

A HUNTING-McCOY--WHEELER STORY Circa 1920 to 1950

The People in this Story

Mildred Alice Hunting (1894-1933) was born in Watertown, NY in 1894, the oldest of four children – Frederick (Fritz b. 1899), Maro (b. 1895) and Dorothy (b. 1904). Her father, **Stanley Ezekiel Hunting** (b.1865) was the descendent of John Hunting and Hester Seaborne. Born in England, they were married in 1616 and came to Dedham MA in the spring of 1638. John Hunting is buried there. Stanley's family arrived in Watertown in the 1880s. He married Grace Devendorf there in 1893.

Grace Leonora Devendorf (1872-1961), Mildred's mother, carried a Swiss name. Her ancestor, Johanes Diefendorf or Devendorf, was born in Switzerland in 1700. Grace's parents were Frederic Bassett Devendorf (1846-1915) and Anna Clarissa Bassett (1896-1922). They were first cousins. Frederic and Anna married in 1871 in Watertown CT, Anna's home. They had three children: Grace, Christine (Aunt Chris) and William (Uncle Will).

Anna's Clarissa Bassett's grandparents were William Bassett (1805-1878) and Maria Guernsey or Garnsey whom he married in 1832. William's parents were Mathilda Buell (1774-1818) and Nathan Bassett (????) They had 10 children. The Bassetts had come to Plymouth MA in 1621 on the ship *Fortune* and went thence to Duxbury and Bridgewater, MA. By 1850 some of them ended up in Milton CT and others like Anna Clarissa Bassett's family settled in Watertown CT.

The Guernsey/Garnsey bible is at the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House and two round boxes are here. The boxes belonged to Anna Bassett Devendorf (b. 1846). The larger one seems to have been a Guernsey/Garnsey hand-me-down and used as a sugar container.

Stanley E. Hunting, grew up on a dairy farm in Pamela NY. Six foot five inches tall and 240 pounds with a 90 inch arm span, his great shocks of hair made him look even taller. His mother, Jane Ann Converse Hunting (b. 1831), took an active interest in the suffrage movement and lived long enough to vote Republican enthusiastically.

When his father, Maro Reed Hunting, died in 1883 from a kick by a cow, Stanley left the farm. He married into his father-in-law's plumbing supply business and through his charm and zest he expanded it to branches in northern New York and St. Petersburg FL. Grace was equally ambitious. She wanted to be one of the "best families" and live in one of the "finest houses." Her house on Paddock Street, Watertown is a massive, white square with ionic columns supporting the front porch. Helen McCoy, Mildred's childhood friend, lived down the block in a more modest and welcoming white clapboard.

Mildred graduated from Maryland College for Women in 1916. She visited college friends around the United States, traveled to Europe in 1922 and to Persia in 1926. In Tabriz she helped a missionary friend close an orphanage for the last group of Armenian children whose parents had been killed by the Turks during WWI. Her brother Maro fought in the War and married Judelle Houston, daughter of the Philadelphia architect who built the Pennsylvania statehouse. They lived on Clover Street in Rochester with their children Houston, Stanley and Mathilda. Her sister Dorothy married Francis D'Amanda, a prominent lawyer in Rochester. Their children were Louis and Christopher. Mildred and her siblings became estranged from their brother James apparently over shares in the Hunting Company after their parents died. Mildred married Edwin Sessions Wheeler in December 1929 and died in December 1933 from diaphragmatic pleurisy.

Helen Inez McCoy (1894–1995) was born in Watertown, NY. She had two brothers: Harold who was a newspaper and advertising man and Chauncey who sold billboard space and real estate until the Depression. Her father, Frank was a telegrapher for the railroad and met her mother at a boarding house where they both live in Fort Wayne IN. Julia Glidden was teaching on an Indian reservation. She had been in one of the early classes of Wellesley College which opened its doors in 1875. Her roommate, Inez Sanborne, heir to the Chase and Sanborne coffee money, financed Helen's education because Frank did not believe in educating women. When Helen graduated in 1916 she returned home to teach math in the public schools and take care of her mother whose illness had already interrupted her college career for a semester. Helen blamed her father for her mother's death. He refused to admit that Julia had a life threatening illness or that she should in any way lessen her care of him.

When she died from a stroke Frank insisted that Helen stay home and look after him. She refused. Sometime in the early 1920s she married Claude? Mercer and moved to Philadelphia. Unfortunately he was a philanderer who drank too much. Helen had made a serious mistake but received no support from her father. "You've made your bed now lie in it," was his chastisement. After ten years, however, she had had enough. Helen learned stenography and typing and sued for divorce.

Her first job with a dentist? Real estate broker? ended badly. These days the son of her boss could have been charged with sexual harassment and she left. But when she went to work at the accounting firm, Lybrand, Ross Brothers and Montgomery, she found "real gentlemen" and she flourished. She became head of the records department and one of the few female executives in Philadelphia when there weren't that many. She lived first in a little house next to her Watertown friends, the Hillegasses, and later in a comfortable one bedroom/Pullman kitchen apartment at 437 School House Lane in Germantown PA.

Helen made a very good life for herself. Her wardrobe included evening dresses and fancy handbags and for seven years she refused all marriage proposals including Teddy Wheeler's. She had other family commitments. Her brother, Chauncey, and his wife, Emily Bassett, had neglected their daughter, Nancy, who collapsed at Christmastime in 1936. Helen took charge and eventually took legal custody of her niece. Nancy spent

three months during the spring of 1937 in the TB preventorium at Eagleville PA and then attended Sunny Hills boarding school near Wilmington DE. Like Inez Sanborne, Helen's college friend, Barbara Bach, helped finance Nancy's education.

Helen would never have considered herself a feminist and she was never critical of the social mores of her class. But to the lasting benefit of her daughters, Helen had acquired an agency for her own life among strong women who did the same. She was the model of a career girl. When the social norms conflicted with her personal requirements, she did what she had to do courageously and without complaint and when she died she told "her girls" "I've had a wonderful life. I want to go home."

Richard Hunting Wheeler (January 30, 1931 – March 20, 2013) was born in Brooklyn Hospital to Mildred Hunting Wheeler and Edwin Sessions Wheeler. His sister, Elizabeth Hunting Wheeler was born there a year and a half later in July 1932. The family lived at 184 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn and then 625 Fairmont Ave., Westfield NJ until Mildred's death in December 1933. A year later the family moved to 861 Winyah Ave, Westfield.

Richard graduated from Westfield High School in 1949 and the University of Maine in 1953 with a degree in forest management. Upon graduation he enlisted in the Air Force and took his flight training at Ellington Air Force Base outside Houston TX. There he received his wings and married Barbara Hodges on November 13, 1954.

He was assigned to the 22nd Air Refueling Squadron at March AFB in Riverside CA. Deployments took him to Alaska, Newfoundland, Japan, Okinawa and Guam. In the late summer of 1957 he was offered the opportunity to reenlist as a teacher at the Air Force Academy but decided to continue on in forestry. In November 1957 he joined the Forest Service and was assigned to the Savannah River Atomic Energy Commission plant in Aiken GA as an assistant forester. In 1959 he was transferred to the Choctaw District in Heavener OK.

His first child Kathleen was born 1956, his second Deborah in 1960 and his third daughter Patricia was born in 1962. Throughout these years he continued to fly in the Air Force Reserve with the 65th Troop Carrier Squadron out of Davis Field, OK. These flights took him to Venezuela, Brazil and Honduras.

In 1962 he returned to graduate school at the Colorado State University, Fort Collins Forestry Watershed Unit. While studying for an MS in hydrology he worked full time as the hydrologist for Roosevelt National Forest near Ft. Collins and flew National Guard flights out of Cheyenne CO. These took him to Vietnam.

The family's happiest home was in Missoula MT at 441 Keith Avenue. Richard had made captain but his unit, the Wyoming Air Guard, did not fly to Missoula and his Air Force days were over. He was the hydrologist in the Forest Service regional office doing research on stream morphology and inventory, water rights, fire rehabilitation and the effects of mining on the ecology. In 1974 he was chosen for a UN Food and Agriculture

Organization (FAO) assignment to Thailand. Working in Chang Mai in the Mae Sa Integrated Watershed Program he taught the district foresters how to read rain gauges, practice settled agriculture instead of the slash and burn process and how to reforest eroded hillsides. He met the King and Queen several times, enjoyed Thai food with the family and vacationed in Burma.

When he returned to Missoula in 1979 he found that he did not like the supervisory arrangements at the Forest Service regional office and in 1979 he took a lateral move to Mount Hood National Forest. He retired in 1986 to become a private consultant. He discovered his real loves were teaching hydrology to USAID students from the Caribbean at Mount Hood Community College and serving Holy Cross Episcopal Church and its Latino members. He became an accomplished square dancer and was active in the Snow Crop food bank. He died unexpectedly from lymphoma in March 2013 and is buried in the Willamette National Cemetery, Portland OR.

Elizabeth Hunting Wheeler (July 24, 1932 -) was also born in Brooklyn Hospital and moved with my family from Brooklyn to Westfield, NJ. I remained close to family, often visiting my father and stepmother, Helen at their retirement home in Peru VT, which they purchased about 1956. After my father's death in 1967, Helen moved to Manchester VT and eventually to Sweetwood, a continuing care facility in Williamstown, MA near my work in North Adams MA.

I graduated from Westfield High School in 1950 and Miami University (OH) in 1954 with a BA in government and international relations. In July 1954 I joined the American Field Service as a tour leader for the European high school students studying in the United States. The following year I accompanied American students to summer home-stays in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and France. In 1956 I entered the Boston University African Studies Program but moved in 1958 to New York without completing my degree. Apartment 65 at 452 Riverside Drive became my permanent home.

In 1960 I borrowed \$2000 from my uncles, Francis D'Amanda and Maro Hunting, for a six-month hitch-hiking trip through Africa. I came home to work at the African Studies Program of American Universities (ASPAU), which recruited and placed African students in Ivy League colleges. In 1962 I became Director of the Women's Africa Committee of the African-American Institute (AAI) and traveled twice again to Africa. The purpose of the Committee was to help African women leaders serve the women and girls of their countries. I left AAI in 1962 to work as a management consultant with Nelson Associates, NY and was subsequently asked by my client, Hampshire College, to become Director of Development. I joined Hampshire in 1967 to raise the first \$30 million to build this new college in Amherst, MA.

Moving back to New York in 1972 I became an independent consultant working for institutions such as the New School, the United Nations Association, the Painter's Theater, Church Women United. I entered Union Theological Seminary in the fall of 1981 as a special student and graduated in 1984 with an M.Div. degree.

In 1985 I was called to the First Congregational Church, UCC in North Adams MA and was ordained there. In 1992 I was called as interim minister to the Stockbridge MA UCC church and in 1994 to The Riverside Church in New York City as Minister for Stewardship and Communications. I retired from Riverside in 1997 but has continued to serve as co-chair of the Ordination Committee and member of the Search Committee, which recommended The Rev. Dr. Amy K. Butler to be the seventh minister of the church.

Teddy and Mildred

In 1922 Teddy Wheeler met Mildred Hunting at the train from Rochester and took her to lunch at Vanity Fair, a midtown New York tea room. She reports the menu – chicken croquettes and green peas – but all she says about him is that he then took her in the rain to the boat on which she sailed for a three month tour of Europe.

A constant traveler, she later wrote her sister Dorothy, that she subsequently saw him “quite a bit” in New York. But in early 1929 there was no hint of an impending marriage. That January she was in St. Petersburg FL with her mother and father. They had moved there for his health between the time she left for an eighteen-month sojourn to Persia from 1926 to 1928. A clipping from a St. Petersburg paper reported that she had received a distinguished service medal from the Near East Relief for her Persian work. It implied she had settled in St. Petersburg to help her father open a new branch of the Hunting Plumbing Supply Company and had no other plans.

But by September or October, 1929, she was writing her sister of the first meetings with Teddy’s family in New York and Concord MA. She spent a weekend with the Concord relatives who, she observed, lived leisurely lives as they do in England in palatial homes furnished with antiques on family farms of long standing. In a later letter during those months she reported to her sister that Brooklyn Heights had an air of respectability about it and was convenient for Teddy’s commute. She described the Nickel Company as the family firm (wrong) and Teddy’s only sister as heading a family of thrifty New Englanders (right) who lived very simply but comfortably with homes in Brooklyn and New Canaan CT.

By November she was in Watertown NY among her childhood friends to prepare for the wedding. And on December 3, 1929 she and Teddy were married at a small ceremony in All Souls Universalist Church, Rochester NY. Ruth Huntington Sessions and Paul Shipman Andrews who married Ruth’s daughter, Hannah Sargent Sessions, represented the family. Paul was Teddy’s best man. The Watertown paper reported that the bride wore a tailored, afternoon dress, selected by her mother in the “ashes of roses shade.” She wore a black hat and black shoes and carried Premier roses and lilies of the valley. For a honeymoon Teddy took her on a cruise to Bermuda.

He was an unlikely choice for her. By the time Mildred had graduated from Maryland College for Women in 1916 the family had moved to Rochester from Watertown NY and

her mother was a prominent club woman often traveling with New York State delegations to YWCA and church missionary conventions. Like most young women of adequate means Mildred returned to her mother's house when she graduated to do what young women of adequate means did. She went to tea in the homes of her circle, she called on the old ladies of her family, she attended lectures by missionaries and women's suffrage organizers, she visited college friends in Savannah, Detroit, New Orleans and St. Augustine, she ran the house in her mother's absence. Her younger sister Dorothy regarded Mildred as her true mother.

In October 1917 she got her first paid job at the local library and did not like it. She felt her "liberty" to do what she wanted to do was "denied" and she was not "her own master." Nor did she like her boss. He thought she didn't need the money and wouldn't stay long. She thought he didn't take her seriously and she bristled. "I'll do just as I please and leave if I don't like it," she wrote. A week later he fired her thus ending her "business career." It had lasted a month.

She was, however, a faithful volunteer during WWI. Throughout 1917-18 she worked with the Red Cross gathering medical supplies, serving as a hospital aide, making home relief calls to the poor and attending rallies and military drills to support the boys abroad. Her brother, Maro, fought a year and a half in Europe with the 307th Field Artillery Division. Her other brother, James, enlisted in the New Haven Students' Army Training Corps in October 1918 but was discharged two months later. Maro, wounded that November, was discharged in April 1919.

When the war was over and the family restored, Mildred returned to picking up after her brothers, helping her mother keep house and doing the social and charity rounds. She liked her hospital work but she seemed disinclined to make a career of charity. Nor did she think herself well educated. The European grand tour was an alternative to a degree from the best women's colleges like Wellesley where Dorothy and her childhood friend, Helen McCoy, went. By July 4, 1922 Teddy had taken her to the *Manchurian* and waved her away to Germany, Italy and France. The passengers on board suspected she and her friends were chorus girls because they sang "ragtime" tunes all the way to Europe. She was 28.

By the time she was 30 she was beginning to wonder whether she would be "auntie" to all the children of her friends. The "wander years" were coming to an end and she had neither spouse nor work. Remaining single meant economic dependence, legal instability and the perception of childishness. To be married was to be a woman. She sounds bored with her life and herself. But she did what she wanted to do and went where she wanted to go and "drummed" on the piano for entertainment.

The popular songs of Victor Herbert, Jerome Kerns and Oscar Hammerstein were the taped and tattered sheet music that got most use although interestingly she owned both *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* and *The Second Book of American Negro Spirituals* published in 1925 by James Weldon Johnson and his brother Rosamond. These are still standard references for persons interested in the history of spirituals. There

is no way of knowing whether her thinking about people of color was evolving as she played the new black art form of ragtime. But she was restless. And when things at home seemed stalled the solution was to travel.

In July 1926 she sailed for Persia on board the *Tuscania*. With the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 women were going places while she was picking up the dirty underwear and wet towels dropped by her brothers where they stood. She said that she was never meant to be idle. So if the only suitable outside work for a lady who liked her freedom was volunteer work in the parish, she might as well do it abroad.

The ostensible reason for her trip was to keep house for a missionary friend who was shutting down an orphanage for Christian Armenian children whose parents had been massacred by the Turks during WWI. The orphanage, under the aegis of the Near East Relief, was located in Tabiz. By 1926 only 100 or so children were left to be placed in foster homes. Once placed they were said to have been "liquidated." Mildred did not participate in this work but ran the house and rode her horse.

When she returned home in 1928 she apparently had no thought of marriage. In her diary she hardly mentions men and only once hints at desire. She comes across as a strong-willed, take-charge, non-nonsense woman who thought the youthful flirtations of socially acceptable men juvenile. She called receptions "stupid" and moustaches the affectations of men who wanted to show off their "manliness." She took dancing lessons but was relieved that her mother didn't press her about beaux because so few men took her to dances.

One Mr. Denmark at first "hypnotized" her and then settled in to a "devoted friend" who liked plain food and whose kiss upon her hair was like a "benediction." Two weeks later his talk offended her. It was "too sentimental." Yet that same year, 1918, she complained that "no man wants to marry me." Ten years later, however, one man did. Was Teddy her last chance or did he offer her something no other man had?

Teddy lived among strong women. His aunt Ruth Huntington Sessions was president of her area Consumer's League and his aunt Mary Wheeler drove her electric car into Boston. His cousin Catherine Huntington marched in support of Sacco and Vanzetti and his cousin Esther Wheeler Anderson lectured on Thoreau throughout New England. He complained about having lived too much and too long among such women but then he married one. Mildred described him to her sister, Dorothy, as "a sympathetic and kindly soul," "such a quiet soul and conservative." She wrote that "he is sweet to me and insists I am quite perfect. When Teddy is about my hair gets in a very untidy state. I have never been so ruffled. But it's such fun."

Teddy may have succeeded with Mildred because he knew all the cues women communicated to tell a man where he stood and what liberties he could take with her. Some of these were so arcane that even well brought up men like Mr. Denmark blundered unforgivably. Teddy did not. Drive and dash were not his style but consort to a queen, Prince Albert to Her Majesty, yes.

She wanted a man who was as competent and decorous as she was. Could he play bridge and win? She could. Could he fix the gas stove and other household appliances? She could. Was he athletic in the genteel sports of tennis, golf, horseback riding? She played golf and thrilled at a cross-country gallop. Did he take over when she took the lead in the dance as she was wont to do? Could he travel the desert wastes in style?

“A poor specimen of a man” not only lacked these social skills, he was also sexually coarse. Mildred was not an innocent. During her college years she condescended to tell the “poor kids” the facts of life. But pawing men disgusted her. She wrote with distaste of one uncle who kept welcoming her with kisses, of a shipboard dinner partner who kept squeezing her arm, of a school friend’s father who remarked upon her growing good looks. These were the crudest offenses. They couldn’t be avoided but a woman would look long at a man before marrying him to see if he could control himself in polite society. She had looked Teddy over for at least seven years and he passed the test.

When Mildred died of diaphragmatic pleurisy in December 1933 after only four years of marriage and four months in their new home at 625 Fairmont Ave., Westfield NJ, Teddy died with her. One can never really know another. Intimacy grows slowly and cautiously and always with restraint. Haste is the mortal danger. Meddling in another’s inner sanctuary can do great harm and unveiling the sanctuary to another requires great trust. I think he had risked it with Mildred.

Character permitted no self-pity when she died. But neither did character permit a healing catharsis. Were it not for his belief in the restorative powers of nature, his deep reserve would have left him no consolation. As it was, Mildred’s picture remained on her piano but he never spoke of her and I dared not ask.

Teddy and Helen

In the spring of 1940 Teddy married Helen McCoy. He had met Helen through Mildred who first mentions Helen in the summer of 1915. Mildred had graduated from her two year college and Helen was home in Watertown before returning to Wellesley for her junior year. Teddy had first proposed to Helen in 1937 after the “nightmare of Mildred’s sickness” and the years of “hell” that followed. But she had been disastrously married and after ten years, painfully divorced. Not only had she had enough of marriage but she had a very good life on her own. She was among the small, elite group of business women in Philadelphia where she managed the records department of the accounting firm of Lybrand, Ross Brothers and Montgomery. She had a house of her own and entertaining neighbors. Teddy was persistent but silent; she was gregarious and asked herself: what would we talk about?

In 1939, however, the situation changed radically. Helen had become the legal guardian of her niece, Nancy McCoy. During the Christmas of 1936 Nancy, a gentle child of eleven, collapsed while visiting Helen with her father, Chauncy. Helen took charge because Nancy’s estranged parents could not. She sent Nancy to a “preventorium” for

patients with incipient tuberculosis and later arranged for her to go to Sunny Hills, a private boarding school. Chauncey was an alcoholic and died in 1941 or '42 on the streets of Washington DC. Her mother, Emily, married again and readily left Nancy with Helen. The ostensible reason was that she could not afford to support her. Helen gained custody of Nancy but as long as Emily was still alive adoption, she thought, was inappropriate. Nancy never abandoned her mother but she has always acknowledged her debt to Helen and Teddy.

When Helen agreed to marry, probably in 1939, she did it for the children. She was a single parent just as Teddy was. Nancy needed a parent's care and my brother and I pestered her with questions about why she wouldn't marry our daddy. Then when our daddy championed Nancy and unconditionally embraced her as his own, Helen gave in. "Well," she said, "let's try it." They were married in Wilmington DE and brought home from their honeymoon in Florida hanging moss, a conch shell, fresh sponges and a warming trend.

Things in our household thawed considerably. Gone were the finger bowls and the tortuous carving of chicken wings. Helen picked up the bones and licked her fingers. Gone was the genteel suffering in full dress during sweltering summer afternoons. Helen stripped naked and lay panting on the bedroom floor. Gone were the immaculately pressed and monogrammed sheets and pillowcases. Helen's wash flapped on the whirligig and came directly to our beds smelling of ozone. Gone were the indulgences of being waited upon. Anna Willis and Mabel Houghton could go home. Helen taught us how to look after ourselves.

She was socially ambitious in all the Waspy ways. She joined the DAR and the Green Mountain Girls and attended Wellesley alumnae meetings into her Nineties, taking pride that her mother was in the charter class of 1870. She modified the Victorian manners to accommodate the freer life of a working woman but she lacked the sense of humor that would give these manners an appeal. She adamantly opposed my first housing choice in New York. It was a basement room of a brownstone with a shared bath down the hall. The flooring was linoleum and the few sticks of furniture looked like dormitory cast offs. But in 1956 I was earning \$45 a week at the American Field Service and this Murray Hill rooming house was within walking distance of the office. She would not even consider it. No. Absolutely not. What will I tell my friends, she demanded.

Helen's world was restricted as she believed it should be. It was civilization in its entirety and within it she was the best – the best schooled, the ablest manager, the sturdiest friend, the most resourceful provider, the most energetic person. In choosing up sides, she would be among the first. She had a straight-ahead drive that my father never had and was every bit his equal in Latin, math and grammar. She could sell anyone anything and had a get-up-and-go enthusiasm his homebody habits lacked.

She was game. When he died she cut loose and traveled often. In her Eighties she rode astride a donkey up a mountain in the Greek islands and wanted the complete works of Milton for Christmas. She preferred reading about the mysteries of Stonehenge and

Machu Picchu and in her Nineties she triumphantly traveled to Wellesley to receive the honors of her college. She was the ace saleswoman of Wellesley pecans.

She was a matter-of-fact person who looked the facts of life in the face and once decided she never looked back. When she was no longer invited to bridge parties because she could no longer remember the cards she announced she was moving to a new continuing care facility in Williamstown, MA. Her beloved "little house" could not compensate for the anxiety of keeping it up or the isolation she felt. The issues at Ninety were new but her attitude toward them was the same one she brought to us in 1940 when she was 46. Just do it.

In good time and by their testimony Helen healed the wounds of Richard and Teddy. She opened their hearts and they loved her for it. Nancy was more reserved. But Helen made it safe for to test the world through the pictures she drew and a sweet-tempered Puckish humor. Quietly she found her way. Out of three abandoned children and four sad people, isolated in their own pain, Helen made a family. We became one body because of her. She was a successful businesswoman and an enterprising clubwoman but we were her best work. She died in her 101st year.

Richard and Elizabeth

I was born in the cruelest month of the Depression – July 24, 1932. That month a rag tag remnant of World War I veterans was driven out of Washington at gun point. Beginning in Oregon, they had hoboed and hitched across the country to petition the government for help. Their crops had failed. There were no jobs. They were penniless. Army Chief of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur, who commanded the evacuation said he had stopped an "incipient revolution." President Hoover said he had thwarted a mob incited by Communists and criminals. We had weathered at least 15 major depressions in recent memory and we would weather this one. Private charity would help the worst off, he said.

Respectable people in comfortable homes agreed with the President. They read the New York *Herald Tribune* with satisfaction: there was "not a shred of sympathy left anywhere" for the Bonus Army cause. Two months later *Fortune* magazine reported that 28% of the population were without any regular form of income. (William Manchester *The Glory and the Dream* Boston: Little, Brown and Company pgs 13-17)

Born in Brooklyn Hospital, I lived in a comfortable apartment at 184 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY. In 1900 Columbia Heights was the most fashionable street in Brooklyn. In 1912 leading Brooklyn families still lived there for the panoramic views of New York harbor. But real estate watchers observed apartment buildings and rooming houses insinuating themselves among the private homes and compromising the fine living for which the street was known.

My family were not new to Brooklyn or the *Herald Tribune* but they were new to fashionable addresses. My father, Edwin Sessions Wheeler, had a good job at

International Nickel as superintendent in the Bayonne NJ plant and my mother, Mildred Hunting Wheeler, was still a new bride having been married less than 3 years. The summer in New York had been sparkling, not too hot. I was surrounded by my father's in-laws, aunts and uncles who lived within blocks of each other and my brother, Richard, born January 30, 1931 was my best friend.

Like many families mine moved to the railroad suburbs in September 1933. Since the mid 19th century Brooklyn had been home to working well-to-do Protestants. And until it was bridged by the Brooklyn-Manhattan subway the East River had protected suburban Brooklyn from Manhattan's low life. Was our move the first white flight from the city? Probably but the railroad suburbs of the 1920s also offered the leafy amenities of the country equidistant between Bayonne and Wall Street. Westfield NJ was a lovely compact town of 10,000 with large houses, large churches, good schools, safe neighborhoods and Republican politics. Our house at 625 Fairmont Avenue was solid, red brick and ugly but we didn't stay there long.

Mildred Hunting died December 1933 of diaphragmatic pleurisy, a highly infectious disease for which there was no cure. Teddy fled the house he lived in with her almost immediately. In the interim his aunt Adeline Sessions took charge. My first memories are of a brief war with her. She had cornered me in my high chair. The issue was string beans. They had grown cold in the standoff and I was to sit there until I ate them. There must have been a compromise for Aunt Addie was beloved by her family.

Probably Addie and my father's sister, my aunt Bessie Thompson, found our housekeeper, Mabel Houghton, and Bessie's cook, Anna Willis, moved out to Westfield from Brooklyn during the weekdays. Mabel's domain was the upstairs and the care of my Richard and me. Anna ruled the downstairs and the kitchen. Richard remembers Anna Willis as a "slightly wizened, small black lady who was a strict disciplinarian." She snapped a wet towel at his bare legs to get him out from under her feet. Undeterred Richard spent a lot of time in kitchens charming the cooks for handouts.

I remember Mabel Houghton as a short stocky woman whose fingers and nails were dry and deeply cracked. She supported a family of three children and an invalid husband and lived in a house from an earlier time. It was heated by a coal furnace and a cast iron kitchen range and it still had an ice box cooled by blocks of ice delivered on the iceman's back. Our house was heated by an oil burner and a curvaceous GE frig cooled our food.

When we occasionally stayed with her overnight, Richard and I would help her armor up in the morning. We would pull the strings of her corset from behind while she held on to the bedpost. She didn't take care of our clothes very well but she played with us for hours at hide the thimble and Parcheesi. When Richard went off to kindergarten she would console me by pointing out how rich I was. I would dump my allowance pennies on the floor and count them into stacks of five and ten. I learned my numbers but also a kind of petty greed that is the other side of thrift. To hide such distasteful attitudes I also learned how to behave properly in public. Every well brought up little girl knew what to do at Eleveses. I drank hot water and ate Ritz Crackers from a little china tea set seated

at a little child's table on a little chair with a two-sided back. Anna Willis and Mabel Houghton did not like each other but made it work for 7 years.

We must have moved to 861 Winyah Ave. in early 1934. I clutched a tiny white rabbit with a orange carrot and did not sleep well. I was afraid of dark creatures under the bed and terrified by nightmares that woke me up. Only my father could banish them. I either had to cry out loud enough for him to hear and likewise arouse the monsters. Or I had to jump from my bed beyond their reach and run to my father in the next room. I chose the latter. He would carry me back to bed and lie beside me until I went to sleep.

I was an anxious child, eager to please and careful not to upset authority of any kind. I worried about policemen. "Policemens is tender," I am said to have admonished my brother who stepped off the curb without the officer's permission. I worried about the ominous tones from the adult conversations about the Spanish Civil War and Japan's invasion of China in 1937. As I got older I hid my eyes from horror movies that were the entertainment at Halloween parties and I would skip to the end of novels because I couldn't stand reading about the bad things that happened to the characters before the happy endings.

I worried particularly about my father. If I could be perfect for him, I could secure my world. If I could keep him happy, no more bad things would happen to me. My response to the family catastrophe was to trust no one. Since my mother had abandoned me, everything I loved could be taken away from me at any time. Better not to love at all.

Richard's response was quite different. When Helen agreed to marry Teddy in 1939 he asked her to give Richard "a little extra love." Richard, he said, had "missed Mildred a great deal" and "talked about her quite a bit." He worried about Richard but he was "impatiant" with him too. Sometimes, he wrote, Richard does not seem "friendly to me."

I think Richard blamed his father for the loss of his mother. While he did not disobey his father, he would comply in slow motion. He was stubborn and passive resistance was his confrontational mode. Even with older kids who tried to bully him he would not fight. Helen wanted him to take boxing lessons and I would fight with anyone who challenged me. But he just stood his ground.

Men may feel he was not commanding and austere enough. But he never had to be either. He had no ego needs that command and control could satisfy. Rather through a laid back geniality he created a safe and intimate place without doing intimate things. He greeted all people as though they were family. With the exception of the King of Thailand, to whom he bowed before explaining new crop rotations in the King's forest, all others got a hug.

I think the lesson this three-year old boy took from his mother's death was to identify with anyone in distress. Since he was not responsible for his sorrows neither were they and he would help them if he could. His response to his own loss was compassion for the

world and a physical embrace of all living things. He is a tree hugger and a people hugger.

Our father was the closest substitute for our mother and he was the only one I let touch me. But he was too stunned to give his little girl the mothering she craved. He could hardly keep himself together. And grief distanced him from his children. I clung to my brother. Richard's wife, Barbara, has always thought I idolized him uncritically. But he saved my life. Although well defended against tenderness at least I knew what it was.

Teddy had help during the weekdays but he had us all alone on weekends and holidays. In the years after Mildred's death we vacationed with her sister, Dorothy D'Amanda, in Pultneyville NY. My cousins, Louis and Christopher, and I amused ourselves drying and smoking corn silk in corn cob pipes until our fathers bought us out. Richard's missed this windfall being confined to a steam tent with the whooping cough. But he was always there for Uncle Frank D'Amanda's deep fried zucchini chips.

We vacationed, too, at the Hotel Lookoff in Sugar Hill, NH. The women and children in Teddy's family spent the summers in the country and Sugar Hill may have been one destination. It had many frame hotels with wide piazzas overlooking putting greens and assortments of young women to look after the little children. We rode the tramway up Mt. Washington but that was about the most exciting thing we did. Sugar Hill was a fashionable resort designed for summer widows and their eligible daughters but there wasn't much fun for children.

We spent the Christmas holidays in New Canaan with Aunt Bessie and Uncle Jack. The tiny chicken on my dinner plate I learned was a squab and the gifts I received were only the grandest of Aunt Bessie's yearly purchases for me: a doll's house with running water, a model farm with toy horses and toy fox hunters dressed in their pinks, a rocking horse with real horse hair from the F. A. O. Schwartz Christmas catalogue. Richard's gifts were equally extravagant. All our aunts and uncles lavished love upon us as best they could.

Teddy had to work Saturday mornings and sometimes he took us with him. The secretaries in his office on the 13th floor of INCO's headquarters at 67 Wall Street let us play with the typewriters and then we would take the 3rd Avenue El uptown and the 5th Avenue double-decker bus downtown. We climbed the Statue of Liberty right up to the torch and visited the newly opened dioramas in the Natural History Museum. I was delighted to see a lady with blue hair. I was shocked to see a man, child in each hand, weave his way across Broadway against the traffic. And he wasn't alone. Jaywalking seemed to be a New Yorker's right. Here was a city of outlaws who broke the law legally. The idea was intoxicating.

We would take the Jersey Central Railroad in to Jersey City and transfer to a ferry. I loved the train. I would stand on the platform beside this steaming behemoth and ride it for adventures my sheltered home never knew. It took me past the Hoovervilles along the tracks in the Jersey marshes. The tar paper shacks and lean-tos, black with cinder and

soot provoked me. Why would anyone live like that? Then they were gone and the train steamed on to the Liberty Street ferry, my ship of dreams. We never went inside. Even during the worst weather we stayed outside on the upper deck because there before us was lower Manhattan. In the changing tides and weather every crossing was theatrical and new. The sight thrilled me.

The three of us did a lot of things together. But the closest we ever got to my father was when he read to us, Richard on one side and me on the other, snuggled up under a kerosene lamp in a Pocono Mountain log cabin. He had brought Ernest Seton Thompson's animal stories and the Leatherstocking Tales of James Fenimore Cooper for our evening's entertainment. These were his boyhood books, too. He was a decent, lonely man who did his best for us and that was good enough. We suffered no more than children usually do.

We may, however, been more sensitive to the hurts of others than most children. Although Richard and I responded differently to the trauma of our mother's death, we both picked up on the dissonances in the world around us and reacted similarly. We noticed, for instance, that personal racism and anti-Semitism were incompatible with the WWII propaganda that all of us were in this together.

As a little girl I surreptitiously looked to see if the black on Anna's hand had rubbed off on mine and was ashamed. I had picked up something that my child's brain knew was somehow wrong. Later at the 9th grade prom in 1947 when I danced with the star running back I knew I'd crossed a line and I knew I had been right. He was black but one of us. Richard remembers similar experiences. The men's double quartet had come to rehearse at our house and Harold Jackson came with them. Harold was black. "What is he doing here," hissed Aunt Helen. He's an "awesome first tenor," was Rich's reply and he argued for hospitality.

He won that time and we won when Teddy took us to Ebbetts field in 1947 to see Jackie Robinson play in his rookie season at first base. It was a sportsman's duty to defeat the Yankees, whom everyone agreed bought the game. Everyone also agreed that the National League played better ball than the American League and the Dodgers with Robinson on board would show us how. Teddy wanted to see it despite having a black man on his hometown Brooklyn team. Teddy must have known that Robinson was not an anomaly. But there we all were behind first base.

To call our family racist does not capture the nuance of northern white Anglo Saxon Protestant attitudes. We sorted the entire world into shades of "whiteness" as in "one white man can do the work of two Italians" or "how the Jews (or Irish) became white." I was for tolerance but not equality, for paternalism but not solidarity. For my 9th grade graduation essay I wrote about how it took both black and white keys to play the *Star Spangled Banner* and how the Negro had to challenge every principle and practice of racial segregation. But I also wrote that progress would be gradual. Factory and tea room jobs would train the work habits for professional and management responsibilities. I wrote that freedom had to be earned.

I thought I was advanced and enlightened. We belonged to the dominant culture and because it was dominant it was right and natural. Mildred had thought so, too. In 1926 when she sailed for Persia, she disparaged the Jews who marred the passage simply by being on board. She also complained about most Europeans except the Germans. The French were inhospitable, the Italians were slovenly, the Russians were corrupt but the Germans were admirably exact. She had nothing but praise for the Germans who were such a relief after the discomforts of Europe elsewhere.

It is worth noting that the world changed dramatically and violently during the formative years of Mildred, Helen and Teddy. *The American Earthquake* Edmund Wilson called it. By 1910 Ellis Island was processing 1 million immigrants a year and six heads of state were assassinated for the sake of a socialist vision that would sweep away corrupt capitalists and hereditary property. By WWI blacks were moving in the Great Migration from the South to seek war work in northern cities and the Bolshevik Revolution was the inspiration for the strikes and uprisings that agitated Europe and the United States throughout the Twenties, Thirties and Forties.

Between June 1933 and December 1934 1.5 million workers took part in hundreds of work stoppages. In 1936 the Fascist coup in Spain rallied Communists, Socialists and the radical Americans in the Lincoln Brigade to the defense of the legitimate government. And although the Ford Motor Company, River Rouge Plant No. 3 in Dearborn, MI was struck in 1941, it was the last battle in which the Communists played a major role. No one knew this, of course, and people like us had reason to fear.

In the hiatus of WWII the country united against everyone's common enemies. But after the war the lingering bitterness erupted in a wave of strikes at home and nationalist movements in the colonies. Between 1945-46 175,000 workers shut down the GM plant for 113 days and 800,000 workers walked out of 1000 steel mills in the biggest strike in history. That spring 1 million miners struck the coal mines. The unions had shut down the whole country.

Labor was at its apogee. These were the last of the great industrial wars that had begun in the 1870s, but again, no one knew this at the time nor could people like us take comfort in a world secured by the colonial empires. By 1947 India was independent of the British, by 1949 Indonesia was independent of the Dutch and by 1954 the French were expelled from Indo China. Africa was next. By 1960 colonialism was over and so was the "white man's burden."

As the working gentry, we identified with the upper classes and ruling elites. Change was not dismissed outright. But the right kind of change was accomplished only by acculturation through education over many generations. Otherwise chaos would rule over order. That this very paternalism enraged organized labor and Third World nationalists was no reason to give it up.

Our parents were typical of their time and class. Helen and Teddy held on to their beliefs

because there was much of value in their way of life that they refused to let two world wars, a depression and social revolution destroy. Surely they were right to defend the heritage Western civilization has given to the world. But they would consider the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth's sixty year reign over a multicultural commonwealth a holding action and they hardly appreciated their children's easy attitudes toward people of color. WWII swept away the manners and mores they stood for but was the public parent who taught their children justice and decency for all. Already tuned to empathy we were ready for the cultural revolution of the Sixties.

Rich's response to his mother's death was to make the world his friend. He would strike up conversations with strangers on topics they didn't know they were interested in and rush to the side of someone in need without a second thought. For me the world was a dangerous and unpredictable place. If I were to deal with anger and loss at all I had to abstract it into painting, music, religious ritual or public policy. My response was more political; Rich's was more personal. He treated people as equals, I was interested in the idea of equality. His policy was his personality. He was a "people person."

At his first Forest Service job in Aiken SC he did the forbidden and dangerous thing of eating lunch with the black tree planting crews in the segregated south. He worked the fire lines with them and didn't mind getting down and dirty. They in turn trusted him and came to him rather than the District Ranger for answers. This was apparently the source of some friction with his superior. In graduate school at Colorado State University, Ft Collins half the students in the watershed unit were international students, two of whom were regulars at his house. In later years when he taught hydrology to Haitian and Dominican students at the local community college his relationship with them was as a substitute grandfather who looked after them while they were away from home.

The loss of our mother may also have affected our grades. Smart but too in need love, both of us were very social and neither of us were good students. Rich was admitted to the University of Maine on probation and I was refused admission to Miami University until I asked to come out to Oxford for an interview in my defense. Neither of us achieved over 3.5 grade point averages until our senior years but both of us were elected to service honoraries (Owl for him, Cwen for me), fraternities (Lambda Chi for him, Kappa Kappa Gamma for me) and both of us filled our days with other activities (football and ROTC for him, student body president for me) and heavy dating schedules (house parties on the Maine coast for him, the SAE house for me).

We also thrived in our summer internships. Rich cut pulpwood near the Canadian border. He used horses to skid the logs to the landing where they shook off the logs and returned to him on their own. The other two summers he dug out huckleberry bushes which were the host plant to blister rust and did the real dirty work of fire fighting by digging out the hot spots. While in the Idaho forests he took time out to sit for an ROTC exam that granted him a two year draft deterrent.

My first internship was with the American Friends Service Committee, Interns in Industry Program. I worked on the assembly line in the wrap/pack unit of the Fleers

Double Bubble Gum. The women on the line wanted to know what I was – Irish, Italian, Polish, what? I thought I was American. What did they want to know? I had met my first “worker” and my first Communist heretofore spoken of in my house as alien beings. I learned to love opera from the Italian men who would sing along to the records of their favorite opera stars in a little restaurant near our rooming house in south Philadelphia.

The second summer in DC at the Census Bureau I entered by hand raw census data on to large accounting sheets, met President Truman in the rose garden and watched a film of the May Day parade in the Soviet Embassy. I was impressed but uneasy. It was 1952. Were Senator McCarthy’s surveillance cameras filming me for un-American activities? My lack of courage disgusted me.

By my senior year I was bored with dating, with the frat house drunks and the sorority good girls. Richard was in Texas at an ROTC boot camp and on his way to a life long career in forestry and partnership with Barbara Hodges. I was eager to get out and get going. We would do similar things. Both of us chose non-Western countries for our overseas service and both of us were transformed by the experience. He did a tour with the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization in Thailand and came home outraged by American waste when most of the world lived in misery. I was liberated from American social codes by the African women who walked around bare-breasted and the African men who walked around holding hands. We would both seek leadership not just consolation in the church and follow callings in public service through government and non-profit organizations.

Rich had saved my life when we were little. No one else could fill his place. Ever. But he had gone to the woods on the west coast and I left the suburbs for the city on the east coast. I would never again have his help through the daily intimacies of family life. From now on we would work out the catastrophe of our childhood separately. On March 19, 2013 my brother died of lymphoma.

References

The information on Mildred Hunting Wheeler’s college and post graduate years are from her five year diary dated January 1, 1914 to October 19, 1918. This diary is at the Porter Phelps Huntington Museum, Hadley MA

The information on Mildred’s courtship and marriage comes from letters to her sister, Dorothy Hunting D’Amanda dated 1919-20 and 1929. These letters and the St. Petersburg clipping, along with photograph negatives and other letters written to her mother from Persia in 1926-27 are with Richard Wheeler in Gresham, OR

Information on Richard’s relationship with his father comes from letters Teddy wrote to Helen McCoy before their marriage in 1939. They are in the Porter Phelps Huntington Museum, Hadley, MA.

The information on Richard Wheeler's perspective comes from his unfinished manuscript of events from 1931 through 1986. As of 2012 he is still writing.

The information on Elizabeth Wheeler's perspective comes from her unpublished manuscript of events from 1932 through 1996. As of 2012 it is a reference for further writings.