

CHAPTER 14

ON THE BANKS OF THE ARKANSAS RIVER

She kissed me on an October night in 1941. She thinks it might have been August. Whenever, it started a love affair that went from 1228 Sherman Street, where Mike¹ had an apartment to a lodge in Evergreen, Colorado,² to Christ Methodist Church, June 22, 1943.

All that I am willing to report about that love affair is that it was full of hours together at Elitch Gardens dancing to the big bands, movies, picnics in City Park, chili at a special little place down on Broadway, and convincing her that she had to get rid of that other boy friend. Also there was the telephone. At noon each day, to the Iliff dormitory (called Grey Gables, or Gray Stables) where I lived, came a telephone call from that girl. Whenever I came in a minute or two late, one or more of my student colleagues would be standing-in for me, and not especially anxious to stand-aside. Finally, 22 June 1943, at Christ Methodist Church, the affair ended and the real thing began. We got married. We honeymooned in a foothills town called Lyons, Colorado, and the mountain town called Estes Park.

By then it was war time. Mike had taken a job in the Classification Department at Buckley Air Force Base, at a comfortable \$150 a month salary. Well, comfortable in those days. I was two years into a Masters Degree, had been ordained Deacon in the Methodist Church--at no salary. And then we made one of those mistakes we have never been sorry for.

BEWARE OF DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS. A District Superintendent talked us into taking a student charge at Manzanola, Colorado, 150 miles southeast of Denver. I could run the church, get paid a fair salary, take the bus back and forth to Denver each week to attend classes. Nothing to it. My God, how young and innocent can you be. But we did it. Moved to Manzanola in January, 1944. And I not only ran the church, did the preaching, but Mike took on another job with the U.S. Government at LaJunta Air Force Base (20 miles east of Manzanola); and then later another government job in Manzanola as director of the Office of Price Administration (ration office).³

MIGHTY GOOD WATERMELON. The money was pretty good for those days, I guess. But the money we don't remember. What we remember is watermelon. When you are the preacher in a small town, everybody knows you and your wife, and nobody really knows either of you. It is a lonely job.

¹Mike was my nickname for Mitchell, which Opal LaVerne's father did not really appreciate.

²For more information on this contact Hal Secor.

³The war was on and if it was important (gas, sugar, mayonnaise, flour, butter, etc.) you had to have a ration stamp to buy it.

It was lonely until one night we were out walking along the main street (just about the one and only street) when a car pulled up beside us and a head and shoulder stuck out. A big guy with a big, friendly grin, asked, "Do you guys like watermelon?"

"Sure."

"Well, we have one back there on the corner, across from the church.

Why don't you come and help us eat it."

And that was the beginning of one of the great and lasting happenings in our lives: Jim and Mildred Worrell.⁴

GUARDING THE COAST. This will be a little hard to understand. James Worrell was a newly graduated physician who was at the moment an officer in the Coast Guard stationed in LaJunta, Colorado, 20 miles east of Manzanola. Yes, I said, Coast Guard Officer.⁵ In LaJunta? Fact is, the Arkansas River does trickle past Manzanola and LaJunta, and by some wild thinking the Arkansas River was declared to be a navigable river. And, indeed, it was and is.⁶ This was proved when a motorcyclist drove from Pueblo, past Manzanola and LaJunta right straight down that river bed.

Being navigable the Coast Guard was involved, thank God, or we would never have met the Worrells. Don't be afraid of mistakes. Sometimes they prove invaluable.

NONE BETTER. What can I say about the Worrells? They taught us practically everything we ever knew about being parents. They were the mentors. Some years later (we were living in Boulder at the time, two kids by then), Mike and I, after a close encounter with a fast moving automobile head-on down the highway, began to think about what would happen to the kids if we ever got wiped out. In such cases, mostly the kids wind up with members of the family, and we had good families, but not really good enough. Good enough would have to be a Worrell family. So I went to an attorney and told him that in case of our deaths my wife and I wanted to will our kids to James and Mildred Worrell. The attorney grinned at me and said, "You can't will your kids." I told him to do it anyhow. So he did. Jim and Mildred were made guardians. Our estate went under their control if they took our children on as their own. Good.

A year or so later we were visiting with the Worrells in Keosauqua, Iowa, where after Manzanola and New Mexico, they had finally settled in for life. I thought I ought to tell Jim what we had done, so I did. He grinned and said, "That's O.K. We've done the same thing." More years later (Worrells and Tremmels had three kids each by then), one day the telephone rang. Mildred:

⁴Jim grew up in Quincy, Illinois, on the banks of the Mississippi River; Mildred grew up near Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

⁵He was director of the U.S. Public Health Service Center in LaJunta.

⁶A navigable river is any river you can float a log down. I'm serious.

"Guess what? You guys are stuck for another twenty-one years. I'm pregnant again."⁷

If that does not tell you who the Worrells were and are in the Tremmel world, I do not know what would.

HE HAD BIG FEET. Another thing that happened in Manzanola time was Parson. My girl was by herself in Manzanola week days while I was in Denver. To keep her company we got a little Springer Spaniel pup and named her Lady. My girl and Lady became great friends. Then a tragedy happened. Lady got sick and died. There were tears, and I determined to replace the loss.

In Denver I shopped around and found a kennel where they had Springer Spaniels, and one in particular. He was a champion-type, but he cost too much. So I made a deal with the lady who owned the kennel. I would give her a down payment. She would hold the dog and I would pay off as I could. About the second or third time I went in for payment, we got to talking. She asked who I was and I told her a student at Iliff and a preacher at the Methodist Church in Manzanola. I was buying the dog for my wife. She said, "You take him now and pay me off when you can." She was a Methodist, too.

So Parson (good name for a dog intended to live in a parsonage) went home to Manzanola as a surprise. But guess who got surprised. I got surprised and so did Parson. I will admit that Parson did not look like Lady. He was big, with long ears, shaggy legs, big feet. It just wasn't Lady. Mike looked at Parson and began to cry. She said, "He has such big feet." And that loving relationship lasted for the next fifteen years. Parson was insulted and Mike refused ever to apologize.

Oh, well, Parson had his friends. One friend was Jim Worrell's dog named Louie. Louie really was ugly, but he was friendly, and he liked sports, too. Remember, Parson was a Springer Spaniel, which meant a retriever, and the Arkansas River was not far off, and in the Fall of the year, ducks. Jim talked me into buying an old shot gun (cocked-hammer type, as old as Daniel Boone) and we tried our hand at duck shooting. When we hit one, seldom as that was, Parson would gleefully swim out to retrieve it. Louie, with better sense, would stand on the bank and wait until Parson got to shore. Louie would then promptly take the duck away from Parson and run off with it. Oh, well, that's life. Whom can you trust?

But Worrells and Parson and Louie were not the only big happenings that happened during Manzanola time. William Michael also happened.⁸ And with him our world not only changed, it changed forever better.

⁷The names of all the Worrell kids: James, Katherine (Kiki), Mary, Tom.

⁸Michael was born at Mennonite Hospital in LaJunta, Colorado, April 14, 1945.