

## CHAPTER 15

### PHEASANT FOR DINNER

It Just So Happened that in 1945, with a year's work accomplished towards a doctorate, we left Manzanola and moved to Windsor, Colorado, a good place to be. It also Just So Happened that on June 17, 1945, I was ordained as a minister (Elder) in the Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

A GO-TO-CHURCH TOWN. Windsor, fifty miles north of Denver, was\is a really neat town, with the mountains over there where they belong, and a lake over there, fitting in quite nicely. A main street. Park. Some sixteen hundred people; a sizable number of them German background people, many of them working at a sugar beet processing plant just east of town. Seven churches. The two big churches were the Methodist Church and the German speaking German Lutheran Church. Those two churches accounted for most of the Sunday-go-to-meetin' people, but not all of them. For other German types, who apparently preferred English preaching to German preaching, there was an American Lutheran Church and an Evangelical Lutheran Church. There was also a beautiful little Episcopalian chapel, and two evangelical "come-to-Jesus" operations. Practically everybody in town went to church. It was a serious, relaxed, neat town for living in.

The Methodist operation included a handsome building--organ, choir loft, full basement for church school and church parties, an office for the pastor, a nice parsonage right next door, with a welcome strawberry patch and garden plot out back. I was finally a real pastor, but I also continued as a real student, continuing work at Iliff. I was also, I think, a pretty good husband and, maybe, even learning to be a pretty good "Dad".

PUT YOUR SACK IN A BOTTLE. And again we found private escape in a physician and his wife--the Deishers. Joe and Beth Deisher, out of New York, showed up one day to establish a practice out west. Being a "good pastor," I moved in quickly to see if I could capture them for Methodism. I could not. They did not go in for that sort of thing.

But like preachers and preachers' wives, physicians and physicians' wives are also known by everybody in town, and not really known by anybody. Besides they were about our age and also beginning in the baby business. So we became friends, even to the point that on Christmas Eve the Tremmels and Deishers, arms linked, led the Christmas Eve caroling crowd through the streets of Windsor singing "We three kings of orientar." Yes, *orientar*. Joe had been indulging in a bit too much Christmas cheer and all along the caroling route he did a little Christmas carol retranslating.

Joe purchased his liquor at the drug store. The druggist would take Joe's purchase into the back room of the store, put it in a sack, and Joe would slip

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, as you all know, the then Methodist Church is now called the United Methodist Church. This name change occurred in 1964.

quietly out a side door. One evening just as I walked by, Joe came out of that side door. I looked at him. He grinned back. Then he said something not to be forgotten, "Nothing looks so much like a bottle in a sack as a bottle in a sack."

He was funny. And in her own way, so was Beth. And they were both crazy. For example, after we had left Windsor and moved to Boulder, one day the Deishers showed up. They had come, they said, to see us, but especially to see Boulder Dam. Oh, well, people from New York. And even more radical, imagine two New Yorkers who do not even know that Boulder Dam is not in the back yard of Boulder, Colorado, deciding to go live in Alaska. Well, they decided that, and did that.

On one occasion, after we had moved to Kansas, Joe came visiting. He had gotten himself an interview at Menningers<sup>2</sup> in Topeka, Kansas. He was thinking about moving back to the lower states and getting involved in psychology and psychiatry. Joe said that the interview had been interesting. Among other things, the interviewers asked him if he had ever considered psychoanalysis for himself. I do not think Joe really understood the full implication of the question, but Mike and I did.

Deishers and Tremmels have kept in touch through the years. Sometimes this meant communications from Alaska, sometimes from the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific, some times from the Appalachian Mountains, from Chicago, and currently from the State of Washington--all places of Deisher residence through the years.

SLIGHTLY JADED ECUMENICITY. As reported earlier, Windsor was a town that took religion seriously, so occasionally we would get together in ecumenicity. On one occasion near Thanksgiving Day, the Episcopal Church, Father Bonell pastor,<sup>3</sup> joined our congregations in a thanksgiving service. It was to be held at the Episcopal Chapel. I was to read the scripture. Because it was to be a coming together of people to celebrate "The Lord Jesus," the scripture selected (although out of season) was from the Palm Sunday account of Jesus' ministry when the people gathered to shouting: "Hosanna to the son of David...Hosanna in the highest." It is the account where Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey. In that scripture are these words:

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee,  
meek, and sitting upon an ass...<sup>4</sup>

It Just So Happened that the night before the celebration, I went to a small lake on a farm nearby where I had been invited to come anytime in duck season for a little shooting. The farm parents were not home when I got there,

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<sup>2</sup>Menningers is a world renowned psychiatry clinic.

<sup>3</sup>Bonell was as English as an American can be, and full of odd humor and fun.

<sup>4</sup>Gospel of Matthew, 22.5, King James Version.

but one of the sons was there, so the two of us went duck hunting. Of course, I had Parson with me. The lake, except for an open circle in the middle, was frozen over. A duck came over and I managed to hit it, but it fell into the water, not on the ice. I did not send Parson out into the water to get that duck for fear he would not be able to get back on the ice and back to shore.

Then another duck came over and my young host took his turn. His shot was also successful. This time the duck fell on the ice maybe ten feet away from the open water. I sent Parson out to get it. He walked very carefully; carefully picked up the duck and started back. At that point the duck that had fallen in the water proved to be not dead. It started flapping about and, like a shot, Parson was in the water after it.

The last rays of daylight were flickering away. I saw Parson get the duck. I saw him swimming to the edge of the ice. Then, to my horror, I heard him whimper, and I knew. He could not get out. Almost immediately I started out to get him. The ice was too thin to hold me. With each step it broke. The lake was not all that deep, so I was not in danger of drowning. But I was in danger of freezing or, at least, so it seemed. I was not going to be able to do it.

My young friend found an old flat bottom boat near the shore and for a while I tried to batter my way through the ice. It was working but slowly, slowly. Finally I could not stand the cold anymore, so I surrendered the boat to my duck hunting companion and said, "Do what you can". I went to the farm house and let myself in and took off my clothes and wrapped myself in a blanket. Some time later the door opened and in came my comrade with a stiff, shivering dog in his arms. Half-hour later, dressed in my still wet but warm clothes, I took that dog home. He was a little shaky, but already up and walking.

Next morning: Parson was running around as if nothing had ever happened. I was a wreck: shivering; coming down with a cold; in no condition, really, to go ecumenizing at the Episcopal Church. But I did. It came time to read the scripture. I was not in the best of condition as became evident when I read:

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee,  
meek, and sitting *on his ass*.<sup>5</sup>

I saw Mike's head jerk up, and after service, away from the crowd, she asked, "Did you hear what you said?" I said, "Yes, but I kept a straight face, and I don't think anybody noticed."

COAL BILLS AND PHEASANTS. As I said, Windsor was a good place to be. But no place is perfect. There are glitches everywhere. And we got glitched in Windsor. The first winter there a misunderstanding occurred. In Manzanola the winter heating bill for the parsonage had been paid by the church treasurer. In Windsor, to our springtime shock, the Tremmels got a bill for about \$125 for coal, not being paid for by the church treasurer. But we did not have \$125.

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<sup>5</sup>Of course he was, but the book says "...on *an* ass."

In fact we did have it. We had a \$1000 war bond given to us by Mike's parents.<sup>6</sup> But that bond was being saved for after-the-war purchases, including, and especially a washing machine. To this point my girl's washing machine was a washboard and tub powered by considerable exercise.<sup>7</sup> I took the bond and headed for the bank. At the bank I stood around, and stood around, hesitating, hesitating. Finally the banker, a member of my church, asked me if he could do anything for me. I said, "No," took the bond and went home.

Mike and I sat down and figured it out. If we could live for a dollar a day for three months, we could save enough money to pay that coal bill and still have the bond. We shook hands on it. We would do it. And we did. First, Mike got the banker to lend us the \$125 to pay the coal bill--a no-interest loan to be paid off in three months.<sup>8</sup> We had a little garden out back. My girl got very clever at fixing cheap things tastily, and I went hunting.

Also, It Just So Happened that out west of Windsor was great, sloping hill country, where lived many pheasants. Of course the problem was that pheasants were not in season. So what was about to occur was an activity not only inappropriate for Methodist ministers to engage in, but also illegal. Nevertheless, one Methodist minister did so engage, and with great efficiency.

First, he would dig a hole in the back yard.

Second, he would sneak a single shot rifle into that old Pontiac.

Third, he and Parson would take off for a slow drive up and down those wide-open slopes until quarry was sighted. At that point, from within the car, the preacher would perform spectacularly: One shot, followed immediately by Parson's talent as a retriever.

Fourth, a careful drive home right *into* the garage, where a skinning knife was waiting and a newspaper in which to wrap the skin and feathers, and a shovel for a quick burial.

Net result: a fine pheasant dinner. Some of the best dinners we ever had.

Next winter we were, first, more careful about how warm we kept the house and, second, more careful how we spent our money so the coal we did use could be paid for without illegal excursions out to the rolling hills west of town. But something else had happened by the end of next winter. The war had ended and prices zoomed. Our days in Windsor were numbered because the preacher's salary did not zoom, even when he announced that it had better.

Time had come to look for a new job. And It Just So Happened that there was one available in Boulder, Colorado.

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<sup>6</sup>Actually the cash value of the bond was about \$800 at the time.

<sup>7</sup>We also had \$1800 saved from Mike's working days. But that was being kept for a new car, if the war ever ended.

<sup>8</sup>Mike accomplished this with such finesse, and also because I had earlier that year bounced a check, she took over things financial and, thank God for wise decisions, has been in charge ever since.

SAY YOUR PRAYERS INSTEAD. But before reporting Boulder, a report on two signs on the doors of the Windsor church: As I said, Windsor was a good place to be. The church was an excellent building, the congregation large and friendly, a good organ, a good choir. But there was something wrong on Sunday morning. The folks would come to church and sit talking to each other before the service started. People should come into the church and sit quietly meditating or something. After all (being Catholic born and bred) could I not ask, "Is not the church God's house and not a place for casual conversation?" No, I really could not ask it out loud. So I thought up a solution. There were two wide front doors into the church sanctuary, so I had two little signs printed and framed:

Friend, compose yourself and  
enter here reverently, for this is a  
place of worship and prayer.  
No one entering a house ignores  
him who dwells in it. This is the  
house of God.

Everybody thought the signs were very nice. Just the thing to have on the church doors. And each Sunday after walking right past those signs approvingly, they sat down and started talking to each other. They went right on talking.

Years later it dawned on me what an ass I had been (Catholic ass). Protestant people do not reverence a place. God is not in a place. God is in a happening. I had not recognized that my "talking congregation," stopped talking and became reverently attentive not because of a doorway, but because of a time--the time following the Invocation (the call to prayer).

RESCUE THAT SIGN. A few years ago Mike and I did a nostalgia visit to Windsor, quietly. It is still as charming as it ever was. Even a little better now because they have developed a park and boat ramp access to the lake. Also, we found that the church was being renovated. The doors were open, so we went inside. My signs were not on the doors. I looked around and found one of them on a shelf in a back room. Sign in hand, I went next door to the parsonage. The pastor was not there but his wife was. I told her who I was. Showed her the sign. Said that I was the one who put it up forty years earlier. She was embarrassed: "*Oh, my God. A preacher out of the past and we took his sign down.*" She did not say it, but I could see her consternation. I said, "No, no, don't be distressed. I am here only to ask if I may have this sign." She was so relieved that I got the sign with enthusiasm.

That sign is today right in this room where I am writing. One of the treasures of my sometimes, somewhat misguided past.

SPEAKING OF JESUS. Before leaving Windsor, one more thing of slight Catholic significance. One Sunday morning the doorbell rang. Nine-thirty. My parents. They had never come to see us before on any day, much less Sunday. We talked. I can't remember what about. They undoubtedly played with their

grandson Michael. I don't remember. I only remember that the hour was coming when I had to excuse myself and get about my business. I made some such comment. Then the last thing in the world I could have expected happened. My father told me that he and mother had come to attend church. They did.

After church my father expressed his pleasure at being there and then, in typical William A. fashion, said, "I enjoyed your sermon. But you don't really know much about Jesus, do you?"

His comment struck me not as an insult, but as absolutely funny. This was my father in serious mode. And, of course, he was absolutely right. I didn't know much about Jesus. I still don't know much about Jesus. And nobody else does either.