatible time. Often he did a show at some club and finished around nine pm. That was afternoon here in Springfield. I was able to go then so we met in Schiller Park. Werner was to follow around the perimeter. The trouble was Werner felt terrified of me - that it was a ghost. He was so up-tight I thought he would have a stroke. Horst did not notice this. For us it was an easy stroll and we tried to solve the problems that he had. Astral Projection was not coming easily to him but he said the walk was just what he needed after being so tight after work. He was comfortable being with someone. A person alone could be attacked but a couple, were safe. One evening he said he bought a house. People told him having a home would be better than hotels when they were in Stuttgart. I have done little but buy a few nice pieces for my bedroom. There is a library. I have all my paranormal books there. No music and no piano - those are work. There was a large basket in the corner of the library and in the dim light I saw something move. “Oh that is Rolfa and Zabadack my dogs. “ They did look like ghosts especially the on with a light face just three black dots. They were Afghan hounds. Then I realized these were on the album cover. He was showing me his antique car, a ’34 Rolls Royce touring car, Werner his man, as chauffeur, and his two dogs. The lady was just publicity.

He worked at relaxing into an astral projection and after three months he had a success. I felt the side of my bed dip and opened my eyes. I had never seen myself in this form but now I know why he ws so overwhelmed. Every bi of the person even the soft weave of his suit was shot with light. Every hair on his head and face too. It was so surprising. He kissed my forehead and then said, he feels drawn back. I said “Ask for an easy landing!” This was new to write music about.

The newlyweds visit

I liked Sharon we me accidentally at the Farm Bureau Store. And chatted as long as we could. I told Charles and he agreed we should ask them to visit. We were settled at Riddle Hill for a while. The evening progressed well enough and I hoped for the best for the newlyweds. Regina showed them my pastel paintings and Sharon loved The Infant o Prague so I told her I would frame it for her . It was ready . We would go to visit and this happened to be the night of the first Moon Walk. So this was the entertainment. Everyone was very impressed with the landing and stepping onto the moon; Everybody but me. It looked like the White Flats in New Mexico. Marshall had worked there and took part in several atomic tests. We had pictures! I lost interest figuring the thing was a hoax. I could look in on Jankowski and see what he was doing.

He was in the Catskills wearing his black topcoat and suit and hat. There was a skimobile sitting there warming up. This man does not know how to drive a car and is tempted. He got on it and took off down the road…At Sharon’s someone said something that I had to answer and took my eyes off my clairvoyant scene a moment. When I looked again he was climbing a steep slope. I saw the skimobile plastered against a huge evergreen tree. He was brushing himself off. I went out of body immediately and asked if he was hurt? …”No. The road took a dip and turned the skimobile to the right and next thing this tree was coming at me and I jumped off. It just kept it! So I had to leave it and walk back.” … We were coming up the main road when Klaus saw us and came running. “Horst, are you all right?” He nodded and told his adventure to Klaus. …”Come, we get ready for performance.” … I said, “Jankowski, will you tell them about the skimobile?” …”No! It was not mine.. They should not have left it here running unattended.” Whew, stiff talk!

It did not take long for Mr. Henry E. Midden so show hos true colors to the newlyweds. Withing three weeks he began demanding that Sharon do things on the spot when he said. It led to feisty discussions between Bob and Sharon. The loco spirits had invaded the 56 house. The 56 house was not easy to keep clean. I had chosen the black confetti tile but it was a hellish thing. I spent most of my time there keeping it dust free. Charles always used the basement entrance and left his work shoes and garments in the basement by the wash tubs. Bob trotted in the front door with his muddy barn boots and trotted through the house. Again, Sharon lost. She did smoke and would not try to stop. She needed something and her smokes were her only win. She was so nervous from the life-style and yelling between Bob and his father that pregnancy did not happen for six years. By the time it did she was completely unraveled and stopped cleaning that black floor and just spread newspapers over the shit.

When their first baby arrived it was a little boy. Bob was 44 and thought it would never happen. He was so elated and in love with his son that he would let no one correct or say no to the child. This was his namesake and Bob fell into the same namesake-itis that his father had with his first son. Little Bobby was adored and within their limits given every consideration; the best cuts of meat and chicken. The world revolved around Bobby! When second son, Pat, arrived, Sharon‘s time pampering Bobby was cut. Bobby began tantrums. Bob responded. Pat needed a father’s attention too. Mrs. Delos Brown’s curse move into Pat. Did they think Bobby had tantrums? They ain’t seen nothing. Throwing things became punching things. The punching moved to the panel doors until there was not a door in the hall without a hole punched into it. Then he began on the walls. He got psychiatric attention but the problem was not solved. He stopped when he had punched a hole in the painting that Sharon loved: The Little Infant of Prague. The frame flew in every direction and the painting was torn beyond repair. Sharon had two wildfire brats and no backup to support her in controlling them. The painting was the only thing beautiful she had . She said nothing. She sat down and cried. Pat was shaken but Bobby heaved a sigh and said, it was only a piece of paper. Pat walloped him. “I hurt mother. She is the only one who loves me.” If it wasn’t for you none of this would have happened. You’re bad and you made me bad.” He turned to Sharon, “Oh, mother I am sorry. I love you so much.”

This wild destruction and filth ruined their circle of friendships. The Afro-headed priest visited until she began telling him the place was a mess and not presentable for him. He thought it was just “Boys will be boys” until he just dropped in unannounced. Then he stopped visiting. Her best friend finally said, she would not bring her family anymore because the place smelled so bad and those newspapers slid when you walked on them. Even the thought was revolting. Mrs. Romang loved her friend but this was asking too much. Sharon dropped into a chair and thereafter spent the day smoking and making everyone PBJ Sandwiches. Her youngest got a taste for ketchup and put it on every bit of food that passed his lips. Once Bob was going through the kitchen and noticed Pat pouring catchup on his corn flakes. Bob grabbed it and said, ”No more catchup in this house!” That was his only correction, ever.

Sharon became pregnant a third time. She hoped it was a girl. She wanted petticoats and ribbons and lacy things and love. She did have a little girl and they called her Ann Maria. Sharon’s mother came to help and cleaned up the house and basement. She knew her daughter wanted to manage things herself, but then she saw how things fell apart immediately and Bob was the problem. How Sharon hated that farm! It was sucking the life right out of her. And that greedy demanding old man: All he ever thought of was work. Illness did not matter- it was work that was important. Sharon was trapped like I had been before her. We loved God but damned Catholicity. Worse, Sharon was diagnosed with Diabetes and told that she must take an insulin shot daily. Sharon could not tolerate the idea of sticking herself with a big needle daily. It was horror added to horror with only that darling baby girl smiling so lovingly. The Doctor said it could be controlled with diet if she kept to the right diet! Sharon loved that new baby girl. It was such an easy child. Ann Maria never complained she just smiled and watched. Sharon would try her best using diet. She knew her mother could not stay forever doing the cleaning that she should be able to do. She tried. She honestly tried. She prayed that God do whatever was necessary and best. Her coping energy was not rebuilding. What would happen!

The brothers quietly began a clean-up in the old bouble house. The hellish locos had infested Old Man Midden. His sons tolerated each other- it was Junior they hated. That Thursday in April Bob and Charles worked together amicably. Mr. Midden left to town to deliver eggs and milk and do his business. Bob and Charles began to clean the old double house of unwanted things like snake skins. When one broken Empire leather rocker was tossed out the second story window the dry - stuffing immediately caught fire and poof went up in flames and was gone. The things were fire hazards. The brothers worked quietly together - Had the locos failed? Had their nastiness failed? Good is stronger than evil. In two Thursdays they removed more debris and even the nasty old mulberry tree and wood shed plus a couple wooden chicken batteries and the old dog house. Only of that original line was the smoke house. They needed that for the hams. The guys pulled the hayframe over the burn spot and Mr. Midden drove in and noticed nothing missing. It was October when he went to the area where the tree and wood shed had been and couldn’t find them. I was with him at the time. And told him those things were gone a half year. His response shook me. “Really! I haven’t looked at these things for forty years. I hate this place”.

Then it was May and Julie got the idea to take one of Henry’s graduated to Delaware to visit Cathy and John Henson - the oldest of Henry’s children. The girls said, no. I was elected to ago with Julie

Iat was a trip with mostly time spent moving Julie’s dresses from the truck/car to the motel and back. We had dinner where Congressmen took their dolls after an night’s encounter. The big thing was a whirlpool where several people had been swallowed and bodies never found. Returning the Brickyard Race at Indianapolis was finished and we got caught in the traffic. Now and then a police cruiser would blink it’s lights and quickly Julie would reach over and blink ours, She said it was a greeting to out of state police going through… which Norman her husband was. Police were heavy we did a lot of blinking.

When we returned Charles took us to the garage. He bought a new Cadillac- 1978. It was maroon and gorgeous. He said they also had a silver one, but he thought I’d like this color. He was correct the silver ones filled the east side of town as ghetto-cruisers. He suggested we all take a ride in it. We could go to the cemetery. I laughed and said. Yes. We can drive through the cemetery and show all the folks the new car. Julie laughed and in a moment, Charles laughed too.

We had the car about two and a half months when the turn signal handle broke off at the wheel and dangled. He took it back but they must order one.

I felt foolish using hand signals while driving a brand new Cadillac but it had to be. We were always on a shoe-string when it came to inside our home. Charles had the guys making walls and laying carpet upstairs for the apartment-to-be. I had no shades or mini-blinds for the windows. There were 5 lacey panels from Mrs. Barringer and they were see-thru. When things happen it is a big download at once. So it was now. At Christmas time I had decorated a hall for the Pen Women Club and there were little sprigs of viiolets and ribbon. I gathered it all home afterward.

Old Mr. Henry E. Midden phoned. He had a problem. There were holes in his steel roof. It all happened after he heard footsteps over his head for several nights. While Charles was listening to his father’s tale of woe, I was making little faux potted violets to deflect the neighbor’s eyes. Each window sash got 8 little square pots a bit of dry moss and a violet. Many thought I raised some wonderful African Violets! They started bringing me theirs. One lady asked if we had any pets. I said no but we have six children…Children were fine as long as we did not have any pets. I thought that strange. No shades or mini blinds had been lefta n the house. People are supposed to leave the shades or mini-blinds! There were no previous owners. The people had gone to a Rest Home. Senator Horsley was always calling me about something. He was so happy that I was away from that miserable farm and that feudal maniac. (I still had one, Charles. But I was an optimist.) I bless the mailman to this day! Had we not been evicted I would have still been under the Delos Brown Curse and as crazy as the Midden men.

Mr. Midden heard things moving in the attic above him. He telephoned Bob to get a ladder and see what was in the attic. Bob was tired and cranky. They just got everybody fed and down in bed and the telephone rings. Bob dressed and got the extension ladder from the storage house and tugged it upstairs to check in his father’s attic. He was met with five sets of glowing yellow eyes! He came back down and went home, got his rifle and went back up the ladder. He banged away until there was no more movement and then crawled into the attic and pulled out five of the biggest raccoons ever. He got them all in a sack and closed everything back to normal and went home.

It rained really hard. Old Mr. Midden’s ceiling was showing wet spots in his bedroom and out in the hall and other bedroom. There were holes all over the metal roof. Perhaps old Mrs. Delos Brown was in her glory! Old Mr. Midden telephoned my husband and told him the story. Charles and our sons went out there with a spotlight on a standard, sand bag weights and huge tarps. They covered the roof. In the morning our crew was sent to the farm. All our jobs halted. That was when they discovered there is no way to mend an old crazed steel roof. The whole thing had to be reroofed. They could bolt the new roofing to the metal one. Old Mr. Midden agreed. He trusted Charles’ work. He had many projects on his Cook Street place and Charles did fine work. The first day went fine. Charles had a new guy that was afraid of nothing! He skipped along the rooftops with his buckets of nails like a kid in the playground. He did resent the ban on smoking while working. He had to wait for his breaks. Roofing was the most costly of the insurances for our workers. So we took no chances.

But the curse was working on the farm in another direction. It was aimed at Sharon, Bob’s wife. She was self-doctoring that diabetes. Sharon was a sweet lady that let love plop her into the center of a family of demonic maniacs. For her it provided a living death until it would claim her completely. A normal farm was adjustment enough but to this farm with maniacs in charge -it was a death sentence.

Charles crew was at the Red Brick Summer Mansion replacing the roof that had been shot full of holes. Sharon and her mother were in the 56 House watching the roofers and Sharon felt like going to the bathroom. Along the hall she staggered and screamed and then fell. She was unconscious. Her mother screamed for help. The guys all came running but only Charles knew what he was seeing. He had met this state too often. “Mother sit down. Guy, go back and get Bob. I am calling an ambulance. Then he called me and said get to the hospital. Sharon’s is sick”

When I reached Emergency I was surprised to see our old Dr. Wyness. He gave up private practice and repeated complaints for new cases daily. When he saw me his eyebrows went up Sharon was being moved on a gurney past me. She was completely out. Doctor shook and hung his head. She never came out of the coma. Yet, I knew she prayed for this life to end. And I could not repeat that to anyone. My “Jesus People” daughter brought her prayer group and they would save Aunt Sharon. I agreed, “God is working, all right.” She hung to life support 19 days. In this time, I was really hanging on. My nerves needed to escape this.

The new turn handle came in. We bought the car in Jacksonville so that is where I was headed. They said it would take an hour and a half. I took several large sheets of drawing paper, pens pencils, ruler and T Square. I had a book Plate for the Cathedral of Amiems with me and sat down in the show room. I started the picture and finished it in that time. Our salesman was astounded. This Cathedral had 5 rows of saints around the front archway; and flying buttresses and stained glass windows. The complete staff was called in to see this black and white painting. It was intricate enough to keep my mind concentrated. I won several prizes with it later. Sharon was not so lucky. But as she had told me, this disease was her way out. Indeed in that hospital bed - it was not Sharon anymore. It was a body that had no real life. Only the respirator was keeping her breathing on day 18 now.

Everyone took turns cleaning something for Sharon. Roaches were everywhere. I was on a step ladder cleaning in the overhead cabinets. The baby Ann Maria was in her little car-seat watching me. And then a clairvoyant picture formed and I watched this scene. Sharon was in a garden dressed in a white gown that was tied at the waist with a golden cord. An older spirit advisor showing her records of how her future could be. She could live but the body could not be revived. It would be no better than at present with tubes and attendants never awake or speaking. Or she could leave the body and get on with a better life in the spirit. She need not worry about her children or parents. The spirits chose me as guardian for the baby. The boys would cling to their father and he to them. The spirit let Sharon think about all the possibilities and decide. She looked so lovely that I went out of body to meet with her but I could not. She was in a glassed cage undisturbed. The spirit advisor told me I must wait. She must decide. When she stood up and came forth, she said, “Oh, Mary I am so glad you are here. Yes, I’ve decided to leave--oh - it will be all right you will take care of the baby and the boys will be in Bob’s care. See, if I stay it would be nothing but what I am now. So it will be fine. I am leaving. I have some graces for taking the life, so that is a plus too. Goodbye.” My spirit hit my body and the ladder shook so much I was clinging to the cabinet door and hoping it would not break off...OMG Sharon decided to die. Oh, God what shall I do? Oh, dear Lord!

Then I heard these instructions. Pack away all her silver and china and crystal. Have Bobby take them to the attic. Pack her garments in the spare bedroom closet - especially her wedding dress. Then food! Collate all the foods. Put all the cereals on the top shelf. And honey next to the peanut butter . Put ketchup above the peanut butter. Gather all those Tupperware and shove them in one lower cabinet. Leave a bar of soap in each cabinet. When you get to the linen closet you will see why. (There aren’t any roaches in that closet it had dozens of gift soaps!) The egg beater and instant puddings go in a drawer by the sink so the boys can make snacks. All pot holders in a drawer near stove. When the phone rang I knew it was not good news. Mrs. Craycroft said Sharon died. I stood quietly a few moments and finally said, “Uagh, thank you. I - I will see that the boys eat supper and do their homework first. Take it easy dear.” I hung up. She thought I was very cold. The boys hated the messenger and beat on my legs. When Bob came home the boys ran to their father hoping I was just being mean. But he cried and they three clung together weeping. Sharon’s death came when we had closed on the house. We were to move that Saturday! Hanks crew volunteered their time and we were completely moved by eleven am.

We were ending our time at Riddle Hill. I went from house to house saying my goodbyes and of all the people. I think the taxman was the most endearing. He said, “Don’t worry, little lady. If you had good neighbors here, you will have good neighbors there.” I hoped he was right. He was, all but one, Harriett. I walked from door to door introducing myself. All along things were nicely receptive until I got to Harriett’s. She said, “Oh, I am too busy. I don’t have time for that coffe-clotch stuff,” and she closed the door. Actually I did not either; it was just an introduction. Later I did try to chat with a few ladies that moved in but they talked soap and diapers; nothing intellectual. They were not uplifting in thoughts. One had been on an Anthrapalogical dig and found it interesting enough to mention in one sentence. I wished I could paint inside the house, but everything went upstairs. We had bright aquamarine blue in every room plus tarnished ugly gas/electric light fixtures. The one in the living room was the worst with 4 oval domes suspended from darkened metal chain from a central dome that was flush with the ceiling. Finally, the upstairs was getting ceiling fan chandeliers - and we got a dining room pull down for over the big dining room table. It was huge and we dared not move it too often. After several more months the other old fixtures were replaced with bug catchers. My best buy was a small tiered fixture for the foyer. It looked like 3 circled of crystal drops - one inside the other. I still have it - $10.00.

There were no shades or mini-blinds left in the house. All I had was three thin curtains from Mrs. Barringer. I fixed little green square pots with artificial violets that I gathered after a church dinner. These broke the view into the house. The neighbors thought I grew them and began brining me theirs that they were tired of! Mrs. Bearden asked if we had any pets. I said no, but we do have 6 children. She fanned her hand, “Just as long as there aren’t any pets.” Off she went leaving me in wonder. We did not get an answer for over 40 years.

An apartment! Oh it was right thing to keep an income during the lean winter months. It was the sneaky way Charles went about it that irked all of us. We did not appreciate losing the upstairs, but then, it worked a bit. We couldn’t have that screaming stuff; no walls are that soundproof; it would upset the tenant, Blessedly, Charles had to keep his trap shut. Well, until he learned the tenant’s hours and he timed it for when he was not there. This proved to us that definitely, that dad was not mentally afflicted - build and blow every so often, but he could control himself. We found this purposefulness thoroughly hateful and frightening. It left us shaking and the children screaming. It was his lord and master play but it was so loud and terrifying. No way to gain a loving family; they saw that red truck and flew into hiding in their bedroom. Turn on the TV and set up their Hot Wheels and Barbie dolls so he would not find anything to scream at them about. But he would - anything even one corner of a schoolbook not in alignment on the table. Fear begets hate. Take years of this and he gained a family that hoped he would fall off a three story roof or get hit with a sledge hammer. Often, only the thought of prison kept me from whacking him with my iron skillet.

However he always wore his pleasant face at work and people loved and trusted him. While Charles was furniture-sitting a massive Queen Anne Dining Room Set for the Fred La Barres, Fred got a house to sell. It was in Springfield. We looked. It was given to a Disciples of Christ Church as payment for a couple’s retirement there. The church was selling it. Hank Sommer looked it over. It had been empty a year. The plumbing and fixtures were all ruined and needed replaced. The garage had a snake coiled by the drain and mice in a raised corner building block. But the house upstairs had 2 ½ rooms and bath that the last owner used as an apartment. There was a staircase from the back door to a small landing and then a straight shot of stairs to the back yard. But the upstairs’ rooms had no walls at all. There were 2 naves. They looked like little play houses and the kids though these would be for them; one for the boys and one for the girls. With this in mind the family agreed with their dad. But Charles had a different idea all together. I liked the house across the street; same price and partly finished third floor. In it, everything was usable and finished; it was for a family! No good, Charles wanted the church one. We discover the rooms were not for the children’s bedrooms but to rent as an apartment. A little voice told me, this will work for you, agree! Charles continued to be the despised master despot and the children were all deposited in the one large back room!

That room was a combination bedroom opened to join an enclosed sun porch. It was bigger than the bedroom they all shared at Riddle Hill but this was permanent! Too late we discover that room was an ice box. We thanked God for all those stuffed rabbits all from Easters past Every stuffed toy was against the edge of the triple navy bunk beds. It was bolted to the wall. The four girls slept in the triple bunks. The boys used the double bunk that was used separately before. Marshall had the top bunk but years later confessed that the hot air blew across the walk-way onto his ace at night and hw was always dry throated. The children were modest and discovered the closet doors when both were open made two neat places because the closets were walk -in style and they could dress privately. We had bought several pair of plastic drapery when we helped Norm and Julie. She wanted to take all her peace roses and the drapes shaded them from the sun streaming in our wagon. The hazard was discovered years later. Mrs. Barringer changed her drapery and we received the old pale green ones. They were very dusty and I washed them. They turned yellow! It was too much yellow; first yellow plastic then yellow cloth drapery. When I could get some material that went with the red carpet, it had one yellow thread and the children balked. Could not use it, Charles sided with the children. I never had his backup and sale fabric is non-returnable. The women decorate the house! ME! I had not rights at all.

Ah there is a question? Why was Aunt Julie moving? She and Norm took a job at a Woman’s Prison in Bryan, TX. She was driving a large car home at night and saw a Black Angus bull on the road in front of her. She slammed on the brakes and the car skidded into a rural mailbox. This came crashing through the window and did a big job on Aunt Julie. It was one day before her new Insurance on this job was to go into effect so the Insurance was no good. As she could not work she was terminated and told to vacate the house they were furnished. She had trustees dig out her Peace Roses . We put them out of the blazing sun in our wagon. Julie was incapacitated and the trustees packed all their stuff for her. Norm and Charles were looking for a large empty trailer for them to move into. Norm drove the trailer back and Charles drove the Station Wagon. One thing about that couple: They never corrected a work problem . If either had a squabble with their job; they looked up another small town that had a nursing facility and needed a Deputy Sherriff. This attitude took them all over the country. They honeymooned in Fairbanks, Alaska and worked there a while. The farmer tried to sue Julie for killing his bull but Norm found a Jewish Lawyer who turned that around completely for them. Ah something positive. They did not need the curse of the Farm. They made their own problems. Ordinarily, they did not need the Curse of the Midden Farm - they made their own. The best thing for all of us was that Charles was too busy to do the Maniac thing.

Meanwhile a memory here was of Bob and Sharon. It was before they had children; here at 334 S. Adelia Bob and Sharon stayed at our house and watched the kids. I had hot pink swag drapery in the bedroom and Sharon was beside herself with that color. I had used it in the living room at the 56 house. Bob finally said, “Oh close your eyes.” Those are my colors: Hot pink and electric blue.

I was unhappy with a fish pond in the back yard by the walk. It was filed in but the rim was above ground and tripped everyone. The Demonic Despot would not have his crew remove it. It was cracked. They could have taken a sledge hammer to it and level it in a few minutes. I could not manage the sledge but I knew leverage. I tackled that. I dug out the dirt and then using an iron pipe and brick I levered those huge pieces out. That was when I thought a terrible thought: I’d like to use that sledge hammer on him but good! It was a repercussion like with Aunt Lucy and Bagg. What you wish comes true.

I finished the fish pond the thing was removed but I noticed as I passed the huge old mirror, that I was walking bent forward. I tried to straighten up and couldn’t. I went to the doctor using a cane to walk. I had really hurt myself. Dr. Holman did a few manipulations and massaged my legs. After several treatments the pains lessoned. He gave me strict instructions not lift over ten pounds. This is what saved me from my mother’s demand that I carry her around after she would have her legs amputated. I told her twenty pounds, but it was ten. Dr. Holman’s nurse was a Catholic lady. He was Jewish. She kept him straight with our holydays and he kept her alert for all the Jewish ones. He was a dear person. His wife was from Germany and when he discovered I wrote to Jankowski he was delghted that I meet his wife. Together we chuckled at my self-taught Deutsch. What was funny was that she was from Stuttgart and knew the area well. We sat together at concerts . I had my verbose friend with me but those were the only times she did not talk. There was one German conductor who seemed to be tipsy. He was staggering a bit and conducting badly. Only I would notice that and I was getting more silently peeved by the second. This was insulting us. He may not have enjoyed performing for a small town audience but he should conduct precisely well. One of last numbers was by Weber in the Ten Tones he invented. It seems to wander on its own. Muriel lost her short bit of patience. “What is this? It is all over the place -- just rambling rubble!” I explained Weber’s 10 tone scale. She said, “Well, Weber can run on a short peer and take his 10 Tone Music with him. ” The Holmans laughed and it caught in the audience. Weber was a failure in Springfield. The conductor made his own Delos Brown Curse.

The Midden family was truly under the spell of the Delos Brown Curse. When Sharon died Bob had to change his work schedule. He did the milking while Old Mr. Midden had to shuffle his buns over to the 56 house and take care of the baby. Thank God they used paper diapers that came with adhesive tabs. Those darn cloth ones slid off! He learned to make formula and test it against his wrist. By golly, he was learning motherhood at 84. He chuckled at himself and the baby smiled. ”Oh, God she is sweet! And no mother! He turned away and supped back his choke. “Darn rotten Diabetes! What a curse!” At 84 he was learning compassion; and for once money was not on his mind. He called Legal Services. There ought to be people, women that help a father in a situation like this. Mothers hold little babies and hug them lots. He got results. Ladies were sent to clean the house and wash the cloths and hang them out to dry. The baby went everywhere the ladies went. They got her a car seat and she saw everything from the floor. She was so ideal a child that the ladies brought her presents and half dollars that they collected in an Alka Seltzer tube. Baby was loved. She did not remember her mom but was happy with everyone. It was Bob who was suffering. At the wake I held Ann Maria most of the time. Bob was telling the story casket-side and then Charles was. It was he who was there when his father gasped his last breath. I was holding Ann Maria when the Jewel Tea Man came through on crutches. His one leg had been amputated. I nearly fainted, Horst had the same disease - he was using a cane in San Moritz. Was he in for this? After that I got everyone’s name wrong and I knew all these people! A lady who was not friendly to me came by and I called her Gwendolyn and then said, “ No it’s Guenevere - oh no, but it is a beautiful long name- forgive me!” She laughed and shook my hand.

Ann Maria was a paranormal. It started when Bob took her to Emma Brown’s wake. She was old Mr. Midden’s housekeeper. Ann Maria said, “No, we can’t sit there. Those are already filled with people. Bob looked he did not see anybody but honored Ann Marias words and told us when we came and shrugged. I relaxed and saw them, mostly women. Some took turns going up and chatting with Mrs. Brown’s spirit. One of the spirit ladies told me, “She wanted us to help her get to Heaven.” I nodded and little Ann Maria smiled. Later a friend died and I wanted to visit old Dr. Lieb. I asked Ann Maria if she would mind. She said, ”No, Daddy knows lots of dead people, we go see them. … I was surprised that Dr. Lieb was shown in full Ansar Shrine Regalia. We said a prayer and then sat down. Then behind the palms I was a movement. It was Dr. Lieb. When I smiled he began chatting and using his cane as a prop. “You see I got a new Shilleighlie, always wanted one. How do you like my new Shilleighlie“ He shook it and Ann Maria laughed. Now he was on a role! He told us a story and we both tried to seem mournful because a man entered. Dr. Lieb scolded him. “Not once did you come to see me in that dad blasted nursing [home. But, Dr](http://home.). Lieb I didn’t even know you were alive (104)…But he did! That makes a difference! I ought to clobber him with my new schleighlie! We both laughed out loud. He floated over to the man who was weeping in the roses on the casket. Why the crocodile tears, nephew? Come what’s new alligator? Too late for money, nursing home’s got that. Hum. Maybe lack of money. Ah, then good every penny you are not getting. Ann Maria howled with laughter. I was surprised at his audacity. He turned to us. Why is it that you two hear me and he doesn’t? I explained the spirit life and hey, did he know how to get to Heaven and check in? “Yeah. Been there did that, came back to see how things were going. Gonna stick around a bit and see if I can get a rise out of a few people. I will. I will clobber them with my new shilleighlie.” Ann Maria loved him. I was pushing the heavy glass door open when Ann Maria said, “Oh Aunt Mary you know the best dead people. When I go with daddy they aren’t so funny. I liked his red sparkly jacket and his tall red hat. The way that thingy (tassel) swung back and forth; it was so much fun. And when he tried to look mean; I could not help laughing.” I told her I thought the hat was called a fezz or maybe a fuzz. …”My Goodness, Aunt Mary, even his hat is called funny. What kind of Doctor was he?” …A dentist. He used his cane then, to tell funny stories. At times it was a rifle, shooting bad people or pointing to pictures at a circus….”Good! He will keep everybody in Heaven laughting.”I was unaware that a consultant was listening to us. When she mentioned Heaven, he smiled and nodded. “How old is she?” Ann Maria pipped up smartly: “I am three and a half years old and I go to day school in the park and paint pretty pictures with my hands. It is called Finger Painting.” … She looks older, he said. Her mother was a big lady I told him. He looked at her, “Amazing! I’ll bet you even know your numbers.” She smiled. “Yes Sir, I can count to ten. Would you like them in English, Spanish or German, Sir?” The consultant just looked at her and mouthed -OMG. Ugh, no Sir. God doesn’t have a language we just pray to Him.” The consultant nodded and agreed. “Yes, indeed we do.”

We would dress nicely for all these outings. I never knew who might see us from the music world. Ann Maria was a big boned child. She would look at a dress on a hanger and say, “That won’t look good on me.” She tried it to please me, but she would be correct. Her cloths needed a crispness and simple cut. Now under wear was lacy and ruffled and gleefully hidden. She had Mary Janes and lace edged white socks, white gloves and a little flop hat. Often we heard the High School Concerts at the State House. We watched from the third floor rotunda. There was too much action on the second floor. It had the Governor’s offices. Security was nearby. He had his hand-cuffs peeping through the flap at the back of his jacket. I called his attention to it and heard a young voice say, “Oh Aunt Mary, look at the pattern in this bannister. It is just like the gorgoyles on your dishes, and so it was. The security guard began to listen. “Aunt Mary, there is an instrument which I am not familiar with; the tall wooden one against the wall. Do you think we could go down and inspect it? His finger went into the air, “How old is the child?” Ann Maria tells him and adds that in two week she will be four. He looked at me and said, “She speaks like she is thirty.” I nodded. “Yes, Ann Maria, we can inspect the tall wooden one. It is an oboe. It has a deep sound. Not many orchestras have an oboe.” We turned to the elevator and the officer said loudly, “Make way! Child coming through.” He kept a path open for us and Ann Maria went directly to the girl with the oboe. “Hello, I am not familiar with your instrument. Can you tell me about it?” The girl had it nearly dismantled as they had finished the concert. She screwed it back together while telling Ann Maria about her instrument and sustaining the sound evenly. “It has a deep sound. And then she blew it. Ann Maria’s little white gloved hand went to her chest. “Oh that is the sound of the duck in “Peter and The Wolf.”

The girl said, “It is?’ …and behind us the teacher said, “It IS!” and glanced at the officer. He said, “Four in two weeks.” The teacher rolled her eyes and said, “Oh, God.”

Beings my youngest children were in their last years of High School and rest of them working, Ann Maria spent those hours with me. She had no words at all when she arrived, and I needed to hear some adult words. I spoke adult with her. After our names we began with the things in the kitchen; the partition that divided the room and then I was going to use the blender so I explained the noise and the blades and how they revolved. She was most eager to learn and repeated the new word in a whole sentence. This gave her an advantage with parents but their children were often at a loss. The little boy was going too fast; Ann Maria said, “Slow down, your wheels are revolving too fast and you will turn over.” As fast he did turn over and then cried. The mom said, “Why did’t you listen to Ann Maria?” He said, “I did, but I didn’t know what she was saying. She would go with The Magdalene and sit by an older neighbor and swing on their porch swing while listening to stories.

When we’d had her a few days only, she indicated that she wanted us to hold her on our laps while she played the piano. We were preparing our ears for loud dissonants but instead those tiny hands touched softly and she played “The Ziphers” beautifully. Ah, music! But she did not like our children’s records or the Disney tunes. She walked early and we went to the library. There we listened to children’s stories , chose a few and found books with pictures of musical instruments. Now we went upstairs to check out what kind of albums this kid would like. Right off she sees “Peter and the Wolf“ and then “Pictures at an exhibition “ -“Yes, Aunt Mary has the music that Marshall’s computer plays! And see it shows the Dance of the Eggs! That one is fun.” I wondered about this child, she had not played the record, yet she knows what it is! As we were checking these out, we saw that a pianist was giving a recital there so we attended that. Various military bands would stop at the Armory and give concerts there. This was a favorite freebie. Here she noted the conductor and asked what his work involved. When we attended a concert she could study all the instruments’ sounds. We went to travel shops and collected pictures of faraway places. When she had a doctor appointment for a check-up, we took the travelogs and a pair of long bladed scissors. This is one way to make people with germs avoid your space While waiting our turn, we cut out the best pictures and put them in an envelope to take home.

Ann Maria was very different from her father and brothers. Many times I really needed a break and begged him to take her a weekend. I did not know it but he had become addicted to farm sales. This would cramp his style! He bought until the dump truck was full then came home and let it slide off the truck and go to another sale! Ann Maria kept him home - He would get a pizza while she played with Butchie and a cat only she could touch. Everyone called him “Claws”. She found him sleeping on top of a truck wheel and brought him to safety. She would last until Saturday morning and then say, “OK, daddy, I had enough. Tale me back to Aunt Mary’s. He came in and asked, “What the heck is the Dance of the Eggs? She promptly showed him the Album cover. “Oh daddy, you can close your eyes and see all those little eggs with their stick hands and legs dancing!” Bob said, she didn’t care for “Spike Jones and the City Slickers.” I laughed. We loved him too. Play him on tape in the car while traveling.

Bob pulled some unsavory stunts via the estate attorney and the rest of the heirs knew no better. At that time there was no inheritance tax but he said there was and that the IRS demanded payment from all the heirs immediately! Also that there was a document they must all sign showing they paid this tax. The heirs all signed. Charles and I decided this did not sound right. I called an attorney in the Ridgely Building because I was on a silly fun streak with him…Dr. Durbin’s x-ray tank leaked over one weekend and it went through the floor onto this attorney’s expensive desk. Beings I was so upset over this, he laughed it off and we dried and polished the desk top together. So I called him and told him about this question we had. I had to work ½ a day Saturday and he was in. My friends did not go to their offices on the weekends. He read the papers and said,” Charles, your father gave your brother a loaded gun to play with. You are right there is no inheritance tax and this paper you all signed gives Bob the right to remain on the farm 15 years instead of 5. This would mean the estate will not be settled until then! Here is what you do: Write a letter - use my stationary, Say you leally withdraw your name from this document. If you tell the other, heirs that would be good. Now the rotten thing is the IRS will not refund the money although they got it illegally. They will want you to take in out on your income tax as a loss and likely over several years. OK, kids! I wish it was better news, but little lady, I’ll call you if the tank leaks again! -and he laughed.

Charles took action and alerted the other heirs. They each withdrew their names from that document and Bob BLEW his top. In full demonic rage He came to our house (I was volunteering at the Mac Farland Zone Library). He grabbed Ann Maria! Took no clothes, toys, jewelry or hair barettes for her very curly hair. He told my children that, “Ann Maria is old enough to dress herself and go to the bathroom. I can take care of her now.” And he flew out the door. My children were astounded at his ferocity and the foolish thing he had done. He was not hurting us; he was hurting Ann Maria. We were all she knew! We were frightened for her. Would she become a slave to those slobs on that depressing farm with its bad vibes. The curse was trying to swallow our little Ann Maria.

But Little Ann Maria was a determined 5 year old. She wanted to come back to us but that was out! So she asked to go to Mrs. Barlow. Mrs. Barlow had a common educated husband but she was out of college. Once Mrs. Barlow heard Ann Maria speak in full sentences with adult words, she knew this child was very special. By the day Mrs. Barlow was taken by surprise. This child was so advanced it made her feel inadequate as a mother. This child stayer with her! The farm was not a place to live; it was a place to visit. The Delos Brown widow’s curse was fooled!

I had a few irons in the fire quite privately. Charles never knew nor the other Middens. Charles was still uptight about my having a music degree and he did nasty things to be in control. One thing was to make one early trip to town for Cosima’s job but to just drop me in front of my office and make me stand in the cold an hour or more until the Dr. came to open.. I was not going to stand in the cold - there was Thrifty Drug Store across the street and it had a coffee shop. I ventured in there, got a coffee and then looked around for a seat. Instead I saw Tisckos waving to get my attention and come there. I sat there and met hiss few friends and Dr. Walty from the old Bank Building had an office in this building and was in a music group of older men. I met these fellows too. One was a dear little 92 year old man who sneaked out of his house each morning to not eat the porridge his wife made for him. He took the bus to the drugstore for a coffee. One day our spot was occupied and we chose a big round table in the open. Harvey Beam and his beautiful wife stopped by to chat with Tisckos.. He thought he recognized me and yes, from the bank building. I told him he may not wish to meet me. My name was Mrs. Midden now and he was handling Probate on the Midden Estate. He asked which brother and I said Charles. He laughed. Of the lot he liked Charles because of his speech. He himself used to stutter and he hated the day he must begin going to court. He said, he told himself, I will not stutter; I will spean plainly from now on. And he did! After that the wife did not come but the Judge had coffee with us every morning and asked what the boys were up to. He went to court knowing what to expect from this bunch. With us was a 92 year old man who had once visited the farm. He met marshall and me. He was a World War 1 buddy of old Mr. Midden. One morning he said something about his late friend, my father- in- law and Harvey said, “Why don’t you tell him what a rotten son-of-a-gun that old man was?” “I answered, because he is 92 years old and that was his only friend from the war. We let him have happy thoughts.” Harvey pulled back and looked at me a full moment. Then he said, “How did you get in that cut-throat family anyway?”

I smiled a bit and said, “Pure lack of luck”/ He broke down laughing.

Father Wright knew our predicaments with the Middens. He kept close watch over Ann Maria becoming her Uncle. Father Wright and I had so many things in common, one being protecting Ann Maria and guiding her progress. He provided news and even scoops as to the child’s education, and her home life by way of their handyman, Mr. Barlow! His wife realized the child’s place was with them now! Ann Maria had no place on that farm. And the curse did not claim her. Yet one day the estate was settled and everyone faced the fact. The farm would be sold. Junior tried to arrange a poor sale so he could get the whole thing for his boys arranging an off day and time. But Charles took measures. did come. After many long months haggling with the Probate Judge over who and what about the estate, Judge Beam lost patience with the crabapples and decided the farm needed to be cleared, cleansed and fixed up in such a way to be sold at Auction. The very thing Charles suggested at the beginning. His attorney Senator Knupple made one appearance and spoke to Judge Beam. What he said froze the competition in their pants. Bob had to move by the first of May 1983 after five years of ruination by Bob’s negligent and poor safety of his livestock as well he must bury the carcasses of those animals that died of starvation and disease. Also his lack of good faring methods for producing normal sized crop output. Several years it lay fallow or produced 5 bushels of corn per acre!

The heirs were instructed to sit quietly and watch their brother move. While doing this, I noticed the bight blue paint on the south wall in the kitchen. They were removing the kitchen cabinets; that was the original paint. Charles went to the house and knocked. Junior told Bob that cabinets were part of the house. Bob took up a sledge hammer and chased them away but he tripped on a warped walk board and promptly lost his temper big time. He threw the sledge hammer at the two, Charles picked it up. Bob picked up one of the 4 x 12’s used along the walkway and in his anger swung it. The fight was on! The two nephews dashed from the house and there were three against two. Charles put up his arms and the board hit his Rolex. Now it was a battle and Henry Junior called the Sheriff. It was stupid of me but at the time I thought Charles had more sense. I had my little .25mm in the glove compartment and Jonathan at 1 year old in the front seat with me. I got out and gave Charles the gun. Three against two was not right. Charles shot once in the air and then the gun jammed. God was looking out for us! Now it was just fight until the Sheriff arrived. Nobody was charged because the gun was jammed. The Delos Brown Curse got a big workout that night. It wasn’t finished. It tried again in a few days.

Charles was feeling the ned to medically retire, but he wanted each of his crew to be going into better jobs. Jobs with perks before he closed shop. During these months he was reacting to the pinched nerves in his head from a 1974 mugging. There were several brain surgeries but the last surgery was closed pinching two nerves and caused unrelenting headaches They could give a shot to relieve the pains only 3 times. The 4th would remove all feeling and he would not detect an adverse effect. Although this cooled his nasty disomic temper, he needed much more attention. He was such a menace at the time that when he went outside we did not find him right away. The police cruiser came and he was not in sight. We heard a moan and the officers saw him between the garage and the white panel truch. My reaction was not that of a loving spouse. Clearly, I was disappointed when he moved. I said , “Oh, he is so awful .” And I shrugged. Two policemen helped him up and to the house . His lip was split and he had a bump on his head. We cleaned him up and took him to the hospital. They drilled a hole in the bump and relieved the fluid. He was lucid and active and once we were taken home he had to go to the farm. It was our night to watch.

We pulled the car in the drive that goes to the new barn, and “U” turned and parked to face the 56 house.

This was their last evening to be there and the two boys asked their rwo friends to help. They had lots of empty paper barrels from feed and were stuffing the many heritage papers from Mother Luls Sommer-Midden. Some barrels had lidshad lids on them others did not. It seemed to be ok and then it began a slight drizzle. The front and back doors flew open and kids rushed out -some to cover the barrels and the two in back fighting! Pat was saved from death when the dinky 2 x 4 railing held his weight when he fell against it. The screaming, fighting and noise were terrible. And then our car, the ’78 Cadillac was rocked from side to side by unseen forces. When I calmed a second, It was Indian Spirits. The Locos were on the warpath! Our car was constantly shaking, as these terrifying grey Spirits emerged from the dip in the pasture. It was like seeing a black and white movie of an Indian attack. They were grey and ugly. They cme so fast at the car and then pushed off from it and headed for the 56 house. I told Charles, pray, pray for the angels to help. The car must be dented and sliced on every side.

Tall Warrior Angels came from the north. Three came to our car and said. This area is not safe; we are moving you. And with that the angels picked up the car and transported us to the North side of Highway #97 and set the car facing the farm. We saw hundreds of grey Indian Spirits and many times more of tall warrior angels with great flashing swords. I had never been so frightened. Charles sat mute. He could only move his eyes. We saw the angels fall and disintegrate in this battlefield. They did not cross the highway so that was good. We sat quietly until the refuse of the battle was cleared away. The farm looked better; it seemed at peace. There were no signs of fallen or wounded angels. The Angel that moved our car back to its original position said: “The wounded angels have unctns waiting. There is no pain or healing time. All is instant”.

We sat in the car quietly. All movement at the56 house was in silence. When the vehicles, truck and people left there was just a peaceful silence. We were the last to leave.

I did not work that day but went to the Probate court with Charles, The Henry Junior branch were ready for the doors to open. Bob and his boys arrived quietly. He gave up the battle and told the judge he was responsible for all he had been accused. The judge set the repayment amount at $130,000.00. We knew Bob had no money what so ever. He blew everything on his partying. Junior was dissatisfied: That was less than a third because he had sold the Store buildings and two houses, etc. to the State for nearly twice that. But Judge Harvey Beam banged his gavel. Like he said at our breakfasts that is the most cut-throat bunch he ever saw. He knew this case before he entered the courtroom daily. All the coffee group knew it too. Neither Harvey or I spoke of anything. We all shook hands civily and then he sid, “And now I an retire in peace knowing I did my best. We held hands a moment .

Charles had no idea that I knew Judge Beam until we went to Democrat Day at the State Fair that August. Harvey saw me and yelled,” Mary!” and then threw open his arms. He had a nug of beer in his right hand but now it was dripping down the beer wgon and his mug was empty. He hugged me to him and we laughed and laughed. He came to Charles as a friend that day. Charles was dunned. “I did not know you knew Judge Beam!” I made eyes to Harvey and said,

“Oh yes, from the old bank building when I was 18”. Harvey laughed. I couldn’t even pay for a phone. I used a Republicans.” He laughed again and Charles was none the wiser. He whispered Conn’s cafeteria now.”

“I am a Committee Clerk now. The dentist I worked for is the onethat was spsread all over the news .” He asked what was that relly. “He was saying he completed dentures for Public Aid people and he hadn’t. One lady went to the Midicare and told them. They called me for other names and well, You know I am truthful. Remember that song?”

Harvey laughed . “Charles I’ve known Mary since the forties. Remember that song we all solved with little Dr. Lewis and Bill? And crabby Hugo - hey! He’s loosened up now… God, those were good years!” He looked at Charles. “And you knew nothing about us? Tisckos, Mary and I and that little old man who escaped his porridge each morning; he was 92 and knew yur father in the war. Mary would not let me tell him what a cut throat your old father was! She insisted, we let him have happy memories. This one’s a keeper. Yes, she came to Thrifty to escape the cold and we all had coffee together. I ‘d ask her what the brothers were up to and knew what to expect before I got in the court room. That was the nastiest case ever. Let’s have a beer!”

Bradforton

There were other deaths in the Midden Timber in the 1980’s. One a young man dived into the pond and hit his head on a submerged stone at the east end. It is so large it could not be moved. The other involved a spaced out young Midden and his equally bombed friend. They left the party to drive for more beer. On their way back the friend fell asleep while driving and accelerated the car. It hit a culvert and the driver ws killed. The bombed pal shook his friend but no response so he walked back to the party . He neighbors across the street finally called the sheriff and the driver was dead.

There is an elevator at Bradforton. My knowledge of the happenings there were from ’52 when I married into the Middens. The family that operated the elevator lived in a large house next to it were named Leutimeier. Their son returned from the war the same time as Charles. The guy was a loner that kept his rifle nearby. One day he killed himself after setting fire to the house. The property was absorbed into the elevator area. Several men perished inside the storage bins and a couple in the piled loose corn stored outside after bountiful harvests. The elevator itself burned twice; once while Henry Sommer, Junior worked there. He escaped. Across the street different organizations tried to start a dog training and boarding business but they failed. Once because of stupid employees who abused the dogs. A larger business is there now. Across the street there was a small General Store. Over the years several vehicles ran into it. In one accident, the owner was killed. The Delos Brown Curse has been steadily busy ruining lives and property in the area of the land grant. It continues to this day. Veterans Parkway at Jefferson is a vulnerable spot for car crashes and trees falling across electric wires. Another crash site is at Jefferson and Walnut and also North a ½ block where the turn on ramps to the concourse is. The land grant area starts by the Indian Village of the peaceful tribe.

It continues that Nobody got anything out of the hoped for money that Bob was obliged to pay. Junior had his batter of retained attorneys to pay and actually solicited both Julie and Charles to help him pay these. Charles said nothing doing; because of you I had to hire an attorney. I am paying him .Julie paid him the ten thousand that Grampa Midden had in an account for each child. We felt that Junior showed off all his life swinging those attorneys at the family; they are his responsibility. As for Bob he had a rough go and it took a bit to get the boys on track but they aare both great guys now. A friend got him a job at the furniture store. Not a penny was ever recovered. The farm estate was auctioned. Henry Junior tried unsuccessfully to kabotch the sales. So he could buy it all but that was not to behe bought the two forty acres and the ten acre field on the South of the road. His wife had hopes of restoring the brick mansion but her mother estimated the cost was out of her range and backed out. Somehow I was blamed for this unhappiness. Junior and his wife, Adrian built a lovely home but it is back of the 10 acre piece and with lack of grooming it goes unseen from the highway. Adrian could not believe the horrors and setback they faced in their new home. It became look before you open the door; copperheads were everywhere. Never approach a fallen log, they nest in those. Some kids threw a few rattlesnakes in the timber and there already were black snakes that stand on end and fight you back so this is viper timber. There were arguments over nothing and then everyone was screaming like banshees and fighting over by then a forgotten reason. Mrs. Delos Brown watched the old summer mansion deteriorate. Her curse was in full swing. Only when her daughter returned home from college did they realize - it is this place! Nobody has been happy here. You drive in the drive and it is like a pall settles over you. Can you curse the curser? Would it do any good?

The homestead was sold to others who also had dreams and found their purse strings lacking. As the homestead deteriorated, the young Mrs. Henry Midden decided: She was very lucky to have not gotten her heart’s desire. The new people stepped into the Delos Brown Curse. I did not mention the curse to anyone. The Sommer- Midden Reunion was able to get a tour of the farm. This is when the distant young Mrs. Henry Midden approached me with her lovely healing words.

The new owners wanted to especially talk with me since the house had been built for my family. She said there was never a day of peace there. No matter what they did plans never really worked. I told her there were two problems with the house construction. 1.) to save money they chopped two feet off the west end. This pushed the stairs that go to the basement into the breakfast area and one could not get through behind the chairs or table because of the bearing wall where the kitchen cabinets are. These good people knew nothing about our eviction or dairy farm dreams. Actually the hogs kept the snakes away from the homestead. Hogs eat anything vipers and daffodil bulbs. I remember Sharon was at wits end because the hogs uprooted all her iris bulbs but would not eat them. The new lady did not have a snake problem. “Our dog is a black Rottie. He uses them as toys; tossing them into the air and catching them in his strong jaws. My husband picks them up later.” They have other horrors and did not need to know ours. That farm had many loco squatters keeping them busy protecting their sanity. Our stuff was past tense for them as was the. Gun play, the walk board swinging and estate hassle; they were tackling problems of their own. They added an entrance room at the front, plus steps and a little porch. Charles had built a similar porch and steps, I laid those huge solid bricks along the house to the drive area but later Sharon did not like them and Bob tore it all out. He was always tired after chores that nothing was replaced. There was nothing but standing water after rains. The new people covered the basement entrance but it was a fight every inch of the way. “It was like the place is cursed! “ She said. We too often wondered why things came so hard. And then my friend Debbie Ross told her story. it was all do to that crooked couple - those horse thieves. That woman, Mrs. Delos Brown had a huge chip on her shoulder and cursed the whole land grant. She caused untold suffering, awakened the Loco Squatters who rule it.

The new owner said her husband had a decorative iron works business but the place was a shamble of wire bits of decorative iron scattered everywhere like booby traps. The small summer mansion that Dr. Sommer built is abandoned. It is beyond saving. What was once ancient and elegant is deteriorated to nothing. The couple removed the bathroom Bob had added upstairs. Bob’s entry was by stepping over the open stairs and very dangerous. Now it was a bedroom again but…the flooring, walls and ceiling were not replaced. Daylight and weather stream in. Actually the building is ready to fall in. The common wood had been stippled to look more cosly, but without the stippling the wooe is very costly today. From the Highway it looks wonderful! The bricks have no mortar. When you are driving on Rte #97 you will see large brightly painted roosters and black and white cows and other farm animals of steel. They area fun cheerful site. The barn of this story is gone several decades now but the Loco Squatters are there so be on guard. They are ready to spring into your life just like the copperheads, rattlers and black snakes coiled in poison oak to greet you! Laugh at the fun animals but keep driving.

The end