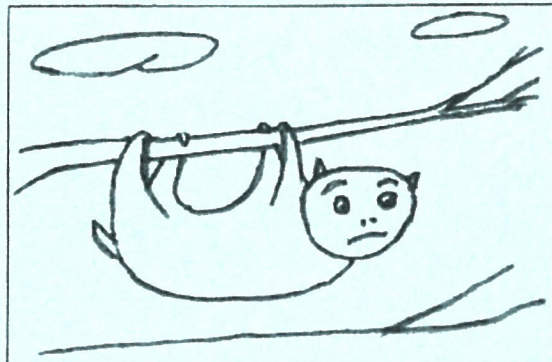


THE LANGUAGE OF MY SOUL

-Anatomy of A Dyslexic Mind-



By Glenn Sheffield Leavitt

Revised and
Expanded Edition

FOREWORD by Michael C. Ryan, Ph.D.

AFTERWORD by John W. Henderson, MD, Ph.D

About the Author

Glenn Leavitt earned his BA in German & Russian, and his MA in German & Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. While teaching German and Russian at Albion College, he completed all but the dissertation a Ph.D. in German at Michigan State University. In 1971, he earned his MA in Blind Rehabilitation at Western Michigan University. He is a certified Rehabilitation Teacher of The Adult Blind. He worked nine years in a state rehabilitation center for the adult blind, first as a Rehabilitation Teacher, then as an administrator. In the last decade of his career, Mr. Leavitt became actively involved in the Disability Rights Movement, as a director of a large Center For Independent Living (CIL).

Mr. Leavitt has served on the boards of numerous disability oriented organizations, including both the MI and NC chapters of the International Dyslexia Association (formally the Orton Dyslexia Society). He has been a guest lecturer in graduate level classes at Michigan State University, and he has served Rehabilitation Services Administration as a member of federal grant review, and Independent Living program evaluation teams. His numerous journal and newsletter articles deal with a wide variety of disability issues.

Upon retirement, Glenn and his wife Eva moved to Western North Carolina where he continues to write and pursue various volunteer activities.

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Dedication

For Eva, who just nicknamed me *Goofy* and married me anyway.

...and for Julie, who married this scatterbrained old widower, and then developed such a deep interest in dyslexia that she is using her professional skills to tutor dyslexic students in a home school co-op.

Dys-lex-ia -- from the Greek dys "difficulty" and lexia "pertaining to words"

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FOREWORD

Glenn Leavitt's book fills important gaps in the literature. In a series of loosely connected anecdotes reflecting the short attention span and idea-hopping typical of even the most gifted dyslexic, Glenn Leavitt presents a chronicle which brings the reader face to face with the conflicts that arise in the life of a brilliant human being coping with hidden disabilities.

In his *Identity And The Life Cycle* (Norton, New York, 1959), the renowned developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson describes eight distinct developmental crises that must be resolved as a person goes through life from pre-school to old age. Glenn Leavitt's book is, among other things, an outstanding case study of most of the stages identified by Erikson. The portrayal of his struggle with the "generativity vs. stagnation" stage is a particularly unique and valuable part of Glenn Leavitt's work. However, this remarkable book does more than chronicle one person's struggle through critical life stages; it is filled with concrete examples of mostly intuitive, compensatory techniques and the innate courage the author needed as he wrestled with social, academic, and vocational failures. Vacillating between the persistence of a survivor, and the escapism of a substance abuser, Glenn Leavitt emerged from the crucible of life brimming with challenging perspectives on dyslexia and disability. The questions Glenn Leavitt raises and the solutions he suggests are bound to stimulate lively exchange of ideas among researchers and people with disabilities for years to come.

Michael C. Ryan, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist
Kalamazoo, MI

Preface to the First Edition

Writing is in itself an educational process, especially for someone who is essentially a non-reader. As an author with both dyslexia and a visual impairment, I have become acutely aware of how inexorably a person's multiple characteristics combine to form a single, sometimes unique, disability. As I began to scribble and type little notes on incidents I wanted to include in my story, it soon became apparent that re-reading and sorting my notations was a visual task my aging, imbalanced eye muscles could no longer tolerate. Symptoms of severe eyestrain curtailed my ability to concentrate, which in turn led to increased dyslexic reversals, misspellings, and short-term memory lapses. After the first two years of intense work on this book, my little computer printer was able to spit out 100 pages of narrative; but it was only when my wife read it aloud, that I was able to grasp the totality of what I had put together so far. Writing is not only a learning experience; it is usually a team effort as well.

Although there is not enough space to name all the thoughtful people whose insights have helped me, I must take this opportunity to thank Erickson Learning Center Director, Caryn Edwards, who urged me to begin; Kay Howell, Director of the Michigan Dyslexia Institute, who gave me my first opportunity to admit publicly with a smile, that I am dyslexic; and my friend Henry Hirsch, whose wise suggestions saved me from falling headlong into several common writer's traps. The kindness of these people helped make this a better book; all the weaknesses and mistakes that remain are mine. Glenn Leavitt - 1993

Preface to the Revised Edition

After the first edition went on sale in January of 1995, my neighbor, Roger Hill, sat with me in my little office at home, and made an informal tape recording of the complete text for some of my blind friends. Listening to Roger, I soon realized that even the eloquence of a retired Dramatic Arts Professor could not cloak the major flaws in my book: By more or less randomly inserting diary entries and hopping from topic to topic, I would confuse all but the most patient and dedicated readers. Not wanting future readers to feel that merely opening a book on the subject can cause a person to become dyslexic, I started working on a revision. To make reading *The Language of My Soul* a more enjoyable and rewarding experience, I have deleted the extraneous material that tended to clutter the first edition; and I have added clarifying information in places earlier readers found puzzling. Glenn Leavitt -2004

INTRODUCTION

May 17, 1989, in the Erickson Learning Center in Okemos, Michigan: the Director kindly offered to switch off the fluorescent light so I would be more comfortable reading the five page report on the tests I had taken two weeks earlier. "There are no surprises," she explained as she handed me the report. Our eyes met in a moment of unspoken accord, then, I think she said, "Now, I'd like you to read through the report, and we can discuss any questions you might have." Without the grating, steel-on-steel screech of bright fluorescent light to shatter my concentration, being asked to read and comprehend was a little less threatening. I began to move my eyes thoughtfully back and forth down the page.

I did not notice the paragraph heading "Test Observations," but a few lines down, I caught the phrase "...rest his eyes..." For a moment, a desperate survival instinct, finely honed by fifty years of practice, short-circuited my grasp on why I was in the Learning Center on a sunny morning in May. I would use the director's pride in her center and her familiarity with the content of the report as levers to get her to do the reading for me. From the rich, almost wordless realm of my consciousness, a simple, hopefully provocative, verbal question emerged. I started to ask, "Eyes, uh?" but before I could form the word, "eyes" collapsed into "I..." Clearly, the director knew exactly what was going on in my brain. We laughed as I confessed that I was about to use leading questions based on prominent phrases, headings, and common sense to bait her into reading the report for me, while I would gaze intently, but uncomprehendingly at the pages in my hand. "I know," she smiled, "during the interview, you showed you are quite aware of your weaknesses." I nodded as we began to wade through the report.

Seven months ago, I had laughed and cried listening to a tape-recorded book on Dyslexia. It had not taken long to reach the happy conclusion that there was a coherent pattern in the tapestry of exasperating failure, of occasional brilliance, of deception and accomplishment, of frustration and fear woven into my life. Maybe I was not dumb, not scatterbrained, not seriously visually impaired, and not even very crazy. When I was younger, I thought other people were like me, but as I got older, I realized that reading, writing and memory were special problems. Uncharacteristically, I had recognized the parts of the problem, but I had not been able to fit them into a comprehensive whole. I had totally misunderstood my problem, and apparently, the professionals who had examined me at various times in my life had missed a key component, as well. Many of my compensatory mechanisms had been developed, more or less unconsciously. The book had helped me fit the pieces together; I was probably dyslexic.

The idea of having a single, definable condition was both attractive and troubling. At least dyslexia was not described as being degenerative or fatal. For several months, I skirted around the apparent truth, like a wary fish trying to discern the presence of a deadly hook in a worm lowered into the water from a strange, unknowable world above. Finally, six months later, I had submitted to the tests. Now, it was disconcerting, yet strangely delightful to hear the Learning Center director explain that the tests revealed major discrepancies between my intelligence and my ability to carry out certain types of information processing, which can be described as a specific language disability, or dyslexia. My brain works differently than most other peoples. Like many famous dyslexics, such as Albert Einstein and Nelson A. Rockefeller, concepts, not words, form the language of my soul.

The Director had devoted her career to helping children having difficulty in school. She felt the story of how I had dealt with dyslexia would be enlightening for parents and teachers, but I knew writing about my life would be much more challenging than she realized. After all, dyslexia was just one facet of an exciting, many faceted existence. Dissecting out dyslexia, like a specimen for biopsy, would be impossible. A human life may be played out on a stage decorated with a backdrop of the person's biological heritage, as well as with those historical events that seem to crash unforeseeably into just about everyone's existence; but the story of a person is not just a record of what happened to one human being; it is what the person did. Neither the weaknesses of the body we inherit, nor the accidents of history we have to endure, should ever be allowed to become excuses for what we become.

Chapter One

GLENNIE

How can I explain the difficulty I have recalling my life? Many people seem to remember conversations, quoting with great confidence words spoken long ago. My chronicle, however, is recorded in scenes, smells, moods and concepts, all of which constitute an alexic language, which I must translate into an awkward, unwieldy code of words in order to communicate with other people. What I am about to tell in English words may seem in places fragmentary and inconsistent, but I want to believe it is wholly true. Goethe, the great German author, called his autobiography *Fantasy and Truth*, candidly admitting that he was filling the gaps in his recollections creatively. I am certainly no Goethe, but as I struggle to express my memories in words, I am troubled by the thought that sometimes I too may be filling memory gaps with fantasy, being more creative than truthful. But, maybe, when memories fade and words fail, creativity is truth?

Somewhere in the Bible, there is a peculiar warning that we will be known by our words. I always thought we would be judged by our deeds, but who am I to argue with God? So in this book I have held the feet of my fantasy to the fire of truth, by inserting here and there some of the actual words I wrote over a period of about fifty years. The originals of some letters and diary entries were scrawled in an almost illegible tangle of incomplete sentences, untroubled by punctuation or reference to spelling conventions prescribed by Webster. Many of the earlier pieces needed a little cosmetic surgery; but their contents, with all their embarrassing personal revelations and intellectual flaws, have not been changed. My words then, as well as now, are my words; and by them you may know me...

My earliest memories are of fear and uncertainty. Once I accidentally locked myself in the upstairs bathroom. I have no idea what happened to the key after I turned it in the lock. I was terrified. My mother called the firemen to get me out. Ever since then I have resisted admonitions to keep doors locked.

* * * *

In the late nineteen thirties, a hurricane devastated parts of Massachusetts. I must have been about four years old as I looked out of a second story window at a large tree blown with such force that it fell across the street and into our yard. A few days later, some men came and sawed it up.

* * * *

Sometime around 1940, we moved from New England to Wayne, Pennsylvania. Our house was next to the railroad tracks. I loved to sit on the embankment, smelling the coal smoke, and thrilling at the immensity of the locomotives and the length of the trains. (Fifteen years later, I would debark from a military troopship in Bremerhaven, Germany, and as the German steam locomotive chugged and clacked its way south to Saarbruecken, an industrial city blackened with soot, I would know I was going to enjoy my Army tour of duty in Central Europe.)

* * * *

My first childhood friend was our dog, Buddy. In view of contemporary world events and our family's proud New England roots, Buddy was known as a "Belgian" rather than a German Shepherd. With Buddy, my lifelong love affair with animals had begun, and I was stunned beyond tears when my parents explained that our move to Pennsylvania had so confused the dog, who had never left my side, that she had run away.

* * * *

I do not know a lot about my grandfather Leavitt, except that he was a Universalist-Unitarian minister with deep roots in Maine and Freemasonry. I have been told he was amazingly ambidextrous and that he was an excellent speaker. Once, Grampa came to visit us in Pennsylvania. We spent happy times together in our vegetable garden. The raspy sound of his voice is still quite clear in my memory, but I cannot picture him, nor do I remember what we talked about. He pulled up a turnip and sliced off a piece with his slim silver pocketknife. I can still taste it.

* * * *

I do not often have nightmares, but even when I do, they quickly fade from my consciousness. One dream, however, repeated itself several times in my pre-teen years. It was a simple scene, but it left me shaken with awe and fear: a monstrous, black, railroad locomotive-type machine exuding raw power was moving too slowly and deliberately. It did not seem to be a direct threat to me, but I guess it was.

* * * *

At about the time I started kindergarten, my mother had me begin piano lessons with a lady who lived in the house behind ours. The yards were separated by an old broken-down wire fence covered with sweet smelling (and tasting) honeysuckle. Mother played the piano quite beautifully, and she wanted my older brother, Preston, and me to make music part of our lives, as well. Soon it became painfully obvious that I could not master musical notation, nor could I consistently make my fingers follow directions dictated by spots and lines on a piece of paper. On the other hand, I loved to make up tunes and combinations of notes that sounded good together. In fact, I have always been able to pick up just about any instrument and produce sounds that other people find pleasant, but if the instrument demands much finger dexterity, I can play only a few simple tunes.

* * * *

Green means walk, red means stop, but when there is only one stoplight suspended right over the middle of the intersection, a seven year old waiting on the corner sees more of the red side than the green side when it is all right to cross. So, I transposed the street crossing rule to something like this: people say to cross on the green, but GREEN is when you see red. This line of reasoning, one of my earliest attempts to translate critically important verbal instructions into the language of my mind, was almost fatal. As I darted across Lancaster Pike to go to Miller's Ice Cream store on the other side, I was hit by a Mack Truck, knocked ten feet into the air, and landed on my head. My brother insists to this day, that the blow scrambled my brain beyond repair, but the doctors at Bryn Mawr Hospital told my parents that there was no evidence of serious injury. I did not remember seeing the truck at all, but maybe my dream of a tremendous machine moving too slowly was a frozen slice of the incident in my mind.

My mother took me to an eye doctor with the name of Longacre. I thought he was going to make me ache, but he didn't. He just gazed into my eyes and had me look at some charts. A few weeks later, mother drove me to the nearby town of Ardmore to pick up my new glasses. Glasses were not bad, and I loved the smell of the lens cleaner they used in the optician's shop. Over thirty years later, after an eye surgeon at University Hospital concluded that my reading problem was due to severe, but inoperable, eye muscle imbalance, my mother told me that Dr. Longacre had said, "Glennie should never go into an occupation that requires a lot of reading or close work." Evidently, the doctor had never elaborated on his comment and my mother had not thought to pursue it any further.

* * * *

During those first few years in Pennsylvania, I had a series of ear infections. Our family doctor would come to the house, lean over me, inserting a cold otoscope into my fevered ear and decide to lance it. He would then put a handkerchief over my face and spray it with chloroform from a metal atomizer. Mom and somebody else held my arms and legs during those terrifying moments, as icy spots of sound and light overwhelmed my consciousness. Only once did I have my ear lanced in a hospital; that was on a Christmas morning.

* * * *

I think I was in first grade when I contracted scarlet fever. Someone came and posted a quarantine notice on our front door, and something special had to be done about the returnable glass bottles in which our milk was delivered. Being sick with ear infections and scarlet fever was not too bad. My mother would read to me and my father would bring little toys, now and then. My "school" was a little radio with a wooden cabinet. I got to listen to the "crying lady" programs in the afternoon, and in the evenings there were some pretty good radio plays. On Saturdays, I never missed the children's program *Let's Pretend*. Somehow, it seems I learned a lot from the radio. Some programs were funny, some were enthralling, but of all the titles and plots of those dramatizations, only two ever took verbal root in my memory. One was about a doomed South American jungle homesteader, *Dunengen and the Ants*, and the other was a weirdly philosophical drama based on a legend that contends: "In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." All the rest of the presentations have blended into the rich tapestry of memories without words or time that nourish my mind but seem incapable of translation into a language I can share with other people.

* * * *

Summer camp in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts was a great adventure for Preston and me. Early one morning, smeared with oily--sweet mosquito dope, I climbed into an old wooden boat and rowed over to a shallow cove full of reeds. The monster pickerel I snagged was over twelve inches long! But the excitement must have been too much for me, because the following morning I checked into the camp infirmary. After measuring my vital signs, the camp nurse said it would be best if I spent a day resting in my cabin, because I had a slight fever of 100.5°. That afternoon I scrawled a postcard to my mom back in Pennsylvania:

[Postmarked in July 1942]

Dear Mom,

I have a tempecher of 105. Please send more candybars.

Love, Gelnn

* * * *

What did World War II mean to an American child? Colorful metal toys were replaced by drab, foul smelling plastic ones. My parents counted ration stamps. The bald old man at the bottom of the hill became an air raid warden with a helmet and military belt. My cousin Dickie, who was a Navy Seabee, died in the South Pacific.

My dad's skill as a cardboard packaging designer meant that he had an essential job, and he was exempt from the draft, but most other men his age and younger disappeared into the deadly excitement of war, which the rest of us experienced only in movie house newsreels.

* * * *

In the early forties, a country estate in the nearby one-store town of Ithan was left vacant, as the owner took his family with him to a military base in the South. The newly activated officer was anxious to have someone care for his home and land for the duration of the war. Dad had worked on a farm as a boy and he thought country life would be good for our family and, besides, we could get around some of the wartime shortages by raising our own food. In retrospect, I do not think dad knew a lot about rural living. We made such classic errors as buying a goat to keep down the grassy areas, only to find that he preferred apple tree bark. The orchard was ruined. Our ducks were supposed to supply eggs and meat for holidays, but they soon became my brother's and my dearest pets. Eating roast duck one Thanksgiving caused a family drama none of us will ever forget. Dad heard about a Boxer dog that had flunked out of Army K-9 School, because he was too aggressive with other dogs. (He had jumped a six-foot fence and killed a German Shepherd). So the empty place left in our hearts by holiday feasts was filled by flat nosed Cappy, who loved all people with a passion, equaled only by his hatred of all other dogs. Surprisingly, Cappy and the goat ignored each other, and the remaining ducks put on a hilarious show quacking and pecking at the tremendous, vicious dog until he learned to keep a respectful distance.

The house in Ithan was spooky; it had too many empty, hollow-sounding rooms with dark corners stacked with the owner's speedily packed belongings. There were few neighbors. My brother, who was four years older than I, had started grammar school in Wayne, so I ended up spending a great deal of time alone.

* * * *

In spite of wartime gasoline rationing, my dad always found a way to get us back up to New England for a few weeks in the summer. At least one time in the early forties, we went by sleeper train. Some of my fondest memories are of the old family cottage at Higgins Beach, Maine. I loved the ancient, raw wood cottage, full of heirlooms and photographs of relatives I had never known. I loved the beach with its smelly tidal pools full of reddish-brown starfish and the meandering trails of colorful little periwinkle snails; but most of all, I loved falling asleep in my old army cot with a cool breeze drifting into the open window, and the rush-hush-rush sound of the waves breaking on the beach.

* * * *

Primary school was bewildering. If it had been up to me, I would have found a happier way to spend my time, but it wasn't. I think I really tried to do the assignments, but what I did wrong always seemed to attract more attention than what I did right, so instead of the unrewarding three R's, I concentrated on learning how to cope. I quickly learned that the attention a pupil cannot gain through required speaking and writing can be secured through two positive, but somewhat incompatible characteristics: creativity and acquiescence. These two attributes were soon to become fundamental to my personality, but remained unrecognized for the survival strategies they really were until I was over fifty years old.

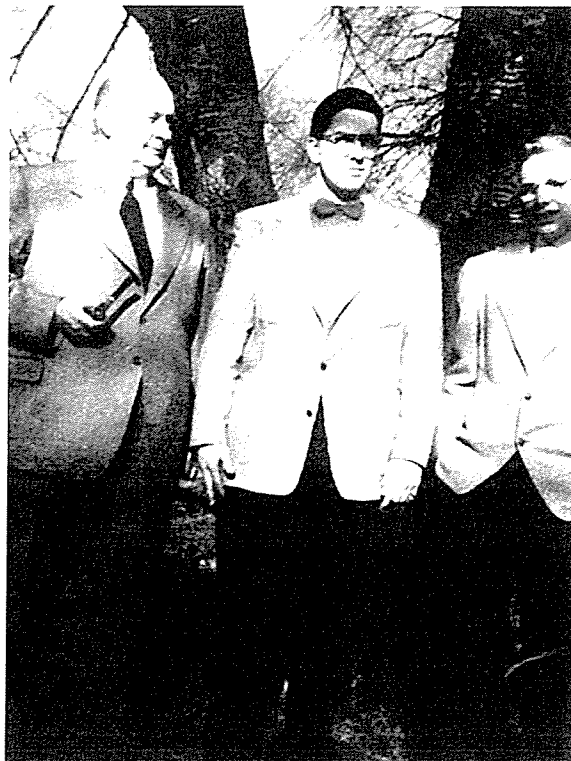
I have dim recollections of deeply embarrassing difficulty learning the alphabet, numbers, and months of the year. Clocks made little sense to me. But the greatest frustration came when my teacher demanded that I stop pointing at the words on the page with my finger, and cease moving my lips as I read. Only in my forties, when I returned to pointing and reading aloud, did I learn what I had been missing by giving in to that well-intentioned, but for me, unreasonable demand.

I have always loved rhymes, rhythm, and alliteration. When our grade school teacher asked that we compose a poem, I would wallow in the attention my creations always brought.

At home, I usually played alone, busying myself mostly with various kinds of construction toys and my chemistry set. I spent hours mixing chemicals and building gadgets, but I seldom even tried to read the instructions that came with my toys. I just fiddled around until something worked, fell apart, or smelled bad. Once I built a battery-powered electric motor that really worked. It was a proud and happy day when I showed off my accomplishment in school; I could do something well.

* * * *

Fifth and sixth grades were not pleasant years. I could not play games well enough for the other kids to want me on their team. Spelling bees were terrifying. Reading, writing, and arithmetic were barely passed, more on the basis of my "potential" than on actual performance. I was usually characterized as being musical, creative, sensitive to the feelings of others, and anxious to please. Positive comments, however, were inevitably coupled with observations that I was a somewhat awkward dreamer who was not working up to my ability. Already at that age, I had a vague feeling that there was an inexplicable gap between the real me and the person my parents and teachers thought I was.



Dad, Preston and me in about 1951

Chapter Two

HIGH SCHOOL

After the war, we moved back into the town of Wayne. We had an invitingly spacious yard, and we were surrounded by neighbors with children of both my and my brother's age. However, it seems my die had been cast as a loner. While Preston, who was now a teenager, had a wide circle of friends and did well in sports, much of my life centered around my animals and "science" projects. My two years in junior high school were like two moments of rest between rounds in a boxing match of ever increasingly savage combat. The fact that seventh and eighth grades were housed in the high school building made us Junior High students both proud and anxious. For me, leaving grammar school was a step taken with optimism and relief.

Our town was not far from Philadelphia and the influence of that city's universities was quite strong. Our junior high curriculum centered around an experimental class called Core. In Core, the students were supposed to build an imaginary town where each of us had a house, a job, and civic responsibilities. For education theoreticians, Core may have been a dandy idea, but for children our ages, I am afraid it was simply an excuse to delve into happy busywork instead of learning. One could succeed in Core without reading, spelling, ciphering, or memorizing, so I did quite well.

The halo effect I had cultivated by being compliant and creative in grammar school took on a new and even more effective aura in junior high. I could think up convincing reasons to locate our Core class town in my beloved New England; I could make up exotic floor plans for my house, and constructing a paper mache relief map was sheer delight. Of course, the Core curriculum did include occasional encounters with the basic skills. Whenever I could not perform well, it was always said that my behavior and imagination indicated acceptable intelligence; I was just a "late bloomer."

The Core class in junior high had been a safe refuge from the increasingly frustrating challenges I had been facing in fifth and sixth grades. However, when, as a fourteen year old, I entered ninth grade, my halo seemed to disintegrate rather quickly. My deficiencies in the fundamentals were exposed to the uncompromising demands of a few teachers who were older and more traditional than the ones I had had in junior high. My parents pointed out to me that other kids were doing well; I was supposed to look to their accomplishments for inspiration. If I would only apply myself, everything would be all right. In response to the admonitions of my parents and teachers, I wavered back and forth between New Years type resolutions to improve myself, and subtle, self-defeating defiance. Reading was an unrewarding chore, my spelling was exasperatingly unpredictable, introductory French was a painful fiasco, and

mathematics was a disaster. Even Scouts was drained of fun, because advancement and merit badges depended to a large degree on memorizing, which I found virtually impossible. Frustration spilled over into my behavior and soon I traded my blemished halo for the role of a clown.

I diverted attention away from my deficiencies, but toward myself by becoming a notorious kidder. Most of my joking and teasing was based on literal interpretation of figurative language, to which later I added malapropos and logical inconsistencies. I was sensitive enough to use this tactic without hurting people's feelings, most of the time. Face to face, I was very sensitive to the pain of kids who tended to be picked on, like those who were black or poor. On the other hand, I could appear cold and inconsiderate when it came to keeping in mind such things as fellow students' birthdays or a death in the family. In retrospect, it seems I was developing two important strategies at this time: I consciously made jokes based on the kinds of speech and memory errors I was liable to make anyway, while at the same time learning to keep my mouth shut otherwise, in order to limit my propensity for putting my foot in it. In my high school class yearbook, a classmate remarked that I was the "quiet guy with a dry sense of humor."

* * * *

Poor old Miss Ramstine, close to retirement, she tried every technique she could draw from her years of teaching, to get math facts into my head; but my papers were always riddled with "careless" mistakes, and my answers were almost always wrong. She put me in the back of the room; she shamed me; she kept me after school writing out endless repetitions of number problems. I think I usually understood what we were supposed to do, but I would invariably miscopy a digit, get columns out of line, or somehow forget a step. Every now and then I would hand in a homework assignment with very few errors, but I think Miss Ramstine always knew when I had copied answers from somebody else's work. The terror and embarrassment of being called on to do a math problem on the blackboard in ninth grade ranks among the most devastating school experiences for me up to that time. Oh, how I wish Miss Ramstine could have peeked into my office forty years later to watch me work out admirably accurate budget projections for large and very complex government program.

* * * *

Life became much more complicated in high school. All the usual turmoil of adolescence was intensified by my inability to achieve academically at the level everyone seemed to think I could. The school testing specialist, who used a strangely sweet smelling powder for some skin disease, told my mother my IQ

was 140, an incredible conclusion for a student who could misspell his own middle name. I started to skip school, hiding in my tree house, or in the basement where I had constructed a "science" laboratory. Late one school day morning, my mother found me in the cellar. She was shocked; I was speechless.

Although we had good times together during summers at the beach or fishing in the backwoods of Maine, my parents and I were never very close. I was lectured concerning my school grades and behavior, but we never addressed the problems in a real discussion. My father and mother had a problem child. I felt very alone. Somehow, I was different. Maybe my brother was right about the effect of being knocked ten feet into the air and landing on my head?

My parents sent me to a special clinic in Philadelphia where it seemed they tested every aspect of my being. Their conclusion (at least as it was shared with me) was that I was a "late bloomer," who was not yet working up to his potential! I cannot recall any particular emphasis on my vision or reading, but there may have been. On the recommendation of that clinic, I spent one summer seeing a psychologist on the staff of a private school in west Philadelphia.

Dr. Comfort's demeanor fit his name. He was a kind, soft-spoken man, who clicked saliva in his mouth as he spoke, and smelled of the amoebic bad breath typical of people with false teeth. I did not mind the sessions with the psychologist that summer. To get to his office, I had to take the commuter train and then a city bus, which gave me plenty of time for daydreaming. Dr. Comfort gave me a few tests and talked to me in a non-threatening way, but I cannot pinpoint any particular effect he had on my academic performance or behavior.

* * * *

It seems a little paradoxical that on one hand I was a slow worker, while at the same time it seemed I was always busy with something. My imagination flowed in an endless fountain of curiosity and ideas. I had (and to a certain extent still have) an irresistible drive to build things or take things apart, sometimes with unfortunate results. Once I blew up the sidewalk. Well, maybe that is a slight exaggeration, but I did blast a three-inch deep hole in the concrete slab at the base of our back door steps. I was trying to build a blast furnace to make my own iron by duplicating the process depicted on a classroom wall chart. I had used a can opener to punch some triangular holes around the bottom of a gallon-sized tin can, and stuffed it with paper, sticks, and coal. On top of my "furnace" was perched a second can with a few hands full of backyard dirt which appeared reddish enough to make me think it must have iron in it. With my cheek on the sidewalk, I was able to blow into the holes and get the fire going pretty well, but nothing special happened. Mom's vacuum cleaner had a place to attach the hose

so the airflow could be reversed. With the machine plugged into an outlet just inside the back door, I was able to pull the hose down the back steps and get the nozzle within a few inches of the holes in the bottom of my furnace. I watched with naive confidence as the sides of the can grew red, then white hot, but my "ore" did not melt. Then, as I stepped back to find a stick to prop the air hose in just the right position, it happened. With a somewhat muffled snap, pieces of sidewalk, sparks, and tin cans flew upwards as an air bubble imbedded in the concrete burst. I was deeply impressed by the principle of physics I had inadvertently demonstrated, but I decided to give up my experiments in smelting.

* * * *

"Popular music makes you forget. Classical music makes you remember." So went the sentiment of our kindly music teacher whose words carved a rare, if somewhat hazy, niche in my memory. My mother had introduced me to the mystical language of music with her piano. Sometimes she would follow, with halting precision, the notes on the page in front of her, but she was at her captivating best when she would create a blissful eternity of sound, improvising on themes of her favorites, Beethoven or Tchaikovsky. I think I was about twelve when I was finally able to save up the fortune needed to buy a Webster 78 rpm record player (which, by the way, was the featured item in an antique shop I visited recently!). From then on records were a standard and much appreciated gift. I had everything from Dixieland to modern (1950's) jazz, from Bing Crosby to Fats Waller; but my favorites were the classics. To my amazement, I soon found that I could memorize the sounds of my favorite symphonies and concertos. I could, as it were, play an entire work in my head any time I felt like it. I enjoyed most of the popular music of the era, but the classics did not just entertain, they talked to me in a wonderful language uncluttered by words. I was a little impatient with the slow movements, but loud crescendos and finales were tremendously satisfying, as if the orchestra were acting out for me the anger and frustration school had engendered in my life.

* * * *

Sometime around my thirteenth or fourteenth year, I moved my "science" laboratory from the basement to the bathroom in the unused apartment on the third floor of our house. The immediate reason for needing running water and more light was my acquisition of a secondhand microscope and some equipment for making slides. Gaining access to the third-floor bathroom made further expansion into the remaining unused rooms easy. Of course, every science laboratory needs laboratory animals, so I started with a two-foot black snake, which I kept in the bathtub. The snake had to eat, so I bought white mice to feed him. When the snake escaped (to my mother's dismay he was never found), I was stuck with a cage full of half-a-dozen uninteresting mice, so I traded them for

a pair of hamsters. It did not take long to learn of the special characteristics of those little desert creatures. I threw together every piece of scrap lumber and wire into cages; but I could not build housing fast enough to accommodate the hamsters' insidious rate of proliferation, so I decided to go into the business of selling them. For about nine months, I gave full attention to building cages and foisting hamsters off on schoolmates, but the hamsters kept winning the battle of numbers. When, late that summer, I was admitted to Bryn Mawr Hospital for an appendectomy, my mother was left in charge of a third floor hamstery populated by at least thirty busily reproducing rodents. When I came home, about four days later, the little exercise wheels were still, and the few cages that remained were empty. Mom had exercised a little entrepreneurship of her own and sold the whole menagerie to the unsuspecting son of one of her friends.

* * * *

My four years in high school were deeply traumatic. Perhaps that is why my memories of that period are so scrambled. I know I flunked out of the public high school, but whether it was at the end of the ninth or tenth grade, I am not sure. I know my parents, in desperation, sent me to a Quaker private school on City Line Avenue, where I was to repeat a grade. I know I was able to make up for some of my failures at Temple University Summer High School one steamy July and August. And I know that I went back to the public high school in Wayne and ended up graduating with the same class I had entered with in ninth grade. Most of my recollections of those school years are a blur of terrifying moments in English, math, and language classes; of principals' offices; of trying and failing until I became convinced I was failing to try.

The Quaker private school had an aura of academia about it, with ivy-covered buildings, a pleasant campus, and a library where I loved to wile away my study hall time thumbing through old books. The school had some well-defined standards for student achievement, but in spite of the kindness and patience of a few dedicated teachers, of whom I have very warm memories, the administration would not let me stay without repeating still another grade. I had a girlfriend back in the public school who promised to coach me through summer school English and Spanish so I could get back into my old high school and graduate with my former classmates. Whatever the year was, it was one of the hottest summers on record. Nevertheless, with a skilled English teacher who had us diagram sentences, and with the special social motivation offered by my girlfriend, who was very good in Spanish, I made it.

* * * *

Delightfully intriguing bodily developments had begun already for some girls

in the sixth grade. For us boys, our classmates' budding womanhood was a matter of serious anatomical speculation, of exciting vocabulary building, as well as leading to uncannily clever attempts at personal observation. But by ninth grade, just about all of us had caught up to the girls physically. In high school, the simple grade school dichotomy of boys versus girls expanded into a new and much more complex point of differentiation based on one's willingness and ability to participate in the ritual of dating.

Like Icarus in the Greek myth who flew toward the sun with handmade wings of feathers and wax, I soared without hesitation into the exhilarating realm of boy-girl relationships. As a rather clever wiseguy, who also knew when to keep his mouth shut, I had secured a fairly good standing among the boys, but the complicated social situations which accompany casual dating demanded a degree of social acuity I could not muster. In a small group of boys and girls whose relationships were a complex web of overt and subtle emotions, I would inevitably lose track of what was going on and blunder my way into devastatingly embarrassing situations, which exposed my frail psyche in the same way that Icarus' waxed-feather wings had been exposed to the searing heat of the sun. In the Greek myth, Icarus lost his life. My crash landing, however, was only temporarily fatal. I quickly retreated into singular, one-to-one relationships. Whether going steady was popular among teenagers at the time, I do not remember. What I know is that my total inability to deal quickly with complicated situations and multiple stimuli was already overwhelmingly clear. Whether I was trying to do homework with the radio on, or attempting to participate in a lively party conversation that included girls I had dated, I would get confused. I was capable of concentrating on only one thing at a time and in the case of dating, that meant going steady.

My high school social life, like my academic life, was a series of steps from total immersion in one project or relationship to another. It was as if I were going through all life's experiences in the blackest of nights with only one narrow beamed flashlight to find my way. I could perceive and deal only with the narrow area illuminated by the beam; of everything else, I was desperately unsure or almost totally oblivious.

Of course, my favorite school subject was Biology. Virtually no reading or writing was required, and in recognition of my enthusiasm, I was allowed to take a second year of Biology in lieu of some required course, like Trigonometry, which I would certainly fail. I put together aquaria and terraria; I pinned the pickled frogs into dissecting trays, and served as a general handyman for the appreciative teacher, Mr. Calvert, who could talk for hours about fascinating plants and animals. The only other high school subject that captured my interest was Physics. Although I copied all of the required calculations from classmates' papers, I did do the laboratory experiments myself, even "borrowing" some

equipment to repeat them at home. I probably received a C or D as a final grade, but I think I got an A for constructing a very complex project with tubes and syringes demonstrating principles of hydraulics. Like the working electric motor I built in sixth grade and my contour maps in seventh grade Core class, my science projects continued to convince teachers that my ability to figure things out should be allowed to counterbalance my deficits in basic academic performance.

There were several times in my youth when I had an opportunity to be alone and totally immersed in a single activity for several days at a time. Under such circumstances, I was able to accomplish things I was proud of, and I felt good about myself. Once, I was expelled from school for a whole week; I do not remember why. For five happy days, I replaced counter tops in our kitchen. With no instructions and with nobody around to point out my mistakes before I noticed them, I used common sense and did a good job, which lasted for years. One summer I volunteered to re-shingle the roof of our garage. As with the kitchen project, working alone with no time pressure, I was able to do a quite acceptable job. It is too bad there was so much more to life than roofs and countertops.

"Mr. Leavitt, we are holding your son." A telephone call from the police at 4:00 A.M. startled my parents into realizing that my problems were not just academic. Early in my high school years, I had discovered that alcohol helped relieve my anxiety. I became the most daring drinker in my class, even using some laboratory equipment from school to build a crude still. Although my attempts at brewing and distilling were not very successful, because I used imagination rather than a guidebook, the undertaking did bring me a degree of attention and status among the boys. I dreaded parties but several beers usually made them more tolerable. Medicine bottles filled with whiskey stolen from my father's liquor cabinet were my self-prescribed elixir to obliterate the reality of my painful classroom and social failures. On the night of my arrest, I had gone to the state liquor store dressed like a laborer and bought a fifth of 100 proof bourbon whiskey. Three of us went for a ride in my dad's car, which I borrowed to "go to the movies." When the police found us off a lonely side road, the whiskey bottle was empty and we were starting on some quarts of beer. At home the next evening, my father tried to lecture some sense into my unmercifully hung over head. I loved my dad, but nothing he could say seemed relevant to life as I was experiencing it.

Once I was invited to a wedding, after which I was going to pick up my date and take her to a show. I had mixed several varieties of liquor at the reception, and when I got to my date's house, I did not look or smell like anyone a decent parent would want her daughter to go out with. I saved the girl's mother the unpleasant task of refusing to let her daughter go with me, however. As she opened the door, I gulped with nauseous urgency, "May I use your bathroom?"

and tried to push past her toward the place I desperately needed. I did not quite make it.

I do not think I was ever truly addicted to alcohol, but my attempts to use it as an escape from myself became increasingly frequent from about tenth grade until about five years later when, in the last year of my military tour of duty in Germany, I began a serious courtship. As success in winning a bride became the center of all my attention, fear of exposing my weaknesses became more important than trying to drown them.

* * * *

My dad had been raised in a very liberal church denomination. He rarely went to any church, but he always encouraged my brother and me to attend nearby church services, as long as we did not take religion too seriously. At various times we sat through worship in Presbyterian, Methodist, Universalist, and Baptist churches, but the one we attended most regularly was Quaker Meeting. Without my realizing it, some Quaker simplicity and pacifism began rubbing off on me. Once I was given a Bible. Believing the Holy Book might provide the kind of guidance I thought I needed, I tried to read it. However, after several attempts to wring some sense out of the obscure King James English, I put the black leather volume aside and prayed a prayer so intense that its intent (but not its words) still rings in the ears of my mind: "God, I'm not sure who or what you are, but please don't let me waste my life. Show me something to do that will be good for somebody else, no matter what the cost." Although it had no immediate effect on my social and academic problems, I never forgot that moment, and that sentiment has remained the cornerstone of my personal religious orientation to this day.

* * * *

Like many teenagers, I suffered from overwhelming stage fright, creating the most exotic excuses to get out of any situation where I would have to speak in public. My mother, however, was an accomplished amateur actress, and she continually encouraged my brother and me to take part in plays. For my mother's sake, I did take a few brief, non-speaking parts with mom's local drama club. Not even being able to memorize the National Anthem or Silent Night, I felt hopelessly trapped when I was talked into taking a brief speaking part in our high school senior class play. I was appropriately cast as a ragged, bearded, quite Bohemian poet. One of my lines was addressed to a respectable, middle-aged character: "Oh, Miss Carter are you drunk?" Since the name of our school principal was also Miss Carter, my wise guy instinct prevailed over discretion. To the delight of my fellow students, I turned from my assigned position on the stage

and aimed the words directly at our principal in the front row. Admiration and scoldings for my audacity followed me for the rest of the year.

* * * *

In spite of the few older, more traditional teachers, the public school was generally quite "progressive." It was possible to scrape through the college prep curriculum without really reading a book. Nevertheless, some inescapable demands were made of me, and my academic faking skills were not perfected to the degree I reached in college, so I did more than my share of outright cheating.

Writing my first research paper, dependent for its content on background reading, loomed before me in my senior year like eternal condemnation. I had been able to coast through many writing assignments on the basis of my imagination, but this would be different. Other than the attention I was getting from writing creatively, the most effective sparkle left in my badly tarnished halo was my performance in Biology class. I decided to capitalize on my "biologist" image by absconding with a little paperback biology journal from the bookshelf behind Mr. Calvert's desk. Reasoning (correctly) that our English teacher was not familiar with the journal, I selected a relatively short article with a title referring to a topic I thought I knew a little bit about. My brother's girlfriend was proud of her typing skill, and she was in love, so conning her into typing out the article as if I had composed it, was easy. My senior year grades were so shaky that I am sure the A I got on that "research" paper materially contributed to my being able to graduate from high school.

I should have been disappointed when my parents told me they would be going to northern New York State to attend my brother's college graduation during the same period my high school graduation was to take place, but I wasn't. Having the house and my mother's car available for five days without restriction seemed like a great opportunity to test my wings in the adult world. Of course my view of adult living centered around using alcohol to avoid responsibility for being myself. Determined to prove something about myself (I am still not sure exactly what), I took the drinking lead in every gathering of classmates I could find. I am sure I attended (but I have no recollection of doing so) both the baccalaureate and graduation ceremonies. I do recall, at least vaguely, waking up one morning on our front porch, sprawled in a lawn chair, chilled and in incredible, bodywide misery from a hangover. Nearby were the equally miserable bodies of two classmates. After devouring some kind of breakfast, we took my mother's car and sped about 80 miles, across the New Jersey Pine Barrens, to a rooming house full of partying graduates on some beach. Only in trying to recall these events of forty years ago, does it occur to me that during the entire week my parents were gone, I don't think I ever fed my poor dog. I hope one of the neighbors did.

Chapter Three

FALSE STARTS

One summer, a year or two before graduation, I worked for a veterinarian scrubbing cages and assisting in operations. Dr. Fisher was a patient man, who explained slowly and simply, exactly what he wanted me to do. The praise I received for doing a good job as a veterinarian's helper made choosing a career easy: I would study Veterinary Medicine and spend the rest of my days taking care of dogs. It never occurred to me that such a course of study involved a great deal of math and reading. My goal was to continually bathe in the praise and commendation the animal hospital (and Biology class) had brought into my cheerless, unproductive teenage years.

I could not get into the Eastern, prestige schools my parents wanted me to attend, but Colorado College and the University of Alaska accepted me. Talking about living with polar bears and Eskimos brought me a lot of attention, but Colorado was the only practical choice.

Having a few hundred dollars in the bank, I fell in love with a used car dealer's International panel truck that a contractor had used to haul laborers to building sites. With ill-fitting windows cut into its rear panels, and air vents on its roof, my faded green truck looked like a war-weary, retired tank. Fascinated by the idea of having everything I might need in one place, I made my truck into a crude apartment on wheels. On the floor behind the driver's seat, I bolted down a 12 by 12 inch radio yanked out of a junked pre-war Buick. Then, to further satisfy my budding passion for self-containment, I outfitted the back of my vehicle with a narrow mattress and crude shelving for supplies. As if to substantiate the impression that it was a military relic, my "tank" defended itself with a blue-gray smoke screen of burning oil whenever I could get the engine started.

In late August of 1953, two friends and I drove my truck about 1,700 miles from Eastern Pennsylvania to Colorado Springs. The truck survived the trip, and as far as I know, each of my companions ended up doing well at the college. As for me, the whole undertaking was a crushing debacle. Bewitched by a romantic fantasy of learning by osmosis, I imagined that just walking along campus pathways, inhaling the atmosphere of lecture halls, and daydreaming through pages of important looking textbooks would be the keys to academic success. I read nothing and took no notes in classes. I drank (and ate) my way through a couple of parties, but I could not fully grasp what was going on socially. However, it was neither social naiveté nor academic anemia that clinched my downfall. It was my ill-conceived determination to pay my own way, without accepting any more money from home than I had already accepted to pay the first semester's tuition. I had a job as football team manager, but it paid only a pittance. (I think I

had a second job for a while, but I cannot remember what it was.) Too proud to let my family know I was broke; I began to cook little meals on a Sterno stove in my dorm room. Of all my memories of Colorado Springs, none stand out more vividly in my mind than the foul-sour odor of the garbage cans at the back door of a nearby grocery store where I once talked a man into giving me some bones and stuff to boil in my "stew." By late October, the pain of a nagging throat infection became so severe it could no longer be ignored. The kind doctor who gave me some medicine and ordered me to rest was never paid. Early in November I abandoned Colorado ill and bewildered, but totally unable to understand why.

Sharing defeat, the truck and I limped back to Pennsylvania, where my "tank" died a natural death, and I pretended I never wanted to go to college anyway. I got a job as Rat Exterminator and Assistant Small Animal Keeper at the Philadelphia Zoo. Every morning I patrolled the grounds, placing poisoned grain near suspicious holes. In the afternoons, I usually scrubbed cages in the Small Animal House. Now and then I got away with wandering around, just looking busy. Once, in the Pachyderm House, I volunteered to help the keeper clean the elephant's quarters, but one tremendous old elephant got nervous and chased me out. I loved working in the zoo; in fact, I must admit the happiest memories of my youth center around the zoo, the veterinary hospital, and doing handiwork alone at home. My parents, however, pushed me hard to try college again.

Always trying to please, I quit the zoo and enrolled for the spring term at Ohio State University. For no other reason than the attention talking about it brought me, I chose to major in Criminology, but again, as with Colorado College, by the time midterm exams were due, I knew I was through. I had mastered the drinking routine in a fraternity, but academically, I had done nothing. Before the end of the term, I deserted Columbus for a job on the New Jersey shore as a short order cook in a "greasy spoon" eatery, with a boss I simply could not seem to please. My parents were distraught. They wanted so badly for me to be a college graduate, and down deep, I still wanted to be a veterinarian. I had failed mom and dad. I had failed myself. I could not do anything right. I surely was not a good short order cook! I was drinking a lot and I am sure I was somewhat under the influence of alcohol when I decided to take what appeared to be the ultimate step of desperation. I joined the Army.

* * * *


It was August in South Carolina. We new recruits baked in our stiff, new olive-drab fatigues. We took tests and waited. We waited and took tests. I developed a painful pilonidal cyst and was hospitalized for a couple of weeks. When Upon my release, two bits of news awaited for me: I would take my basic

training at Camp Gordon, Georgia, and my Army intelligence tests indicated I had an IQ of 96.

Except for the terrifying prospect of being expected to memorize my serial number and the Military General Orders for guard duty, I liked basic training. Our sergeant's commands were brief and clear: "Attention!" "Give me ten push ups!" "Faster!" "Take a break!" I knew who I was, and I could do just about everything expected of me. I even made squad leader. Proudly, I wrote to tell all about it:

Dear folks-

~~I~~ I thank an awful lot of
 for the packages I really appreciate
 them. ~~In the basic training they~~
~~pick us~~ I'll start at the bigguy
 Do you'll know what Jim is talking
 about. the whole company lives
 on a separate quadrangle with
 their own orderly room, mess
 hall, day room etc. there are about
 280 men in the company, after
~~they~~ the company is divided
 up into 4 platoons and each
 platoon has 4 squads of approx.
 16 men. after we'd been here a while
 they pick a trainee platoon Sgt.
 for each platoon and squad leader
 for each squad

I've made Squad Leader
 for the 4th Squad of the 3rd
 Platoon its a lot of work and
 responsibility but they trainee
 Sgts get out of a lot of the
 dirty jobs (KP etc.) I wear
 Sgts Stripes  as do all
 of us trainee Sgts.

We start Basic officially
 Mon. they tell us now but
 we've had a lot of classes and
 things already. We march most
 of the day. Some guys have
 started calling out ahead from
 least exhaustion, sunstroke, tick
 breeze etc. the last couple of
 days its been awful here as it
 was at Tachon

Thank a lot for the subscription
 you know what I want
 for my birthday is a subscription
 to the Autocar, a British
 Sports Car mag.

Give my best to everybody
 especially Rudy & Anna.

Tell Rudy & send her
 my best tell her to be a
 good girl.

I haven't really had a
 chance to read all your
 letters all the way make
 & sit down and read all my
 mail tonight & that'll be time
 Love you

What I meant to say:

Thanks an awful lot for the packages. I really appreciate them
 I'll start at the beginning so you'll know what I'm talking about. The
 whole company lives on a quadrangle with their own orderly room,
 mess hall, day room, etc. There are about 280 men in the
 company. The company is divided up into four platoons and each
 platoon has four squads of approximately sixteen men. After we'd
 been here a while, they picked a trainee Platoon Sergeant for each
 platoon and squad leader for each squad. I've made squad leader

of the 4th squad of the third platoon. It's a lot of work and responsibility, but the trainee sergeant gets out of a lot of dirty jobs [like] KP etc. I wear sergeant's stripes, as do all the trainee sergeants.

We start basic officially Monday, they tell us now, but we've had a lot of classes and things already. We march most of the day. Some guys have started falling out already from heat exhaustion, sunstroke, trick knees, etc. The last couple of days it's been as hot here as it was in [Fort] Jackson.

Thanks a lot for the Suburban [our hometown newspaper] You know what I want for my birthday is a subscription to The Autocar, a British sports car magazine.

Give my best to everybody, especially Pudg [misspelling of my brother's nickname] and Ann.

Tell Ruby [the maid] I send her my best. Tell her to be a good girl.

I haven't really had a chance to read all your letters all the way. Maybe I will sit down and read all my mail tonight. I think I'll have time.

Love, Glen[n]

Most of my letters home would end with excuses for not having read all my mail yet, while at the same time they would usually include exaggerated claims about enjoying some literary work which I had actually hardly skimmed.

* * * *

Before enlisting, I had reviewed all the various military occupational specialties for something exotic, which would bring me attention and make people think I was smart. The secret communications school of the Army Security Agency seemed like an assignment with an aura of mystery that would bring admiration from my family and friends. However, what I did not count on was the requirement to learn Morse Code. I was sent to the ASA training program at Camp Devons in Ayer, Massachusetts, where we were to master the code of dits and dahs we heard in our headsets by instantly pushing the appropriate letter on a typewriter keyboard. I achieved an inconsistent ten words a minute, but the tension left me dazed, with excruciating headaches. Somehow, I simply had to escape. Periodically each of us had to stand school guard duty with a loaded 45-caliber pistol. I went to the commanding officer and made up a story about not being able to fulfill my guard duty with a loaded weapon, because I was too much of a "pacifist" to shoot anyone. My ploy worked. After giving me a lecture on patriotism, the CO had me transferred to what most people felt was the dregs of Army duty: the Transportation Corps.

Early in the spring of 1955 our Transportation unit drove 300 miles in convoy from Ayer to Camp Drum near Watertown in northern New York State. For the first few weeks, we assembled cots for the reservists who would soon be coming for their summer training. In the early '50s, there was still no mechanical refrigeration on the base, so after the trainees started arriving in June, I was designated base ice deliveryman, making the rounds of the company mess halls every morning with a private contractor from Watertown, to drop off blocks of ice. I am sure the Army thought assignment to the dirty work, non-prestigious Transportation Corps in support of "weekend warriors" was a suitable punishment for an unpatriotic soldier who did not want to shoot anyone, and who was too dumb to learn Morse Code, but I enjoyed that summer in northern New York.

One fellow GI was dreaming of finishing high school when his tour of duty was over and I felt very intellectual to be able to offer to "tutor" him in Biology from one of the scholarly books I proudly displayed in my locker. My locker library also included several impressive looking volumes from the Science Book Club I had joined in high school and a paperback history of western philosophy (the only one I had really tried to read).

I had spent enough time in army "holding companies" to thoroughly master such fine military arts as wandering around with a clipboard to look busy, or vanishing into obscure corners as I used to do in school. I was still drinking a lot, but I also found time for some recreational reading. The base library had the sweet, friendly smell summer dampness brings out of book bindings, and out of the unpainted wood interiors of old military barracks buildings. When my work was done, I would disappear into this safe haven. There were fascinating volumes to leaf through, as well as my old favorite magazines, *The National Geographic*, *Life*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. Even though I never really read a book or article, the jokes, maps, pictures and captions were all broadening my world view, preparing me for the greatest adventure of my life when, at the end of that summer, orders came transferring about ten of us to an Army Air Transportation depot near Mannheim in what was then know as West Germany.

* * * *

Just as my two years in junior high had been a relatively bearable pause in the thirteen year trauma of school, the summer at Camp Drum had also offered respite from the things that seemed to bother me the most, like memorizing, reading for content, complex social relationships, and confusion. However, duty overseas in West Germany would quickly drive me to the kind of crisis point of

decision that makes or breaks a human life. If a door seemed open in front of me, crime, intrigue, violence, withdrawal into fantasy; almost anything that might bring even a twisted feeling of belonging and accomplishment, would have been possible for me to choose at that time.

* * * *

September has always been my favorite month. I love the smell of ripeness in the air, as well as the aroma and feel of untouched textbooks, full of promise that the new school year will be better than the last. Debarking from the troopship on a cool September morning in Bremerhaven, Germany was in one way very much like my first day at the private school in Philadelphia. At the dock we were greeted by the friendly waves of blonde schoolchildren with little book bags. Like the commuter train rides I used to take into Philadelphia, the troop train ride south to Saarbruecken was a daydream that took more or less forever through friendly looking towns, and past neat little stations with flowers. All of this aroused in me the same romantic optimism I had always felt as I cracked open crisp new books in the first days of a school year.

As our train rolled into a heavy industrial area, where all of Germany's fetish for cleanliness could not completely camouflage the deposits of coal soot, there were awakened within me wonderful olfactory memories of the house by the tracks in Wayne, and I started to feel at home. The second day of our trip took us into the foggy Rhine Valley and to our new company at Coleman Barracks by the village of Sandhofen just outside the sprawling industrial twin cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. Just as it had been with many of my school years however, unnerving realities soon crushed in around me and days in my new army unit began to affect me as if I had been condemned to spend twenty-four hour periods in some horribly concocted, unending school class of math, English, and foreign language. Nevertheless, most of my letters to my folks created a rosy hewed picture with no hints of frustration or pain.

[Late September 1955]

Dear Folks

Did you get my cable? I sure hope so. The boat trip wasn't particularly memorable - just typical army life only no place to go when the day was over. We did see some whales and porpoise on the way over. Bishops island (we think thats what it was) just off the Brittish mainland was realy a welcome sight after nothing but water for so long. We saw the white cliffs of Dover. Sat. morning we pulled into Bremerhaven. We imediatly boarded a train for Zwiesbruken wich is a proccesing center for all Europe. The trip

took 18 hours and we got a good look at a lot of beautiful countryside. We went through Colonge which looked like a magnificent city. Tomorrow I leave for my permanent station which is - 7703 Army Aircraft unit. The town is supposed to be Sandhofen but you do'nt put that on the address. I can't find it on a map - It must be a pretty small place.

I wish I could fully express how thrilled I am with Germany. I havn't even had a pass yet but just what I've seen and heard about sounds wonderful.

** * **

To tell you about eveithing Ive seen since I've left Bremerhaven would take a coulpe of volumes so write soon and let me know what you are interested in and I'll try my best to tell you.

Even though this is so exciting over here I miss the good old U.S. alot and especialy home and you folks. It's a funy feeling to know that if I get a three day pass I can't buzz home in a few hours. Please pack all my civies you can stuff in an old suit case and send them over. There are some Countries that you can't even visit unless you wear civies and the army recomends that they be worn off post. I'm sure now that I don't want my car so dispose of it however you see fit. I don't think I told you on the dock that I took the civies that I wore over to Ft Dix and my books in a suitcase I had in the trunk of the car and shipped them as hold baggage on the ship last minut.

Well, I'll write again as soon as I get settled in my new station. I sure miss you folks and give all my love to everbody.

*Love,
Glenn*

** * * **

Initially, I responded to the challenges of being a newcomer in the land of Loewenbrau and schnapps, by trying to outdrink everyone else in the barracks. I stayed drunk for several days around Christmas, and when I woke up on my first New Years Day in Germany, I vaguely remember fishing under my bunk for one last liter of beer to drown the incredibly cruel effects of a night consuming various beverages from bottles with labels I could not read. (Back at the base in Northern New York, my drinking had been taking a definite turn for the worse. I often drank during the day, and many of my escapades could have easily ended in disaster, such as the night on the train home to Pennsylvania for a long weekend when I got drunk with a fanatically conservative priest and an Indian who were trying to settle their extreme political differences over whiskey. When the train made a middle of the night stop in Utica, we decided to get off to find an "all nighter." I

have no recollection of what we did in Utica, or how I finally made it home to Wayne. I probably hitchhiked.) In Germany, getting drunk on base was fairly safe, but some German troublemakers could make the GI bars down town "hazardous duty." I am glad I was sober enough to get moving the time several knife wielding teenagers came after me in the darkened entrance way of a Heidelberg beer garden, shouting "Go home, GI son of a bitch!" I am sure I must have been very close to crossing the line into true alcohol addiction during those first months overseas, but there was an end-stage alcoholic in our company whose delirious suffering scared me a little.

I have heard that a very effective therapy for people addicted to alcohol involves waiting until they are sober; then showing them a video tape of how they act when they are drunk. Witnessing the stupidity of other people is not half as shocking as getting a startlingly realistic view of one's self. For me it was not a video tape (there was no such thing then), but some of my own letters that brought me face-to-face with myself in those first few months of duty in Germany. The girl I had been dating back in the states lost patience with me. Enclosed with her note breaking off our relationship were all the letters I had written. In a scrawled, hardly legible mix of printing and script, I had dumped together misspelling after misspelling into a jumble of sentence fragments intimating that I was a scientist, and that there would be a great future for us when I got out of the service. Somehow, as I scanned those letters, I knew they revealed a young man whose defeats had won; a young man who had given up reality and was opting for the fantasies of insanity. I stared at my scribbled nonsense in disbelief. Was my handwriting that bad? Was my spelling that poor? Was my thinking so garbled? I had been weak in many academic areas, but those letters exposed a person who had been told so often he was lazy and careless until he finally decided to accept the role.

I knew there was more to me than those letters revealed. I went on a self-improvement campaign. The base had a recreation building with hobby shops, so I bought a fine German camera at the PX and took up developing my own pictures. I started to bowl and got pretty good at it. The University of Maryland had an overseas extension for military personnel, so I registered for a German class, which, even though I never attended, helped me feel I was doing the right things. Here are some excerpts from letters I wrote home between the fall of 1955 and the spring of 1956:

*Headquarters Detachment
7703rd Army Aircraft Unit
Mannheim, Germany
Dear Folks,*

The 7703 is a supply center for the little reconisance planes (Cesnas and Pipers) and helicopters. We have a warehouse, hanger and motor pool to maintain. I'm in the warehouse section. I'm in the Fair Wear & Tear group, we take of old brocken equiptment (whole airplanes or sparkplugs or washers. We pack up this stuff and send it to a main repair station in France or Back to the States for major overhaul - some of the repairs are doen in a little shop here too. I type out various forms concerning there transportation and also work with the file cards we have of everthing that moves in and out. ...there is a small field here and a hanger and although there are other units on the post that is the main reason the post is here. We had a bad accident here today. A PFC who is a mechanic in the Maintenance sect. took a plane out to test the motor (he is aloud to taxi around the field but only pilot officers can fly) anyway he got it on the landing strip and nobody knows for sure whether it was intentional or he just lost control but anyway he took off, got about 100 ft and came straight down. The plane burned up completely and he was rushed to the hospital with very many burns and fractures and is not expected to live.

* * *

Thanks for the bread, dad, it sure will come in handy even though I'm pretty well off finnacialy as of the moment. Germany is a very inexpensive country for a soldier so I'm saving a lot.

You know how it is in this Damn Army when it comes to presents but an iron would come in handy, particurly a small one because I bought a small little transformer for my razer.

I'll write to Erle [my uncle Earl] the first chance I get. Also I'll try to type my letters so you can read them from now on.

* * *

I've met a few Germans so far and they seem like facinating people, especialy the ones down town who are not closely associated with G.I.'s. There's a tavern in a little town just outside one of the side gates of the post. None of the GI's go there because theres no women or music (except German!) I happened to find it while going on a walk one time and I've gotten to know the owner quite well even though he doens'nt speak English. Between a few expressions from my guide book and sign language we get along swell. His wife who speaks a little english cooks delicious food (Sour Kraut, Wiener Schnitzel) and there beer is very good, but pretty tricky too. When I walk in there now he always shakes my hand and introduces me to any of the locals who happen to be there. It's realy a lot of fun. By the way beer comes in bottles that seem just under a quart and cost 80 pfennings (about 19 cents)

* * *

I went on a tour to Spayer yesterday. It was realy fascinating, the Cathedral is one of the oldest and largest in the world. The town

itself dates back to about 400 BC. These tours go to different places every Sun. They are sponsored by the service club and I'm going to try not to miss any from now on. The service club also has ping pong, shoufle board, cards, chess, music room, dances on Sat. nite, snack bar and bowling alleys.

We also have an Enlisted Men's Club here. It is a private night club for the three lowest ranks (PVT - PFC - CPL) It's realy aufuly nice because they are very strict about ones conduct inside. If you raise hell they take away your membership card. Wiskey is 30 cents a shot and beer is 15 cents a bottle.

* * *

Dad, the letter I got from you today was one of the most inspiring letters I've ever gotten from anybody. It was the one you wrote Sunday about improving myself. I'll be glad to take you up on the whole deal, only don't give me a break on my poor handwriting because I've got to improve that too.

I finished one of the Science Book Club selections (Journey into Wonder) today. It was very good, if one of you would like to read it let me know and I'll send it.

* * *

Mom, if your planning to come over I guess I'll start a few German lessons in these letters. The phrase for today will be - Macht Nicht (I'm not sure of the spelling) it's pronounced - MOX NIX and means litterily - makes nothing. It's used to express a feeling of indifference like we would shrug our shoulders and say "whats's the difference"

* * *

I signed up for a couple of courses at both high school and college level on various subjects but they did'nt hold my interest. The instructors are GIs and I figured I could get more out of work on my own than with them. ...I'm studying biology by reading my own books (I brought over a lot) and also occaisionly books I get from the library. Also I'm looking into a book on Christian history published by Life. As you can see I'm trying to keep busy with things that will increase my knowledge. My ambition is education, I mean broadly and not just classroom education.

* * *

The majority of the girls that a soldier can meet easily around here, want to marry a G.I. so badly and go to the States that you realy have to keep on the ball. One of the guys that came when I did is caught already and as a matter of fact, I'm going to meet them a little later this evening in the snack bar. He wants me to meet her and tell him what I think of her.

* * *

This typewriter's sitting in the motor pool office and when I saw it not being used I thought it would be a good chance to write.

...This week has been pretty slow so I've been doing a lot of reading. ...Dad, I've almost finished The Apostle. It sure is a Magnificent book, Also I've started to study math but am finding it pretty tough going with no instructor to explain things. There is a book that might help me in math, one that is written as a self study review. The books I've been trying to use are regular text books that are intended to be used in a class with a teacher. If you could find one that covers high school math and has the answers I sure could use it.

* * *

Well I did it. I bought a camera, it's a Voigtlander Vita B 35mm. It takes 1/25 to 1/200 of a second. We have a photo lab in the service club and there is plenty of equipment for developing and printing pictures.

* * *

They checked my eyes today and said the prescription needed changing. They are making some new ones that will be ready in a couple of weeks. I'm still having trouble with the headaches and am just about out of the stuff they gave me in the states. If you could send some more I sure would appreciate it.

* * *

...Last night I took a girl who works at the Hiedelberg Quartermaster depot to Mannheim dancing. We relay had a great time and she is a very nice girl. The place we went to was fascinating it had no GIs at all. It had the real old German atmosphere with a little band that played mostly waltzes and Hungarian music...

*Love,
Glenn*

In the spring, probably sometime around Easter, I experienced a renewed interest in religion. I started to pray again, and once in a while I would try to read the little pocket Bible I had been given in chapel. One Sunday afternoon in early summer I remember taking a peaceful walk about ten miles through the flat Rhine Valley farmland, circling through a couple of picturesque little villages, and pausing in a tiny Gasthaus to order, in my fractured German, a beer and a sausage. Another time, I put on my civilian clothes and took a city bus and then an intercity trolley about 15 miles South to Heidelberg, where I just wandered alone up a narrow street through the university district and then to the castle. Later, I crossed the Neckar River on the old Roman Bridge and as I started up the lonely hillside on a path called the Philosopher's Way, I fantasized that someday I would master the German language and come back here as a student.

When I went off base alone, I often just soaked in the scenes and smells of

German culture like a detached, uninvolved spectator watching a strangely captivating play on a stage; but when several of us GI's went out together, we would usually drink too much, and intrude ourselves into the local scene in ways that did little to improve German-American relations.

* * * *

A letter from home telling of the passing of my grandfather Sheffield left me saddened and philosophical. The first death I remember was the passing of my grandmother Leavitt in the mid 1940's, which had left me relatively unmoved, maybe because I was still quite young and only my father went to Massachusetts for the funeral. The reality of death became a little clearer a few years later when Grandpa Leavitt died of a stroke; we all traveled to New England to see him in his casket and hear ministers and friends tell of the fine things he had done. Even though I had seen much less of Grandpa "Sheff" than other relatives, he had been the simple kind of person that a grandchild could easily relate to, and that a young man could be truly saddened to lose.

Frederick Sheffield, was a widower who had retired from repairing shoes and sewing machines. He lived on a lake near Worcester in a dingy little cottage darkened yellow-brown throughout its four rooms by cigarettes grandpa smoked one after the other. Visiting him was great fun. He would take me in his creaking old wooden rowboat across the lake to the nearest store where he would buy me a candy bar as he stocked up on food and cigarettes for his lonely, hermit-like existence. In 1952, when I saw him for the last time, he was locked in a hideous, dirty-brick mental hospital that smelled of urine and unwashed clothing. They brought him out on a barred porch where mom and I sat with him for a while as he rocked and smoked in a wooden chair. Around his home, he had carelessly started several fires with his cigarettes, so the county authorities had decided he was no longer competent to live unsupervised. As he rocked slowly back and forth, he philosophized about losing his freedom, complaining the worst thing about it is, "I think too much." As I listened to him ramble on, I saw how stooped he was, sitting in that grimy old chair. His clothing draped over his rounded shoulders looking at least two sizes too big. His face was brown and blotched with patches of dark pigment. Most striking were his ears, which appeared to me withered and dried to a crisp, as if they had already died. He had been so much fun. Why did he have to get that way? Why did he have to end up in that wastebasket of a place? Would that be me some day?

* * * *

In the course of my two years tour of duty at Coleman Barracks, I had three jobs. For the first few months, I drove a sedan for a colonel. Later, when

assignments were reshuffled, I worked in the depot warehouse, an immense, cold, hangar building filled with everything from nuts and bolts to complete helicopter engines. I was to read the labels on packages of aircraft parts, cross reference them on location lists, then put the parts on the correct shelf or bin. The officer in charge was a brisk, laconic perfectionist, and I was always in trouble. It seemed I could not do anything right. The officer accused me of willful disobedience, and threatened disciplinary action. Just as my desperate situation in the warehouse was about to blow up into a courts martial, I was able to finagle my way into a new job in an entirely different section of the company. The storm of supervisory wrath receded to the horizon of my life only to sweep back again with devastating fury, some 20 years later.

My new bosses, Major Ochoa and Master Sergeant Johnson, were two of the most easy-going old Texans in the US Army. On a typical morning, I would stop by the Major's office, where Sergeant Johnson would casually chitchat for a while, and then hand me papers for the pickup and delivery of supplies at US military bases in the Mannheim/Heidelberg area. I had a crew of East European displaced persons, mostly Polish and Czech, who spoke English and German. They were very familiar with the area, and liked to goof off as much as I did. The crew usually handled the paperwork; I was little more than a uniformed presence in the truck.

Kopper, a refugee from Prague, became a special friend. He could carry on an extended conversation in the native language of anyone we met. German, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Italian, even Spanish; it made no difference; Kopper seemed at home with them all. Of course, he passed on to me some choice words and phrases every soldier needs to know. Once, when I commented to Kopper about his linguistic abilities, he responded, "Each new language you speak makes you a new person." Years later, after becoming a college professor of German and Russian, I would often encourage my students by telling them about Kopper and his views on the value of mastering foreign languages.

Spending most of my workday off the base without direct supervision meant that I was free to think up ways to use time and to cover up mistakes. When paper work did not match what we actually ended up having on the truck, we made it match by stealing what we needed or "losing" what we were not supposed to have. For instance, when a company of Army Engineers foisted on us a stolen air compressor we could not account for receiving, we drove out on a tank trail in the woods and dumped it. Then we knew which outfit owed us the favor of forging paperwork to cover up one of our blunders, when a half-ton mess hall oven tottered off our forklift and crashed from the loading dock to the concrete driveway.

* * * *

In the mid forties, newsreel pictures of bombings, battles, and concentration camps had frozen like icicles in my brain. Could such things actually have happened? Wouldn't people who had lived through such horrors be compensated with irrefutable wisdom, or some visible badge of special humanity? As I got to know people who had survived the war and its aftermath, I found the "badges" and the wisdom life awards to its sufferers had none of the Hollywood syrup I had been taught to expect. Instead, I found some to be humble and kind, while others were hateful and bent on revenge. With many of them, especially the former, I felt the same spiritual kinship I had always felt with life's outsiders, a oneness reflecting the wordless mutual support compact of life's rejects. Getting to know these people fed an old angry undercurrent in me that resented and feared self-confident in-groups, the wealthy, the powerful, the well-informed.

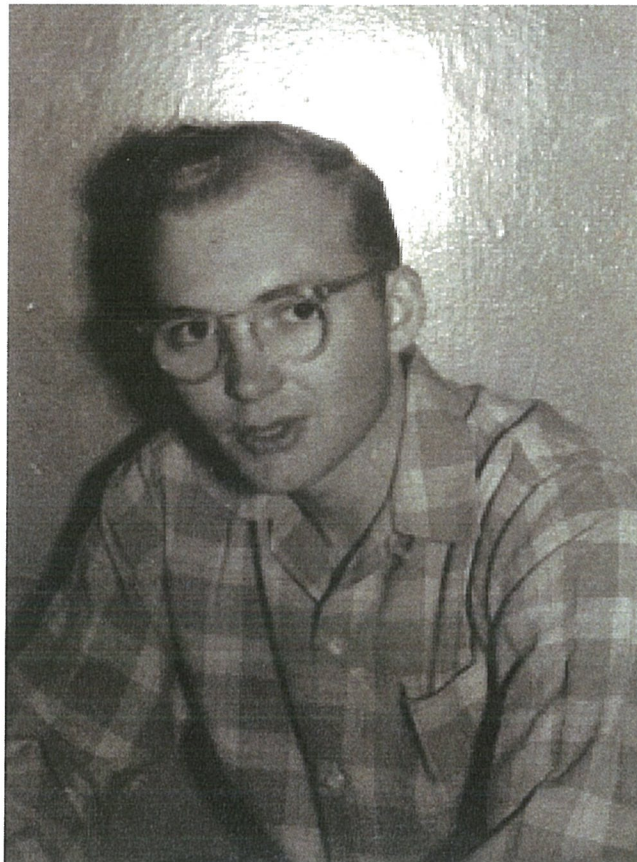
One cold, misty night a guard came across a trembling, ragged civilian huddled in the back of one of our trucks. Under a bare bulb in our company office, the man babbled incomprehensible responses to our questions. Waiting for the Military Police to come and escort him off the base, I held out an apple and pointed to my stomach asking, "You hungry?" I did not know whether that man was a displaced war refugee, or an escaped war criminal, (maybe he was just a bum reaping the rewards of unwillingness to work) yet the grateful terror of his glance as he devoured my apple, core and all, confessed the details of his life in a language I was able to comprehend without difficulty. If we would ever meet again, we would be friends; but we didn't.

In 1956, the Hungarians revolted against their Communist masters. On the Voice of America, we heard that President Eisenhower had threatened to demand NATO military intervention if the Soviets moved any more troops into Hungary. Ours was not a combat unit, so we were ordered to prepare to blow up what we could not transport, and then evacuate west to France. Defiantly, Soviet armor rolled into Budapest, and unarmed civilians were photographed throwing rocks at tanks. NATO did nothing, our unit did nothing, and soon the Hungarians were crushed. During my last year in Europe, a new kind of refugee began to sneak through the Iron Curtain into the West: bitterly anti- American East Europeans who felt they had been cruelly betrayed by the United States. I got to know a few of these people. Their vehemence added depth to my solidarity with victims of arrogance and power.

Sometimes my crew and I went to civilian businesses, which gave me valuable opportunities to get to know some Germans on their own turf. Of all our various destinations, I began to like the US Army Quartermaster installation in Feudenheim best, because at the desk where I had to hand in our papers was for me a kindred spirit, Eva Wilhelmine Ballé.



The Tank
(watercolor after an old photo)



Self-portrait taken in the service club
photography lab about a month after
my arrival in Germany



Eva at her desk in the Quartermaster Depot



April 1957 in the Coleman Barracks Chapel

Chapter Four

EVA

"Goofy! Supper's ready!" Some wives call their husbands Honey or Dear, but my wife calls me Goofy. She was a pretty German Frauelein; I was a lonely GI. I invited her to a dance at the castle in Weinheim, but when we got there, the castle was closed. It seems I had misread the announcement posted in the Enlisted Men's Club several weeks earlier; the dance was on the 12th, not the 21st.

When Eva took me home, I wanted to make a good impression on her folks so I volunteered to go down the apartment house stairs and around the corner to buy some beer. On the way back up, two steps from their landing, I tripped, and Mama's introduction to her future son-in-law was mopping up four liters of the finest local brew.

Eva took me to visit her dearest relative, Aunt Mine, who opened her little cabinet and offered us wine. With one of Mine's most treasured wine glasses gingerly clasped in my right hand, I tried to put together a German sentence expressing my appreciation for being entrusted with a delicate heirloom which had survived four years of bombing: I would not let it fall. Not knowing the word for down, I exclaimed, "Nichts..." and gently flipped toward the floor with my left hand. Of course, my thumb brushed the base of the goblet just hard enough to dislodge it from my grip, and the history of that crystal treasure ended in pieces on Tante Mine's brightly polished floor. Convinced she was dating an incredible klutz, Eva just nicknamed me Goofy, and married me anyway.

For an American serviceman to marry a German civilian in the 1950's was not easy. The Army and the State Department dragged us through every bit of red tape a bureaucracy could devise. After six months of hassle and three fruitless trips 50 miles up the Autobahn to the American Consulate in Frankfurt, I proceeded to demand of the American consular officer that he either come up with a legal reason why we could not marry, or to get out of our way! The vehemence and eloquence of my statement surprised me more than the officer, I am sure, but it brought results. On a beautiful April morning in 1957, we drove my little green Morris Minor to the Mannheim City Hall for a civil ceremony, and then we went back to the Coleman Barracks Army chapel where Master Sergeant Johnson took the place of Eva's shy father and gave me Eva to be my wife. Several letters I wrote home between late 1956 through mid 1957 contained bits of information I thought my folks would like to know about this lovely Frauelein who had stolen my heart.

Dear Folks

...Wilma's full name is Eva Wilhelmine Balle. Her mom calls her Mokol (little bird) ...Wilma is just too good to be true, she is a wonderful friend and companion. She is just about tops in house keeping and especially cooking. She is very inteligent and loves to study in much the same way that I do. ...she is so natural and unaffected that it's awful hard not to like her. ...The first thing that will strike you about her is her complete sincerity and wonderful sense of humor... I'm sure you will like each other right from the start.... She is an artist with food and I think thats the way she got me. She also likes modern music, dancing, long walks and picnics and most outdoor activities, but she won't go swimming because of some ugly scars on her back from the bombing.

* * *

...Her father was a tailer in the army. He was sent to the eastern front and in 1943 he was captured by the Russians and sent to prison camp. At about the same time Wilma and her mother were bombed out of their home in Mannheim and went to the apartment they have now with almost nothing but the clothes they had on there backs. Wilmas dad told me he believes that no German should ever again be allowed to carry a gun. I showed him what you said in your letter about Germany and he said "Glenn, I think your father is very right. America should never trust the Germans. There are too many of them with crazy ideas about the glory of war. I say that and I am a German".

...Herr Balle does some tailering on their sewing machine, and although he can't do much because of his injured hands, he does very well and makes a few extra marks. Wilmas mother works and also Herr Balle gets a small pension.

* * *

...she is a Lutherin, which is not common in this part of Germany. ...She is in excellent health, although she did suffer from malnutrition in the last part of the war. She worked in a childrens hospital during the last year of the war and received a citation from the priest for saving the lives of five children during the bombing.

* * *

...We both want to build a home, not in the sense of a house but in the sense of a relationship. She wants to go to school just as badly as I want to go, and we are going to do it together. We have

made a lot of plans for the future, they are optimistic plans, and we feel that with love, hard work and faith in God, they will work out. That's a youthfull outlook and we are young.

*Love,
Glenn*

Soon after our early spring honeymoon in the South German Alpine resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, I had to face a decision: should I give Eva more adjustment time by extending my enlistment, or should we plan to return to the States when my current enlistment expired at the end of the summer? I had never experienced the usual kind of homesickness for people or my hometown, but I did have a faint longing for the milieu of an old-fashioned American college campus with ivy-covered buildings, crisp, pungent leaves on the walks, and a hushed, musty library. I wanted to go back to the US and try college again. Eva agreed.

In late September of 1957, we arrived at what is now Kennedy Airport. I had to spend a few days at a base in New York completing the final stages of discharge from the service, while Eva went with my folks to Pennsylvania. My parents wanted to like Eva, but they did not understand that not all immigrants enter this country with a built in love of everything American and total disdain for the land and language of their birth. We stayed with mom and dad until January. She tried valiantly, but it was not a happy time for Eva.

I took a job as a laboratory assistant at a pharmaceutical company near Wayne while I negotiated with the Admissions office at Pennsylvania State University. Finally, I was able to get a letter from Ohio State indicating that under the rules that were in effect at the time I left that university four years ago, I would be eligible for probationary re-admission. Based on that letter from Ohio, Penn State agreed to admit me as long as I would take some non-credit, remedial work in math and English.

With the promise of a small monthly income through the GI Bill (I was a Korean era veteran), and the enthusiastic blessing of my parents, I entered Penn State in the spring semester of 1958. This time college would be different. Several years in the army had taught me a vital lesson: in some undertakings at least, I could succeed. Without dormitories, fraternities, without financial crises, without social confusion, and with a more realistic view of who I was and what I could accomplish, taking college classes would surely become a happy total immersion project, just like replacing countertops or roofs. After all, if I could talk the State Department into letting us get married, I could do anything! And above all, I had Eva, who was not just a wife, she was a friend who believed in me. She had unshakable faith that I could do anything, except, perhaps walk down the

street without stumbling into a puddle!

It was a wet, slushy winter, but Eva filled our little third floor apartment, in a retired minister's house, with homey, warm *Gemueticlichkeit*. We ate hardy, German-style meals and consumed gallons of thick black coffee brewed the Old Country way. I studied incessantly, yet I found time to take up oil painting, to write a little poetry and to think more about religion. I even sketched out several pages of a tongue-in-cheek epic drama about the creation of life on earth. Carrying around heavy college textbooks, daydreaming in the magnificent main library, I felt so scholarly I could almost taste it.

My confidence was dampened considerably, however, when in April I received a warning letter saying I was failing Algebra and Chemistry. There was a brighter side, though: having a native German wife had given me special *entrè* among the German faculty, and I was doing pretty well in German 101. After numerous conferences with my advisor and instructors, it became clear that I should switch from the technical/scientific field into the Liberal Arts. I should forget about Veterinary Medicine, and pursue a major in German. Since German language study was located in the Department of German and Comparative Literature, I would be studying Comparative Literature, as well.

Comparative Literature? How could that be? For me, the very act of reading had always been like one of the mythical maidens of Hell: disastrously seductive, but incapable of delivering satisfaction. Or, perhaps more candidly, I should say that my advances toward the voluptuous siren of reading were akin to the love-making attempts of a eunuch. There were not many army enlisted men who had proudly displayed in their lockers books on such topics as microbiology, philosophy, and the social thought of Albert Einstein, as I had done. I had dutifully transported a 25 lb. "library" from base to base for over three years, but had I ever read those books? Not really. I had skimmed them each a hundred times, I had talked about the authors and their subjects with anyone who wanted to play "intellectual" for a while, but I had never read one from beginning to end. In fact, when, in the fall of 1958, I entered my first Comparative Literature class, I do not think I had ever read with significant comprehension any continuous narrative longer than three pages.

Surrounded by the scent and silence of the university library, I was overwhelmed by scholarly fantasy. Rarely did the realization surface that I was not really reading the books, as my fellow students seemed to be doing. I could skim and scan, guess and surmise; I could imagine with all the genius I could muster, but never just sit and read. I especially loved the old encyclopedic histories with beautiful color reproductions of ancient manuscripts and paintings; they were like the *National Geographic* and *Classic Comics* I had enjoyed as a boy. The pictures and captions gave me a feeling for history and culture without

having to read it.

Hearing about people "curling up with a book" sounded so warm and fuzzy to me, but even after taking some non-credit reading instruction, my typical reading experience was limited to about fifteen minutes of hunt and peck word scanning followed by a headache and almost total amnesia concerning what I had "read." But maybe that is not entirely true, either. If the college text had illustrations, maps, charts, concise synopses, or summaries of information, I could sometimes retain quite a bit, as long as I had an opportunity to go over it several times and to make notes. I quickly became a clever cultural name dropper. From titles, chapter headings, gab sessions with fellow students and instructors who had read a work, I was often able to grasp and intellectually manipulate sophisticated concepts in a way that left some professors and peers believing I was not only quite intelligent, but very well read!

I never could have made it through Penn State without Eva. She was not fully aware of my earlier struggles and failures. For my part, I considered myself just a late bloomer whose time, at last, had come. Eva had a simple, indomitable faith in me, which could not be shaken by an occasional setback. Sometimes for a terrifying moment in a class, my mind would go completely blank, and all I wanted to do was disappear forever into a lonely place where there were no books, lectures, or assignments, but then I would come home to Eva and a slice of her irresistible plum cake. Eva would ask if she could help me review something and I would dig in again. But anything I did not write down, review, rework, and then review again, I would usually totally forget.

I took the first course in Comparative Literature in my second semester. We had already become friends with the professor, a brilliant young Ph.D. from Harvard. He assumed that every literate person over eighteen had already devoured most of the classics of world literature, so a semester reading list that included five major novels and about ten shorter works and plays did not seem to him an unreasonable three-month assignment for college freshmen. I was familiar with nothing more than the titles of a few of the works on the class syllabus. So it was in that class, at age 22, I first read through anything longer than a short story or play. I actually turned every page of my copy of Homer's *Odyssey*, but Eva was reading the work, as well, and it was only from our talks and jokes about them that I was able to fix in my memory the exploits of the hero Odysseus. Next, I attempted to read *Don Quixote*, but it completely overwhelmed me. Eva found it boring, so for Cervantes' masterpiece, as well as several other works I was supposed to read for that class, I was wholly dependent on lecture notes and campus conversations. By the end of that second semester, I was suffering from terrible migraine type headaches and I was all but living on antacids. Nevertheless, I passed every course.

* * * *

I am a person of rituals and routines; it is the only way I can keep track of what is going on. My briefcase (like the truck I drove to Colorado) was a self-contained vehicle, stuffed with do-dads to accommodate my forgetfulness. For the rest of my undergraduate tenure at Penn State, my life was remarkably consistent. I seldom did anything but class work. I made out elaborate time maps blocking out into fifteen-minute segments study time for each class, as well as time allotments for every other conceivable life function. Assignments, and everything else I had to remember to do, were noted on endless checklists, which I always kept with my time map. Papers, books, and notes for each class and project had to be in separate, visible piles around our apartment. Whatever was out of sight, was out of mind. My textbooks were so filled with underlining and scribbled notes in the margins, that they seldom had any resale value. My class notes were a maze of small notations, often circled or blocked and interconnected by lines and arrows intended to show the progression of thought or the sequence of events. It seemed that for the most part, I learned from organizing and re-organizing the little information I could garner directly from a lecture. For history classes, I constructed poster-sized time charts to help me visualize the relationships between the lifetimes of key people, and major eras and events. I did best whenever the subject matter could be in some way visually plotted or charted, and I was in desperate trouble whenever I was expected to memorize words, as we were with the philosophical *Dialogues of Plato*.

"...and then what does Crito say?" the Philosophy professor asked. I tried to cringe into oblivion, but he was looking directly at me even though I had chosen the remotest back row seat. I mumbled a garbled collection of Platonic sounding phrases, which evoked a disgusted sneer on the professor's face as he posed the same question to the person in front of me. Everybody else in the class seemed to recall with some semblance of acceptability the sequence of arguments presented in the Dialogues, but for me it seemed totally impossible. I could read the required dialogue again and again. I could read it aloud; I could outline it. I think I understood very well the general ideas of Plato, but there seemed to be no way I could etch into my memory the sequence of verbal steps each dialogue speaker took as he inched his way toward Plato's inevitable conclusion. The "D" I received in that required Philosophy class was counterbalanced somewhat by the A I got in my only other class from the Philosophy Department: Introduction to Logic. The patterns of rational thought, syllogisms and such things, made superb sense to me; they did not have to be studied, read about, or memorized. Somehow I could intuitively arrive at the right conclusion without giving much consideration to the intermediate steps the professor spent so much time explaining to the rest of the class. For me, the class in logic was an unforgettably satisfying experience.

* * * *

I did little outright cheating in college, but I mastered some subtle forms of intellectual deception to the degree that I deceived myself. It is only when I think back on my years in college, with the perspective of maturity and greater understanding of myself, that the significance of my classroom strategies becomes clear. For instance, if an instructor gave us six characteristics of a certain social movement to memorize, I would condense each factor to one key word, then arrange the first letters of key words into a six-letter nonsense word to serve as my memory trigger. If the opportunity presented itself, I did not hesitate to record my trigger word on my fingernail or on the edge of a notebook that I might be able to glance at during a test. Otherwise, I would just keep the trigger word on a piece of paper I could keep in view until that dreaded last moment when the professor would say, "Books and papers on the floor," and then I would immediately scribble it somewhere on the test paper before even looking at the questions.

Of course, whenever I could do it, I did not shy away from building the same kind of halo I had developed years ago in grammar school. By playing on the factors that I was a little older, with a broader range of experiences than most of my classmates, I was able to impress several professors to the point where my mistakes were overlooked as carelessness rather than lack of knowledge. Halo building was especially successful among the German staff. My spoken German was never very good, but I could devise clever linguistic jokes and cultural quips that required more of a sense of humor than mastery of the language. My grade point average improved a little each semester.

* * * *

In the summer of 1958, we gladly accepted my parents' invitation to spend a few weeks with them in Maine. After three days at Higgins Beach, we loaded our cars with a fishing boat, tents, fishing poles, and sleeping bags for ten unforgettable days in the wilderness above Moosehead Lake. The four of us filled the north woods with laughter, and the smell of bacon and fish prepared over an open fire. Those few glorious days were the only real break Eva and I were able to enjoy during my undergraduate years.

By the end of 1958, I had demonstrated to myself and to the school that I could make it. But the effort was generating inner tension that tortured my head and tied my digestive system into angry knots. In the pharmaceutical laboratory where I had worked before coming to Penn State, I had assisted in experiments with laboratory animals measuring the effects of the tranquilizer *meprobamate*. It is ironic that within a year of leaving that job for my third attempt at college study,

I would begin taking that tranquilizer myself for the severe tension headaches that were plaguing me with ever-increasing frequency. Along with the *meprobamate*, which my doctor prescribed off and on during the remainder of my college years, he had me continue with the mild diet and antacids for the stomach pain and nausea I was so often experiencing.

In March of 1959, Eva came through with the best medicine any struggling young husband could ask for: she presented me with our son, Clifford. We did not have a car then, so when Eva's pains began, a kind neighbor loaned us hers to take Eva 20 miles to the nearest hospital in the little town of Belefonte. Although her English had been becoming more fluent, in the midst of her long and difficult labor, Eva could not seem to understand the instructions of the delivery room nurse. Totally unprepared for the realities of childbirth, I was called into the room with several moaning, gasping, poorly draped women, to do my first real world translating. Graciously, I was asked to leave during her actual delivery. With the entrance of baby Clifford into our lives, everything changed, and nothing changed. Life became more complicated, but the complications were proud and happy ones. Tensions and problems increased, but they had meaning. Our future was not just a dream; we could hold a little bit of it in our arms.

Now and then I would decide to start a piecemeal "diary" of thoughts and prayers, probably in the hope that the process would help memorialize things I was otherwise sure to forget. One spiral notebook from 1958 contained my tongue-in-cheek "epic" drama, depicting a conversation between bits of primordial slime haggling about the meaning of fundamental terms like "good" and "now." Scribbled on some of the other pages were about a dozen dated diary notations with such sophomoric insights as: "The next great advance in science will be in the field of" random motion. It may be a machine that is entirely unpredictable." "Education is a limiting factor on creativity." "The ideal education would be to read (and study) a good unabridged dictionary." and "A good hangover cure is to get plenty of sleep the night before."

In spite of some problem classes, I had to drop, such as a Russian course in which we had to memorize conversations, my grades gradually improved. I was inducted into Delta Phi Alpha, the German Honorary Society, and then in the cool, wet spring of 1961, one semester ahead of schedule, I put on a black cap and gown for the proudest ceremony of my life so far: Graduation with a Bachelor's Degree in German. Eva was proud of me. My parents were proud of me. I was proud of me. I had made it.

Chapter Five**ACADEMIA**

The world of academics is much like a religion complete with temples, liturgies, priests, and salvation. The newly framed diploma on my wall confirmed my status as a novice in the "religious order" of academia. Having entered the ivy-covered temples, having purchased the holy books, having chanted classroom liturgy, having paid homage to the great high professorial priests, and having shown all due respect for the holy tradition of the sect, I knew exactly what I should do next. I would enter the "seminary" of graduate school and some day I would don the vestments of the professor-priesthood myself. However, when I eventually reached that goal, I was to find beyond the academic temple veil, in the inner sanctuary of the faith, an impotent, capricious little god whose salvation was not for me.

What our lives were like during my first year as a Master's Degree candidate is well described in this letter I wrote to my dad in the spring of 1961:

[State College, Pennsylvania]

Dear Dad,

By the time you get this your cataract operation will be over and the time to get back to normal seeing won't be far off. Tonight I had a class from 7:00 to 9:00. Before it started I wandered around town looking for a card or flowers to send you, but at last I decided a good long letter for mom to read to you would be best.

Today Clifford came down with a fever. We called the doctor just to be sure, but it looks like nothing serious, except he is bored with staying indoors and gets into more trouble than usual. He loves to play outdoors and its always a battle to get him to come up again.

Wilma keeps very busy all the time. Besides running after Clifford, she has managed to cook so well that we both need to go on diets. She goes to her typing class three hours every Thursday night. On other nights she tries to get in a few minutes practice, but frequently she can't because of all the other things that need to be done like ironing and wash. Also, I've been encouraging her in her new hobby of reading. In my German studies I often run across things that are very funny or otherwise highly entertaining, and it is great fun to see her relaxed and happily enjoying them. She also studies her German and English recipe books like a real scholar.

With only four courses this semester, I am at last finding time

to earn some extra money doing chemical abstracting, and I'm doing some of the extracurricular reading that I've put off, even though it's a must for a student of literature. It might interest you to know that I started the 19th century Universalist theologian Hosea Balou, but so far he has been pretty disappointing. Perhaps he will get better in the latter parts of the book. So far he seems rigidly dogmatic in "proving" every claim he makes through biblical references alone. This seems contrary to the liberal spirit of Universalism as I understand it.

Next Wednesday we have our first test in Russian. It doesn't look like it will be too hard, but maybe I'll tempt fate by saying that? We are reading a collection of non-edited stories by Russian authors from Tolstoy to the present, but they are not as highly "Soviet" and complicated as the readings in the course on Soviet Prose, which I dropped. When the Russians start writing in Marxist terms, their language becomes just as muddled as the philosophy being reflected through it, at least that is what I think.

In the German literature course with Dr. Adolf, we are reading stories written by monks in the early Middle Ages. Much of it is surprisingly timely and interesting. They often deal with the same problems modern authors struggle with, but their clarity, simplicity and sincerity are much more appealing to me than the neurotic, intricate Freudian nonsense of many of the modern authors we studied last semester. The monks and later "singing knights" seemed to be able to get outside and away from themselves in a way that modern people seem to find impossible. I'm going to do a research paper on the literature of the period immediately preceding the year 1000, when all the Christian world believed the end of the earth and judgment Day would come. They were so convinced of this that building and worldly interests ceased, and asceticism and self renunciation became the order of the day. A very interesting page of history.

Well I guess it's time to go to bed now. Tomorrow at 8:00 AM I'm going to the Student Union record listening booths to listen to Wagner's Lohengrin for several hours -- not a very bright way to start a day, but it happens that is the best time to get the records and listen uninterrupted, so it has to be.

*So long for now,
Glenn*

I had worked my way into the inner circle of both the Department of German and Comparative Literature, and the Slavic Languages Department, so my entrance into graduate study at Penn State was confident and self-assured. With my halo firmly in place, my deficiencies were easy to camouflage, and most key

faculty members believed I could do no wrong. Reproducing the sounds and rhythm of a language came naturally, but keeping track of conjugations and declensions was about as impossible as Morse code had been. Broadening my foreign language vocabulary beyond the most commonly repeated basic few hundred words was equally difficult, but my old high school ploy of making jokes based on the kinds of mistakes I was liable to make anyway was a great asset. To the amusement of the professors and Eva, I took special pleasure in utilizing the capacity of the German language to build monstrous compound words by constructing such unwieldy Germanic behemoths as *Lebensversicherungsgesellschaftsparkplatz*. And in Russian, which uses many English cognates, I would quite freely make up entertaining "cognates" of my own. Language study in college, however, soon shifts its focus from oral fluency to literature and culture, subjects much more compatible with my abilities.

Somewhere in the last few semesters of my undergraduate work it had dawned on me that maybe-- just maybe--the scholars and critics who produced deep, erudite, interpretations of a piece of literature, really understood the work no better than I did. They just took a clue from a few ambiguous words, related them to some assumed theme of history, then built a case of one flimsy presumption upon another. I concluded that literary criticism was just as much a creative art, as the novels, plays, and poems, which were the subjects of its analysis. The study of literature, therefore, should not involve endless hours of trying to read literary works; only creatively weaving together a few words, concepts, and biographical facts into fascinating conjecture: This I could do very well. If passing graduate courses had depended on extensive reading, or developing a high level of active fluency, I never would have succeeded, but it did not.

Dear old Doctor Adolf: she was an old-fashioned Viennese scholar who knew everything about every scholarly topic that matters. A Jewish refugee from Hitler's annexation of Austria, she was a kind, sensitive person, and I could always talk my way (in English) into her good graces. Between classes, we would speculate on such topics as mythology in Wagner's operas or the politics of Middle Age Europe. My ideas, much to my own amazement, seemed to be intriguing for Doctor Adolph, and her respect for me rubbed off on most of her colleagues. I accepted as gospel the contention of another of my other favorite professors, Doctor Brown, who claimed that being right, was "merely a habit one develops, sort of like driving a car or tying one's shoes." Nevertheless, unconsciously, I was developing a somewhat different philosophy: intelligence is not something you always have to demonstrate; *you can fake it*, but it takes intelligence to pull it off. Most of the time my strategies worked well, but sometimes I needed a little help from Above.

There was a newcomer among the department faculty, a native German

whom I could not seem to impress. She knew my grasp of the spoken language was weak, and she had no appreciation for students' humor or creativity. She conducted her classes in German, and she would repeatedly aim mercilessly probing questions at me. Frequently unable to follow what she was saying, I was often trapped into responding weakly, "I don't know." I do not think this professor's jibes were entirely personal though; she had a general disdain for all native American students taking advanced degrees in German, as well as for the several faculty members who were not native speakers. She reveled in every opportunity to rub an American's nose in the tiniest nuance of language or cultural error.

When at the end of two years of rigorous graduate study, the time came for my final oral examination before all senior members of the departmental faculty; the new professor was determined to embarrass me, and her colleagues who had given me good grades. In the room lined with the chairman's hundreds of books on the Faust legend, I sat at the end of a conference table that had never before seemed so long. I had poured over the subject matter of all the graduate courses I had taken. Most importantly, I had carefully considered the pet ideas of each faculty member, in anticipation of the direction each one's questions would take. One by one they began their interrogation. The questions were difficult, but they were presented cordially, with a smile, anticipating a wise, knowledgeable response.

The new professor was one of the last to examine me. She looked me in the eye, with her lips pursed in contempt, as she withdrew a sheet of paper from the pile in front of her and slid it across the polished oak table to me. On the page was a long, somewhat irregular poem, which I was to identify in terms of who might have written it, and what was its literary significance. She believed, I am sure, she had chosen an obscure poem she could assume, with great confidence, I would know little about. I have had a few problems in my life, I have also had more than my share of breaks: Junior High Core class gave me a respite after the trauma of fifth and sixth grades; the kind veterinarian had helped me develop a career goal to cling to; my "research" paper (which my brother's girlfriend typed) gave me the passing grade I needed to graduate from high school; and getting the job with Major Ochoa had saved me from a military court martial. Each of these circumstances had fallen more or less unsolicited into my life, offering a way out of what seemed like inescapable disaster. Now, in the departmental conference room, with all eyes upon me, I glanced down at the paper before me to find that out of thousands of literary examples she might have selected for her trap, my antagonist had chosen one of the relatively few poems about which I had a great deal of information to be displayed. It seems that in her disgust for me and my work, she had not even skimmed through my Master's thesis, so she had no idea that in it I had discussed in great detail both that particular poem and its author. Smiles of satisfaction ricocheted around the room as I expounded with impressive detail on the professor's question. After the

examination, the chairman of the department told me privately that I had done so well he would have accepted my performance as a Ph.D. comprehensive examination.

I would have liked to remain at Penn State forever, basking in the warmth of success, but financial reality prodded me into acknowledging the need to find a full-time college teaching position for a while, before I could even consider pursuing a Ph.D.

In 1963, when I received my MA in German and Comparative Literature, there was considerable interest in the language in which I had minored in my Bachelor's program, and it was the presence of Russian in my academic record that made me an attractive candidate for language teaching openings on several small, but prestigious campuses. Even though I had completed only six courses in Russian, I had enjoyed it, and I had done rather well. Somehow, everyday spoken Russian had always seemed easier than German, but I did not know why.

After a spring of employment interviews, and a few summer weeks of packing, we said Aufwiedersehen to the state of Pennsylvania and drove a rental truck and our tired old 1949 Buick to Albion College in Michigan. We arrived just in time to get settled before classes began. Clifford was still a pre-schooler; for him, moving was nothing but a happy adventure.

In German culture, wives are often known by their husband's position. For instance, Reverend Schmidt's wife is known as Frau Pastor Schmidt, or sometimes just Frau Pastor. Eva was especially delighted to exchange the role of a struggling student's wife for that of Frau Professor. Of course, initially, my official title was not Professor, but Instructor of German and Russian. Three years were to pass before I would receive a letter from the Dean informing me that I had been promoted to the rank of Assistant Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages. It was good I was not promoted any sooner, because I distinctly remember some embarrassing early confrontations with the spelling of the words *foreign* and *professor*.

We found an excellent buy on a small, one-year-old house in a working class neighborhood. We had few possessions, but we were happy and optimistic. A yearly salary of \$6,500 seemed more than adequate for a young family in 1963. Across the fence, behind us, lived Mexican-American Gilberto "Benny" Benevides and his German wife, Gisela; we quickly became friends for life. Down the street was a Jewish couple, Hank and Evelyn Hirsch, with a boy Cliff's age, and we became friends for life with them, too. A few blocks away lived Lydia and Victor, Russian immigrants, who had spent time in Germany and South America.

Now and then we all got together and conversations in Spanish, German, Russian, and English would melt into a joyful bedlam that no one participant completely comprehended. There were some holiday seasons where we would start with what we called German Christmas (St. Nikolas Day) on the 6th of December; then we joined in wishing Hank and Evelyn's family happy Hanukkah; then we would celebrate American Christmas, and finally we would close out the season with Russian Orthodox Christmas on January 6. Certainly, our off-campus social life in Albion was as educational as it was entertaining.

My first days of teaching were terrifying. I froze in front of the class. My neck muscles would not raise my head to look squarely at the students, most of whom were freshmen and probably almost as scared as I was. I had an awful feeling that my ignorance would be exposed, that my students would know more than I did (and in some advanced classes I taught later, that would be true). However, I had enough political sense to realize the opinions of the students carried less weight than those of the department chairman, the dean, the college President, and to a lesser extent, my colleagues, so I concentrated on cultivating their good will and my initial panic soon faded away.

Teaching introductory level language classes turned out to be great fun, and I think I did it very well. Years after being in my classes, young people would write or drop by to tell me how enjoyable and profitable the classes had been. Of the four of us in the German section, only two had doctorates; the rest of us would soon begin our programs about forty miles north of Albion at Michigan State University in East Lansing. The Albion Modern Language Department Chairman, a Professor of Spanish, divvied up teaching assignments according to our personal strengths and preferences, and we all got along fine.

In Russian, I was entirely on my own. It was like total immersion in kitchen countertops and the garage roof project all over again. No one on the faculty knew any Russian. With its strange sounds and alphabet, Russian appears so complicated that no one questioned my motives when I plastered the walls of my classroom with two-by-three foot grammar charts. Perhaps the local native Russians (there were quite a few in the town) understood that those gigantic "crib sheets" were really for me, but those wonderful people were so delighted that their language was being taught that they went out of their way to encourage me. Almost every week, I went to Konrad Felisky's barbershop where we babbled away in his native language while he pretended to find some hair on my head to cut. Some of the older, retired Russian people helped me establish a Russian club and a Russian language film series. In my classes, I adopted the "direct method:" from the first word of the first day of class, only Russian was spoken. To the delight of both the Dean and the college President, several newspapers ran stories about my remarkable Russian classes. As I scouted out nearby universities where I could work toward a Ph.D., I seriously considered switching

into Russian, but I really did not know much about the language or its literature, beyond what one needs to teach the introductory level classes. Memories of what graduate study really entails steered me to the more prudent choice of German. Just how ambiguous my feelings were is reflected in some notations from my "piecemeal" prayer diary during my second semester of teaching, and in a letter I wrote to the Dean about nine months later.

April 11, 1964

An almost inexplicable tension -- an incapacitating self consciousness -- has come over me. As always, relief comes through prayer and contemplation of reality beyond myself. Lord, I believe; help me in my unbelief!

April 12, 1964

It seems the root of the problem is simply this: I am not sufficiently prepared to teach even German very well, and therefore I have no business devoting most of my time preparing lessons in Russian for which I really have no teaching preparation at all. I should drop the Russian and turn to German with all the vigor I can muster.

* * * *

February 9, 1965

*Robert Lisensky, Ph.D.
Academic Dean
Albion College*

Dear Dean Lisensky:

Dr. Keller has informed me that you would like to have a statement concerning Doctoral work from each of us who joined the staff in 1963. Here is an outline of what I have done and what I plan to do in that regard.

At Michigan State University, where I am enrolled as a Ph.D. candidate in German, I am required to take twenty seven credit hours of course work. I have earned nine credits, and this spring I intend to take three more hours of work. Six of the required twenty seven credits must be in a cognate field. I am arranging to meet this part of the requirement by taking at least six credit hours of graduate work in Russian this summer at either the University of Indiana Slavic Workshop or at the Institute of Critical Languages in Putney, Vermont. Taking one course per quarter, and two courses per summer session, I should be through with the course work by

the end of the summer of 1966. I would then be able to get the comprehensive examination out of the way during the fall quarter of 1966. Allowing one year to finish the dissertation, I will probably be ready to graduate in the fall of 1967. If I maintain continuous registration at MSU during the academic years from now until all other requirements for the degree are met, I will have fulfilled the Ph.D. residence requirement without taking any time off from Albion College.

I still owe a considerable amount of money on my graduate studies at Penn State, and recently I had to borrow still more money in order to have dependable transportation for my trips from Albion to East Lansing. Therefore, unless I am able to find additional funds to help meet the cost of carrying on my studies, the Ph.D. program may have to be extended over a longer period than I have indicated above. The chances are good that I will receive a fellowship for the Russian work this summer, but there is virtually no chance of a fellowship for the periods when I will be engaged in part-time study at MSU.

One other factor which may slow down or even alter my Doctoral program is my very deep interest in the Russian language. I am utilizing every means at my disposal to prepare for a possible change in major. If enough time and money become available, I will shift to Russian.

I hope these thoughts on my future seem realistic and are acceptable to the Albion administration. I would be delighted to hear any comments or suggestions you might have. Thank you.

Glenn S. Leavitt

At first, my interest in pursuing a Ph.D. was based on the prestige and rank I wanted for myself and Eva. The fact that a doctorate would be absolutely essential for me to remain in college teaching did not sink in until I perceived how seriously my campus colleagues were taking their Ph.D. programs. A seven year deadline for obtaining the degree seemed quite generous as I entered my doctoral program in the spring of 1964, but by 1967, I was beginning to believe that earning a Ph.D. in East Lansing, while teaching full time at Albion, might more reasonably require a decade. Even with the advantage of commuting to Michigan State with a colleague who had read and loved to talk about the works we were studying, the fact that I was not actually reading much soon caught up with me.

* * * *

American campuses were undergoing very fundamental changes during my tenure at Albion College; in the background were extraordinary historical events. In my first semester as a college instructor, President Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald. Then with the mid to late sixties came Vietnam, drugs, hippies, the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the Detroit riots. In 1963, professors were still considered captains of their classroom ships, protected from unwarranted intrusion into what was said or how things were taught by the principle of academic freedom. The American Association of University Professors was still a professional organization, which championed academic integrity and scholarship. College faculty meetings were mostly civil exchanges of ideas between people of good will. But by the end of the decade, the AAUP seemed to have deteriorated into a union concerned with pay raises and working conditions, and faculty meetings were punctuated with utterly unscholarly, illiberal outbursts, and harangues from a faction which, while identifying itself as liberal, appeared to believe theirs were the only views worthy of being heard. I had learned at Penn State that to be liberal meant openness to the ideas of others and unwillingness to be regimented into a lockstep, thought controlled, pack. Sitting through faculty meetings in the late 1960's gave intellectual and political substance to the vague resentment I had always felt toward social elitists. I became convinced that the traditional political liberal vrs. conservative dichotomy was inadequate and should be replaced by differentiation based on *responsible rationality versus mindless partisanship*.

* * * *

Teaching went fairly well for me during the first two years or so, but eventually I had to take my turn teaching advanced German conversation and the introduction to German Literature. As a college student at Penn State, learning language had been difficult, but passing classes in literature had been easy. As a college instructor, the situation reversed. Guiding college freshmen and sophomores through the fundamental structure of a language, one page of an open textbook at a time, was seldom much of a challenge. But standing in front of juniors and seniors, in a class on literature or advanced conversation, and being expected to pull comprehensive answers to varied questions instantly out of my head, demanded of me what appeared to be impossible. To a certain extent, I could use my old faking skills to hide my deficiencies from almost everyone except my two native German colleagues and several perceptive students; they were fully aware I was foundering. Even though my German horizon seemed darkened by portents of professional shipwreck, a safe haven remained. The college did not offer any advanced Russian classes, so I continued to enjoy deeply satisfying admiration and praise there.

One traditional aspect of being a professor was particularly easy for me: absentmindedness. Once, about three quarters through a semester, I mislaid my

grade book. I tried my best to reconstruct the information it had contained, but to be on the safe side, I gave very generous grades that term. One beautiful May morning I received a call at home from one of my Russian students. It seems the five students in my small second year class were waiting in the assigned room for the final examination, but I had forgotten all about it. Just as it had been all my life, forgetfulness about other people's names, jobs, and interests stood in the way of my developing many strong friendships. Even after the school put together a faculty roster with photographs, I would offend sensitive people with my unpredictable ignorance.

Of course, I was supposed to be studying many German and English texts as part of my Ph.D. program at Michigan State. As I had done at Penn State, I was merciless on myself working out ways to get through classes with a bare minimum of laborious, unrewarding reading. Certainly, I could get more out of discussion and looking at things than I could get from pages of print, so I decided to do my dissertation research in Germany, systematically touring certain places of literary importance and interviewing German intellectuals, rather than just perusing books.

Eva was delighted at the prospect of taking seven-year-old Clifford to meet his German relatives in the summer of 1966. Flying would have been too expensive, so we booked tourist class passage on the German ocean liner, Hanseatic. After ten days at sea, we landed at Cuxhaven not far from the port where I had debarked from a troopship over ten years earlier. In Mannheim, we lived for over two months with Eva's Aunt Mine while I visited places and people important for the topic I hoped to write about in my Ph.D. dissertation.

One warm August afternoon, while Eva chatted with her folks, Cliff and I took the inter-city trolley down to Heidelberg. We ambled up the narrow street to the university district, then up the steep hill to the castle where we paused for a lunch of sausage and orange soda. Afterwards, we descended to the ancient Roman Bridge. As we crossed the Neckar River and started up the Philosopher's Way, my mind wandered back to the time ten years earlier when I had walked that path and daydreamed about success as a student. I tried to explain to Cliff why our day in Heidelberg was so special to me, but I think he was too young to understand.

* * * *

Professors are given many sample texts by publishers hoping they will be adopted for classroom use. Some of the books are really quite handsome volumes. I loved to thumb through them, admiring the pictures and time charts they often contained. Of course, I still had most of the literary texts from Penn

State, as well as some beautifully illustrated old philosophical and literary volumes I had inherited from my grandfather Leavitt's personal library. In my office at home, I had an impressive floor to ceiling display of books more or less alphabetically arranged. I loved to hold them, to smell them, and to rearrange them, but I never read them. Well, almost never. Actually sometime in the mid-sixties, I was moved to try to read an English translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* from cover to cover, and I think I made it. However, all I have retained from that exercise is the name of one character, Raskalnikov*; I recall nothing of the plot. When I left Albion College in 1970, I sold, gave away, or threw away well over 2,000 books.

Ph.D. programs require the writing of a lengthy dissertation. For my Master's thesis at Penn State, I had been able to choose a rather pseudo-philosophical topic which called more for creative writing than for reading. But in spite of my diversionary tactics, (such as the summer trip to do research in Germany), the professors at Michigan State kept steering me toward subjects that would demand of me my old nemesis, extensive reading for content. I had finished all the required course work for the Ph.D.; would I now have to settle for the degree known sardonically in academic circles as an ABD, All But Dissertation?

By late 1968, I felt up against a wall. The college required that I complete the doctorate by 1970 to gain tenured status. MSU would require a dissertation that demanded a great deal of reading with retention. The chairman of the Albion Language Department was assigning me more and more advanced German conversation and literature classes. My eyes were bothering me terribly. I was still plagued by severe headaches, and recently I had developed an ulcer and bleeding colitis. I can remember so clearly one afternoon at home alone, pacing back and forth, and up and down the stairs, repeating aloud, "There's no way out! There's no way out!" Changing glasses prescriptions and repositioning lighting only seemed to make things worse. Our family doctor suggested bypassing my regular ophthalmologist and going to the Eye Clinic at University Hospital in Ann Arbor. .

*Apologies to Russian literature fans. When my editor pointed out this example of my muddled memory, I told him to let it stand.

Chapter Six

EYES

With the exception of Dr. Longacre years ago in Wayne, the eye doctors I had seen in the past all seemed to be detached and abrupt. At the Eye Clinic at University Hospital, however, the senior practitioner, Dr. John Henderson, was a personable, interested investigator. Along with his associates, he did not consider just my ability to see letters on a chart 20 feet away; he tested my capacity for tracking, scanning, and fixation as well as how long I could tolerate various visual tasks, and what kinds of lighting were most helpful. As the testing progressed, it became clear that the central problem was frequent double vision caused by a major, but highly variable, eye muscle imbalance, which interfered with my ability to fixate. Dr. Henderson brought in a group of his students to gaze into my eyes and watch one of them wander around slightly off target as I tried to look at a small object closer than about ten feet. I went to the clinic several times. Graduate students of Orthoptics encouraged me to attempt strengthening my muscles with prism exercises, and a young eye surgeon wanted to perform what he considered a very simple operation on the offending muscles. Soon it became clear that the prism exercises were useless torture, and Dr. Henderson intervened with the surgeon, pointing out that the situation was so variable that an operation had a very good chance of only making things even worse. In a letter to my optometrist in Kalamazoo a year later, Dr. Henderson described his findings:

Dear Doctor _____

Re: Glenn Leavitt

Mr. Glenn Leavitt has asked that I send you a summary of his ocular problem.

We have seen him at the University Hospital on a number of occasions because of a basic convergence insufficiency which has been extremely variable. This has been helped somewhat by the use of base-in prisms and eyeglasses for reading.

On his most recent visit here we found that additional prism for near was of no greater help. He felt that he was doing well in his basic reading work because of the use of braille and other visual aids. However, on examination with correction, his visual acuity was 20/25 in each eye for distance and he was still able to read Jaeger O for near. Extraocular movement showed a constant exotropia, however, with the lag of each medial rectus on horizontal gaze and a remote convergence near point with no successful convergence effort. His prism and cover measurements with his previous glasses showed 6 diopters of exophoria for distance and 20 diopters of exotropia, to intermittent, for near; with the newer

prescription for reading, including a 6 diopter base-in prism in each eye, he was orthophoric for distance and showed 10 diopters of exophoria for near. The decision which is still not reached is whether or not this extremely variable situation could be safely treated by surgical resection of the medial rectus muscles. This has been deferred because the outcome is difficult to predict.

*Sincerely yours,
John W. Henderson, MD.*

Dr. Henderson did have a very innovative suggestion, however: utilization of non-visual reading techniques employed by people who are blind. Based on a letter he wrote describing my eye condition, I was deemed eligible to receive recorded books for the blind through the Library of Congress Talking Book Program. In addition, I was able to get texts needed for my Ph.D. program read on tape by the skilled and knowledgeable volunteer readers at Recordings For The Blind in New Jersey. The doctor's letter also opened up the possibility for me to take free tape-recorded correspondence courses from the Hadley School For The Blind in Winnetka, Illinois, so I enrolled in two: Introduction to Rehabilitation, and Braille. At about that time, I was hospitalized for a while with what was diagnosed as a pulmonary embolism (which later turned out to be spasms of the esophagus), so I used the weeks I had to spend immobilized to concentrate fully on Grade 1, uncontracted, braille. When I returned to MSU classes, I began taking notes in awkward, alphabetic raised dot symbols. Using braille and taped books brought a certain celebrity status; however, in less than a year it became abundantly evident that mastering the braille code was going to be as onerous as attempting to master Morse Code had been, and recorded texts helped me get more sleep than information.

I had not shared with my parents much about the difficulties I had been having, but when in a telephone conversation, I discussed the results of the Eye Clinic examination with my mother, she commented something like, "Well, of course. When Dr. Longacre first checked your eyes, he said you should never go into anything that required a lot of close work."

* * * *

The years 1969 and 1970 were extremely tense and unpleasant for Eva and me. Anticipating having to leave Albion within a few semesters, we sold our home and went into a little rental unit. Eva was so worried about whether I would be able to continue to support us, that when an opportunity opened up for her to enter a nursing aid training program at the Albion Hospital, I encouraged her to

apply. For the first time in my life, I was beginning to face squarely the fact that I had some sort of impairment that stood in the way of making use of print materials as most other people seemed to be able to do. Even though I told other people that Dr. Henderson's diagnosis fully explained what I was experiencing, somehow, deep inside, I was not convinced. Echoes of high school rang in my brain: Maybe I was a self-indulged malingerer? Maybe I was not a late bloomer, but a mildly retarded non-bloomer who had somehow gained college degrees and an assistant professorship by a series of flukes? I started groping for ideas about how to make a living without reading.

It occurred to me that I could probably use the direct language instruction method I had been so effectively employing in my Russian classes, to teach English in a foreign country. Pursuing the English teaching idea led me to a meeting in a nearby church where a missionary from Kenya was discussing his work among Africans. That evening, the missionary did not tell much about Africa, instead he explained the spiritual emptiness of all people, even very religious people, who leave God out of their lives. I knew he was right, and I knew I felt at a crisis point and spiritually empty, so I made a public profession of faith. When I went home and told Eva, she thought all the desperate events had finally driven me over the edge, but she agreed to come with me to the final meeting the next night, and by the end of that evening, Eva, Cliff, and I were united in faith that no matter what happened, a loving God was in control.

Trying to use the services and techniques employed by blind people opened an unexpected door in the trap I seemed to be in. Somebody, (I wish I could recall who) told me that Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo had a program that taught study techniques for visually impaired college students. So in the spring of 1970, Eva and I drove over to Kalamazoo. My purpose in visiting WMU was to get some insights on how to deal more effectively with my problem, but the Blind Rehabilitation Chairperson had a different understanding of why I was visiting the campus. She told me a lot about the Masters program in Rehabilitation of the Adult Blind, and she arranged for me to tour the newly opened Michigan Rehabilitation Center for the Blind about a mile away from the campus. I left Kalamazoo that afternoon with a better understanding of the services available to people who are blind, but Eva and I agreed there did not seem to be anything that could be applied to my situation.

About two months later, in mid-summer, I received a letter from the professor at WMU inviting me to apply for entrance into the MA program in Blind Rehabilitation that fall. One federal stipend slot was still open, and she assured me there would be no problem getting it, as long as my application was received within a few days. It did not take long to decide; this was the way out I had been looking for. Whether it was out of sheer desperation or a product of newfound religious faith I will never be sure, but I submitted my resignation to Albion

College on the same day I mailed my application for admission to the Western Michigan University Graduate College.

Just as the Chairperson had assured me, acceptance by the graduate school and award of the stipend came almost immediately, and we started packing. For Eva, however, this was a very difficult time. She had dreamed of being the wife of a full professor with a Ph.D., of being Frau Doktor. Instead, she was on her way back to being a student's wife with a husband who was considered handicapped. I think it is cultural, but Eva has always had a hard time dealing with the idea of a husband even temporarily incapacitated by a cold. Sickness and disability are for women or old folks.

In spite of the stipend, Eva had to seek full time employment in Kalamazoo just at a time when eleven-year-old Cliff needed the stability that only a loving mother at home can bring. Building on her training in Albion, Eva was able to get into a paid position as a trainee surgical technician, which eventually developed into an exciting, rewarding lifetime career for her, in some ways compensating for the loss of security and prestige our move had brought. Although Cliff never talks about it, I am sure the family disruption, just as he was entering puberty, was deeply upsetting for him, especially because he now had to spend so much time alone.

* * * *

The religious awakening in our lives was a mixed blessing for me. Some of life's circumstances could now be interpreted as part of a divine plan, which was comforting, but why did I have to use such intense concentration to remember what I had been told, to handwrite legibly, or even to read and comprehend the instructions that came with some new gadget? It seemed that no one else I knew was forced to expend the painful degree of attentiveness I had to expend just to live. We attended churches where personal Bible study and scripture memorization were common, but in the words of the Apostle Paul, those exercises "...profited me little." I wanted to believe I was reasonably intelligent, but something was missing. In some mysterious way there was an intellectual hole in my head that not even God seemed able to fill.

In a letter to a friend back in Albion I reviewed my understanding of all that had happened to us like this:

Kalamazoo, Mich.

May 18, 1971

Dear Anton,

Sorry I didn't get this letter written sooner, but since we moved from Albion to Kalamazoo, it's taken a while to get things back in order. It was good to see you and your wife, Lena again when we visited Albion last month. We are thrilled to hear that the Russian Orthodox Church is still carrying on so well. You and Lena deserve a lot of credit for hours of hard work you put into preservation of that beautiful building, and the continuation of services in modern Russian, so more of the people can understand. Anton, you have a quality of fiery determination to do what's right, which is badly needed in this sick old world today. Over our coffee with Hank at the restaurant in Albion, you implied that if you could ever be convinced about God, you would preach circles around Billy Graham. Anton, I believe you would.

When I tell you how God chose to use you and the Orthodox church in our lives, maybe you'll see why I am so certain that God has his eye on you for great service, if you'll let him. Back in September of 1969, circumstances had left Eva and me feeling defeated and resentful. After completing all the course work, I had to give up my Ph.D. program at Michigan State University because of my eyes. Albion College would let me stay on the faculty for only one more year without a doctorate. The college teaching market was glutted with Ph.D.'s; so at age thirty five, I would have to turn my back on ten years of specialized study and seven years of teaching experience. I would have to find some new kind of work I could do with my visual limitation. Eva could not understand the Albion College tenure policy, and she was deeply disappointed that I would never be Doctor Leavitt. She was especially hurt when we had to sell our beautiful home, so we would be free to move quickly if an opportunity came along. Even our son Clifford was picking up the tensions he felt at home.

Our first few years in Albion had been marred by a growing sense of spiritual poverty. We had desperately tried to find God in the church associated with the college, but all we seemed to run into were hypocritical people and sociology lessons from the pulpit. Finally, we resigned our membership, concluding that there was simply no help or comfort in organized religion. But after a few months, we began to think it was not right to raise our son Clifford in a churchless home. We decided on a sort of last ditch, clinging to a straw, effort to explore other denominations: we would choose some church we hadn't yet been in, and attend regularly for at least three months. Now, Anton, I don't know how you feel about miracles, but listen to this. The very next day Lydia Karpov called to

invite us over, because it had been almost a year since our families had gotten together. That evening as we all babbled together in Russian, German and English, she couldn't stop talking about the church. She invited us to come with them next Sunday. We did, and we found the whole experience very uplifting. We were struck by your determined leadership among the members. We loved the reverence of the liturgy, the pot lucks after Mass, the warm fellowship with older folks like Pete and Marfa; but it was the presence of faithful younger families, like yours that kept us coming back. Being welcomed into a choir that sang in Russian made me feel great. Eva quickly dove into the group that prepared the pot lucks, even though it was hard for her to completely understand some of the older ladies. We quickly learned to love your humble Father Paternost. We felt God working among the people of that church, as well as in our family life.

That fall, we started reading our Bible together. By Christmas, a spark of God awareness had been struck in our hearts. I found myself talking and questioning about God with other people, something I had always felt very uneasy doing before. I found I was getting an emotional charge out of church, but real spiritual ammunition was coming from the Bible. Toward spring the little house we were renting frequently echoed with pretty lively discussions over piety versus the Bible, which sometimes turned to arguments. Of course, behind a lot of our tension, was the fact that I could not be tenured at Albion, and there seemed to be nothing I could do about it. Then came (in my view, anyway) a second miracle. After church one Sunday, we decided to take a roundabout way home, which happened to take us by Eaton Street Baptist where a sign had been set up announcing that for the next three evenings a missionary from Kenya would be telling of his work among the people of that country. It had occurred to me that I might be able to use my instructional skills teaching English overseas, so I said to myself, "Here's a chance to learn about life in a country which, as far as I know, is reasonably stable and hospitable to Americans. It couldn't hurt to go to one of the meetings."

That evening, the missionary, Ed Weaver, showed some interesting slides, and then he spoke for about thirty minutes. He impressed me right away as a warm, happy, very confident person who knew what he was doing and why he was doing it, but he didn't devote enough of his presentation to the kinds of things I wanted to know about Kenya. So afterwards I cornered him and bombarded the poor man with a barrage of questions. He was kind with his answers, but he kept steering the subject away from Kenya and onto me. I became a little irritated with him, but he persisted. Then came the greatest miracle of all! Whenever anyone had talked to me about salvation before, I had always rejected it as a lot of

fanatical bunk. This time, however, it was different. Everything the missionary said was straight from the Bible, and it all made sense. I didn't have to search for God, as I had been doing; God had been knocking at my door all the time. I didn't have to feel too sinful or unworthy of God's love; He loves every person on earth, no matter what he has done or thought. The idea of being "born again" then became clear: If God loves me now, and forgives all my sins now, then right now, as I accept Him as my savior, I am reborn into a new, clean, beautiful person in His sight. The bulldozer power of His love and joy flowed into my heart that night. Ed Weaver quickly pointed out that salvation has nothing to do with church denominations or membership, nothing to do with baptism or giving money, nor does it concern giving up smoking or drinking, it is a free gift of God to anyone who will confess that he is a sinner who can not save himself, and accept His son Jesus as savior and Lord.

The next night, Cliff came with me, and at the meeting we shared the deepest joy any father and son can share, as together we publicly confessed our recognition of God's love in our lives. On the third evening, Eva came and accepted Christ as her savior, too. We were a new family.

Miracle upon miracle of His love and blessing has flowed into our lives since those nights in May of 1970. There was no magical end to all our tensions and uncertainties, but we had a solid Rock to stand on as we hashed things out, and finally ended up here in Kalamazoo, with the prospect of my soon entering into a new career in Blind Rehabilitation, while Eva gets to do the kind of medical work she had always dreamed of doing.

So this is our story; God had you and your family play an important part in it. Just as God used you in our lives, now we pray that with this letter He will use us in yours.

We'd be very happy to hear from you, or better yet, to have you come over to Kalamazoo for a visit. We hope your plans for training are working out, and that all is well with Lena and the boys.

*Sincerely,
Glenn*

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After the rigors of graduate study in German at Penn State and Michigan State, the program in Rehabilitation of the Adult Blind at Western Michigan University seemed almost ridiculously easy. It was a short, one-year program, with no substantial research requirement. Not even attempting any visual reading

meant that for me little more than attendance was required for passing.

One of the first things we learned was that blindness is not the total absence of sight. Most blind people can see something. A person is legally blind if he can not see at twenty feet something that a person with normal vision could see if it was two hundred feet away; or if the person's field of vision is restricted from the usual one hundred and eighty degrees to less than twenty degrees, even if the visual acuity within the narrowed field is normal. A second, and almost more important fact I learned about blindness was that people with partial vision were often worse off than people who had never seen at all, especially those who must learn to adjust to years of exasperatingly slow loss of visual field or acuity in adulthood, due to such conditions as retinitis pigmentosa, or the bizarre fluctuations experienced by some people with diabetic retinopathy. Blindness is a complex subject; the degrees and types of sight loss are innumerable, and the ways visually impaired people deal with their problems and each other are as varied and individual as humanity itself. In "the country of the blind" all the common stereotypes soon crumble.

Wearing the polarized, clip-on dark glasses the doctor at University Hospital had suggested to shield my eyes from the sun, and the glare of fluorescent lights; getting tape-recorded versions of the assigned texts, and struggling to take braille notes in class with a pocket slate and stylus, I was the only "blind" student on campus with a corrected visual acuity just slightly below normal, and with a valid driver's license. I carefully explained to everyone who asked, exactly what my diagnosis was and why I was using some non-visual techniques. My standard wisecrack about my visual fixation deficiency was, "I can see all right, I just don't look so good."

My position among the other students in the department's programs was unique, and uniquely educational. I was accepted as an equal, indeed, at age 34, the old man, among the sighted students; but most important for the rest of my career in Blind Rehabilitation, I was considered part of the in-group among my colleagues who were blind.

Throughout much of my life I had known the pain of not being able to do or be what was expected of me. I had been an outsider who had always been more at home among people who were experiencing being left out, like racial minorities, the poor, and immigrants. After only a few weeks on the campus in Kalamazoo, what some of us perceived as a condescending attitude among some of the Blind Rehabilitation program faculty toward the blind students (and me) had forged an angry solidarity between us that lasted for years after we had graduated from WMU. We were probably hypersensitive, but for a few of us the department's approach to students seemed to rank only the fully sighted students as responsible adults, as if the university were trying to give credence to the

demeaning old proverb I had heard on my little radio in 1941: "In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."

Contemplating attitudes toward blindness, made me think back on the racially explosive decade of the 60's we had just lived through. At that time, I had found it hard to understand all the accusations of insidious racism among white people. Now, as a "visually impaired" student in the Blind Rehabilitation program, I gained a new perspective on the kind of pernicious bigotry Martin Luther King, Jr. had opposed. I became more understanding of how hard it is for each of us to recognize the innate injustice within us. Of course, we each carry a certain load of prejudicial baggage about minority groups whose plight we have not personally experienced, and it is certainly much easier to sense attitude flaws in others than to face them squarely within ourselves, but it would take a few more years for that lesson to sink in.

The field of Blind Rehabilitation genuinely fascinated me. It excited my imagination and creativity in a new way. Many of the things we were studying were not just theoretical: they were real-world problems for me, and I felt challenged, as never before, to hammer out real-world solutions for them. Half way through the MA program at WMU, I had a paper accepted for publication by a major professional journal, "The New Outlook For The Blind". Ostensibly the paper described study techniques and devices which might be helpful for blind people, but actually it was telling about the devices and techniques that were making college study easier for me.

[October 1971]

TIME, MONEY, AND STUDENTS WITH VISUAL LIMITATIONS
by Glenn S. Leavitt (who is currently in a Master's Degree program
at Western Michigan University)

Time is money, and time costs money. Many students with visual limitations find that their methods of study take up too much time and that their haphazard attempts to improve efficiency are often ineffective. Experience, however, has shown that an investment in certain high quality devices and their methodical use can result in better learning and the saving of hours of study time every day. When a sighted college student chooses to spend \$500 on a skiing outfit, or even \$1,500 on a car, few people feel he is being extravagant. A visually impaired student, who may never buy a car or a skiing outfit, should therefore, not hesitate to arrange for the use of equipment worth \$500 to \$1,500. Such an investment

will not only increase his learning efficiency, but it will afford him more time for social life and other recreational activities that are essential for balanced, healthy development.

The equipment and methods discussed in the following pages have proved quite effective for a typically visually handicapped student who is a slow braille reader and a rather inaccurate typist. More highly skilled students may find some of the suggestions will not apply to them.

[Three pages follow with details about using technical devices and methods that have long since been made obsolete by computer based developments]

...Although all that has been said above may seem rather complicated and expensive, an application of these ideas should substantially simplify the task of learning effectively from college assignments. In applying these suggestions to a student's particular situation and to the evaluation of his need for new equipment, the following basic points made in this article should be considered: 1) Everything is read (listened to) at the fastest comprehensible speed; 2) A small, portable machine is useful for recording lectures and for reading during available bits of time throughout the day; 3) Ideas from what is read are condensed and recorded onto separate tapes for each major aspect of each subject (Low frequency beeps on the tapes are used to identify sections or dates on the tapes; 4) Notes, rather than the original works are used for review; 5) Face-to-face use of readers is kept to a minimum; 6) Braille reading is kept to a minimum; and 7) Paid or volunteer readers are used to do as much "mechanical" work as possible.

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Perhaps the most exciting facet of being alive is memory. Even though my ability to recall is apparently somewhat defective, I nevertheless find warm satisfaction in reminiscing, especially when combing through long past events brings to light the interdependency and interrelationship of happenings, which had seemed quite disparate and meaningless at the time of their occurrence. Memories, which had been jumbled like a box of jigsaw puzzle pieces can, upon reflection, almost miraculously fall together into a stunningly coherent whole. Why did I go to Kalamazoo in the desperate spring of 1969? Why had the chairperson of the Western program arranged for me to be given a tour of the Michigan Rehabilitation Center for the Blind by its Education Director? All I really wanted were ideas on how a person like me, with a peculiar visual anomaly,

could continue fulfilling responsibilities as a college professor and Ph.D. candidate. Instead, I soon found myself introduced to a new field of endeavor, a field in many ways quite congenial to my abilities. When I was shown around the Rehabilitation Center, I had been impressed by its cleanliness, its lack of institutional smell, its spaciousness, and the relaxed friendliness of both the staff and the blind adults who were there for training.

When I first toured the Michigan Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, I was a distraught academic whose future appeared bleak. But, when I reentered MRCB a little over a year later, on January 2, 1971, it was as a newly hired employee with a Masters degree in Rehabilitation of the Adult Blind. After a few short years teaching adaptive techniques to blind adults at the Center, I would become the Center's Education Director whose duties would include occasionally conducting tours of the building for young people who would then enter the Masters program at Western, only to come back to MRCB to start their own careers working with people who are blind.

This was the second time we made the transition from graduate study to the first rung of a career ladder. We wanted to be confident, but since the Albion experience, we knew the possibility of failure was real. As she got to know more people who were blind, Eva began to worry herself sick about what she would do if my eyesight would fail. Would she be able to support the three of us on her meager salary as Surgical Technician? Even when we had been eligible for government poverty programs during our years at Penn State, we had never applied for food stamps and the like, and we had accepted help from my parents only with great reluctance. Now, in spite of the shiny new Masters Degree on the wall, were we really only a eye blink away from welfare and charity?

* * * *

In the fall of 1972, not long after I had joined the staff at MRCB, our telephone rang in the middle of the night. We all get such calls; and as we get older, we get them more frequently. Someone we love has died. There will be a funeral to attend, relatives to be consoled, and then the reality of the loss will sink into grief as we try to get back to normal, only to find that "normal" will never be the same again. This call came from my brother in Pennsylvania: Dad had been rushed to the hospital with a ruptured aneurysm. There was really nothing they could have done to save him.

My father, James Preston "Pret" Hutchinson Leavitt, had been a jovial, overweight, Santa Klaus of a man, who reveled in good times and good friends. He loved to shop, and loved to give things away. He was generous to a fault. He taught me to stalk brook trout in tiny mountain streams, just as his dad had

showed him when he was a boy. As a teacher of fishing lore, dad was kind and patient. I have always treasured and nurtured those outdoor skills as one of the most beloved parts of his legacy.

A typical child of the Prohibition Era, dad could smoke and drink with the best. He married my mother, Amy Sheffield, in 1929, thus, both his career and his marriage began in the Great Depression. I am sure life for mom and dad in their first few years must have been tough, but I do not remember him talking much about that period. As a natural salesman and a clever packaging designer, he was unemployed for only a short time in the thirties. A large part of his work life was spent getting the Southern textile industry to switch from wooden crates to specially reinforced cardboard boxes he designed. Having dad away on business trips was part of our everyday life as I was growing up.

Dad's roots were in Maine, Freemasonry, and the liberal New England Universalist Church of his preacher father. But even though his religious views were known as liberal, dad was very illiberal about people who took religion seriously. He was strongly anti-Catholic. If ever he tried to mold my thinking, it was with firm words about how dangerous and devious "Papists" were. But dad was not an angry, ranting man. His thoughts were expressed with the calm reasonableness of someone who is convinced, but whose ideas never had been seriously challenged intellectually. As a boy, I usually enjoyed talking with dad, even though I did very little of the talking, and no serious questioning. Usually I just listened credulously, commenting with no more than an agreeable expression on my face. My doubts about the soundness of some of dad's views were at that time like shriveled seeds in my brain, which would come to fruition only after years of incubation.

My father had little good to say about foreigners, especially if they came from Catholic countries. I still remember how deeply offended he was by the fact that a very successful business acquaintance and neighbor named Sedlacek, scoffed at dad's suggestion that he should change his name. The almost paranoid view my dad had about foreigners had been fed by World War I and World War II propaganda: Germans were fiendishly clever automatons, and the Japanese were the epitome of sly deceit. When I had been home on leave shortly before departing for Army duty in Germany, he had insisted on buying me a signet ring engraved with my initials. He never said it directly, but somehow I knew perfectly well he wanted me to wear that ring in case I was killed and there was trouble identifying my body. That ring led to a strange, heart-rending strain in our relationship, which began in those unsettled months after Eva, and I arrived from Germany in 1957. The first time dad and I were alone together, he inquired as to the whereabouts of the signet ring. I told him how it had caught on a side rail when I jumped off an Army truck and just about skinned my finger as I fell to the ground. I showed him the thick, year-old scar tissue on my finger and

explained that I had lost track of the ring when Eva and I got married and moved into our little apartment. Dad's questioning became uncomfortably intense: Why had I not written home about the accident? Had Eva ever seen the ring? Did I recall how the initials were engraved on it? I replied with a joke about having a more important ring now, a ring I could wear without fear, because Eva did not require me to jump off high truck beds. Besides, it would probably turn up among our things eventually. Then dad meandered off into a disjointed monologue about how German Intelligence would abduct people in other countries and then assign an agent to assume that person's identity and just blend into the everyday life of their country until needed by the German Fatherland to spy or commit espionage. A few years later, when I became a Professor of German and Russian, dad could not hide his uneasiness. Apparently, that development only broadened the scope of his concern. The ambiguity of his suspicions was evidenced by his eventual warm acceptance of Eva, and the many good times we shared in his later years after he retired. I would guess the matter had been forgotten; but then, in one of the rambling, philosophical tape recorded letters we used to exchange, he would insert loosely veiled allusions to his nagging doubts. It is clear to me that my father was never totally convinced that his flesh and blood son, Glenn, ever returned from Germany.

Dad had misgivings about my becoming a Rehabilitation Teacher too. He believed I was going to be some kind of "do gooder" social worker, who would never amount to anything. But when we told him it appeared we would be settling in Kalamazoo, Dad took a deep interest in our house hunting, and said he wanted to help us with the down payment. We accepted his offer not only because having a roof we could call our own meant so much for Eva's sense of security, but also because we wanted dad and mom to be part of and to feel comfortable with what we were doing. Dad and mom had planned to come out to Michigan for a visit as soon as we were settled in the older home we had selected in the fall of 1972. Realizing how frail he was becoming, I longed for one more chance to sit and talk with dad, to hear about what was going on at the beach, to share some old fishing lies, to pour a little healing balm on the wounds my youth had inflicted on our family, to confirm his budding realization that the field I was entering was not social work, and most of all to convince him once and for all that his son really had come home from army duty in Europe. ...How quickly what we are sure we will do *someday* becomes never.

Chapter Seven

REHABILITATION

The Michigan Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (later renamed the Michigan Commission for the Blind Training Center) was a 50-bed residential facility where blind adults came for periods of several months to learn many basic skills. Until 1975, I was one of about six rehabilitation teachers who gave instruction in braille, adaptive cooking techniques, typing, etc., while our counterparts, the mobility instructors, taught safe travel with a white cane. The students ranged in age from about 18 to 80. A few of them had been blind all of their lives, but most were relatively newly blinded as a result of diabetes, macular degeneration, or accidents. For the most part, blind rehabilitation was happy, relaxed work. The students deeply appreciated the program and often became personal friends with the staff. My usual technique of teaching with a "crib sheet" at hand worked very well in this setting where most of the instruction was one-on-one. My creativity was a particular asset, because so much of what we were doing involved resolutions for problems unique to an individual rather than just applying classroom memorized formulas to more or less standard situations.

For newly blind people with no way to make personal notes they can refer back to, successful daily living depends largely on memory. For instance, one needs to keep in mind where the furniture is, how to judge when it is safe to cross the street, the arrangement of the keys on a typewriter, important telephone numbers, and the names of new acquaintances. Acute listening and accurate recall are invaluable skills for someone who is blind.

Whether the motivation was empathy with the students' problems, or a subliminal desire for self-remediation, I do not know, but very early in my Blind Rehabilitation career I undertook development of a broad new range of refinements for the instructional area known as Listening Skills. My approach was so well received by the students that I was soon stimulated to embark on designing a course in Spacial Concept Development, a new subject area aimed at the special needs of people who had never seen. Just as it had been in my Russian classes at Albion, I was soon a defacto expert on what most of the rest of the staff knew very little about. I worked out an impressive repertoire of original, didactic games, teaching strategies, and unique techniques, which were both popular and effective.

I learned to use a dictating machine, and soon I became a regular contributor of little articles for the Association of Rehabilitation Teachers Newsletter THE NET. Several of these pieces offer insights into what the practice of rehabilitation teaching is all about, while at the same time revealing rather clearly the intellectual tack my mind was taking at the time. For example:

[From the October 1974 issue of THE NET]

WHAT DOES A "PROFESSIONAL" REHABILITATION TEACHER
OF THE ADULT BLIND REALLY DO?

by Glenn Leavitt

At this time when our field of rehabilitation teaching is young as a true profession, and still feels challenged and insecure; it is crucial that it be defined in the clearest way possible.

Dictionary definitions of the word rehabilitation stress restoration, yet seldom do we rehabilitation teachers restore anything, least of all vision. What professionally trained blind rehabilitation teachers do with a person who became blind as an adult is to guide him in the development of alternative and adaptive skills which allow him a greater degree of independence than he had when he first lost his sight, but probably significantly less independence than he had as a sighted person. On the other hand, work done with people who were born blind involves habilitation, not rehabilitation. However, the word rehabilitation is too much a part of our field to get rid of now, so we have to allow the term become professional jargon. We will have to agree on our own definition of the term as used in the profession, in spite of what the dictionaries say.

* * *

Rehabilitation teaching is the specific area of human services, which attempts to meet the needs of severely visually limited people who desire to function at a higher level of independence. The emphasis is on the development of adaptive and alternative means to achieve greater independence in the areas affected by the visual limitation. Rehabilitation teaching fills the gap between the physiological help offered by the fields of medicine, occupational therapy, etc., and the skills and knowledge offered by various types of educators trained to deal with the general population...

* * *

Throughout these remarks, the words profession and professional have been used but not defined. The crucial factor in differentiating a job from a profession is the matter of the worker's primary allegiance. A person hired to do a job has primary allegiance to the company or organization that hires him. A professional person should be faithful to the organization or company with which he is associated, but his primary allegiance is to his profession and the people it serves.

[From the June 1974 issue of THE NET]

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AT MRCB
by Glenn Leavitt

Starting with this issue of the NET, and continuing as a regular feature from now on, I will be including some practical material from our new Concept Development teaching area here at the Michigan Rehabilitation Center For The Blind. Initially I was alone in this area, but in the last few months, Katie Thielen of the Mobility Section has joined me and offered many valuable suggestions. Each of us has two adult students who are congenitally blind. We meet with them individually two or three times a week. In this series of articles for the NET, I will describe the goals of the Concept Development class, some of the teaching techniques, my mobility concepts game called Bring Home The Bacon, my tactual baseball game, and two mind stretching devices we call the Concepteazer, and the Space Walk.

* * *

A concept is a mental generalization based on direct sensory intake and often supplemented by verbal exchange. Many congenitally blind people develop deficient or confused concepts of common objects, shapes, and spatial relationships, because they have experienced insufficient sensory and verbal input to comprehend how these concepts are understood by the general population. Therefore, the goals of concept development should include the following:

- 1. Understanding of what a concept is*
- 2. Understanding of why people who have never seen sometimes have spacial concept deficiencies*
- 3. Knowledge of which types of concepts are liable to cause problems*
- 4. Development of new and/or improved concepts through: a.) Consideration of dictionary definitions, b.) Manipulation of contrived physical demonstrations, and c.) Experience with real-life examples*
- 5. Understanding of which questions to ask, in order to clarify a troublesome concept that comes up in one's work, study, or conversation. Usually such questions will be aimed at establishing: a point (or points) of reference, or establishing an analogous situation.*
- 6. Development of curiosity about and willingness to explore objects, spaces, and physical reality.*

In order to meet these goals at MRCB I am putting together a dictionary defining common concept problem terms with specific reference to the needs of blind people and their teachers, so that

we all will be speaking the same language, and avoid the pitfall of developing jargon understandable only to those familiar with blind rehabilitation. In addition to the verbal definitions, we are collecting and building objects, devices and games, which constitute contrived examples of problem concepts. Finally, we are seeking to stimulate a lively dialogue between various members of the professional staff in order to identify more concept problems, and find new and better ways to clear them up.

* * * *

This was an outstandingly fertile part of my life. As a Rehabilitation Teacher at the Center I could get away with remaining totally absorbed in one project after another. Not only did the words flow for articles about my teaching areas, but designing the instruction led to several inventions.

Could black and white photographs be reproduced in a tactually discernible, that is "feelable," format so people who had been born totally blind could see with their fingertips the concepts of shape, perspective and shadow I was trying to convey in Concepts class? Floating in my mind was a pretty clear vision of how the half-tone printing press mat process newspapers were still using to print photographs in the 1970's could be modified to make what I would eventually call "tactual-visual images" (TVI'S) of pictures. Even though he could not quite grasp what I wanted to do, the foreman in the printing room of the *Kalamazoo Gazette* patiently filled me in on the details of the photo reproduction process, and he loaned me some zinc printing plates and thick cardboard press mats to play with for a while until the details of my idea gelled. Getting some simple basic training tactual-visual image pictures made to try on my students was expensive; but all the personal time and money I had invested in the project paid off with a level of personal satisfaction I had seldom known, when Debby, a young lady who had never seen, ran her fingers across one of my raised dot pictures of some everyday objects on a living room table and gleefully exclaimed, "Oh, it's a pretty lamp shade!!"

Flush with success in Listening Skills, Concepts, and TVI's I soon sprang into another badly needed, and until then almost totally neglected, rehabilitation teaching area which I named Oral-Aural Communications. Since almost all of what I was doing involved unresearched topics, I was free to invent and imagine, without ever having to worry about what someone else might have written about the subject. My office in the communications area became a personal domain, where creativity flourished, unhampered by demands that I read comprehendingly or respond to verbal commands. One of the Center secretaries,

who was partially sighted herself, volunteered to help with the typing of draft after draft of letters responding to inquiries about my classes and instructional games. My articles (which she had typed as well) were being received with warm enthusiasm by the rehabilitation community. Then, in 1974, I put together a short book, *Oral/Aural Communications: A Teacher's Manual*, which was published as an attractive hardback by the Charles C. Thomas Co. of Springfield, Illinois. At the request of the editor I composed this statement for use on the book's jacket and in the publisher's advertising materials:

"During the development of the Oral-Aural Communications teaching area at the Michigan Rehabilitation Center for The Blind, Mr. Leavitt was repeatedly approached by visiting rehabilitation teachers, vocational counselors, and agency administrators from other states with questions about OAC: What is it? Why is it? What do you teach? How do you teach it? He found that he was having to answer the same basic questions again and again. This book is simply a reply to the most frequently asked questions about OAC. Most of the text was written with an imaginary visiting rehabilitation teacher by the author's side. The author answered his questions on his level, assuming he was well educated in the area of blind rehabilitation in general, but as yet quite ignorant of OAC as an entity in the total rehabilitation spectrum. The author assumes that his reader knows how to operate basic playback devices, but that he has not yet given systematic attention to explaining their use to others.

The intended audience for this book includes people training to become rehabilitation teachers for blind adults, people training to become resource teachers for blind children in schools, practicing rehabilitation teachers, agency administrators, and visually impaired people interested in improving their personal skills in this area."

Sometimes we reach a point in our lives where it seems all of the pieces of the puzzle have fallen into place, and the end of the story should be simply: "...and they lived happily ever after." Certainly, the story of my life could have been tied together into a neat conclusion at several points in the previous twenty years. If I had fallen off our garage roof while proudly nailing up new shingles, or if I had been trampled by a testy elephant while goofing off in her cage with the pachyderm keeper at the Philadelphia Zoo, or if God had chosen to end my life in 1974, right after my book was published, it could have been said that Glenn had found his niche and had ended his life happily doing what he loved.

Unfortunately, however, life is not a fairy tale; it is a continual confluence of satisfaction and struggle, of pride and pain, of accomplishment and failure. Goethe summed up this aspect of human existence very well when he had Faust exclaim to the Devil, "Only when you can get me to say to one moment of time, 'Your ecstasy's so perfect, let me stay here forever!' then, Evil One, you will have won the battle for my soul." [I believe this translation to be my own]. Of course, Satan, in the form of Mephistopheles, is never quite able to present Faust with such pleasure and satisfaction that he would unequivocally accede and thus lose his soul. Likewise, I must admit that even in the most productive periods of my life, such as the several years in the early 1970's I spent as a highly successful Rehabilitation Teacher at MRCB, I was not satisfied. An inability to divide my attentions between several critically important matters, and an inner drive to achieve more and more approval, always seemed to push me on into circumstances where I was bound to fail.

Simultaneous with my triumphs at work, two factors at home were overshadowing professional achievements with turmoil and uncertainty. First, we were trying to take our religious conversion very seriously, but Eva was finding the social pressures in fundamental churches oppressive and depressing. Even though Eva and I agreed on doctrine, the differences in our views on church involvement and Eva's working outside the home were driving a wedge between us. Was I becoming blind to the needs of my wife? This shallow, hollow sounding verse I penned on the back of an anniversary card seems to indicate that I was:

For The One I Love On Our 14th Anniversary

*Painters and poets create works of art,
That bring us beauty and rest;
But a wife who loves family, and cooking, and
home,
Is the artist whose works are the best
For no girl looks better,
Than my gal in a sweater,
As she whips up some cookies or stew.
And no husband's more blessed,
Than the one whose love nest,
Is graced by the love and the talent...of you.*

A second, even more volatile development in our family was Clifford's collision with adolescence. Stark evidence of his angry rebellion remains etched on pieces of family furniture, as well as in each of our souls. How much

desperation, how much self-denigration, Cliff learned or inherited from me, I will never know. However, I do know that a seething caldron of ability and perceived defeat led him for the next few years into a confused collage of quitting and joining: from high school to the Marine Corps, to college, to a trade school, to the Peace Corps, and to college again; always doing well, but always retreating from success. At last, in his mid-twenties, he married a wonderful girl who believed in him (as had happened to me 25 years earlier). Then he went on to demonstrate he could not only fulfill a goal, but he could do it with highest honors.

But I had a hard time acknowledging the possibility that my wife's angry depression and my son's tumultuous youth might have been part of quite normal life processes for middle aged, immigrant women, and for immature young men. Just as I had blamed my own failures on an inexplicable flaw in myself, I was sure Eva and Cliff's problems had resulted from my shortcomings. I had deceitfully shared with Cliff enjoyment of books I had never read. I had badgered my wife about working, and demanded that she immerse herself in church, when I, myself, could seldom recall a word of a sermon after the closing hymn had been sung. My students at the Center loved me for my sensitivity, but I was failing to be sensitive to those I loved the most.

In a buffet drawer at home, I found some colorful Chamber of Commerce travel brochures on Memphis, Tennessee. Having never been in Memphis, and never having known anyone who had, I supposed the brochures had been sent unsolicited by an enterprising travel bureau. Just how wrong I was about the source of the brochures and about the way I had been treating Eva crashed down upon me in a grocery store parking lot a few days later. Instead of getting out of the car, Eva turned a grim, tear stained face to me and with the determination of the survivor she is, she let me know that she had had enough: I would stop bullying her, or she was leaving. With more of a sense of how much I needed her than guilt about how I had been treating Eva, I gave her an awkward hug and begged her to forgive me. She did not leave.

* * * *

Early in 1975, the MRCB Education Director who had hired me advanced to the position of Superintendent. The slot he left vacant looked very attractive to me. A promotion, I reasoned, might be a step toward healing the family wounds which had deepened to the point that Cliff was on the brink of quitting high school to join the Marines, and Eva was about to pack her bags. Totally misjudging my family's needs, I reasoned, even if Eva might never be Frau Doktor, at least I could make it possible for her to become Frau Direktor, and maybe I could be a better model for Cliff as an institutional administrator. I do not remember if any other teaching staff members had shown much interest in the position, but I know I pursued it with great vigor. As an inveterate planner and reorganizer, my mind

overflowed with ideas on how to enhance and improve the Center's program. I think my innovations, my writing, and my college teaching background all pled strongly in my favor and soon I had the job.

Although I do not recall any other staff member candidating for the Education Directorship, several were strongly opposed to my getting it, apparently because my training was in rehabilitation teaching rather than in mobility. All of the instructional staff were Western Michigan University graduates in either rehabilitation teaching or mobility, but only the mobility staff were all sighted and they were the ones expected to move up into administration. As long as I was "in my place" as a teacher, I enjoyed acceptance and friendship from most of my colleagues, but as an administrator I was thrust immediately into an atmosphere of resentful hostility for which I was not at all prepared. My years as Education Director at MRCB were a seemingly endlessly drawn out replay of my brief tenure as an Army warehouseman in Germany, only this time I had to struggle for years in the hornet's nest.

All my weaknesses seemed to gang up on me right from the start. I was expected to read and comprehend narrative teaching reports, and there was no way to trick anyone else into reading them for me. First thing every morning, the Superintendent, several other senior staff members and I would meet to review the previous 24 hours' activities and plan the coming day. I did not yet understand that in such a meeting situation, I must take notes on everything, so I would exit the morning meetings vaguely conscious that I had missed a lot, but unsure of exactly what or why. I thought a general bull session over coffee break with my good friend, the Director of Counseling, would help fill in the gaps for me, but my strategy of posing questions based on "creative misunderstanding," which had often gotten me out of trouble in the past, did not seem to work very well with him. Early each afternoon, I was to lead a meeting where the teachers, counselors, and nurses would orally report on the progress of individual students. I, the former Listening Skills teacher, could not keep track of what was being said. Most difficult for me, however, was responding to open hostility from certain instructors unhappy with my appointment. Subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) verbal assaults called for quick comprehension, and a speedy, well thought out response. I tended to react with silence or with the kind of self-deprecating wisecracks which had served me well in past roles as student and professor, but which now only fueled the fires of antagonism against me as an administrator. In short, the administrative position I had sought so ardently, was as unsuitable for me as ballet dancing would be for a hippopotamus.

* * * *

As I became more conscious of just how poorly I could deal with face-to-face confrontations, I felt isolated and helpless. However, expressing ideas in

meticulously constructed prose was one of the few things I had learned to do fairly well. So in a strange twist of workplace logic, I made up for my inadequacy as a first line supervisor by engaging my superiors in the bureaucratic game of "memo wars." My written communications literally dripped with thinly veiled and for the most part uncalled-for hostility.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendent, MRCB

FROM: Glenn Leavitt, Education Director, MRCB

RE: Communications within the MRCB facility

It has been well over a year since the bulk of our telephones were removed from MRCB. We have waited patiently for the new, money saving communication system to be installed. With this memo, I want to express formally the request that has been made informally again and again. The present lack of communication ability throughout the Center is dangerous for our student population, a major limitation on the effectiveness of our program, and it is causing a great waste of money and time. The basic situation is as follows:

- 1. As Education Director, I am responsible for the direct supervision of seventeen blind rehabilitation teachers, and four other staff members.*
- 2. The seventeen teachers teach in eighteen different teaching areas. Both the number of teachers and the number of teaching areas have been increased since our phones were removed.*
- 3. The eighteen teaching areas are spread out within a facility with approximately 44,000 square feet of floor space.*
- 4. The blind adults with whom we work are subject to seizures, diabetic reactions, alcoholic problems, mental illness, mental retardation, suicidal tendencies, hyperactivity, and aggressive behavior. Usually we have at least one student who is both deaf and blind.*
- 5. Live telephones are an integral part of our teaching program. Orientation-Mobility instruction requires that most students master the use of telephones to get information for safe travel as a cane or dog user. In addition, the Oral-Aural Communications teaching area gives specific instruction in dialing, dealing with operators who do not realize the caller cannot see, and effective means of taking down information received over the phone.*
- 6. The Recreation Director is responsible to keep in contact with the community, planning during the day recreation activities for*

students to take part in evenings and weekends. The Recreation Director must make and receive calls. The Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for supervising sixteen (soon to increase to thirty) volunteers. There is no alternative for contacting volunteers in their homes.

At the present time, to handle all the above situations, we have two telephones. Both phones are situated so they are usable for outgoing calls only. There are no telephones in the upstairs dormitory, except the payphone, and there is no readily available telephone in the high-danger teaching areas, such as Industrial Arts, Adaptive Kitchen Skills, Physical Education, etc.

I am paid over \$9 an hour. Most of our teachers are getting over \$8 an hour, and the Volunteer Coordinator donates about 12 hours a week of her valuable time. Lack of communication is costing me at least an hour a day, as well as an hour a day for each teacher, and each student. Furthermore, lack of communication is about to cost us the services of an excellent Volunteer Coordinator, who feels it unreasonable for the Center to require her to make all her contacts with volunteers by phone from her home.

Attached to this memo are specific recommendations to remedy this situation.

* * * *

If something I am supposed to read has a descriptive title and well-chosen chapter headings which lead directly to the author's conclusions, my comprehension battle is often half won before glancing at the first words of text. The MRCB teachers' narrative teaching reports tended to be wordy and devoid of easy-to-spot clues concerning their content. Over the objections of the majority of the instructors, I was able to introduce a reporting form that reduced what was for me meaningless verbiage to a more comprehensible chart format which presented the student's progress in a one-page display not unlike the time maps I used to devise for the study of history. A few of the staff liked the new form, but for most of them, my effort to introduce it was but one more piece of ammunition in their arsenal of accusations that I was a cold, impersonal director who wished to reduce living people to bureaucratically acceptable check marks. It is interesting to note that fifteen years later, long after I left MRCB, the form was still being used by Commission for the Blind teachers.

The only other change of any significance I was able to implement during my tenure as Education Director appears, as I look back on it, to be just one more symptom of my lifelong obsession with books. Obsession is not too strong

a word to describe how I felt about the disarranged, unclassified collection of books and manuals that were piled in out-of-the way places around the Center. Such neglect of the printed word was a sacrilege; I had to do something about it! Under my direction, a volunteer, who happened to be a retired librarian, catalogued each of the publications and arranged them on several six foot bookshelves in my office. I loved having the Center library in my office. I was fascinated by the meticulous job done by the volunteer librarian. I would recommend to staff and colleagues that they consult the collection. Now and then I would pull one of the books off the shelf, scan the contents, and daydream about being a knowledgeable, consistent leader who could keep track of what was going on.

My inner tension seeped into everything I tried to do at work or at home. To relieve my frayed, weary nerves, I plowed half of our back yard into a vegetable garden, and I started walking two and a half miles to and from work every day. Nevertheless, the old headaches and digestive maladies returned with a vengeance. Eva's depressed state deepened, and Cliff left for Marine Corps basic training in California. The temptation to return to alcohol was strong, but the teachings of our church and concern for Eva kept me from slipping down that road again.

[Excerpts from my prayer diary kept during 1976]

Eva's health. ...Cliff's smoking. ...protection from the tyranny of time. ...to be a fair, effective administrator. ...Show me the blind spots about my own sin. ...Keep me from seeking revenge. ...thank Eva for 20,000 meals. ...thanks for the GI Bill that got us through PSU, and the federal stipend that got us through WMU. ...Thanks for the Talking Book Program that makes it possible for me to read books. ...help me respect authority. ...Help me realize that God is working in the person who offends me.

I knew very well what it was like to feel alienated and rejected, but being intensely disliked was new for me. It was unbearable; I could not get it out of my mind. I was angry at the instructors who appeared determined to undermine my every step, but I was even angrier with myself for every dumb mistake, for every word I misread, for everything I did not read, for every word I forgot, and for every meeting in which I pretended I could follow what was going on. I knew that over

the years, I had demonstrated ability to do some things well and I could handle some situations with sensitivity and grace, but not this one! Like the radio play homesteader Dunengen, surrounded by unrelenting South American killer ants, I, too, seemed hopelessly surrounded; but my "killer ants" were my own weaknesses. At age 35, I had had to abandon years of academic training and an assistant professorship to start all over again in an entirely new field. Now, at 45 my home life was a shambles and my future in Blind Rehabilitation was hanging by the slimmest of threads. The Superintendent and I crossed swords frequently, each time with more serious consequences, until in the spring of 1979, the final clash would cost me my job.

* * * *

Insubordinate? I was not insubordinate! The Superintendent was crazy. But, exactly what had he told me to do a few hours earlier in the morning meeting? I could not remember. Certainly, I could not look him in the eye and admit that I had absolutely no recollection of the critical matter we had discussed such a short time ago. Although my brain was blank concerning the Superintendent's orders that morning, unnerving memories emerged in my mind of a similar incident twenty years before in an Army warehouse. The Lieutenant had been a young, crisp Bostonian, who barked commands like a machine gun. He would call the warehouse crew together each morning and give a long sequence of orders describing exactly how we were to do our jobs. Most of the other guys seemed to understand (or at least they knew how to get away without understanding). I tried, but I always got things fouled up. The Lieutenant was having problems with several of us. He accused one soldier of being lazy; another he called dumb, but he singled me out for special wrath, calling me insubordinate and threatening courts martial. Just as uncontrollable disaster was about to collapse in around me, an old Major's kindness had kept me out of the brig. Nevertheless, nagging questions remained: Had I been insubordinate? Was I lazy, crazy, or dumb? Why had I not been able to follow what the Lieutenant was saying, no matter how hard I tried? Now, twenty years had passed. I had earned two Masters degrees, I had published a book and designed new teaching areas, but this morning's incident of ...whatever it was... would leave me no choice but to resign my position at the Center, or be fired.

[A diary notation from February 24, 1979,
six months before I had to leave MRCB]

Maybe I'll be leaving soon.

My words are gone, my energy is gone. All is gone. But I'm starting to better understand Galatians 2:20: I must die in order to live.

Lord, show me that step that does not have to crush, one good thing, one good word...



My garden in Kalamazoo

Chapter Eight

INTERMEZZO

Writing has always had a certain therapeutic function in my life. If all other channels for release of my creative energy are stymied, my soul bursts with reckless abandon onto any old scrap of paper that happens to be at hand. It is as if the concepts I cannot verbalize or hear in the verbalizations of other people somehow fall together on paper, only making sense after I have had a chance to read and re-read my own words. Those miserable years as Education Director at MRCB were strangely productive of crudely illustrated literary expressions of my frustrations with what was happening, as well as philosophical contemplation on the nature of being. Was life absurd? Could anyone ever be totally right or truthful about anything? Was the gulf between what we can express with words and the way things really are so wide that there was no use trying to make sense out of existence?

In the midst of all the turmoil of the late seventies, I was able to keep some semblance of humor, and compose little verses that appeared to be nonsense word games, but in retrospect, they contain autobiographical and philosophical reflections of where I had been, where I was, and quite surprisingly, where I was going. One little cache included a collection I called *A Child's Garden of Versus* (sic.). Here is an example:



THE WATERING CAN

*If a watering can,
Why can't I?
But if it can't,
I won't.*

*If you understand,
Then raise your hand.
But if you're confused,
Don't cry,
So am I.*

Hard physical labor in my garden had been therapeutic, too. As calluses were forming on my hands, my mind kept wandering between down-to-earth problems and speculations on loneliness and social injustice. One summer evening, soiled and sweaty from several hours' labor in the back yard, I sat down at the kitchen table and scribbled on a note pad:

STRINGBEAN TRILOGY

*Bean seeds have no needs;
Their hard shells are prison cells.
No sign of life, without, within,
They callously ignore their kin.
To be born and die a bean seed,
Would be very sad indeed.*

*Young stringbeans break out on my vines so quickly,
You'd think God swept into my garden
and hung them there,
While I was busy with the heavier, more important job
of pulling out young weeds.
Love creates.
Pride destroys.
But sometimes, Lord, just sometimes,
It's so hard to see much from down here!*

*Fresh stringbeans give me heartburn,
But I'll never learn.
When they come, I can't stop with one;
I chew...consume...and burn.*

There were many other poetic contemplations from this period. Some were just silly; others became quite philosophical. Most of them were short. A few rambled on for several pages, requiring months of scribbling, squeezing in new words here, and crossing out lines there, until I was satisfied or lost interest. The one I liked the best (I am so glad I saved it) was a four page, tongue-in-cheek epic about an extremely bright grade school pupil named Young Rick. In arithmetic class, Rick stuns his teacher with a long verbal treatise proving "conclusively" that $1 + 1$ can never equal 2. I did not fully recognize it at the time,

but Young Rick was not just belated, whimsical vengeance on my high school math teacher, Miss Ramstine. Young Rick was proclaiming what I wanted to shout to the whole world: "*Precision is a false device. Approximation is precise!*"

YOUNG RICK

*Miss Jenkins stood before her class,
Where some would fail and some would pass.
Her voice was firm, but also kind;
Her goal the growth of each young mind.
Among her brightest was young Rick,
Whose strong point was Arithmetic.
Rick caused his teacher great delight,
With answers almost always right.
But on this day young Rick's reply,
Would shock, and stun -- electrify.
His quick response to what she asked,
Would leave the thinking world aghast.*

*The day was bright and wet with spring,
Attention spans diminishing.
Miss Jenkins knew she'd earn her pay,
To get much learning done that day.
"Be quiet class! You know the rule.
Don't make me keep you after school.
Just one more hour and then we're through.
We'll spend it with a Math review.*

*Each child sat straight and raised his head.
They knew she meant just what she said.
Up on the board she had designed,
A challenge for each pupil's mind.
"One hundred eight plus sixty three?"
A hand shot up. "I know, ask me!"*

*But as the teacher's smiling nod,
acknowledged little Kate,
She shamed herself by answering,
"One hundred seventy eight."
Then in turn three others tried,
to give the target sum:
"Two hundred six?" "Two hundred two?"
"One hundred sixty one?"
"Oh dear!" Miss Jenkins thought.
"But I'm afraid it's true.*

*These children need to go way back,
to one plus one is two."*

*Now all good teachers know that
it's a habit to be right,
And once correctness is unleashed,
most all will see the light.*

*And so it was with such a goal,
She called upon her brightest soul.
Convinced she would not tax Rick's mind,
She asked, "What's one plus one combined?"
Young Rick looked up, he scratched his head,
His thoughts on all that she had said.
Then from his lips the words they flew:
"One plus one is almost two!"*

*Soft giggles, shock, and fear of doom,
All ricocheted around the room.
Miss Jenkins' face showed deep concern.
She called for order to return.
Again, she asked -- She knew he knew --
"Now Rick, what's two combined with two?"
But Rick, as sure as once before,
Replied, "The answer's almost four!
In fact, when all my logic's done,
I'll prove one almost equals one."*

*Right when she might have lost her cool,
A bell announced the end of school.
"You're all dismissed, the day is through.
But Rick, you stay. I've words for you!"
"Oh shame on you!" exclaimed Miss J.,
"Just what's got into you today?"
Young Rick looked down, his face got red;
Then with these words his case he pled:
"Miss Jenkins, please don't take offense.
I meant you no malevolence.
Though what I state is no attack,
I can no longer hold it back.
Throughout the time of man on earth,
Half truths have often shown some worth.
But when what's more correct is found,
Man moves out onto firmer ground.
And now the time has come to say,
Arithmetic has had its day!*

*Like a house that's built on sand,
It seems precise, appears so grand.
But under it's a fundament,
That's weak, in fact it's fraudulent.*

*Once you explained Math was undone.
If one was not the same as one.
Yet in God's realm it's very plain,
That no two things are just the same:
No two people, plants or fleas,
No two atoms, stars or seas,
No two words, or thoughts, or rules,
No two wisemen, no two fools.*

*Though you look both near and far,
You'll find things may be similar,
But never, ever just alike,
Never but a semblance strike.
A system has validity,
When it reflects reality!
It should be clear as noonday sun,
No one can ever equal one!
The best that we can calculate,
Are totals that approximate.
Precision is a false device;
Approximation is precise!*

*And so, Miss J., you must agree,
One hundred eight plus sixty three,
Will total, when correctly done,
Almost a hundred seventy one!"
Miss Jenkins struggled in her mind,
Conflicting evidence to find.
Yet all that she could say was, "But..,"
Then meekly let her mouth fall shut.*

*Now years have passed, and Rick is grown.
Miss Jenkins, bless her soul, is gone.
The world's now on a strange new kick,
Since Richard killed Arithmetic.
Now numbers take a wayward path,
In what is called Approximath.
And for the subject and its name,
Young Rick gets all the fame and blame.*

"Young Rick" was too much fun to end as it did. So I embarked on a sequel, in which a teenage Rick attacks many other scientific and philosophical presumptions, but only a fragment remains:

THE RAMBLINGS OF YOUNG RICK

*Infinity? Eternity? Nothingness?
Immeasurability? yet no "ability,"
can credibly describe no-thing.*

*Infinity, eternity?
To be nothing, and yet to be,
is utterly impossibility!*

*Infinity, eternity?
Grammatically, semantically,
ability to be?*

*To think infinity,
to say eternity,
makes it be
eternally
for me.*

*If you object, then here's a fact,
that you must understand:
if the universe is infinite,
I hold it in my hand.*

*And if time is eternal,
then you cannot disavow:
that every little bit of it,
fits neatly into now.*

*And so I'm sure we can conclude,
though some may find it odd:
the ultimate cosmogony --
Nothing's made by GOD.*

Marcella, a young, congenitally blind MRCB student, was a delight to know. Once, when I tried to point out to her that she was confused about a spacial concept, she quipped, "Well, I'm going to stay confused and nobody's going to change it!" And when a counselor suggested to Marcella that she seemed out of touch with reality, she thought for a minute and then mused, "Well, I don't care. Reality's not all it's cracked up to be." Some professionals had labeled Marcella retarded, but those of us who worked closely with her knew better.

ODE TO MARCELLA

*We live our little lives,
and die our little deaths.
We think our little thoughts,
and take our little breaths.*

*Weighed down by chains of reason,
we're blind to all you see in
your world of minds-eye freedom;
so we simply turned away.*

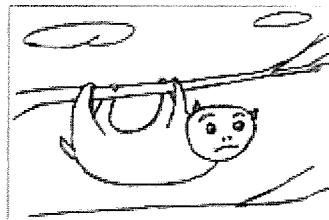
*But with vision and simplicity,
you taught us what we couldn't see:
Our pitiful reality
"...is not all it's cracked up to be!"*

*Marcella, as we stood amused,
you said you'd "rather stay confused."
And due to all that we're imbued,
we couldn't see your point.*

*But our little lives are richer,
and our little thoughts are deeper,
maybe God's a little nearer,
and we need to wonder why.*

*To recognize what's really true,
a debt of gratitude is due:
Thank you, Marcella,
for being you.
You're clearly quite OK!*

But the most personal poem I composed in this period, the one I felt was so revealing, I did not like to share it with anyone was *The Sloth*. As I wrote it, a little pain swelled into my throat; I was exposing more of my real self than I wanted to. I did end up sharing *The Sloth* with a few other people, but I hoped they would not guess how autobiographical it was. At that time, I did not have the comfort of a label like dyslexia; I was just a lonely, scatterbrained oddball who perceived the world as upside down and did not know why.



THE SLOTH

*A sloth accused of apathy,
Considered all his woes:
"My life and thought are bottoms up,
Suspended by my toes."*

*"I just don't care to run and jump,
As other creatures do.
It only makes me awfully tired,
And kind of hungry, too."*

*"Besides, when I am hanging here,
As others go on by,
They all appear so upside down,
With backs aimed toward the sky."*

*"I wish that I could find a friend,
Who'd hang up here with me,
We'd scratch and cry and view the sky,
And never leave this tree."*

Chapter Nine

DISABILITIES

Sometimes the best remedy for dissension among partners is to find a common enemy. Eva and I found our mutual foe in the MRCB Superintendent. It was not at all fair for us to blame him, but at least our attention was turned away from our personal differences and our worries about Cliff, who by this time had completed his active duty commitment in the Marine Reserves, and was now at an agricultural college in Ohio studying Beekeeping.

Although I had to resign my position at the Center, I did not have to leave the Michigan Commission for the Blind altogether. The Commission Director was seeking someone to head up a newly funded Independent Living program in 28 counties of the central and northern part of the state. Gambling that the newly appointed Director in Lansing was not intimately acquainted with personnel problems in Kalamazoo, I wrote him a very positive letter, explaining that I had the experience and the approach to people with disabilities necessary for success in the Independent Living field. Apparently, the Director did not ask the MRCB Superintendent much about my performance as an administrator, because if he had inquired, it is doubtful I would have gotten the job.

The new Independent Living program was to be headquartered in the central office of the Commission for the Blind in Lansing, so we sold our home and moved. Of all the places we had lived, Eva had liked Kalamazoo the best. It was a pleasant town with convenient shopping, and she had a number of close friends from her work (and even a few from the church). She was depressed and angry about leaving. I tried my best to make the transition easier for her by giving her free reign in choosing the house we would move into, and the several thousand dollar profit from selling our home in Kalamazoo was hers for decorating the new place any way she pleased. To a certain extent, we were able to comfort and strengthen each other, but a strong undercurrent of the old misapprehensions remained. Shortly after we moved to Lansing, Cliff came home for a while. We celebrated his 21st birthday, and then spent a few happy months together before he signed up in the Peace Corps and flew off for a term in Zaire, West Africa to teach Beekeeping.

In some ways, my new position as Program Manager of what we called the Urban/Rural Independent Living Program was made to order for me. It was the agency's newest program, and I could be just about as creative as I wanted to be. As Education Director at the Rehabilitation Center, I had been too engrossed in personal survival to venture into programmatic innovations. In the new program, I was able to introduce several ideas, which helped the program get through repeated threats of cuts in federal funding, as well as warding off attacks

from national Independent Living leaders who felt a state agency for the blind could not run a valid Independent Living program. My successful encounters with opposition from outside the state gave me a bit of national recognition, especially for my persuasive writing. Working directly under the agency Director was easy. He was a kind, laissez-faire administrator who depended on me to know what I was doing. When the challenges came (and they did come), they were not unlike those I had faced before. I could get away without much reading most of the time -- but not always. I could get away with most of my foibles just enough to keep out of major crises most of the time -- but not always. Had I learned how to deal with my weaknesses a little better or were the circumstances just a little more congenial than they had been in Kalamazoo? I am not sure, but most likely, both conjectures are approximately true.

* * * *

Throughout my life I had usually been able to invent ways to get out of public speaking. At work, my avoidance strategies had ranged from deferring to a junior colleague who would be flattered by the attention, to finagling my way to last place on a meeting agenda so there would be little time left for my topic. If I got trapped into making a presentation at a meeting, I could usually cover my deficiencies with a few wisecracks, as long as the audience was small and friendly; but with my new job, I could not count on that being the case.

"Independent Living" was the major component of an international civil rights movement led by people with disabilities. As an Independent Living Center Director, I was thrust into a leadership position in a movement characterized by demonstrations, and articulate public protest. The people who had done the legwork for the movement's struggle with society's resistance to equal treatment for the disabled were primarily wheelchair users. They wanted equal opportunity for all people with disabilities, but they had little understanding of blindness, and for many of them (and for me at the time) the very idea of a "learning disability" was still totally foreign.

The first time I was required to deliver an oral report on our Independent Living Center was an unmitigated disaster, but I survived. The next time I spent weeks having my secretary type out draft after draft of my report. Then, with the required material in very large type on the podium before me, I attempted to read it word for word, with the result that my presentation was so boring no one even noticed its content. What was I going to do? Memorizing had always been just about impossible for me; and I could never keep a sequence of information straight in my head long enough to wing it. The answer to this dilemma, like the answers to other challenges I had faced rested squarely on two simple factors: extra time, and repetition. I can do anything I set my mind to, as long as I am willing to expend the additional hours it might take me to do it. In the case of

speeches and oral reports on the status of my program, that meant not only repeatedly editing drafts to find such things as thoughts that ended up out of order; but then I would have to go over the final version out loud again and again until I would be able to give the presentation with the text on pages of large type in front of me as a crib sheet for security, even though I would need to look at it only occasionally. As an extra prop for my self-confidence, I would always include a couple of questions or comments addressed directly to a friendly face in the audience who could be counted to respond in a positive or humorous way. Eventually I got pretty good at it.

* * * *

Exactly what was the "Independent Living movement" of the 1980's? What was our Commission for the Blind independent living program like? And, with a lot more experience under my belt, how did I deal with the other major challenges this new undertaking placed before me? The best answers to each of these questions are found within the following three pieces I wrote at the time.

In a speech given at the annual convention of the Michigan affiliate of the American Council of The Blind And Visually Impaired early in 1980, I explained the Independent Living Movement to about 150 blind people.

*HISTORICAL PARALLELS BETWEEN THE TRADITION OF
BLIND SERVICES AND THE MODERN INDEPENDENT LIVING
MOVEMENT*

First, I want to thank you for inviting me to be part of your annual convention. As most of you know, my favorite topic is independent living. So when your chairperson told me your theme this year was Michigan's Sesquicentennial, I said there is only one way for me to relate to that: discussing historical perspectives of independent living. Most of you are aware of the Commission For The Blind Independent living program. In fact, some of you have participated personally.

But let me digress for a moment with something that appeared in the Reader's Digest several years ago. It seems that the wife of a UN Representative from Sri Lanka was at a party in New York City. She was still struggling with the English language. When asked if she had any children, she hesitated for a moment, and then replied, "No, I am impregnable." Noticing the smiles, and feeling she had not expressed herself correctly, she said, "I mean I am unbearable." But when she saw that several people were now struggling to hold back laughter, she delighted everyone by

explaining, I am sorry, I mean I am inconceivable."

That woman was having a hard time with a language that was not her own. But even among native speakers of English we can have semantic problems. Sometimes misunderstandings just make us smile, but other times semantic confusion can lead to fierce disagreements, alienation, or even wars.

This phenomenon is clearly a factor in any attempt to have dialog between three distinct "camps" in the field of rehabilitation. Namely: Independent Living Movement activists; Vocational Rehabilitation program staff; and people who by reason of blindness or employment are steeped in the tradition of Blind Services. We all need to talk to each other, but we often speak past one another.

What do you as blind people think of when you hear the term "rehabilitation?" Chances are the process most of you envision is substantially different from what would enter the mind of a counselor in a general vocational rehabilitation agency. And what about the independent living movement buzzwords: peer counseling, consumer control, single disability program, and the term independence itself? These, and a few other terms in federal independent living regulations mean different things to very influential people, including blind consumers.

The semantic problems arise from some history that many people in general disability vocational rehabilitation, as well as most of the activists in the national independent living movement are totally unaware of, but which most people who are blind know very well. Some of the confusion is coming to a head nationally right now; and how it is resolved will dictate how much, if any, independent living funding will be available to blind service agencies in years to come.

Independent living activists sincerely believe they are introducing new ideas into the field of vocational rehabilitation. They feel these "new ideas" will benefit all people with disabilities, and they find the general aloofness and disinterest exhibited by most people who are blind to be enigmatic and frustrating. Many people with training and experience in vocational rehabilitation judge the independent living movement to be unneeded and threatening; and they view the existence of separate agencies for the blind as simply inefficient and nonsensical. This three way tug of war is further complicated by the fact that many old time clients and workers in the blind services tradition find the revolutionary zeal of the independent living movement boring, and they perceive general disability vocational rehabilitation programs as rigid and impersonal. The basis for these varying perceptions lies in about 150 years of human service history, the later part of which many of you in this room have experienced personally.

Although I titled this talk "Historical Parallels Between The Independent Living Movement and the Tradition of Blind Services," You notice I have had to refer to a third distinct tradition as well, namely: the tradition of vocational rehabilitation. These three traditions range in age from well over 100 years, to a youthful 20. In my review I will not attempt to give a complete history of rehabilitation, only the points that lead to some current misunderstandings.

A lot had happened in the blind services tradition before there was any vocational rehabilitation at all. For instance, in the early 1800's, schools for the blind had been founded, giving an "education" flavor to blind services which has survived to this day. In the late 1800's we saw the development of services to blind adults. Usually these services involved both vocational and general independence skill training. Blind agency "home teachers" were usually blind themselves, and "peer counseling" (although no one would have thought to call it that) was a fundamental part of the service. Also, we should note that there was much involvement of blind people themselves at all levels: from policy making, to administration, to service delivery. The facts that a blind service recipient happened to be very young or very old, or whether the blind person was interested in learning a trade, or whether he had a second disability, were seldom exclusionary factors in these services. Governments had little to say about what was done, because the organizations providing the services were local and private.

Blind services had almost 100 years of tradition behind it by the time vocational rehabilitation was founded to serve the needs of World War I veterans wounded serving their country. Vocational rehabilitation's purpose was to get those young men back into the mainstream; to heal their wounds, to restore their health, and to get them back to work. Vocational rehabilitation grew out of hospital services: the workers were able bodied medical personnel, the service provision model was medical --prescriptive -- with the highly trained professional telling the patient what to do and how to do it. This was true of services to all wounded veterans, except the blind. They tended to be served by the long established blind tradition, So their services tended to be provided by people who were blind (often non- professionals), and the services were geared more toward general independence and less toward vocation. The approach was educational rather than medical.

By the 1940's the differences between these two human service traditions had become so clear and generally recognized, that blind people themselves began a strong movement to organizationally separate government supported "rehabilitation" services for the blind from government supported vocational

rehabilitation for all other disabilities. Simultaneous with the trend toward separate programs, general vocational rehabilitation agencies seemed to become even more rigid and narrow. One key difference can be seen in the definition of "homemaker," a type of case closure with which blind agencies took great liberties, but which general agencies would avoid like the plague.

In the 1960's a group of wheelchair using college students became so frustrated that they launched a civil rights/rehabilitation movement, which has come to be known as the independent living movement. They started with demands that classrooms and public buildings be wheelchair accessible, but soon broadened to a wider range of issues. Since their vocational rehabilitation agencies wouldn't help them, they helped themselves.

The "new" ideas that characterized the fledgling IL Movement were... What do you think?

1. Disabled people helping disabled people
2. Peer support
3. Rejection of the medical model in favor of the education model
4. Consumer control over all levels of service, policy, administration, and delivery.
5. Services provided through local, community based organizations
6. Cross disability service, with no one excluded because they are considered "too severely handicapped."

The IL activists invaded the streets of cities across the country, and they rolled into Washington hearing rooms; until in 1978 they won the Title VII Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, which allowed federal funds to be used for the services they had envisioned. The Michigan Commission for The Blind was able to secure one of the first IL grants to be awarded in the country, but whether we will be able to continue depends on two key questions which are still being debated by rule makers in Washington:

1. Can a state agency operate an IL program with the required level of consumer control?
2. Is a state agency for the blind, by definition, a single disability agency, and therefore incapable of offering "cross disability" services?

Based on what we are and what we have been able to do, I can answer these questions most emphatically: Yes, a state agency for the blind can operate an IL program with a very high level of consumer control! And No, a blind agency is not a single disability agency!

Much of what the IL Movement leaders consider to be their unique contribution to rehabilitation has long been fundamental to blind services. We need to remind them of this, but with kindness

and humility, because their movement came about as a result of very real injustices

IL activists feel all independent living programs should be "cross disability," and they fought hard to get that wording included in the federal legislation. We need to keep reminding everybody that blind services are actually more "general" than those of the so called general agencies, because no type of disability is excluded as long as the person is also at least legally blind.

IL activists demand consumer control: the principal governing body of an IL program must be mostly people who are disabled. We need to show them that strong consumer involvement on all levels is part of our tradition, and it is quite alive today. We are comfortable with it, and we encourage it.

The activists feel services should be community based and locally controlled. We need to show them that the blind are a community, diverse in many ways, but united by a common tradition, as old as... well, a little older than our great state of Michigan.

Once we take a few minutes to recognize the fact that blind services and the IL Movement have had different starting points, but we have come to the same conclusions. And once we see clearly that the age difference in our movements means we are at different stages in our development. Then it becomes easy for the IL Movement and the blind services tradition to speak the same language, and to work together effectively. Let's do it!

* * *

In an article, which appeared in *The Rural Exchange* - University Of Montana, Missoula, I described the specifics of how our Michigan Commission for The Blind IL program served the needs of elderly and multiply severely disabled blind people.

MICHIGAN PROVIDES INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES IN A "CENTER WITHOUT WALLS"

Anna was living in Harrisville Medical Care Facility, which is located in one of Michigan's very thinly populated Northeastern counties. Within a twelve-month period, she had experienced a heart attack, a leg amputation, and had become legally blind. Her doctor decided she was too ill to live alone in her first floor apartment in Spruce Corners, a blinking light community of 200. Spruce Corners, approximately 70 miles from the nearest city with over 10,000 people, is about 180 miles north of Detroit. In addition, Anna's vocational rehabilitation case had been closed because she was "too severely handicapped." But Anna was determined to regain independence. At 37, she was too young to settle into a

nursing home!

As a former Special Education Teacher, Anna knew of the Independent living movement but she thought Centers for Independent Living (CIL'S) only functioned in large metropolitan areas. She was unaware that a rural person whose disability includes blindness could benefit from the activism of urban people with disabilities who drive their own vans, advocate for lift equipped buses and readily exchange information about their activities in print newsletters.

However, Anna did have disabled peers who were deeply sensitive to the frustration of being a person with a disability, unable to drive, and who lives in a thinly populated area. The people who understood were the staff of the Michigan Commission for The Blind (MCB).

In 1979, the MCB had heard that federal funds would be available for the establishment of Independent Living Centers, so they submitted a grant proposal to set up an independent living program for Michigan people whose severe disability includes blindness.

The majority of IL models are well suited for the needs of sighted people with orthopedic disabilities who live in urban or suburban areas. The MCB knew, however, that there were many people with disabilities who did not fit the typical IL service model. The MCB designated its CIL as a "Center Without Walls" Thus, the Michigan Commission for The Blind Urban/Rural CIL was born.

The Urban/Rural CIL serves 29 mostly rural counties, which make up over one fourth of the state. The Urban/Rural CIL has two fully accessible offices, one in Lansing and one 168 miles north in the village of Gaylord. Virtually all services are itinerant. Consequently, when Anna explained over the telephone how determined she was to get out of the nursing home, and be re-accepted in Spruce Corners as a person with dignity and independence, her Vocational Rehabilitation counselor referred her to the new MCB program.

Cheryl, a newly appointed Independent Living Specialist, was given Anna's name as one of her first referrals. Like the two other IL Specialists employed in the Urban/Rural CIL, Cheryl had a Degree in Blind Rehabilitation. Also, she had lived with a disability that included blindness since she was a teenager.

When Cheryl contacted her, Anna explained that she wanted to convince her doctor (and herself) that she was capable of living on her own again. To achieve her goal, Anna knew she would have to learn adaptive techniques used by blind people, and she would need some help in locating a place to live in Spruce Corners that was wheelchair accessible.

Early one snowy morning, a few days after her telephone

conversation with Anna, Cheryl packed the trunk of her state car with samples of such things as reach extenders, low vision aids, signature guides, sock savers, HiMarks, talking watches, tactual insulin syringe templates, pill organizers, magnifier lamps, and a whole lot more. (When you drive 120 miles to see someone for the first time, you don't want to forget anything.)

Cheryl's volunteer driver was cautious on the icy roads that morning; Anna's noon meal was just being served as Cheryl entered her room. When Cheryl asked why she didn't eat in the facility dining room, Anna responded, "They're too short staffed to have someone wheel me down and they think I'd be a hazard to others if I tried to wheel myself." Upon hearing that comment, Cheryl knew where she had to begin.

The Individual Written Independent Living Rehabilitation Plan (IWILRP) Anna and Cheryl worked out together was two pages long. The plan included such items as teaching Anna wheelchair mobility, non-visual money management, and adaptive cooking and homemaking techniques. Also included were arranging for Anna to receive a low vision evaluation by a Certified Low Vision Specialist, a hearing evaluation, approximately \$150 worth of low vision aids provided by the CIL, and an array of other adaptive devices. Cheryl would establish telephone peer support for Anna with a blind wheelchair user who lives in Lansing. And the IWILRP stated that Cheryl would return as soon as possible to present a "blindness awareness" in-service training program for the Harrisville Facility doctors, administrators and staff.

As knowledge of the Urban/Rural CIL grew, so did Cheryl's caseload. Soon she was serving over 50 people in her 13 county "community." Some IL program participants were elderly people who, in their retirement years were learning for the first time how to cope with severe disability. Others were younger people with developmental disabilities, who had fallen through the cracks in the human service system. A few had advanced multiple sclerosis. One Native American was both blind and deaf.

More than nine out of ten program participants had several characteristics that would be considered severe disabilities. A few of them, like Anna, were ready to fight for more independence than their neighbors would believe possible. Others needed to be roused from complacency and defeat. The "community" needed to broaden its view of disability, and people with disabilities needed to broaden their view of their own potential.

Cheryl wrote IWILRP's that included: teaching a family member how to finger spell; finding a "safe" ashtray; convincing a county dial-a-ride service to provide portal-to-portal service; white cane travel techniques; how to cook without seeing; purchasing hearing aids not covered by insurance; informing people about in-

home emergency response systems; and finding a resource to repave a wheelchair user's badly pitted driveway.

Cheryl went back to see Anna seven more times. The MCB's "center without walls" was still less than a year old when, after 18 months in the medical care facility, Anna joyfully moved into her own apartment. The local Lions Club helped with the move, and Anna's church promised to supply faithful volunteers to take her shopping.

Before she died two years later, Anna had resumed her previous position as choir director in her newly ramped church and she was doing volunteer visitation in the Harrisville Medical Care Facility twice a week. She had become a founding member of the Center for Independent Living Participants Advocate Group, a private, non-profit corporation composed entirely of CIL program participants.

The CIL Participants Advocate Group is devoted to the maintenance and expansion of appropriate independent living involvement for all people with disabilities, especially rural people whose disability includes blindness. Today, the CIL Participants Advocate Group has become a major force in the Michigan independent living movement and works closely with the MCB "center without walls."

Enormous challenges confronted a state blind agency trying to participate in the Independent Living Movement. How did I shake up federal bureaucracy inertia? ...with humor and common sense. Accurately reporting the multiple characteristics of the people we served was one of the most exasperating problems I had to deal with. This politically thorny issue is still unresolved in the field of disability services, as well as in all levels of education. One of my attempts to heighten awareness of the problem did end up doing some good: It started with a letter to the RSA Commissioner in Washington.

*Nell Carney, Commissioner
Rehabilitation Services Administration
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202*

Dear Commissioner Carney:

The enclosed paper was fun to write, but its message is quite serious for people with disabilities. I hope you will agree that the

concepts of :*"primary" and "secondary" disability have been producing badly skewed, misleading data*

If we are going to meet the needs of people with disabilities in the 90's, federal regulations must require a medically and logically sound accountability system which accurately reflects the involvement (or lack of involvement) of people with various combinations of disability characteristics. Certainly, our computers could easily manipulate multiple characteristic data on people with disabilities, such as those of the mice Millie, Molly and Mukluk, without cutting off their "tales!"

If there is any way I can be of help as you look into this problem, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you for your consideration.

*Sincerely,
Glenn Leavitt, Program Manager
Centers for Independent Living
Michigan Commission for The Blind*

HOW THE THREE BLIND MICE LOST THEIR "TALES"

Do you remember the three blind mice whose tails were cut off by a carving knife? This is the story of three blind mice who, quite tragically, lost more than just a useless portion of posterior anatomy. Instead, these little mice each had critically important parts of their identities brutally excised by an archaic data collection system.

You see, rehabilitation program statistics tell a tale. Among other things, rehabilitation data are supposed to let us know who was served, and who was left out of the system. But it is possible for statistical "tales" to be so badly distorted that everyone gets confused. To illustrate, let me tell you about the three blind mice named Millie, Molly, and Mukluk, and about the Chedderville CIL that served them. As I explain how these three disabled rodents lost their "tales," you might try to think of ways to keep this cruel deed from ever being repeated in years to come.

Millie Mouse has been blind all her life, but lately her hearing has become so bad that she is trying to learn American Sign Language. Also, she wants to get some peer support from other mice who share her multiple characteristics.

Molly Mouse was born with Down Syndrome, and she has epileptic seizures which are difficult to control. Her vision has always been poor; but as of about a year ago, she has become legally blind. Molly needed an advocate to help her get a chance to "graduate" from the Activities Program into a regular paying job in the Chedderville Opportunity Center.

Mukluk had diabetes, which had led to a heart attack, then to

blindness. Recently, he had to undergo amputation of a leg. He wanted help in making his hole in the wall wheelchair accessible, and he was anxious to learn adaptive techniques for avoiding mousetraps.

In Chedderville there was a small IL center known as the Rolling Rodents CIL. In fact the RRCIL was so small that it had only three service recipients that year: Millie, Molly, and Mukluk. Now, you would think that telling the statistical "tale" of just three mice with disabilities could be done quickly and accurately, but don't count on it! You see, the CIL was required to use a data collection instrument which included a list of 14 disability characteristics. Each program participant had to be assigned a "primary" disability and could be counted only once. The CIL director felt torn between her desire to be honest, and the heavy pressure she felt to show that hers was a "cross disability CIL serving "a range of disabilities;" so the form was completed like this:

<u>DISABILITY</u>	<u>NUMBER SERVED</u>
1. Blindness	2
2. Other visual impairments	0
3. Deafness	1
4. Hard of hearing	0
5. Spinal Cord	0
6. Other orthopedic	0
7. Amputation	0
8. Mental Illness	0
9. Substance Abuse	0
10. Mental Retardation	0
11. Epilepsy	0
12. Heart Condition	0
13. Respiratory Conditions	0
14. Learning Disabilities	0
<hr/>	
Total of lines 1 through 14	3
(Must not exceed total individuals served)	
 (Secondary disabling condition)	3

Therefore, the "tales" of these three little mice, as well as the tale of the RRCIL, were neatly and irretrievably cut off!

Consider for a moment what this enforced dismemberment will mean for mice with disabilities, and for the RRCIL. Three key elements of the rehabilitation community missed out on some vital information. The Rodenta Rehabilitation Services Administration (RRSA) that regulates and sets priorities for Independent Living; the United Mice Congress that pays the bills for much of the IL

service that is available; and Research and Training Centers that analyze rehabilitation data for long range planning, each will never know some very important facts:

1. They will never know that RRCIL served mice who fall into seven, distinct disability categories.

2. They will never know that the RRCIL served, not two but three mice who were blind.

3. They will never know that RRCIL served a mouse who had undergone amputation.

4. They will never know that RRCIL served a mouse with mental retardation.

5. They will never know that RRCIL served a mouse who had epilepsy.

6. They will never know that RRCIL served a mouse with a severe heart condition.

7. They will never know that what the form calls a "secondary" disability can be the "primary" problem for a mouse whose disability is complex.

8. In fact, some mouse bureaucrats and legislators will take the data at face value, and forget that CIL's work with whole mice whose disabilities seldom come in neat, single label packages!

Well, when all CIL reports for the fiscal year had been submitted, RRSA asked a Research and Training Center to analyze the year's data from all the programs, including Chedderville's Rolling Rodents CIL. After meticulous manipulation of the data, the conclusion was reached that CIL's were over serving mice who were blind, and neglecting mice with disabilities such as amputation, mental retardation, heart conditions, and epilepsy. In the following year, all CIL's were informed that they should give the "underserved" disabilities special priority; but a few CIL's, like RRCIL, lost their funding, because they were not serving "a range of disabilities."

It's too bad that the medically insupportable and statistically indefensible concepts of "primary" and "secondary" disability were allowed to confuse decision makers and disrupt services for three severely disabled mice, when even a mousecomputer can handle multiple characteristics very well! Aren't you glad such a thing couldn't happen in the service system for human beings with disabilities??

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Those of us who grew up in the 1940's were steeped in rosy optimism about the future: During the War, Allied propoganda had portrayed "Jap" soldiers throwing Chinese babies into the air and catching them on their bayonets. And Nazi Germans were said to believe themselves to be the Master Race, the only true human beings, with a divine mission to exterminate like rats, such subhuman aberrations as Gypsies, Jews, and the handicapped. Once the Japanese and German armies had been defeated, and their war criminals had been tried and hanged, the positive ideals of Western propoganda would permeate the world with respect for all human beings. Our school books and encyclopedias featured full page, pastel colored, panoramic views of life just around the future's corner, with four-engine airliners soaring over pristine skyscrapers, and people with the costumes and skin colors of all nations holding hands and smiling.

When, I entered work with handicapped people, it seemed I was stepping right into one of those rosy views of a new era. As a college professor of modern languages, I had taken part in the movement to bring cultures together in peace. Now, as a worker in Blind Rehabilitation, I was going to help people with severe disabilities take their rightful place as equal members of the family of man. The future was going to be a better place, and I was privileged to participate in its making. ...Or was it going to be a better place? The fallout of a US Supreme Court decision in 1973 has frightening implications for all people with severe disabilities, especially for infants and for those who were elderly and frail. I became increasingly aware that the most critical issue for people with disabilities, as the world approached the end of the 20th century, would not be the adequacy of services, but the legal definition of what it means to be a person who has full rights to protection under the law. In spite of how politically "white hot" the issues were, I felt compelled to speak out:

Editor, "Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness"
15 West 16th Street
New York, NY

Dear Editor:

As part of your Helen Keller Centennial celebration, you included in a recent issue "a letter from Helen Keller" expressing how optimistic this lady who lived out her life without sight or hearing would be if she were still with us today. Well, here is my reply to that letter:

Dear Helen Keller,

Your letter in the May Journal, like your whole life, was a thrilling testimony to progress and hope for severely handicapped

people around the world. I wish I could respond by telling you that your "prophecy of acceptance" was being realized during the year of your centennial. I wish I could say to you that your dream of the "right to opportunity to exist in dignity and productivity" was coming true in the land of your birth. But, my dear Helen, the optimism you taught me is being overwhelmed by grief for your brothers and sisters born with severe handicaps since you left us. Oh Helen, wherever you are, the US Supreme Court has ruled that none of us has a right to protection under the constitution -- indeed none of us has a right to exist -- unless someone else has determined that we are "persons in the whole sense" and "capable of meaningful life." Helen, thank God you were born when you were. Right now in this great land babies with limitations no more severe than those you dealt with are being allowed to starve to death in sterile, fully equipped hospital nurseries -- allowed to die, because the world has already forgotten the meaning of your life! Oh Helen, you claimed "Nothing, surely, can be more damaging and undesirable than situating disabled people in institutions without chance of home pleasures or the joys of social life." But now, Helen, our society has borrowed from the barbarians of history something that is more damaging for the handicapped than institutionalization; it is death, a permanent termination of the human potential for which you struggled all your life!

Helen, please come back -- Please come back in the hearts of all of us. Stir our hearts, so we cannot rest until this blight on humanity is wiped out, so that we can be born and live out our lives without the fear that sometime someone may decide that we are not "persons in the whole sense," and therefore, we are "incapable of meaningful life."

*Your Friend,
Glenn Leavitt*

I probed the topic of the Helen Keller letter much more deeply in a speech presented before the annual convention of the Michigan affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the mid 1980's.

**WHY I FEEL SUCH A SENSE OF URGENCY ABOUT
INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE ELDERLY
WITH ONE OR SEVERAL DISABILITY CHARACTERISTICS
SUCH AS BLINDNESS**

I know NFB is a no-nonsense, down-to-earth organization, so please forgive the longwinded title for my talk this afternoon. I just wanted to give you a taste of the kind of terminology that is

currently popular. My talk will take about thirteen minutes, after which I hope you will share my sense of urgency, if you don't already. I'm going to start with a short quiz using some standard IL terminology: There are over one hundred of you in this room. How many of you have the physical characteristic of blindness?

[Most people raise their hands.]

Now here's an amazing fact. Each of you who has the physical characteristic of blindness --if you live long enough-- will someday be counted among the elderly people who have the physical characteristic of blindness. Furthermore, many of us who are sighted now will also join the ranks of people who are elderly and blind in our retirement years.

I've been told that one of your members, Bob Gannon over there, is about 42 years old. Bob, that means in about twenty years you will fall into the category of people who are elderly with the characteristic of blindness. I think my friend Al Phipps up here might get there a little sooner; and some of you, like Bill Carr are there already.

Now a second question: How many of you have never heard of a medical doctor, a lawyer, a parent, a sighted spouse, or a "human services professional" who thinks that blindness is a most tragic affliction, which leaves people in a helpless and hopeless state? Raise your hand if you've never heard of someone like that.

[No hands are raised.]

Well, you're doing pretty well on my quiz. Most of you have the physical characteristic of blindness, some of you are already people who are elderly and blind, and most of the rest of you will get that way before you know it. And you are all well aware that a large portion of the general population sees blindness as one of the most pitiful, totally debilitating things that can happen to a human being.

Now, let's go back to Al Phipps for a minute. We all know Al; he's a successful businessman and just an all round nice guy. According to the legal definition, Al's blindness makes him, "severely handicapped in relation to employment," and on that basis he has received vocational rehabilitation services periodically throughout his working years.

But Al, if you'll allow me to do so, I'm going to look ahead a few years. Let's say you are now about seventy years old, and for some reason you are living in Northern Michigan; Let's say beautiful, pristine Huron County.

Now, Al, forgive me, the rest of what I'm going to say is not so pleasant; but it's realistic and not at all uncommon. At seventy, Al has a moderately severe stroke which affects his speech and the limbs on his left side. The effects of such strokes can often be minimized by a regime of physical therapy and occupational

therapy. Many people survive such things and go on to live reasonably active productive lives for many more years. But Al's doctor doesn't see a seventy year old patient with a moderate stroke. He sees a blind man; and on that basis alone, he judges Al to be in a helpless and hopeless condition! Therefore, the doctor, with nothing but "kindness" and "good will" in his heart, recommends immediate referral to a nursing home where poor "helpless" Al should receive total care --no physical therapy, no occupational therapy, no bad tasting medicine-- because, after all, why frustrate this poor old man with such things; he's blind.

In the nursing home Al is pretty much confined to his room, because, as we all know, a blind man using a walker is a hazard to himself and everyone else?! The "enlightened" head nurse decides that Braille books are too heavy and bulky for a one-handed blind man, so she tells the library to send Al reading material on tape only. Al is waited on by well meaning people, and isolated from ambulatory patients. He gets frustrated and discouraged. He doesn't like what's happening, but how much weight can be given to the protests of a blind man with slurred speech??

Now Al's wife, Mary Lou, may try to convince someone to let Al come home, so they can continue living together; but all the "professionals" involved in the case agree that two old blind people can't adequately care for one another?!

Who can help Al? The Department of Social Services might be able to offer some assistance, if a doctor recommends that Al try living outside the nursing home; but Al's doctor is too "kind" to make such a recommendation!

Al and Mary Lou's resources are soon exhausted and they resign themselves to the situation. Within a year Al is gone.

The tragic tale I've just told is repeated, with a hundred variations, every year in Michigan (and around the country) The basic problem is...--you guessed it-- attitudes towards blindness. Now, bad attitudes toward blindness are something that many of us, especially you members of NFB, have taken very positive steps to combat. But, as we agreed at the outset, negative attitudes toward blindness are still quite prevalent, even among doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and various "human service professionals" who should know better.

We all know about bad attitudes, but it's not bad attitudes alone that account for the sense of urgency I feel about independent living for people who are elderly with one or several characteristics such as blindness. It's the explosive combination of negative views of blindness combined with two other threats that stand on the horizon of the 21st century: First there's the skyrocketing growth of the retirement age population in general; and second there are impending shortages of civilization's basic

resources such as food and energy

Futurists are making predictions about the 21st century, and not much of it looks good for people who are viewed by the general public as weak or unproductive. William Provine of National Public Radio's "Hard Choices" is said to have warned, "As natural resources become scarcer and the standard of living begins to decline, 'wasting' resources to maintain seriously defective individuals may come to seem immoral."

I hope all of you are fully aware that within the lifetime of those of us who are at least middle aged, doctors and "human services" professionals carried out systematic extermination of virtually all handicapped people in Central Europe. This was allowed, not ordered by the Nazi government in power at the time. It was done in the name of a twisted humanitarianism, as much as economic necessity. The "eugenics" (elimination of the unfit) movement began generations before WW II, and its intellectual descendants are still alive and well on planet Earth. Anyone who follows the news reports of such cases as Baby Doe in Bloomington, Indiana knows that today, in the United States of America, it is legal for doctors to prescribe death for born, medically treatable, wanted infants, solely on the basis of handicap.

We are in a race. There are three different kinds of races. In a race between two contestants of equal ability, the winner can be proud, and the loser has nothing to be ashamed of. In the Aesopian race between the tortoise and the hare; shame on the hare, if he loses. But then there is the race between the hare and the fox: If the hare loses that race, he gets eaten up. Quite frankly, we are in the third kind of race. But the "hare" that faces disaster is not a state human service program. It is Michigan's 25,000 blind people who are elderly or multiply disabled right now. It is the 35,000 Michigan people who will be elderly blind people fifteen years from now, and it is not just Michigan, it is people of all ages everywhere in the country with a characteristic considered to be a severe disability, it may very well be you or me!

Independent living programs are committed to building a positive image of blindness among the professional and general population. Our goal is to see all the necessary resources and skills made available to people who are blind so they can live as independently as they want to for as long as they want to, saving tax dollars, building human dignity, and serving as models for the people who will come after them.

It has taken years to build the present array of MCB Independent Living services, which still reach only about half the counties of our state. But in Huron County, where we put Al Phipps, and in many other counties there are no programs doing what we do.

Now here's a third and final question for our quiz: What attitudes will you face when you become an elderly person with the physical characteristic of blindness? What services will be available? You know the federal funded programs are in jeopardy, because of the "primary disability" question; and our state says it cannot afford to pick them up, even though we've collected overwhelming evidence on cost effectiveness. The state Civil Rights Act, The state constitution, fiscal common sense, and enlightened self-interest, all call for creative planning and bold action steps now; or the costly, inhumane end we envisioned for Al Phipps may be ours as well.

In conclusion, let me repeat: Yes, I do feel a great sense of urgency on this matter. Human life is precious, and human lives are at stake. Our goal of comprehensive independent living service on a statewide basis can only be reached if all concerned constituencies are willing to fight hard for it. There are some other "solutions" to the problem, which may bring financial profit for a few corporations or individuals, but independent living is an enterprise where everybody wins, but nobody makes a bundle. Agency staff, our Governor, and the federal government all have important roles, but in the final analysis, it will be the unrelenting demands of consumers who will make the future an era worth living in.

* * * *

Even though I was becoming more skillful in dealing with workplace challenges, the vicious gremlins that had plagued my schooling, my jobs, and my social life continued to jump in and sabotage even my most elaborate schemes to avoid them. After laboring for months over a speech, I could still get confused about the date it was to be given. After struggling with revision after revision of a journal article, I was still too reticent among my colleagues to use the article's success as a stepping-stone into the social relationships that might have brought major advancement in my field. I was getting better at using my strategy of "creative misunderstanding" to glean critical information out of casual workplace conversations; and I was getting better at using secretaries, time maps, notes to myself, and rigid routines. But I was still dueling with a mysterious, amorphous enemy. Just below my easygoing, wisecracking facade was lurking anger with myself that would explode within me when someone or some circumstance interrupted my concentration on a project, or on a routine I was using to keep track of things. And whenever I had an insight that promised to clarify an issue or solve a problem, I had to record it immediately somehow, or lose it forever.

Shower time is thinking time for me. Sometimes I come up with exciting new ideas, but other times resentment and frustration push their way into my consciousness. One discouraged morning, after spending weeks trying to resolve complaints of an obviously unstable worker, I felt compelled to rush soaking wet out of the shower stall to my memory typewriter and record these angry, confused thoughts whirling in my brain:

"Not being able to think clearly and remember things according to their importance is a problem I can't explain to somebody else. The problem itself gets in the way of analyzing and possibly solving the problem. It's as if I can be more clear-headed about yesterday than I can about the present moment, but I'm trying to write this in the present moment! Most worrisome is my growing impatience with myself, which is accompanied by outbursts of anger. At times I am aware of the rigid ceremonies I've worked out to remember things, but if you ask me about them I probably won't be able to remember what I forget, or what I do to keep track of things."

Forgetfulness was nothing new for me, but when in 1986 my mother was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's disease, my doctor arranged for a brain scan to see if there was any evidence that I was developing that condition. The results were negative. When the report came back, I wisecracked to Eva, "You're just stuck with a hopeless scatterbrain."

* * * *

What follows are some notes to myself and prayers to God during our first few years in Lansing:

November 14, 1981 (Sat):

Well, I guess that's how it's going to be with this attempt to keep a diary, -- interruptions!

Today the Columbia space shuttle came down safely after a shortened mission, because of a power cell failure.

I've been trying to read and do some visual things now, but my eye gets so tired! The pain in my head seems to dig right down into my stomach. It's an awful temptation to go back to skimming through a book, but I just can't strain my eye

any more for tomorrow.

...I've read and believe that a human being without someone to love is a meaningless swirl of nothing encompassing emptiness. As we learn to love, to give, and to share, we gain centers around which we move -- each new one enlarges us. God is omnipresent because he loves everyone. God is love. We become like him when we love our neighbor as ourselves. But if we don't love (God's way), we have no core, no matter. We are not just small, we are nothing, until we love.

There's a mechanical monotony in self-centeredness which builds tension. None is so vulnerable as the self-centered man. You are centered in what you love. Without love you are a homeless wraith. But, God is love, not man; so we should never expect fulfillment to come from another person.

November 16, 1981 (Mon)

.....If I wasn't absolutely sure God can't fail, and that he doesn't make mistakes, I'd be very discouraged! My eyes are so very tired!

November 28, 1981 (Sat):

It was a watershed experience having MSU students from Congo, and Mali over for Thanksgiving dinner. We decorated the table with little flags from their countries (US, too). Mok made a beautiful meal, which they all obviously enjoyed. We couldn't have Cliff home from Africa, so we brought a little bit of Africa home for dinner. Somehow it made us feel closer to him.

Idea: I'm not kind to people because I love them. I love people, because I am kind to them!

March 6, 1982 (Sat):

Lord, give me a thankful heart for the troubled people and situations you've place in my life. Don't let me blame my weaknesses on them.

[A handwritten letter I never delivered]
 Holiday Inn, Gaylord, MI [1984?]

Dear Mok,

It's about 10:30 and I'm sitting in bed after a day of meetings here. David Search and I went back to the office after supper and worked together putting up some shelving. When I got back to my room a while ago, there was a TV show on about a poet in Colorado, who is a very simple man, a trout fisherman; and a genius with words.

...But everything is boring: meetings, big decisions, lunch at nice restaurants, pleasant friendship with David, and poets... Most of the time, no matter what's going on, you are never far away from my thoughts. I don't understand you; nevertheless, I love you. I'm groping and searching in my mind all day trying to think out what really brings joy to you, but I seem to get nowhere. You are the most important person on earth to me, and I guess (quite selfishly) I

long to be loved by you. But all too often words and acts which were meant only as simple expressions of loving concern, seem to get "lost in translation" and end up as more heavy, jagged rocks forming a fortress wall between us. Mok, I love you. Let's talk out our frustrations. Let's work at building common interests --areas of compromise-- happy secrets all our own.

You've raised a fine son, and he's had some excellent wisdom to share with us. Let's listen to him.

*I looked at some bird figurines for you, but none were very good. Let's pick one out together when I get back in Lansing.
Love, Goofy*



A group of elderly and multiply disabled blind people I led in a demonstration at the state capitol to protest program funding cuts

Chapter Ten

THE TEST

My Independent Living program had two offices: one in Lansing and another 170 miles straight north on US 27 in the little resort town of Gaylord. I would make the four-hour drive between Lansing and the northern office once or twice a month. Rolling along the familiar, uncongested highway, past open farm land and through peaceful pine forests, gave me time to speculate on everything from how to get along better with my wonderful Eva, to the art of driving, while eating a hamburger without making a mess. Now and then, I would try to listen to a tape-recorded book while on the road, but I never got much out of them. Then in a list of the latest Talking Book releases, I saw Dr. Harold Levinson's book, *Smart, But Feeling Dumb* (New York, Warner, 1984). That intriguing title described exactly the way I felt about myself, so I ordered the tapes.

The day I drove to Gaylord listening to that book is now etched in my memory about as well as any day of my life. Usually I am too impatient to listen intently to recorded books, but this one gripped me right from the start. I turned the volume way up to drown out the rumble of the car and drove to Gaylord on automatic pilot. As the reader explained how dyslexia typically manifests itself, I got a lump in my throat; tears rolled down my face. I exclaimed aloud, "That's me! I've always done that!" A chill ran down my spine, "He's describing me!" I laughed and I cried. I did not get much work done in Gaylord that afternoon; my mind was on dyslexia. I listened to more of the text that evening in the motel room, and the next morning I departed for Lansing hardly taking a break in my "reading" of that astoundingly revealing book. About half way back, I was supposed to stop in the university town of Mount Pleasant to drop off some materials for an Optometrist.

Was the Optometrist's office really near the university's Education Department, or did I just make it near? Anyway, bursting with questions about dyslexia, I approached a secretary's desk and inquired if the University had a dyslexia expert. She said she thought a certain professor, who happened to be a nun, was probably the one who had done the most work in that area. I sped down the hall and into the Sister's office where I unloaded a disconnected jumble of questions. For a moment, she appeared quite uneasy, not knowing whether to laugh or call the police. Her Christian kindness prevailed, however, and she began to recite a list of books and experts I should consult. I tried to follow what she was saying, but then in a flash of life changing candor, I looked her right in the eye and confessed something like this, "Sister, this is the first time in my life I've admitted such a thing to anybody, but I can't follow what you're saying." Perplexed, she claimed to be very busy and after writing names for me on a scrap of paper, she said "Goodbye."

As soon as I got home, I went to the city library. Looking for a print copy of *Smart, But Feeling Dumb*, I ran into several other books on dyslexia, so I took them along too. Fortunately, taped versions of the other books were available, so through the winter I was able to attempt a dual-media approach to the subject. Before getting very far into any of the books, however, I tried to stimulate an exchange with Dr. Levinson by writing him a long letter, which began with a biographical sketch and ended with this description of how the dyslexic manifestations he had listed in his book were reflected in my life:

...Listening to your book, it did not take long to recognize myself and came to the happy conclusion that maybe I am not dumb, scatterbrained, seriously visually impaired, or (very) crazy! When I was younger, I thought other people were like me. As I became older, I realized reading, writing, and memory were special problems, but I misunderstood the situation, and apparently, professionals have missed a key component, as well. Many of my compensatory mechanisms were developed more or less unconsciously; now the pieces seem to fit together.

READING: When I must read visually, I read large print headings, and a few sentences that seem to make sense, then guess at the content. Often I have been able to get other people to do my reading for me, by "discussing" the text with them. Reading by means of recording is not bad, except I am too active to sit and listen long enough. No matter which way I gather information, my retention of general principles and trends is pretty good, but I can forget even the most common facts, dates, names, etc.

HANDWRITING: With extra concentration and without distractions, I can write fairly well, but otherwise it is abysmal. As much as possible, I use a memory typewriter, watching the LCD display for misspelling, perseverations, sequential reversals of letters and thoughts, and I then print out drafts to try to catch the rest. It's a rather tedious process, but this letter is an example of the kind of end product I can come up with.

SPELLING: I can forget how to spell just about any word.

MATHEMATICS: I can do pretty well with logic, abstract, theoretical reasoning, but when it comes to arithmetic, thank God for pocket calculators!

MEMORY: When I was teaching, I covered the walls of the classroom with grammatical charts, ostensibly for the students; actually for me. I once forgot to give a final exam. I do everything by lists. I keep track of keys, medications, etc. by imposing on myself an inflexible daily regime concerning them.

DIRECTION: When lost, I find it virtually impossible to follow a sequence of directions given verbally. If I can get written directions,

I must repeatedly take my eyes off the road to refer to them, or I get it all mixed up.

TIME: I concentrate on one thing and lose track of everything else, especially time. Thank God for watches with timers!

SPEECH: I tend to speak in incomplete sentences and parenthesis, sometimes stumbling for a word or using the wrong one. I cover by making lots of jokes based on malapropos and illogic.

GRAMMAR: I sometimes have to make many drafts of a two sentence note, before it makes sense.

CONCENTRATION: I get extremely uncomfortable in the midst of multiple stimuli.

PHOBIAS: Crossing busy streets, driving in congested areas, high places.

COORDINATION: My wife has called me "Goofy" since we met. I have seriously considered writing a book on "The Theory And Practice of Klutz!" Most of all, faith in God and good humor have held me together.

Your book makes a lot of sense; thanks for writing it. Please send me information about your Clinic. Are there individuals or groups who are doing creative work on Dyslexia out here in the Midwest?

*Sincerely,
Glenn Leavitt*

The reply from Dr. Levinson's office was only a kind form letter and some brochures.

Reading about something had never been very productive; I needed to discuss dyslexia with someone face-to-face, so I hounded people and organizations with telephone calls. Although there seemed to be a number of agencies and groups, which apparently did not work in unison, there seemed to be general agreement among them on what constitutes dyslexia (with the exception of Dr. Levinson's theory on inner ear involvement). One organization invited me to a peer support group of adult dyslexics, but in front of the building where the meeting was to take place, I was overwhelmed by intensely ambivalent feelings and drove away.

I do not like exposing myself in tests. As a rule, I distrust practitioners' pretense of precision. I would rather not know something about myself than trust myself to an expert who does not know me. But I had given in to the brain scan a while ago and that made it a little easier. Just about everything I had been able to

find out about dyslexia seemed to confirm my self-diagnosis. After months of vacillation, I finally submitted to a battery of tests at the Erickson Learning Center in the spring of 1989.

My testing for dyslexia took place at an ideal time; first thing in the morning, on a warm, clear April day, April 26th, 1989, to be exact. The Erickson Learning Center offices were in a remodeled older home on a winding, tree-lined, slightly hilly narrow road that looked more like Pennsylvania than Michigan. Determined to do my very best, I stopped to elevate my blood sugar with a large bottle of orange juice on the way to the appointment. In the convenience store parking lot, sipping the tart-sweet liquid through a straw, I reviewed the directions to the Center. I would be on time; I would be refreshed. The anxiety I felt was more like that of an explorer about to set foot in an exotic, uncharted land, than that of someone worrying about passing or failing an examination. Whatever the outcome of the testing, the results would not be garbled by my attempting (at least consciously) to be what I thought I should be; the results would simply reflect what I am. I would not (at least consciously) try to outthink the tests or the tester.

Faced with a fifty-three-year old test subject, the graduate student who administered the tests quickly relaxed into an unpretentious, adult-to-adult mode. She promised to give me a break in the procedure whenever I needed to rest my eyes or brain. She turned off the bothersome fluorescent lighting and allowed me to sit at the table with my back to the window, leaving her to face the glare of the morning sun. The content of the tests is now only a blur in my memory, except for the impression that they were designed for children. I thought my performance was flawless, until I was asked to repeat words and numbers the graduate student recited. I stumbled over one or two of her examples until I discovered that she would allow me to echo her as she spoke, without my having to mentally "hold on" to the material at all.

As we went on with the tests, she kept her promise by allowing me frequent breaks to stare at the wall and gather my wits. At several points, I caught myself drifting off into strategies to beat the test and the tester, but I think I resisted. At the end, she asked me to compose something for about a page in my own handwriting. By that time I was worn out, and for a second I was gripped by my old "exposure" panic. Then, there flashed before me, the content of a business letter I had written, dictated, and slightly rewritten dozens of times over the past year as I had struggled to explain our Independent Living program to its critics. I took up the pencil; sentences, spelling, and handwriting just seemed to flow into what I was sure was a coherent, legible reproduction of my standard letter.

Only as I got lost driving back to my office did I fully understand just how fatiguing those little children's tests had been. "El Klutzo strikes again!" I moaned

to myself, as it dawned on me that I had turned the wrong way when I left the Learning Center. Back in my office, it was (mercifully) a quiet afternoon; I was able to rest and daydream: Why did some tasks seem so easy in the clinical setting, when similar challenges in everyday life had often been so difficult? I'm probably more crazy than dyslexic!

By quitting time that afternoon, however, other concerns crowded into my consciousness, and the weeks I had to wait for the test results went by without much more introspection. My doctor found a suspicious tumor on my arm, which he wanted to remove immediately for biopsy. The day after my surgery, our State Independent Living Council had a rather tumultuous all-day meeting. And about a week later the trout season opened, "requiring" that I spend all of one Saturday wading in a nearby stream.

When, after several weeks, I returned to the Learning Center for the exit interview, I was thinking the \$200 I had paid for the dyslexia testing had been wasted. I should have used the money to buy the beautifully balanced fly rod and reel I had been coveting for years. However, as the Director and I discussed the results, it soon became clear that submitting to the evaluation for dyslexia was going to rival marriage or religious conversion as perhaps the single most life changing event in my adult years. Summarizing the outcome of the tests in a letter she sent me after the exit interview, the Learning Center Director wrote:

*Erickson Learning Center
Okemos, Michigan*

Dear Mr. Leavitt:

With this letter I want to summarize for your records the results of the intake case history Education Diagnostic Evaluation interview and testing you underwent at the Erickson Learning Center in April.

Your evaluation at the Center revealed language processing deficits that are quite inconsistent with your clearly superior level of intelligence indicating that you have the type of learning disability we prefer to call dyslexia.

As you know all too well the most obvious manifestation of your language processing deficit is in the area of auditory intake, and expressive sequencing; however very significant deficits were also quite apparent in the areas of associating verbal symbols with abstract concepts and verbal recall.

Your work history has shown that you have capacity for superior performance whenever appropriate accommodation for

your disability can be provided. In fact, as we have discussed on several occasions, in jobs where creativity and imagination in completing a single project are more important than dealing quickly but superficially with several assignments more or less simultaneously you are liable to perform on the level of people who are designated as "gifted." However, if rapid fire oral directions are given to you by a superior with no visual representation of these directions such as a list, memo, job description etc., you may experience difficulties and you should avoid these types of situations.

Although you feel comfortable with the accommodations available in your present job; if you experience a major change in responsibilities, I would recommend that you consider taking advantage of the structured remediation available through an agency such as our Center.

It was a real pleasure to work with you. The best of luck in the future. If I can be of further help, please contact me.

*Sincerely,
Caryn Edwards, Director
Erickson Learning Center*

I usually experience a knee-jerk reaction to the term "disability," feeling compelled to demand that people use it correctly; so I was pleased to hear the Learning Center Director agree entirely that its use should never imply an open door for arrogant professionals to barge into someone's life with programs and services.

Late spring and summer of 1989 were spent getting to know myself as a normal person with a not too uncommon characteristic many experts in the field of education think of as a disability, a "learning disability." I told my boss of the test results. Even though federal regulations made it very advantageous for him to have a high percentage of disabled people on staff, he mused, "You do your job so well. I wish I had more disabled people like you."

Still unsure of terminology, I explained to my daughter-in-law, Carol, that the tests showed me to be "learning disabled," to which she responded, "Father, we love you, and whatever you are, you're too smart to be learning disabled! Soon, I became acquainted with the enthusiastic director of the Michigan Dyslexia Institute. In discussions with the MDI director, I would waiver back and forth between various terms for the phenomenon we were talking about. Once, when I shared with her an early sketch of a humorous article I was writing, in

which I referred to myself as learning disabled, she lost her patience and scolded, "Glenn, you are no more learning disabled than Albert Einstein was! You are dyslexic." I had to agree that "disabled" did not seem to fit very well, and since that time, in spite of what the various education experts call it, I describe the peculiar way I intellectually process verbal symbols as dyslexia.

I am, by nature contemplative, and the events of 1989 gave me lots of fodder to chew on. The scraps of paper and old business cards I always carried to record notes and lists of things to do, now became filled with scribbled sentence fragments reflecting autobiographical insights on how I had managed, or thoughts on the role of dyslexics in the history of human civilization.

In her dyslexic autobiography *Reversals* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1979), Eileen Simpson confesses that as she reviewed memories of youthful struggles, she experienced a great deal of dyslexic regression. Whether it is regression, or simply heightened awareness, I am too close to discern, but blunders that previously would evoke no more response than an internal grumble, "You dumbbell!" would now bring smiling recognition, "That's just another example of how my brain works." For example, passing by a movie marquee I thought, "What a morbidly silly title for a movie." Only after a second look and some deeper reflection, was I able to conclude that the name of the film was *Dead Calm*, not *Dead Clam*. And in my office, I scribbled a note to my secretary and then rewrote it; because it appeared illegible. A moment later, reflecting on my infamous handwriting, I fished the discarded note out of the wastebasket. Instead of "*Please give the original to Marilyn*," I had scrawled, "*Please give the ordinal to Warilyn*." For almost ten years we had lived in Lansing, where Interstate 96 and Interstate 69 cross each other; and I could still glance at a sign and not be sure which highway it was referring to.

When the Dyslexia Institute Director asked me to attend her organization's annual meeting and give a little talk on the laughable side of dyslexia, I said I would love to. A few days later, while making one of my regular four hour drives north to Gaylord, through the pleasant mid-summer landscape, I pulled out my little pocket dictating machine and started telling stories on myself. Some incidents were fresh in my mind because they had come up in my note taking contemplations. I talked and talked to the little black box in my hand, as the time and miles swept by unnoticed. When I arrived at the Gaylord office, I had two cassettes filled with disjointed anecdotes punctuated by chuckles and guffaws. Even though she was a fine person, I was not ready to expose this side of myself to my secretary in Gaylord, but I dreaded having to type and retype draft after draft of so much material myself. My secretary, in Lansing, was new on the job and anxious to please; besides she seemed to have a delightfully human sense of humor, so after several days' hesitation, I entrusted her with the job of transcribing the tapes. Of course, I should not have asked her to type something

that was not part of our work, but she just smiled pleasantly the following day, as she handed me an eight page, word for word transcription of my meanderings. How much she thought about the content of what she was typing I do not know, but I have no indication that she shared with anyone else in the office my confessions of bungling and deception.

Even though there was time to give only a portion of my material at the Dyslexia Institute annual meeting, it was received by the audience with such enjoyment that I resolved to rework it into an article I called, "*The Lighter Side Of Dyslexia: Confessions Of A Scatterbrain*", which was published in the Orton Dyslexia Society's quarterly *Perspectives* (Spring, 1990). As perceptive, non-dyslexic readers will easily note, that article served as the launching pad for this book.

**"THE LIGHTER SIDE OF DYSLEXIA:
CONFESSIONS OF A SCATTERBRAIN"**

Many people are experts on dyslexia. In an academic sense, I am certainly not an expert at all. Although I have two Masters Degrees, I have had only one Psychology course, and I can't recall what it was about. If I remember right, I did take an undergraduate course in Education back at Penn State, but I think I got a C- in it. On the other hand, I feel that in an experiential sense, I am an expert, in that I have lived with dyslexia for over fifty years. But again, on the other hand, I did not realize I was living with dyslexia until early in my fifty third year. Up to November of 1988, I considered myself an apparently hopeless scatterbrain with a moderate visual impairment. Since submitting to a number of tests, however, I have been able to enjoy a delightful change of status from suspected early Alzheimers, to that of a person who is dyslexic.

The experts know very well that the lives of people with dyslexia can be terribly traumatic. There are thousands of stories about children who are humiliated in school, because they are "acting dumb;" or young men whose angry frustration gets them into such serious trouble with the law that they end up spending years in prison. There is, however, a lighter side to almost every human experience; and dyslexia is no exception. In fact, I believe developing a sense of humor, and capitalizing on the hilarious circumstances that can arise in the life of someone who is dyslexic is the key to coping with this, as well as just about any other characteristic that might be considered a disability or handicap.

I have blind friends who among themselves split their sides

laughing about splitting open a forehead on a half open door. And I have heard a wheelchair user roll with laughter at a story about someone trying to roll their wheelchair through a revolving door. Such stories are for insiders; they would seem cruel and insensitive outside the in-group. Perhaps dyslexia is different, or maybe my experience with it is different; because even before I found out why my brain seems to run on an errant track, I found certain comfort in chuckling with other people about myself.

In fact classic symptoms of dyslexia led directly to successful courtship of my wonderful wife, Eva. For our first date, I invited her to a dance. but when we got there the place was closed. It seems I had misread the announcement posted in the Enlisted Men's Club: the dance was to take place on the 12th, not the 21st!

** * **

..."Double take" reading is part of my life. But what can you do except laugh at yourself, and share it with others, when as you are driving through a small town in Northern Michigan you see a sign in front of a grocery store: "Ground Chuck Sale!" and your mind has to go through several stages of concentrated, interpretive thought as you try to decide whether it is something to do with a groundhog? Or maybe a woodchuck? until you are finally able to reach the conclusion that it is just a typical grocery store offering, and not some exotic North woods delicacy!

You may find it hard to believe, but I used to be a language teacher. Isn't that amazing? a person with what is known as a "specific language disability" teaching languages? But I did it; and in some ways I did it very well. I have to admit I only learned to spell the word professor after I became one; but I did become one! As a matter of fact, I was a foreign language instructor in the foreign language department of a college, seeing and writing the word foreign over and over, until I finally mastered its spelling; but I did master it. My native German wife has always been a better speller of English words than I am; but I am getting better at it.

As a language teacher, I had an excellent memory for sounds, but my ability to develop and remember vocabulary was abysmal. It has been much the same with music: I could easily memorize the sounds of a symphony, but I could rarely keep in mind the words of a song. Memorizing the declensions and conjugations of a language range from extremely difficult to utterly impossible for me, but I taught both German and Russian. How did I do it? I developed crib sheets. For instance, for my beginning Russian class, I ordered from the Soviet Union a set of two foot by three foot charts of the all the various special word endings and constructions necessary to speak that beautiful language correctly. In my classroom I put those thirty six charts individually, side by side, on the wall with masking tape. I jokingly told the department Chairman that I wanted this very

complex material always before the eyes of my students, so that eventually it would sink in. But the truth was (as I'm sure you suspect), those charts were for me. They were constant reminders to plug in exasperatingly inconsistent holes in my memory.

By the way, you may be wondering about my university study of languages, especially on the graduate level, which is primarily the study of literature. How does someone who is at best a "hunt and peck" reader ever make it? I must admit there were some desperately hard times, but there was also fun. Like a pickpocket or some con man, I perfected a few deceptive techniques that have become so much a part of my personality that it is hard to dissect them out and explain them objectively to someone else. Certainly, one of the most successful ploys I used to avoid or hide the fact that I almost never read what I was supposed to read, was to trick some other person into reading something for me. This chicanery worked with a number of professors, as well as with fellow students, and even my wife, who read Homer for me and did not even realize it. The trick is to hold the book in your hand, to love it, to smell it, to feel it; and then to read and comprehend the title and chapter headings. Turn every page to find pictures, maps and charts. If the back cover contains a synopsis of the contents, read and re-read it until it makes sense. Then tell someone else what a good book it is, in hopes that they will begin to read it; or find a person who has already read it and pump them with questions. But do not ask questions that reveal how little you know about what is printed on the pages; you must pose your questions so they imply you know very well: you are just looking for the other person's opinion.

Can you imagine, I graduated from a very rigorous Masters program in German Literature, and never read all of Goethe's Faust? I struggled through some poems, plays and short stories, always making extensive notes in the margins. (I was seldom able to re-sell my college texts, because I reinforced my memory for words by writing and re-writing, underlining and highlighting until the books became totally worthless.) I often did not even try to read my notes; but I think the act of stopping to write and think, and ask myself questions as I was attempting to comprehend the material, helped imprint the information in my mind. Whatever happened, I did get through the program with respectable grades.

I have not been just a professor and a student; I have also been a husband, a father, and a homeowner; and I have had a lot of fun in those roles, too. Maintaining a home when you have a very poor sense of spacial relations can be laughable. Once we installed thick, new carpeting and then found that a closet door could no longer be opened. The solution of that problem seemed simple enough. I took the door off its hinges and, since I am famous for

making messes, I carried the door out onto the front porch, where I carefully sawed off about three quarters of an inch. Try as I may, I could not saw a completely straight line; but that was not my main problem. The main problem became apparent when I put the door back on its hinges and found that I had removed three quarters of an inch from the top instead of the bottom! Some mistakes are relatively inexpensive to repair. I went out and found the section I had cut off. Like the wiggly piece of a jigsaw puzzle, it fit perfectly; so I just glued it back in place. The evidence of my error was hardly visible.

* * *

...Even though I have been telling of the lighter side of being a scatterbrain, I would like to conclude with something that combines a little seriousness with the fun. I have always enjoyed throwing together rhymes. I love the sounds. I love alliteration. People with "scrambled minds" sometimes tend to be delightfully creative. Certainly, imagination has often helped me through ticklish tight spots. What I want to close with, however, is not particularly good rhyming; and it is surely not good poetry. It just reflects the struggle of a human mind to deal good naturedly with circumstances which did not seem like "good nature" at all. It is only in looking back at things I wrote decades ago, in the light of what I have learned about dyslexia in the last twelve months, that nuances of pathos, humor and autobiography shine through these little pieces.

Only now is it clear to me why one moody day many years ago in Kalamazoo, I began to feel a special affinity to a sloth. You see, a sloth seems to be a very solitary, lonely animal. (Have you ever seen a herd of sloths charging through the forest?) A sloth may be a slow learner, and he may do what he needs to do with no sense of haste; but eventually, he gets things done. And because of the way he hangs upside down in a tree, a sloth has a very peculiar, almost dyslexic perspective of the world.

[At this point I had concluded the article with my little self portrait poem "The Sloth," but the Perspectives editor did not have room for it on the page.]

* * * *

Thinking about dyslexia was fun for a while, but then the precarious nature of life shocked its way back into my consciousness with one of those late night phone calls we all dread. I was attending a three-day training conference in Northern Michigan. Eva had remained in Lansing, because she was scheduled to work several night shifts at the hospital. "There's a call at the main desk for

Glenn Leavitt." a hotel worker interrupted just as the evening session was breaking up. "Dad," Cliff's voice had a soft, urgency that chilled my brain, "Mom's sick. They've got her in cardiac intensive care. She's asking for you, but you can't talk with her..."

At about 3:00 AM, dazed by a five hour, caffeine fueled drive, I took Eva's limp hand in mine and prayed that God would somehow heal her laboring heart. A slight, but oh so beautiful smile invaded her pale face, as she clutched a little stuffed monkey Cliff had bought her, "Don't worry, Goofy. I'll be all right." Away from her bed and the maze of tubes and monitors, the doctor explained how her heart, which had been damaged by childhood rheumatic fever, was struggling along at a slow and dangerously irregular pace,. She would need to be watched carefully for a while, but with sensible care and medication, she had a good chance of pulling through. Eva is a survivor. A while ago, she had come through a bad automobile accident with only minor injuries. This episode with her heart would change the way we lived; but somehow I knew she would recover. She did.

* * * *

In August 1989, Clifford and Carol packed a rental truck and moved to Florida, where they both had excellent jobs waiting for them. They had lived in a tiny apartment just a few miles from our house for about five years, and we had grown accustomed to having them over for Sunday dinner. Eva had made every holiday, from Christmas to the Fourth of July, a gala family party with cakes, decorations, and somebody's absolutely favorite dish. On the day Cliff and Carol drove away, Eva and I bravely smiled as we hugged them both, but as the truck pulled out of sight around the corner, we just clung to each other and cried.

Eva had a few friends, but I had no social life in Lansing other than "the kids." And yet, in the weeks after Cliff and Carol moved away, I started to understand that a very unexpected fallout of the dyslexia testing was going to be increased self-confidence and some budding friendships. By now, I could unashamedly discuss my dyslexia with anyone, and I enjoyed intensive exchanges of views on the philosophical and educational implications of the phenomenon. I had always considered myself an all-around dilettante, but on the subject of living with dyslexia, I was an instant expert, simply by virtue of having done it for a lifetime. My growing sociability was some consolation for the emptiness Cliff and Carol's departure left in my soul.

In our loneliness, Eva and I fell in love all over again. We became more considerate and sensitive to each other's needs. Eva would be eligible to retire in the following spring, and we looked forward eagerly to the time when she would

be free to travel with me. Eva encouraged me to follow through on the Erickson Learning Center's suggestion that I try to write a book about my experiences. She patiently busied herself around the house on fall weekends, as I struggled with the awkward mechanics of typing and revising my still quite short manuscript on a little portable typewriter with very expensive memory expansion chips. By Christmas, I felt overwhelmed, and laid aside the typewriter, memory cards, and about 30 pages of manuscript badly in need of editing and revision. The book had been a total immersion project. In my singular zeal, I had stolen office time for the book, and I had been neglecting several major crises that were just then crowding into my field of work. It became imperative that I redirect my energies.

Among my fellow workers in the Commission for the Blind, I was jokingly known for being a technology "aginner." No computers, electronic voice mail, or microwaves for me, thanks! The little portable memory typewriter had been a grudging exception to my technologically Neanderthal stand. With a sly smile, I would admit to a few close acquaintances that the memory feature on the typewriter had been a breakthrough for me, allowing me to more efficiently draft and redraft short letters and messages. However, it had taken me a year to master the machine's features so the mechanics no longer interfered with the message. Nevertheless, the overwhelming difficulty I had producing the first 30 pages of the book on the portable typewriter led me to consider turning to a computer. Was there a computer so user-friendly that I could keep track of its controls? Was there a device with a small, non-glare display with extra large letters so I could visually search for something on the screen without getting lost in extraneous clutter? Was there a machine with a memory disk system that was simple to operate and inexpensive to expand? I spent the winter researching these questions with our department computer experts and the expert staff at Lansing's Living and Learning Resource Center, a private agency dedicated to finding technological solutions to the problems of people with disabilities.

Amazingly, the computer most amenable to my needs was also one of the least expensive on the market, the Tandy 102, the original laptop designed primarily for journalists and traveling salespeople. Since procuring one of those little briefcase size machines in about February of 1990, I found it difficult to go anywhere without it. I told my colleagues at work that the little laptop was the absolute limit of my tolerance for technology, but they just smiled knowingly and said "Oh, Oh, Leavitt, what next?"

Somehow, it seemed that inside of me there had been imprisoned a treasury of pretty good ideas and innovations, and the key to their release was the computer. For the next six months powerfully persuasive letters, position papers, and newsletter articles fed out of my little portable printer. Even though to my knowledge it was never officially published, the "*Three Blind Mice*" paper was the capstone of them all. The Commission for The Blind was being threatened

with losing its Independent Living program funding for not being a "cross disability" program. For years, I had felt like a voice in the wilderness, trying to explain that rigidly structured federal reporting instruments had made it impossible for us to show that our program served people with all kinds of disabilities as long as they were blind, as well. With a smiling sledgehammer, my little three-page nursery rhyme allegory drove home to a national audience the simple fact that data collection instruments which disregard the existence of people with multiple disabilities effectively cut off the data "tales" of independent living program involvement we were providing for blind people who fall into more than one disability category.

On through the summer of 1990, my two fingers stumbled across the keyboard, and idea after idea was transformed into words and action. Was it the computer or an explosion of calm, good-natured self-confidence? Or was no longer having to hide what I could not do making it easier to follow through on what I could do very well?

Some things I was writing could help philosophically, but the effects of state and federal budget deficits could not be avoided on philosophical grounds alone. When defunding of the Commission for the Blind Independent Living program became a certainty, Eva and I decided that early retirement with a reduced pension, but with a good health insurance package, looked much more attractive than joining the ranks of the unemployed in my late fifties.

Some notes to myself and prayers to God during the last seven years before retirement in 1992:

May 8, 1985:

...In a world without God, growing old is a capital offense. There's no justice or mercy: getting arthritis or breaking a hip is punishable by physical torture; and losing loved ones or getting Alzheimer's (like mom) is punishable by solitary confinement.

December 6, 1985 (Fri):

Taking this day off. Depression is creeping into my life. I often feel so empty and alone.

December 31, 1985:

Lord, thank you for 1985. For our new "daughter" Carol, For Mok's safe trip to Germany and reconciliation with Papa. For helping us find the good nursing home for Mom. And most of all, for Mok. I love her more than ever. She's my "lily lily among the

thorns," or more appropriately, she's my sweet little Mokol (bird) among the starlings. Bless her, Lord. Fill her with your peace. Help me be the kind of husband you want for her.

January 6, 1986:

10:00PM in the Chalet Motel in Gaylord. They have already had more than a season's worth of winter up here, and it's only January. The Chalet buildings are beautifully draped with snow that hangs over the Eastern edges in precarious foot thick pillows supported by nothing. It's a frosted, gingerbread house world; lovely to look at, but exasperating to live in. Some of the people I'm working with up here are starting to get a little "stir crazy" and peevish.

Lord, the world system, the cosmos, is just about as solidly founded as the snow sculpture on the East end of the roof. Keep my eyes on what is real, and eternal, and away from "appearances." Teach me patience, kindness, and selfless concern for others.

January 26, 1986 (Sun):

11:30 PM in the Gaylord Holiday Inn. Left Lansing at about 3:00 this afternoon and picked up Jean and Lois so they could attend the CIL Participant's Advocate Group meeting here tomorrow. Then I'm going across the Big Mack bridge to the Indian Health Center in the Upper Peninsula.

Mok was so tender when I left. Thank you, Lord. Bless her and her health.

Feb 28, 1992: [Retirement day]

Old Bureaucrats never die; they just change their forms.

May 12, 1992:

In my little office at home. The usual clutter is gone: the snapshot of Cliff hugging Carol, the souvenir Great Lakes freighter assembled by disabled workers in a sheltered workshop, the Albion College beer stein signed by a class of appreciative students, the four year old anniversary card from Eva with an especially tender message, an amateurish still life in oil, the photo of my mother with Alzheimers disease staring pleasantly from the rocking chair in her nursing home room, the handcarved Russian bear Papa Balle sent me from Germany thirty years ago, the almost finished manuscript of the book, and piles of reminders to finish projects long forgotten; just about everything has been packed in boxes along with dozens of other worthless treasures.

I removed the old wallpaper and painted the room a few weeks ago ...or was it a few years ago? Have I been retired only a

couple of months, or was I born retired? Now the walls are all repainted in neutral, off-white. my desk is dusted and unnaturally uncluttered, so house hunters will think that's the way we always live and take care of our things. My mind has become neutral and uncluttered, too. What day is it? Does it matter now that I have retired? Yes, even though time is only an illusion, it's an illusion that matters very much.

The first couple to look at the house fell in love with it, just as Eva had fallen in love with it twelve years ago. When we came here from Kalamazoo our Realtor had wanted to show us listings all around Lansing, but after driving by this house just once, Eva's mind was made up: this was to be our new home. This house needs to belong to impulsive people. They will nurture it just as much as Eva and I are going to nurture our new little home on a hillside in Western North Carolina. In retirement, there will be time to daydream. Life will just clack and thump along like one long commuter train ride to the school in Philadelphia, but there won't be any classes, textbooks or tests waiting to pounce on me at the end of this excursion. But of course, one doesn't commute to retirement; it's just an eternal Sunday afternoon, isn't it? I don't know.

*Maybe all I really know are questions? Maybe good questions are the only true facts of life? Or maybe it is just that all I really know **in words** are questions? I will probably spend the rest of my thinking life trying to figure out such things, and I'm looking forward to it.*

* * * *

In August of 1992, a month or so after Alzheimer's finally overcame my mother's will to live, my brother Preston called to see if I would compose something to be shared with the rest of the relatives at the memorial service in Maine. It was probably the most difficult writing task in my life. I did as he asked; however, a few weeks later, the three-page piece I sent him was returned to North Carolina stamped "undeliverable." It seems I had miscopied the address of the old family cottage in Maine.

[A "letter to my mother" intended to be read at her graveside in August of 1992]

Dear Mom,

Mom, looking over your old scrapbooks and pictures always fills me with both happiness and pain. A little poem you saved as a teenager ends with the line "...for as gold is tried by fire, so a heart is tried by pain." Mom, Your life (and mine) began in times that were positive and idealistic: times when it was Ok to be sentimental, times when it was more important to be yourself, than to be molded by "pop" culture, so I know you'll forgive me for getting a little sentimental here.

As a young girl, you carried your pain well: the tragic death of your best school friend Marian Dowde, whose sweetness you told us of so often; and the loss of your mother just as you entered those years when a young girl needs a Mom most of all. And you carried your happiness so well, too: winning a beauty contest, and marching through the woods with the Campfire Girls chanting WO-HEE-LO to scare away the bears!!

What a beautiful bride you were, Mom. little mementos and letters tell a tender love story of "Big Shorty," the "silent blond," falling head over heels in love with that guy you called Big Boy. (Of course by the time I was born you were calling each other Monk and Pret.) Life in 1929 was different than in 1992. Just think of it; you spent some time between your spring engagement and your October wedding attending evening classes in cooking and homemaking at the David Hale Fanning Trade school for Girls in Worcester! Now, just in case some younger folks hearing this think that your youth was prudish and empty, Mom, we need to remind them that most of the summer before you were married you spent at the cottage in Maine, as a guest of your future mother-in-law. I'll bet there were plenty of late night walks on the beach with "Big Boy" holding you close and admiring how the moonlight shimmered through your strawberry blond hair. Did you two go over to the pavilion at Old Orchard Beach and dance to some "big band"? I know you could dance a mean Charlston!

A year or two before you got married, you had gotten such stars in your eyes that you enticed your brother to drive you 3,000 miles across the country to Hollywood, where you had a part in a movie. I'm so glad you decided to come back East and marry dad!

Mom, my personal memories of you center around your love of drama, poetry and music. You didn't just read stories to your little boys, you acted them out and sang them. You taught me to love the "music" of well chosen words in old fashioned tales and poems, and you taught me to hear the "words" of meaning subtly hidden between the chords of the classical pieces you played so well. As a young girl, you must have spent many an afternoon practicing your piano lessons, when you would rather be outside playing! You never told me, but I bet you were disappointed when neither of us

boys followed up on our piano lessons. But, Mom, I can still play the first few chords of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, you so patiently taught me when I was about 12!

*Mom, nowadays people seem to think that a wife who doesn't have a career outside the home, does nothing. People who think that way should review the accomplishments of Amy Leavitt. Certainly every town you lived in, especially Wayne, Pennsylvania, was a better place because you were there. Years after the War ended in 1945, blinded veterans were still thanking you for your faithful service as a Red Cross Gray Lady in the Valley Forge Veterans Hospital. Your Saturday Club of Wayne had many projects that enriched the community. But I guess what we all remember best is your acting and directing in Wayne's local theater group, the Footlighters. When Amy had the lead, the play was bound to be a success! You had so many parts, none of us can remember them all; but I recall how we all split our sides laughing as you sat at home memorizing your lines for hilarious comedies like *Life With Father*, and we were spellbound as you prepared for gripping dramas like the one about the last heiress to the Czarist throne, *Anastasia*. But best of all I remember you as the character you played one time called *Mrs. Moonlight*, the lady who never grew old. Mom, I thought you would always be *Mrs. Moonlight*.*

*Mom, I was your wayward son, who had to wander off toward Alaska, but never made it further than Colorado. I went on to Ohio and then to New Jersey. After several years in the Army overseas, and six years of college, Eva and I went off to Michigan. We came back home now and then, but never for long. Mom, as a young man with a family and career, I didn't fully realize how much of your life I was missing. I wish I could have seen you starring in roles at the Bucks County Playhouse and wish I could have been there to applaud when you played opposite Walter Mathau in the Philadelphia Playhouse *In The Park*. But we were in Michigan, a long way from Wayne, and we were busy with our own family and jobs. Years flew by, Mom, we exchanged letters, and we saw you and Dad on a few holidays. We were together for a few days after dad died, but I guess I lost track of you as a whole person, until the years started tearing away at your body and at your mind.*

*It was only when we had to rush back to Pennsylvania a few years ago because you had been hospitalized, confused and debilitated, that I realized that maybe you were not *Mrs. Moonlight*. After you went into the nursing home, we came back to Pennsylvania to visit you several more times. You were always so pleasant at *Pleasant View*. One afternoon I sat holding your hand, not knowing whether you knew who I was or if you were able to follow at all as I rambled on about people and events you might remember. Then you started talking about "Glenn" for a minute. I*

looked down at those blotched, blue-white, old hands that had once changed my diaper, that had played the Moonlight Sonata, that had pointed with such convincing scorn at the Russian Princess Anastasia, and that had tenderly comforted young men who had come home from the war blind, and I fell in love with my mother all over again. That's the last time I heard you use my name, Mom. Thanks, I'll treasure that moment for the rest of my life. And Mom, even though you are now finding your rest beside Dad, you'll always and forever be Mrs. Moonlight in my heart.

Love,
Glenn

* * * *

The poem that follows was based only partially on our experiences with my mother. My work with elderly people gave many opportunities to get to know individuals and families whose lives were touched by dementia, and this is devoted to all of them:



With mom in the nursing home a year before she died

DEMENTIA

*A woman sits in Pleasant View.
She sits, she sits, she sits.
There's lots to do in Pleasant View.
She sits, she sits, she sits.*

*I hold her hand in Pleasant View.
She sits, she sits, she sits.
"Mom, it's me. Can't you see?"
She sits, she sits, she sits.*

*What does she see in Pleasant View?
What does she think in Pleasant View?
What does she know in Pleasant View?
I wish I knew. I wish I knew.*

*Why must her mind decay this way,
a mind that loved another day,
decay away through empty days,
in Pleasant View?
I wish I knew.*

*"Sir, it's time to leave"
I reach to hug. She draws away.
"I love you Mom. I love you Mom."
She sits, she sits, she sits.*

Chapter Eleven

DYSLEXIA AND DISABILITY

Somewhere in the fading memories of my undergraduate studies at Penn State, there remain two closely related admonitions from the ancient Greeks: "Know thyself!" and "The unexamined life is not worth living." Whoever expressed those sentiments would certainly approve of what I have been doing since taking the tests that revealed my dyslexia. In the shower, walking my dog, or waiting for Eva in the department store, my mind continually wanders into a myriad of contemplations on dyslexia, the questions it raises about my personal history, and the role of words and language in the history of civilization.

Over the years, I had deceived myself so well that, in my late fifties, peeking under my own camouflage is an exciting adventure. It is as if I were researching the life of some exotic stranger. I am meeting myself for the first time, and for the first time I enjoy my company! For years, whenever I got things mixed up, my favorite joke was, "Sorry, I'm from another planet." But lately, I am feeling a little more at home here on earth.

It is comforting to hear that Albert Einstein, Hans Christian Andersen, and August Rodin were probably dyslexic; they are good company. Of course we will never know for sure if such high achievers from previous generations really did have a language processing deficiency. However, I would strongly disagree with the researchers who argue circuitously that people whose lives reflect brilliance and creativity simply could not have been "learning disabled."

It is a little frightening for me to consider the life of an infamous dyslexic like presidential assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. Could I have made some of the disastrous choices he made? After all, as a young man, I too found military security, criminology, and foreign cultures very attractive. I was a loner who would do just about anything to appear intelligent and to feel part of an in-group. I am told the jails are full of young men who fit the classic definition of a dyslexic: having above average intelligence, but unable to perform well certain language processing skills in the manner commonly prescribed by educators. Even though I believe each of us is personally responsible for what we do with our genetic and physical legacies, I still find it easy to sympathize with the angry frustration of people who do not fit neatly into society's mold.

This book began with the observation that my earliest memories were of fear and uncertainty. Living with fear and uncertainty nurtures anger. Strategies like my self-depreciative wisecracks could divert attention away from my bungling, but strategies only get around problems; they do not resolve them. One

of the most painful aspects of looking under my camouflage has been to see beyond my strategies and come face to face with my own anger. There were times when it would explode within me; sometimes I stumbled into ways to capitalize on it, but I guess one way or another, it has always been there.

Many people equate honesty with being consistent. Unfortunately, a person with dyslexia may be reluctant to admit forgetting or losing track of things. When my worst blunders would come to light, I would try to laugh them off with the quip: "Oh well, inconsistency is a mark of genius, isn't it?" Nevertheless, a person with dyslexia may often appear quite untrustworthy and deceitful. In fact, as I think about it, an undiagnosed dyslexic may feel forced (perhaps unconsciously) to choose between the role of a deceiver or the role of a fool. Often there appears to be no middle ground.

* * * *

Once I contemplated the role of dyslexic citizens in a democracy. Doesn't democracy work out to be a dictatorship of articulate communicators who are able to contribute and respond to various verbal based media with clarity and dispatch? Is there any room in the democratic process for "hunt and peck" readers, and "double take" thinkers, whose perspectives are not based on speedy response to verbal symbols? I want to believe the answers are "yes." In fact, I think the views of people who tend to bypass word symbols, if given careful consideration, may prove to be the approaches that resolve some of the "irresolvable" dilemmas humanity is dragging along into the 21st century. Dyslexia among human beings may represent more potential than disability.

I used to love bookstores. Sometimes I would just gaze longingly at the window displays, but now and then, I would go in and browse until my eyes gave up. Ever since I was a teenager, I have been an easy mark for book clubs and magazine subscriptions, only to end up giving away or throwing away my treasures, skimmed but unread. Although the act of reading was so enticing, actually great segments of life preserved in the written word have remained for me "closed books."

I have been listening to tape recorded texts now and then since the early nineteen seventies, but with the exception of Levinson's book *Smart, But Feeling Dumb*, I seldom got much out of them. Usually, I would feel compelled to assume the postures and the milieu associated with visual reading: comfortably seated in a quiet place with few distractions. However, the intellectual upheaval dyslexia brought into my life stimulated such a gnawing hunger to make up for a lifetime of literary privation, that I began carrying a small cassette book machine with me, letting it play as I did everything from getting dressed in the morning to munching

a bedtime snack.

From the Library of Congress catalog of talking books, I almost randomly selected biographies, travel adventures, histories, science, and humor. Soon I made an amazing discovery; reading while physically busy, and with occasional distractions and interruptions, seemed to substantially increase my grasp of what a book was all about, even though my retention of specifics remained as poor as ever. I guess even partial attention has to be more productive than falling asleep. For the first time in my life, in my fifty-fifth year, I began reading for enjoyment. In fact, as Eva will testify, I am becoming as compulsive about my reading as an addict is about his drugs. I agonize in withdrawal when I run out of tapes or when the machine goes on the fritz, forcing me to suffer through some routine manual task in silence.

My spate of reading has stretched and strained my brain like taffy in a candy store mixing machine, but nothing I have read lately has been quite so stimulating as Oliver Sacks' *Seeing Voices: A Journey Into The World Of The Deaf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989). I had worked with blind people who were also deaf, but listening to Sacks' insightful discussion of sign language and what it means to be deaf, made more pieces of the dyslexic puzzle fall into place. Some deaf people grow up without any language at all, but they think. The author does not say so, but a corollary should be true, as well; dyslexics may have varying degrees of difficulty processing language, but that does not necessarily restrict their ability to think. When I began to contemplate dyslexia after my testing, I concluded all verbal language (even English) had always seemed somehow foreign to me; because non-verbal concepts, not words, form the language of my soul. American Sign Language is a true language; it is not at all a visual representation of English. After reading Sacks, I asked myself: Do sign language and dyslexia share a mind-boggling concept of non-verbal thought whose relationship to the dyslexic experience is clear even though, as yet, I can find no words to describe it?

I wanted to read more about deafness and sign language. The tape recording had not included a bibliography, but I was well aware that books like *Seeing Voices* must have one. I took out a library copy and made a photocopy of the author's list of suggested books for further reading, which I sent to Recordings for the Blind in New Jersey. Well over half of the titles had been recorded, but it took a couple of weeks for the first little plastic container of tapes from Recordings for the Blind to arrive in the mail. During those anxious two weeks, I spent disappointing, fruitless hours listening to several books on dyslexia that I had ordered before starting Sacks. They were interesting, but generally symptomographic and lacking depth. I was sure the meat of the issue would lie somewhere around the nature of language and the physiology of thought.

I felt certain I was on to something soon after I started listening to the first book from Sack's list to appear in my mailbox, *Thinking Without Language: Psychological Implications Of Deafness*, by Hans Furth (New York, Free Press, 1966). With hardly as much as a vague allusion to dyslexia, Furth reviewed the history of man's thoughts about thinking, confirming for me my hypothesis that thought is not necessarily a verbal language related process. Yes, a congenitally deaf person with no language at all, thinks. Certainly, a person born with dyslexia thinks too. Maybe, just maybe, all the verbal languages of man are latter day straight jackets placing severe limitations on a natural, non-verbal process whose genius is now being forced into oblivion by the epithets "*handicap*" and "*learning disability*"? Maybe there is a world of non-verbal communication, unimaginably rich, yet devilishly difficult to tap? I would like to know.

As I was completing the text of this book, Ann Mabbott, a graduate student who had read my little article published in the Orton Dyslexia Society, *Perspectives*, called to ask if I would participate in research on dyslexia and foreign language study. The student's questions helped to clarify my own thoughts on the subject. Even though I failed high school French and Latin, and barely passed Spanish, I learned a lot about the nature of language in general and English in particular in the process. In college, two of the most rewarding "language" classes were an undergraduate course on the History of English, and a graduate seminar on the History of Germanic Languages (taught in English). These courses, probably more than any straight English grammar instruction I ever had, formed the fundament upon which my grasp of English expression is based.

*Lansing, MI
November 1990*

Dear Ann,

It was good to talk with you over the phone last week. Congratulations on the acceptance of your article. Do you touch on psycholinguistics at all? I can't wait to read it.

Could it be that embarking on your dissertation before you begin your coursework indicates that sequential reversals are contagious?? You better watch out or you'll end up as "backwards" as those of us you interviewed for your research.

I'm enclosing a print draft of my book manuscript. Hope you find it entertaining and informative. I'd appreciate your comments especially the last couple of chapters. If you know someone who is dyslexic who would like to "struggle" through even part of it, I'd be very interested in their comments. Is it readable? Is it thought provoking?

*Please let me know if you run into any books or conferences that zero in on non-verbal thinking. Hope you had a good Thanksgiving.
Sincerely,
Glenn*

*Lansing, MI
Dec. 29, 1991
Dear Ann,*

What a happy surprise to get your response so quickly! I'm going to replay your taped letter now and type some comments as you speak, as if we were having a conversation, OK?

I hope you can find a course in Psycholinguistics. If you find a good one, I'd like to hear about it, especially if the prof has done some significant writing in the field.

The more I think about it and have chances to discuss it with others, the more thoroughly I am convinced that very sophisticated non-verbal thought is common to just about all life forms with brains. Man's ability to think and communicate in word/symbols has both advantages and disadvantages: Things thought out verbally can be communicated with relative ease, but word/symbols invariably drag along with them a lot of culture-bound baggage that muddies things up. Thinking in concepts, Albert Einstein could easily grasp characteristics of the universe which verbal thought bound thinkers found hopelessly obscure. Dyslexia, far from being a thought process defect, is rather a release from the imprecision forced on people whose minds think only in words. Of course there has to be a downside, too. The downside of dyslexia is the dyslexic's difficulty in clearly and precisely communicating (and being communicated to). I guess what I am trying to say is that language is a tool, a very specialized and useful tool to be sure, but just a tool, like an axe or a saw. When I go camping in the Northwoods, I could try to split firewood with my bare hands, but I'd experience a lot of pain, and I wouldn't get much wood split. But if, as an experienced backpacker, I planned to build my campfires with twigs and sticks I could break over my knee, I could keep an adequate fire going without having to increase the weight of my pack with axes or saws. As every backpacker knows, traveling light makes it easier to enjoy the sights and sounds along the forest trail. A dyslexic may be hiking through life with fewer linguistic tools than his companions, but as life's terrain becomes more challenging, hikers with lighter packs and creative brains have the advantage.

Intelligence functioning without words is light, free, and unfettered. It is global in scope, timeless and yet wholly relevant to realities of the moment. I believe most life forms share with man a

capacity to think without words. When an archer fish sees an insect flying above the water, he must make a complex calculation of trajectory in a very dynamic situation, while considering the natural habits and habitat of his prey, in order to successfully shoot it out of the air. Mathematical calculations, chemical analysis, weather prognostication, insight into the psyche of other creatures are all easily dismissed as "instinct," but the fact remains that "instinctive" activities without a basis in intelligence would be about as successful for survival as cardiac fibrillation.

Well, excuse me for going off on a tangent, but verbal discussion of non-verbal thought is one of my favorite topics.

It sounds like your article will be raising some excellent questions. You are getting right to the heart of the dyslexic problem. By labeling dyslexics LEARNING disabled, educators and researchers are establishing a doubtful premise almost certain to lead them to utterly false conclusions. They seem, to reason: A dyslexic child is LEARNING disabled; therefore he must have less ability to learn than his classmates. Since research shows "learning disability" to be related to processing language, and a little anecdotal data seem to indicate that "learning disabled" kids don't do well in foreign languages, they confidently conclude "learning disabled"/dyslexic kids must not be ABLE to LEARN foreign languages!!

You are not yet comfortable addressing the fallacious premise imbedded in the term "learning disability;" but nevertheless, you do a great job of pointing out the weakness in conclusions based on that incorrect assumption. You do good work! When leaders in the Education community are ready to recognize dyslexia for what it is, a language processing anomaly (lack of facility with a certain valuable, but not indispensable tool), then your article will be used by others to help prove the point. Best of all, you will have contributed to the demise of the term "learning disabled," which is certainly one of the most disabling epithets adults can throw at a developing youngster, whose language processing characteristics tend to lead into situations where his self esteem is severely undermined.

Please keep up the good work, and keep in touch.

*Happy New Year,
Glenn*

*Lansing, MI
April 1, 1993
Dear Ann,*

Thanks for the tape of your paper. You've done an excellent

job, and I hope your conclusions concerning second language study are widely accepted in the Education community.

As you know, the only point upon which you and I disagree is the use of the term "learning disability)." I believe the most disabling aspect of being a dyslexic child is being labeled LD, "learning disabled," especially when the professionals who apply the label have a vested interest in the child's being considered "disabled." The professionals who have such a vested interest are the same ones who often argue circuitously that Einstein (or any other high achiever, who got no special remediation in school) could not have been dyslexic (read "learning disabled") because he ended up performing brilliantly. Your critic, who starts with the assumption that dyslexia equals LD, and then concludes that children who are LD cannot learn a foreign language, sounds like just such a biased professional. I have participated in the national debate on these issues, and I know how implacable some of those folks are. I'm going to keep working to see that dyslexic kids are considered as normal as people who need glasses, to see that their way of thinking is treated as an asset rather than a defect, and to see that they have historical and contemporary role models with whom they feel they have a lot in common. I hope you will be an ally in this fight.

Again, thanks for the opportunity to participate in your research. I'm sure the validity of your conclusions will be substantiated in spite of petty critics along the way. Keep up the good work.

*Sincerely,
Glenn*

* * * *

Why was Russian easier than German at Penn State? Beginning level German was taught in English, but Russian classes were conducted almost exclusively in Russian right from the start. I learned Russian as a Russian child learns Russian, as a German child learns German, and as a congenitally deaf child learns sign language. In German classes, I was being taught to translate; in Russian classes, I was learning Russian. It seems clear to me now that mastering a second language as a means of communication involves intellectual skills that are quite distinct from those required for learning to translate from one verbal medium to another. Whenever I wanted to say anything in German, I would start by translating my wordless notion into English. Then I would search my intellect for German vocabulary equivalents. Finally, while juggling possible German-English vocabulary equivalents with one hand of my brain, I would grope

desperately (in English) for the proper German grammatical refinements and word order. It was an exhausting process.

Should a dyslexic student be counseled to avoid foreign languages? If the class is set up as a course in translating between the target language and English, students with language processing problems will almost certainly find it to be an extraordinarily difficult challenge. If, however, the instructor uses the "direct method," conducting the class exclusively in the target language, so the students learn the language the same way they learned to speak English, dyslexic students will probably do much better. In fact, some may find, as I did, that language study without translating can be an enjoyable and rewarding adventure.

Even though I learned Russian as a second "native" language, and felt much more at ease with it than I did with German, my facility in both Russian and German disintegrated with embarrassing haste when I left college teaching. Every skill needs constant practice.

Toward the end of *Thinking Without Language*, Furth speculates: "The deaf child fails to acquire [verbal] language because it is taught too late, in an unreasonable medium, in an unnatural way, by the wrong person." (p.207) I wonder if this speculation has some application to the language instruction of children who are dyslexic? Furth mentions the budding scientific field of psycholinguistics; I am anxious to see what it is going to reveal about dyslexia.

I am aware that researchers are finding distinct features in the brains of dyslexics. Nevertheless, the more I learn about the phenomenon of dyslexia, the clearer it becomes that we are considering something that falls within the scope of variations in normal brain function characteristics, rather than a malfunction or a disease. Circumstances in a dyslexic's life may lead to devastating secondary problems, but the presence of dyslexia alone should not indicate need for a medical doctor or psychologist -- a nursemaid maybe, but not therapy! With well informed, sensitive parents and teachers, otherwise reasonably stable dyslexic children should get along just fine. However, when therapeutic intervention is called for, the methodology should be based on more than just academic research, it should take into careful consideration the experiences and views of dyslexics themselves who are, after all, the living laboratories for the dyslexic experience.

I enjoy discussing dyslexia, but when someone insists that dyslexia must be considered a learning disability, I tend to attack with the zeal of a convert. That was certainly true when I heard a team of renowned educators tell of their research on the social implications of dyslexia. I enthusiastically agreed with

most of their findings, but when one of them persisted in calling dyslexia a learning disability, I began to assail him with barbed questions. My ill-chosen words, however, stimulated more defensiveness than reasoned discussion. A few days later, still hoping to make my point without making enemies, I drafted this letter:

Dear Dr. _____

Thank you for coming here to discuss your fascinating work on the social implications of dyslexia. Several of us who have lived with dyslexia all our lives can vouch for the validity of the conclusions you are reaching in your research. I hope you will find the time and resources to both broaden and intensify your work. You are attacking a critically important aspect of the dyslexic phenomenon; for what ever this dyslexia "thing" is, it is clearly a restriction only in how, not how much one can learn.

As your work seems to be indicating, any characteristic that causes mainstream teachers and fellow pupils to view a child as somewhat deviant, will almost certainly have effects that overflow into that child's social life. This may be just as true of blacks in a mostly white school, of immigrant children struggling with English, of youngsters with true DISABILITIES like blindness or cerebral palsy, as well as of young people with dyslexia.

As you pointed out so clearly, building a positive self-concept is the key to social maturity. However, image-building strategies that work well with some special groups may not always work well with others. In addition, we should keep in mind that terminology, which attracts money for research on a given special group, may actually backfire against the group you want to help. I am afraid some academicians may not realize that categorizing certain schoolchildren as learning disabled is such a counterproductive factor.

White, middle class, non-disabled, reasonably skilled and educated, culturally Christian, native born Americans do not have to live with many demeaning labels, and therefore, they tend to disregard, sometimes rather flippantly, the critical concern some other people have about what they are called. A white Southerner could have argued that Negroes should have worked to build a positive image for the epithet "nigger," rather than demand that society drop it in favor of a more neutral, culturally unloaded designation such as "black" or "African American." The same could be said of wheelchair users who do not want to be called crippled, and it could be said of educated, articulate people with dyslexia who will resist at every turn the notion that they are "learning disabled."

People who are dyslexic can learn very well; albeit they learn quicker and better when employing techniques not commonly used in modern American schools. And as for being disabled, even the most cursory consideration of the etymology and current definitions of that word reveals how inappropriate it is as a descriptor of the intellectual capacity of such apparently dyslexic human beings as Albert Einstein, Hans Christian Andersen, and Nelson Rockefeller, as well as several of us who were in your audience last week.

Your studies highlight the value of role models. Whether we like it or not, certain labels carry with them a great deal of negative role model baggage. Blacks do not want society to use terms that suggest Uncle Tom, or Stepenfetchit. People with true disabilities do not want society to use terms that suggest helplessness, sickness, or a state of perpetual childhood. And people with dyslexia want dyslexic youngsters to grow up knowing that they have a mind that is not only ABLE TO LEARN, but able to learn, THINK, and CONTRIBUTE as Einstein, Andersen, and Rockefeller have done!

Sometimes when culturally loaded, but linguistically neutral, labels have become firmly entrenched in our language, as has happened with the term "blind;" it might be more expedient to build a positive image for the term than to invent a circumlocution. "Dyslexia" is certainly much more culturally neutral than a term like "blind" for instance, and etymologically dyslexia has the capacity to describe very well a specific, alternative, non-verbal thought process. In contrast to "learning disabled", the term "dyslexia" does not carry with it the presumption that a person who is dyslexic is permanently unable to perform any basic life function, especially LEARN!

As you pointed out in your presentation, those of us who are dyslexic sometimes have a hard time disagreeing with someone in an appropriate manner. I hope your colleague was not offended by the way I took issue with him. I am deeply interested in your topic and I would like to keep in touch with you both and your work.

Thanks again.

Sincerely

Glenn S. Leavitt

While what we are called may influence the life we live, what we do will almost certainly influence what we are called. All human beings have characteristics, which, from some perspective, may be considered handicaps. We may be visually impaired, or just overweight. We may be in a racial minority, or just left-handed. We may be an only child, or just bald. Each of us is a unique

blend of innumerable and unique factors. (No two things or people are exactly alike!) Society, by definition, is the designator of norms. Individuals, however, are the building blocks of society. Individuals with peculiar characteristics can choose to reject rejection, and make a conscious choice to demonstrate their ability to contribute, to take a step that does not crush, and thereby, leave the world a little better place for their having been here.



In retirement

Chapter Twelve

THE LANGUAGE OF MY SOUL

What are words anyway? Are they a medium, or are they the message? Why is government without a constitution a chaos of conflicting individual powers? Why is religion without scripture a chaos of individual self-indulgences? Maybe God was trying to tell each of us, even dyslexics, something very important in the passage from John's gospel that opens, "In the beginning was the word..."

Let me conclude this book of words with a poetic utterance dedicated to all my dyslexic friends and their families. In a very real sense, this poem is simply a summary of this book in words that seem less foreign to me than prose, in words that seem a little closer to the language of my soul:

GROWING UP DYSLEXIC

*Words are absurd little birds,
perched in a row
on a powerline in my head.
They chatter and cheep in bird gibberish.
The birdwatcher-me strains to see them,
to hear them,
to know them.
But they are startled and fly away.*

*Words are the enemy,
marching, marching, marching,
toward my fortress-mind.
Uniformed in perfect spelling,
armed with dictionary meanings,
they march in lockstep lines.
On they come --
From all sides now!
My earth trembles at their cadence.
Behind them, in libraries, in bookstores,
in eloquent, articulate people,
stand their vast reserves.
They surround me now:
Spoken words!
Written words!
Instructions!
Information!*

*Words of kindness!
Words of warning!
They tear at the flesh of my brain from every side!*

*I am weary.
I am wounded,
But not defeated.
I sense their vain weakness;
So I ignore them,
and they slink away.*

*But look! Over there,
in the people-thicket,
behind a barricade of pages,
they're re-forming their ranks!
Legions of language,
they are so many.
I am so alone.*

*Huddled in my fortress,
I plan a planless plan.
Their second flaw I see:
Some soldier-words are draftees,
who love and laugh like me.*

*Boldly I creep forward
from my citadel,
across a paper mind-field,
into letter perfect hell! Struck dumb by my audacity,
their captains only stare in disbelief,
as disloyal, conscript-words
desert their cause
to love and laugh with me.*

*But a battle is a battle,
not a war.
Soon the fury is rejoined,
worse than before.
My defenses melt
into a spirituous juice,
that drowns my love and laughter:
"It's no use!"*

*A prisoner now, before their judge,
I have no plea.
There is no me!*

*Uncomprehension restrains my brain,
as the sentencing is read:
"You're condemned to lexi-cution,
until your soul is dead!"*

*Oh, God, is there no room for mercy
In this word-world so absurd?
Are eagles, hawks and vultures
the only kind of bird?
Is there no world beyond the words
where ideas can fly free,
unbound, undowned untyrannized
by lexi-tyranny?*

*Blindfolded, in a musty bookshelf room,
writing hand lashed tight behind my back,
with stopples jammed down in my ears
My mind awaits my doom.
As the lexicutioner gives the sign,
charged words in deadly streams
shriek toward the body that is mine!*

*In a clutch of mortal pain,
my life flashes in my mind,
in a whole at-onceness
language words cannot explain.
With sense and scents,
an orderless whole,
no beginning,
no end,
no terminal goal,
I see my life uncluttered
by sequence or plane,
as from the window seat
of a curious, moebius train.*

*God's creatures speak
of His Love and His Truth.
I form a response,
uncluttered by words,
unencumbered by tense,
unspoken, unwritten,
...just raw, naked sense.*

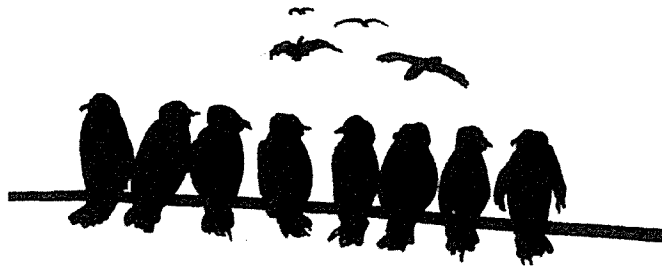
*Without time,
reality is a calm place.
Without sequence,
reality is a peaceful place.
Without words,
reality is a simple place.
Reality's language is
so calm,
so simple,
so real...*

*The enemy's greatest defect is exposed!
And I am not alone!*

*Allies appear from everywhere!
A universe of knowing beings:
artists and animals,
mystics and musicians,
daisies and crazies,
deaf, and dyslexics,
and me.*

*The lexicutioner's deadly missal
now lies shattered,
scattered on the ground.
Those pitiful fragments had never belonged to us;
but we love them anyway,
so we reassemble them as best we can;
and return them,
calmly, gently, peacefully.*

*My war is over,
and it is won..
I'm still an avid word watcher.
It's fun.*



AFTERWORD

by

John W. Henderson, MD, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus and Former Chairman
Department of Ophthalmology
University of Michigan

For many years, dyslexia was virtually unrecognized. The standard assumption was that the individual's learning difficulty must be visual, yet a thorough ophthalmologic examination usually failed to elicit ocular disease. Guilt ridden parents were often urged to invest heavily in un-needed eyeglasses or in an extended series of eye exercises in which rotating the eyes in circles was touted as curative by non-medical practitioners.

The past twenty years have seen an explosion of knowledge in the diagnosis and management of dyslexia. When I saw Glenn Leavitt in our clinic many years ago, I failed to make that diagnosis, although there was little doubt that he also had a severe convergence insufficiency. It was fortunate that our suggestions of alternate means of learning were pointed in the right direction.

At present, more dyslexics are being picked up in elementary school and given alternative learning techniques before being labeled "stupid." For instance, in Harbor Springs, Michigan a program supported in part by the local Kiwanis Club provides one-on-one tutoring for all age levels. At a recent Kiwanis Club meeting I was gratified to hear the father of a successfully remediated boy explain that his son's experience had helped him recognize dyslexic manifestations in his own life.

Glenn Leavitt's book dramatizes most emphatically the need for Departments of Education in colleges and universities to allow no prospective teacher to graduate without adequate coverage of what is known about learning anomalies such as dyslexia. Local school budgets must include provision of remediation, which is based on sound research and teacher preparation.

As a person who has struggled with a specific language disability, Glenn Leavitt has an enviable grasp of English expression. He presents a fascinating story, which should be, required reading for parents and professionals whose judgments may serve to close or open doors for people who are dyslexic.

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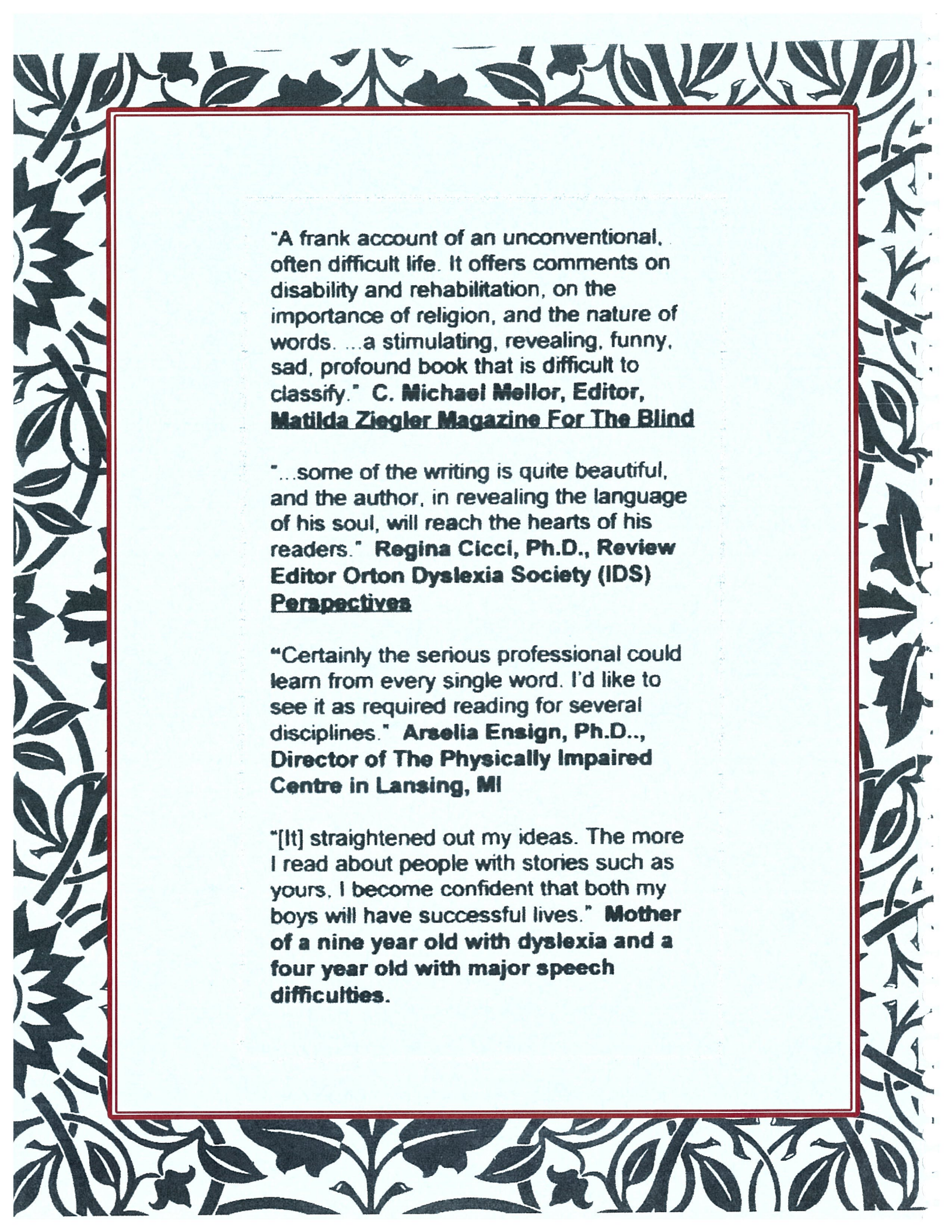
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"A frank account of an unconventional, often difficult life. It offers comments on disability and rehabilitation, on the importance of religion, and the nature of words. ...a stimulating, revealing, funny, sad, profound book that is difficult to classify." C. Michael Mellor, Editor, Matilda Ziegler Magazine For The Blind

"...some of the writing is quite beautiful, and the author, in revealing the language of his soul, will reach the hearts of his readers." Regina Cicci, Ph.D., Review Editor Orton Dyslexia Society (IDS) Perspectives

"Certainly the serious professional could learn from every single word. I'd like to see it as required reading for several disciplines." Arselia Ensign, Ph.D., Director of The Physically Impaired Centre in Lansing, MI

"[It] straightened out my ideas. The more I read about people with stories such as yours, I become confident that both my boys will have successful lives." Mother of a nine year old with dyslexia and a four year old with major speech difficulties.