

CHAPTER 20

BIG DAM FOOLISHNESS

And It Just So Happened that this Special Manhattan was destined one day to become **Mike's Town**; i.e., Opal LaVerne Mitchell Tremmel's town. But first we had to get her there. That was not easy.

PERFECTION ON ITS WAY. The Kansas State University position of Professor and Director of Religious Activities was accepted in September 1956. But things were not favorable for moving the family to Manhattan at exactly that time. John Mark was in Stormont-Vail Hospital in Topeka. Also there were few houses available for renting or buying in Manhattan at that particular time. Fort Riley had moved in an additional contingent of soldiers and many of the officers had elected Manhattan for residence. For a while I tried staying in Manhattan during the week and returning to Emporia weekends. But that I couldn't take, so I simply commuted each day--about 75 miles each way.

In January, I managed to find a house to rent and the family moved to Manhattan. The house was northwest of Manhattan, in the country, so Michael, 11 years old, and James 8 years old, were enrolled, sixth and third grades, in a little country elementary school. Susan was 3 years old.

FOURTEEN-FIFTEEN MEADOW LANE. Even before the family moved to Manhattan, the search was on for different housing--a house to buy perhaps, or build. One day It Just So Happened that William C. was driving up Bluemont Hill. Goodnow and company had to climb Bluemont Hill on foot, but by Tremmel days a road had been built to the top. From downtown a couple of miles straight north on Juliette Street, past Bluemont Elementary school, the plains abruptly tilted upward and Juliette Street abruptly became Ehler Road. Ehler Road climbed 300 yards, leveled off and ran along a valley-way and off down the other side onto that highway that led to that Big Dam Foolishness. At the point where Ehler road leveled off heading for the highway, a branch road (named Lover's Lane by the Tremmel Clan) turned off to the right and climbed on up to the top of Bluemont Hill. Also, just at that branch point there was another road (gravel road), turning off to the left and running about a quarter of a mile to a dead end. That road was called Meadow Lane.

It was at the point where Lover's Lane and Meadow Lane split off from Ehler Road that I spotted a "For Sale" sign on a piece of land about 500 feet down Meadow Lane, on the left side.¹ I stopped the car, sat looking at all the wild beauty around me, and declared: "This is the place." Isaac Goodnow, wherever he was, smiled in agreement and said, "So it is, but remember, I saw it first and said it first--over a hundred years ago."

¹Meadow Lane was eventually paved down to the dead end past our lot 6, Country Club Addition, City of Manhattan, County of Riley, State of Kansas.

The lot lifted off Meadow Lane, tilting upward gently for 200 feet, then took another sharper upward tilt for another 200 feet, beyond which you could not see from below. Actually at that point it leveled off onto high, flat ground where the Manhattan Country Club Golf Course spread out. On the other side of the golf course the land dropped down again to the prairie flat town below.

We bought that lot and then went looking for plans and builder. The plans we found in *Small Homes Guide*, Winter 1955, Spring 1956, #36, given to us by Dorothy Goldsberry. It became one beauty of a house, defined in the Guide as "Big Chimney, Horizontal Lines". That it was.²

I found a builder: a young man named Dale Sanford, and together we built the house and became close friends, even to the point that when Dale's wife went to the hospital to deliver another Sanford child, William C. baby-sat the other Sanford kids until the baby building project was finished and Dale and I could get back to that Meadow Lane building project.

FOOTPRINTS IN CONCRETE. Once before there were indications of small people leaving signs in concrete, as reported earlier in the chapter on the Yellow Brick Road. Shortly after the concrete was poured at the front door at 1415 Meadow Lane, I checked it out and there were two small, Susie-size footprints embedded there. I elected to leave them. Why? Because I was a sentimental blob.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD. We moved in the summer of 1957. Schools changed--Michael, Junior High grade 7; Jim, Bluemont Elementary, grade 4; Susan still one year to go before kindergarten. Father, somewhere in the University, grade unknown.

Fourteen-fifteen Meadow Lane was a beautiful location for viewing, but it was not a 1518 Berkeley Road socially, except for one family somewhat--the Clapps; and another family for sure (especially for Susan)--the Nesmiths. Ed and Gerry Clapp, and their four little boys,³ lived right across the road. Ed was a colonel serving as instructor for the ROTC program at the University. They were fun people to have around and the source of Michael's first automobile. Ed took military retirement and they moved to Fargo, North Dakota. They put their house on the market for sale. It did not sell before they

²Split-level, white roof, white paint, brown trim. First level, north end: big double garage, music room and "commode". Second level above garage: four bedrooms (master bedroom with space for study), and bath. From music room on first level, step down to basement readied for future development with a large excavated window and a fireplace. Up from the music room--enter spacious area of kitchen, dining room, living room set off with tilted-roof-line ceilings, a narrow floor-to-ceiling window, and a magnificent fireplace. Extensive windows bathed every room in the house with outdoor light. *And Air Conditioning*. Original design by Richard B. Pollman. Finished design by the Tremmel Clan--even, at James' direction, to his room having pink walls and purple drapes. When finished, Jim was not totally pleased. It was not pink enough. We also built our living room furniture--which, reupholstered a few times, we still use.

³Ned, Jim, George, Benny.

had to leave. Ed Clapp made a deal with Michael. If Michael would look after the property until it was sold, he would be paid with a beautiful old 1948 Chrysler New Yorker that Ed owned and was leaving behind. The deal was made. The house was sold. The New Yorker changed hands.

The special "Susie family" was composed of Dwight and Doris Nesmith, and their three daughters and two sons.⁴ They lived on Ehler Road, half a block over there. And when Susan was not at home she was over there, usually for one or both of two reasons: Dwight was another Delmos Goldsberry. He knew how to entertain kids. But more important because of Tom Nesmith. Tom and Susan, same age, were best friends right from the start, and they still are.⁵

BIG DAM FOOLISHNESS. The Big Blue occasionally joined the Kansas/Kaw with excessive volume, resulting in considerable water occasionally sweeping through Manhattan and places down stream. It was decided to build a dam across the Blue about five miles north of Manhattan. That meant that a lovely valley would be inundated and all homes and farming in the area lost. There was, of course, a protest, part of which was a big sign on the highway approaching Manhattan from the south: "Stop Big Dam Foolishness". It was not stopped and the result was a lake several miles wide and thirty miles long which swept William C. and company right into the boating world. The dam was called Tuttle Creek Dam.

BOATS BOATS BOATS. Fourteen-fifteen Meadow Lane accomplished. Dam Foolishness finished. Marina built. Temptation got too great and William C. and William Michael and James Harold got boat ideas. They transformed those ideas into a pontoon boat project. If Richard Fox could build a boat out in the side yard, why could we not do the same? We did and we named our beautiful accomplishment "Her Honor" after a mayor we knew.

Summer months Her Honor was moored at the terrific marina that was constructed in a cove about a mile upwater on the other side of the Tuttle Creek Dam.⁶ Her Honor was a thing of pride and pleasure, fun and fishing, and for just plain fooling around. And she could have gone on forever, but when several seasons old Her Honor began to show signs of dry rot. The time was coming. She still had trade-in value. Better make a move. So we traded her in for a seventeen-foot Larson (with a 80 horsepower outboard motor)--a boat that never had the honor of being named, but is still a staunch member of the family, floating right out there in Lake Carroll. Both Her Honor and the

⁴Ingrid, Bill, Lorraine, Barbara, Tom.

⁵Tom and his wife Pam and their two children, Lindsey and Tyler, live in Albuquerque. Tom is Susie's longtime best friend, Pam is a new-time best friend. And Susan is as much aunt as friend to their two kids.

⁶Why Tuttle Creek? A fast Democratic maneuver to keep it from being called Eisenhower, for President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Larson proved to be major items in the Tremmel agenda. Whenever possible one or more of us was/were on board fishing, fooling, having fun.

GOOD FISHIN'. Fishing boats and fishing actually started before the dam was completed. There were several small fishing lakes near Manhattan. So not long after getting located on Meadow Lane, I built a small flat-bottom scow type boat. We could transport it on a car-top carrier. One day small James and I did just that. We went fishing. That day the boat was leaking a little and before the fishing expedition was over several inches of water had gathered around our feet. In that water also gathered a supply of small fish. It Just So Happened that that day the big fish had all gone someplace else, but there were swarms of little two to three inch long crappie that just loved James' salmon-egg bait. I gave up, but not Jim. He kept hauling them in almost as fast as his bait hit the water. In the midst of all this excitement, he said, "Boy, we're sure having luck today, aren't we Daddy?" Yes, Jim, we *were* having luck. The fish were lucky, too. We decided to put them all back in the lake before we left for home.

SUSAN AND HER DAD. Especially our growing-up Susan and her father got to know each other better because of Her Honor/the Larson/the marina/Tuttle Creek. We had always been good friends, but we became even better friends. When she was little we did things together. I remember in the evening before bedtime, Susie and I would take the picture tour around the house. Holding her up shoulder-high, she and I would examine each picture and talk about it. After that it was bedtime.

Problem was that Susan begin to grow up and picture touring seemed not so exciting any more. What Susan really wanted me to do was be like Dwight Nesmith, full of fun and games, but I wasn't up to it. So I maneuvered elsewhere. We went boating together and fishing together and hunting. We hunted for squirrels and quail. Today I can scarcely convince myself that either of us would ever shoot at anything, but we were younger in those days and not so gentle of heart. We shot, and we had fun, and became pretty good companions.

Earlier than the gun shooting days, I got into Susan's good graces with a couple of animal maneuvers. When we got to Manhattan Parson and Poochy were still with us, but time came when they died. I buried each in the side yard and planted a silver spruce tree by the graves, in their honor.

We were out of dogs, but cat time was emerging. Outside of church in Americus one Sunday morning I was seduced by a young, pure white cat. That cat just purred and pushed and promised to love me forever. Susie was intrigued with the performance, so I handed that cat to her and we took it home to Manhattan. I do not remember why, but we named that cat Beethoven. Beethoven turned out to be a mother type cat and in due time produced two kittens for Susie, whose cat Beethoven had now become.⁷ The kittens were named Jiggaboo and Jiggabee and like their mamma they too

⁷That seduction routine in Americus was pure fluke. Beethoven never really liked me.

were Susan's cats. Really Susan's cats. Indeed, so much so that when Susan would go walking down the road those cats would follow her in a line--Beethoven, Jiggaboo, Jiggabee.

BE MY VALENTINE. But an even more important Susan cat was a cat she already had--a cat named REW. It Just So Happened that it was the night before Valentine's Day. I was at the University with some students in one of the chapels. We were planning for a Religious Emphasis Week.⁸ Our attention was drawn to a knocking on the glass door up front. There was a small boy out in the foyer. One of the students went to check him out. The student soon returned carrying a small kitten in her arms. The boy had handed her the kitten and had run off. The kitten had a note fastened to a string around his neck: "I can't keep him anymore. Please give him a good home." So what happened? Susan, about five+ years old at the time, got a kitten next morning with a different note attached: "Be my Valentine". I had already given Susie's Valentine a name: Religious Emphasis Week--REW for short.

REW was an amazing animal. He grew to be big, big--dark grey, thick hair, demanding stare. He took charge of the territory--ruled Bluemont Hill. Beethoven was family, so she could stay, and her kids, but any other cat was taboo, and left the territory in a bloodied condition.

NO MORE ANIMALS! We had apparently become a cat family. No dogs. No more dogs. We were out of dogs for keeps. And then something happened. What happened was Ziggie, also called Jezebel.⁹ One day Jim came home with a little black and white, Scottish sheep dog type dog. (She had some spaniel in her.) No deal. We did not need any more animals. Then grudgingly I gave in slightly. "All right, but outside, not in the house." So that dog lived outside, mostly on the front porch. But it was Fall and the nights were getting colder. I told Jim he would have to build a dog house for that dog. He said, "O.K." but never got around to it. William C. finally built the dog house out back. Fall began to tilt toward winter. One night, promising to be pretty cold, I told Jim he had better let that dog Ziggie sleep in the garage. So that dog Ziggie began sleeping in the garage. Then it began to get colder--really cold. Better let that Ziggie dog sleep in the music room downstairs. Between music room and kitchen there was only a short stairway and one door. You guessed it. Ziggie was not *that dog* any more. Ziggie was family. In fact Ziggie was more than family, Ziggie was my dog--the best, closest dog I ever had. And like REW, Ziggie, too, was destined to go all the way to Tampa.

THEY WERE FIRST CLASS. Ziggie was so important to me that a few

⁸Once each year the University sponsored a week of religious concerns. Various programs and speakers were on campus for a week addressing religious dimensions of history, politics, society, etc.

⁹Jezebel was Jim's name for her.

years ago I named a book of haiku poetry honoring her importance: *Running on the Bias*:

Up ahead, small dog.
running on the bias, leads
me all the way home.

Following little
black dog running up ahead
of me, we grew old.

Black dog not here. Would
have whistled for her, but she
died two weeks ago.

Yes, there were tears that day.¹⁰

Another Susie cat named Gator Bait when he died got poems too:

Old cat, for ten years
now you've tolerated me...
here in my own house.

Not my druthers, but
his. Old cat just decided
to sit on my lap.

This is a tear. No
more dinnertime push and purr.
Old cat died last night.

There were tears that day, too.¹¹

SWIMMING SWIMMING SWIMMING. Tuttle Creek Lake was not the only Manhattan style recreational outlet for the Tremmel Clan. There was also the swimming pool and recreational program at City Park each summer. In the recreational program Michael and James' swimming greatly improved and Susan became a swimmer also.

To show it all off: remember that night when the Tremmel Kids were star performers in the swimming show. Susan was a smooth part of the water ballet--rhythm swimming program. Michael and James starred in a show of their own. Jim was to jump into the deep end of the pool fully dressed. He was then to demonstrate that if a person falls into deep water that person

¹⁰Ziggie died on March 2, 1980.

¹¹Gator Bait died suddenly May 1, 1982.

should take off his clothes: first unload shirt; then, taking a breath between each accomplishment, unload one shoe, then the other shoe, and finally, hardest of all, the pants. Michael was to act as life guard just in case. Jim dove in and proceeded with his performance--shirt off, one shoe off, other shoe off. Then a big breath--under, up; under, up. Another big breath--under, up; under, up. And then not a pair of pants, but a command: "Come get me Mike. I really am drowning!" Michael went into action. Tragedy was avoided and the audience applauded vigorously.

TALK, TALK, TALK. Another regular activity engaged in by the Tremmel Clan was around-the-table-dinnertime conversation: What did you do today? I think we ought to...That's not a good idea...What do you think about?...O.K. Lets do that.

We also established an around-the-table family democracy. Proposals were made, discussed, argued, and voted on. Majority rule. Except father had veto power, with no override.¹²

I remember one of those conversations that kept recurring. It might be called the Kennedy question. In spite of the essay I wrote in high school arguing that the United States would never be grown up until it elected a Catholic president, when I got a chance to vote for one, I was reluctant. The rest of the family were all for Kennedy, but I refused to commit myself. They kept after me, and finally I decided to give in. But instead of declaring so at one of our around-the-table-conversations, I got a Kennedy pin and after church the next Sunday morning, I put the pin in my lapel. Nobody noticed it. Finally I had to ask, "Do I look different?" Everybody cheered, but I still was not sure my decision was a right decision.

But the Kennedy question was not really over, as was discovered in a later small-Susan-around-the-table-conversation. She reported that the teacher had asked everybody to raise his/her hand if he/she wanted Nixon or Kennedy for President.

"How many raised their hands?" I asked.

"Everybody."

"How many voted for Nixon?"

"Everybody?"

"But not you?"

She gave me a sheepish nod, "Yes".

"You raised your hand for Nixon?"

"Yes."

"But we're all Kennedy people. You guys convinced me.

Remember?"

"I know, but everybody else had their hands up, so I did too."

"Are we supposed to vote for Nixon, then?"

"No." She looked at me in a kind of disgusted-with-me fashion.

¹²Michael looking back on the arrangement has called it a Benevolent Dictatorship. Whatever, it was often a fun arrangement and gave rise to considerable discussion and common agreement. I do not recall vetoing very often.

That this table talk was not just a Manhattan time invention appears in the fact that (as Mike tells it) Jim made a contribution to the conversation one time at the dinner table at 1518 Berkeley Road, Emporia, Kansas. He was not very old at the time, but he was in there going. We must have been talking about religion; something about prayer, apparently. James entered the conversation. He said:

"I said a prayer last night."
"What did you pray for, Jim?"
"I prayed that God would let me drive the car."
"And what did God say, Jim?"
"He said, `N-O, no.'"

Recently I reminded Jim of this incident. He smiled and confessed that he had prayed again just a few days before. He had had an accident out in the Gulf on his Hobie Cat. He was overboard and having difficulty getting back on board. He said that he prayed for God to let him back on that boat. And again I asked, "And what did God say Jim?" Jim replied, "Well, I'm here."

THREE SPECIAL VACATIONS. One vacation time we packed up and flew to Mexico City. We had fun exploring the city and, also, exploring the Teotihuacan¹³ ruins 30 miles northeast of Mexico City. I got no special message while in the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, but I am sure he was there. Jim discovered that the movies in Mexico City were very cheap so he went to one. Later I discovered he, also, had gotten no message. But he could tell it was about war.

A second vacation to remember was the canoeing trip taken on the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness between the United States and Canada. Jim Worrell and his Jim, and I and my Michael and Jim took out of Ely, Minnesota, to explore the wilderness.¹⁴ Jim reported recently that that vacation was maybe the best he had ever taken. I might agree with him.

The third vacation was another trip to California. This time, no school work, just fun from Los Angeles to San Francisco on coastal highway U.S. 1, with special fascination for Carmel and Monterey.

KIDS GROW UP. Time kept going by: June 1963, Michael graduated from Manhattan High. In the Fall he entered Kansas State University heading for a degree in art and philosophy, and for a girl named Leah Georganna. Michael calls her George; I call her Georgie. Georganna happened because It Just So Happened that her name was Georganna *Tribble*. In alphabetical order,

¹³A pre-Toltec metropolis existing from c. 400 b.c. to c. 600 a.d.

¹⁴According to Smithsonian article by Jim Doherty, July, 1988, Ely is "a gritty little place where (with apologies to Garrison Keillor and Lake Wobegone) some of the men are strong, some of the women are good-looking and the rest don't give a damn."

Tremmel and Tribble are not far apart. Indeed, in one of those "everybody-must-take" courses you get in college situations Tremmel and Tribble were right next to each other; as they have been ever since. Yes, indeed, just like Arapahoe was the best mistake William C. ever made, that class in biology was the best mistake William Michael ever made.

It was not long after that biology class that Georgie got introduced to the rest of the Tremmels and became another rather frequent guest at the Tremmel house and table. That other frequent guest was a person who had long been visiting at the Tremmel house (although not so often at the Tremmel table).¹⁵ His name was Ralph Edward Lanning. He and Michael were friends (and still are) from Junior High School days onward, right through University and graduate studies at Iliff in Denver.¹⁶

TUTTLE PUDDLE. Below the dam a park was developed. That park included a lake with a beach and facilities for swimming. It had life guards, of which Michael was one. Actually, one might have suspected that Michael and Georgie were a pair of life guards because whenever Michael was on that beach doing life-guarding, or something, Georgie was there also. Not a bad place for suntans and love affairs, even if the place was unromantically called Tuttle Puddle.

TIMES GOES BY: James graduated from high school in 1966. He left Manhattan for Denver in 1967, from there he went to Colby Kansas. In Colby he met Gloria Johnson¹⁷ who was attending Colby Junior College.¹⁸ The day came when both the Johnson parents and the Tremmel parents were in a little church in New Almelo, Kansas for a big wedding. That day we got another daughter and have never regretted it for a moment. It, also, Just So Happened that Tremmel and Johnson made an excellent combination. They named her Tina Laree. Tina Laree was born on Christmas Eve¹⁹ and thus became an excuse for two parties and two Christmas trees each year: one party and tree (the Tina tree) on Christmas Eve; the other party and tree (the Jesus tree) on Christmas morning.

HEADING FOR A WEDDING. As reported earlier, Michael acquired a

¹⁵He did occasionally eat with us, especially when pizza was on the menu. He would smell it happening and just hang around until Mike would ask him if he would like some pizza. "Well, then stay and eat with us."

¹⁶Two other of Michael's special Manhattan friends were Jack Estlow and Mike Larson.

¹⁷A Kansas girl born December 6, 1948.

¹⁸A college where she later received an Associate of Arts Degree.

¹⁹Tina was born December 24, 1968.

Chrysler New Yorker that he drove during high school days. At his graduation, James acquired the New Yorker, and Michael purchased a Ford with fancy wheels. That took him through some University years. Then James acquired the Ford with fancy wheels, and Michael became a Volkswagen enthusiast.²⁰ It was in that V.W. that, after Michael got his A.B., degree, in art and philosophy, in 1969, he and Georgie packed off to Denver for graduate school, and on the way to wedding day.²¹

²⁰Enthusiast or not, ask him and Georgie what it was like sitting in a Bug convertible one night on tornado watch.

²¹Georgie carried her career with her. She was employed by the government at Fort Riley, beginning in 1968. She transferred her government employment to Denver and is still with it.