

January - 1998

Dear Bob:

I recently saw LIFE WITH FATHER after a lot of years and it brought back memories of the first time I saw it at the elegant DAVIDSON theater in Milwaukee. I had gone to the Davidson many times but always in the reasonable seats in the balcony. Then I met your Dad and he took me to see Life With Father & we had right in front seats on the first floor. Needless to say, it made quite an impression!

Thinking of this, I remembered that you once asked me to tell you some family history from before you were born. So here goes:

I was "kinda, sorta" engaged to Gene and he kept after me to marry him right after graduation and we could start a family. Well, at 17 I was not fond of this idea. Gene had been about the country and was ready to settle down, I did not want to, so we sort of drifted apart. Right after that I was "best friends" with Phyl, met Bob, and we started going out. Dad wanted to get married and told me, "Marry me and we will travel" -- now that was more to my liking. Dad joined the Navy, got his basic training at Great Lakes, and we got married when he finished basic. I was only at Great Lakes once, that was with Mom & Dad Pekarske, who knew someone stationed there & we drove down to visit.

I had to quit the bank after I married as they did not hire married women (this was 1944) so got a job at A.O.Smith. It was only a short time later Bob wanted me to join him in Gulfport, Miss. so I hopped on a train and STOOD all the way down there. In the war years you took ^{AVAILABLE} what you could get and there was not much transportation ~~base~~. That was an experience I don't want to go thru again. I was "traveling" tho, if you can call it that!

Gulfport was my first experience in "the SOUTH" and the one thing I remember is getting on the bus, going to the back, sitting down next to a big black woman, and being asked if I were from "up north" and didn't I know I wasn't supposed to be there in the back of the bus. Now THAT was something I never forgot!

I stayed at THE GREAT SOUTHERN hotel which was a formerly ritzy place but going down hill. The men were not allowed off the base all week but on weekends could have families and guests on base with them. Everyone grabbed food, blankets, etc. and headed out to PASSION PARK (guys name for the area) and it was really something. People picnicing, having gab sessions, necking (1940's word) on the blankets, kids running all over the place. THAT I remember!

I wasn't in Miss. very long, Bob got transfered to Texas for more training, and back home I went.

Texas was going to be a longer training time so as soon as Dad found a place to live I joined him down there. Since it involved close to a year, I got a job at the base on WARD ISLAND. I have lots of memories of our Texas time since I was working and seeing other people.

There were a lot of nice gals working there, most Navy wives, so I could talk to others. A friend of Bob's (Reagen) had his wife down too & she worked on Ward ~~so~~ so Ruth & Reagen & Dad & I did sightseeing around Corpus when we could.

I also remember "hitchhiking" to the base mornings. There was one bus going out and a guzzillion bodies wanting to get on it. After missing one after another (they were full) some of us hitched rides with the officers (the only guys that had a car) and they piled em in sometimes three deep. The road only went to the base and then Ward so it was safe.

Seeing as we were in Corpus Christie and so close to Mexico I really wanted to see Mexico. Bob found us a really old beater of a car that ran well but had the springs up your bottom if you did not have enough blankets to sit on. We plunked down our savings (I believe it was about \$400), bought the car, and I got to Mexico for my 21st birthday. We took a car load of guys with us who paid for the gas. When we got there the guys split to do their thing and Bob took me to the market place and bought me my leather purse (still have it) and my sarappe (still have it). Meanwhile the guys were off seeing "Rosita" do her act. They would NOT tell me but it involved something with eggs and tassels. (NOT a woman thing.)

As to the fate of the car: Dad painted it a nice shiney black and sold it to a fellow with a family who did not want to face trains going to California. So we got our money back!

We went back on the train lugging all the gear and Mexico souvineers!

Then Bob went to Alameda, I stayed home & went back to work at First Wisconsin (they now hired married women as there were no men around).

While I was at the bank it went union. Everyone HAD to join! I was the lone holdout as I did not want to pay the money when I knew Bob would send for me as soon as he found a place to live. One day I was called down (by a vice-president no less) to get the "we can't have one holdout & you must join" lecture. So I joined and shortly after that quit to go to California.

I was quite lonely in Alameda. Dad was gone a lot days and also doing repair work nights too. Whenever the ships came in with a... job to get done, the men had to go & get it done. About the only time I got out of the house was to shop at the base once in a while. I did not know anyone. After I was there only a matter of weeks, Joan died and we had to go back home again for the funeral. Dad was quite shook up with that so I had to let him alone to work it out. I got pregnant with you, Bob, the war ended, and we went back home for good. Had to stay with my parents as there were no rentals available. Just about the time you were born Mrs. Pagel lost her husband and Bob made a deal with her that he would take care of the house and yard and the coal fired furnace if she would rent to us. So she moved upstairs and we (now three) got the lower flat. The Lord sure did look out for us!

That is the "before we were a family" story. So now you know "the rest of the story".

*Love
mom*