

CHAPTER 1 – EARLY YEARS

MY PARENTS

Life began for me in Los Angeles, California on December 29, 1942 a year after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entry of our country into World War Two.

My parents, Vincent Ora Taylor and Doris Grace Bucknam, were both from the Boston, Massachusetts area. They both graduated from Braintree High School in Braintree, Massachusetts.

These two young adults were among the generation that was faced with the terrible responsibility and challenge of preserving freedom in the world at unbelievable personal sacrifice that I am certain is beyond our present ability to appreciate. Thank you, Father and Mother.



Vincent Ora Taylor



Doris Grace Bucknam

MOTHER



Gertrude & Carroll Bucknam
wedding photo 1909

My mother, Doris Grace Bucknam, was born on March 19, 1919. Her ancestors had come to New England at the time of the Colonies, several were on the Mayflower. Both sides of her family had been among the earliest settlers in Massachusetts and Maine during the 1620's.

Mother's father, Carroll Bucknam, was raised in Machias, Maine. His father had been a carpenter and undertaker, two vocations that usually went hand in hand at that time. Carroll, became a salesman, not wanting to take over the family business. His brother Will (William), became the undertaker when their father passed away. For a time Carroll sold pianos in Boston, Massachusetts where he met and married Gertrude Holden. Later he drove all over New England selling the flavored syrups used in soda fountain drinks.

Carroll and Gertrude raised their family of three daughters in the town of Braintree, which is near Boston. The girls were named Harriet, Evelyn and Doris, who was the youngest. The family attended the Congregational Church. Harriet, who never married, was my favorite aunt. Evelyn married her high school sweetheart, Carl Beane, and they moved to southern California where he worked with the gas and electric company. So Evelyn became the first in the family to leave New England since the time of the Colonies.

While raising their girls, Carroll was on the road much of the time. Summers he would travel as far as his home town of Machias, Maine, which is almost as far east as it is possible to go and still be in the United States. Doris loved to go along with her dad to stay with his sister Florence in Machias. When he finished his route in Maine, he would go back to Machias to get Doris and take her home with him on his return route to Braintree.

Of the three girls Harriet, who was the oldest, was the most prim and proper of Bostonian ladies. Harriet lived with a married couple for a long time but when they moved to a care center, she lived alone. Mother and I were the only other people who ever lived with her.

Evelyn was a practical joker, loving a good time. Her husband Carl called her Bucky, because of her last name, Bucknam. Mother said that Evelyn would get her down on the ground and tickle her unmercifully. I remember Evelyn as being a fun person who loved to laugh. She would often burp loudly when we were eating together as a family. Her husband, who was himself quite a proper gentleman, would be embarrassed saying, "Bucky!" Evelyn and I would laugh, she was great fun!



**Carroll's Girls
Doris, Harriet,
Gertrude, Evelyn**

Mother was always very shy and quiet. She did poorly in school because of this, to the point of being threatened that she would be held back if she did not stand up in class and give an oral report. She could not bring herself to do it, and ultimately was not held back. The teacher must have realized she never would do it no matter what. Mother did not make friends easily; she hated board games and playing cards. She was not a reader until late in life. She and dad made a number of hooked rugs, but she did not enjoy doing most crafts. One thing mother did better than almost everyone, was keep a clean and orderly house! She loved flowers, grew some perennials and some vegetables. She and dad had an RV in their retirement so they were able to travel, which she loved to do.

During the years when the girls were in their teens, the family spent summer vacations on the coast at Kingston, Massachusetts in a rental house at the beach near Cape Cod.

In September 1936 Gertrude died of hypertension. In those days, there was nothing that could be done for this high blood pressure problem. She died during my mother's junior year at Braintree High School.

After his wife's death, Carroll became so melancholy that he decided he did not want to live anymore, he would just give up and wait to die. Quitting his job, he spent his days sitting around waiting for his death. His daughter Harriet was the only one working, earning \$15 a week at the New England Mutual Life Insurance Company in Boston.

Because their income was so very small, Carroll was soon unable to make house payments so their home was repossessed. They had to move into a room in a boarding house. Doris wanted to work to help with expenses, but Harriet would not let her quit school. Somehow they survived several months on Harriet's tiny income until Carroll decided he was not going to die after all and returned to work.



**Doris
Class of 1938**

When mother graduated from high school in May 1938, she took a job at the same insurance company where Harriet was working. The two girls rode a train from Braintree into Boston every day.

Their room at the boarding house had a small hot plate on which to fix food, but the evening meal each day was provided by Marjorie McKenna, the owner of the boarding house. In order to make a living for herself after the death of her husband, Marjorie had turned her home in Braintree into a boarding house. This was a fairly common practice in those days, as I understand it. Marjorie provided the evening meal as part of the housing arrangement, and ate with the boarders in the dining room like a family.

My grandfather Carroll eventually struck up a relationship with Marjorie, which led to their marriage in August 1942. Marjorie was the answer to his pain and they were very happy together. Marjorie became the grandmother I remember from that side of the family.

In June 1954, Carroll was hospitalized for some kind of surgery. In those days people remained in the hospital longer than is the practice now, being kept in bed a week or more, not allowed to get out of bed much. Marjorie visited him daily and he was doing very well. The morning that he was to be discharged, she arrived at the hospital but became alarmed when she discovered that his room was empty, even the bed was gone. A nurse told her that he had died of pneumonia during the night! They had not bothered to call to let her know that Carroll had developed pneumonia, nor that he had gone downhill so rapidly to his death!



**Carroll & Marjorie
Bucknam
Wesley & Karen McKenna**

FATHER

My father Vincent Ora Taylor, born on January 8 , 1920 in Brockton, MA was the oldest of three children having a brother James and a sister Marilyn. Their father was James Ora Taylor and their mother was Ethel Williams. The Taylor family were Catholic but Vincent never practiced any religious faith as an adult.



**Ethel Taylor
James, Vincent**

I do not know much about the Taylor side of the family, except that the elder James was raised in Iowa. Ethel's grandparents had come from Ireland via Canada and settled in Boston, where Ethel was born and raised. James met Ethel in Boston when he was in the Navy.

Vincent graduated from Braintree high school in 1937, a year before my mother's graduation. Following graduation, he seems to have made a trip to Iowa to visit his paternal grandparents.

He stayed there almost a year, and then returned home to Braintree, arriving just in time to attend the prom for my mother's graduating class. He took her home after the dance, and from then on they began to date each other.



**James Taylor
Vincent, James**

In October 1938 Vincent enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corp, Company # 1143. The CCC was a program begun in 1933 as a means of combating the high unemployment caused by the Great Depression. It focused on such things as conservation of natural resources, road construction, land erosion, wildfire fighting, and later on construction of military bases in the early years of WWII. The CCC members lived in camps, wore uniforms, and were under a military type of discipline. He was discharged from the CCC in March 1939 and returned to work in Braintree as an office clerk. Vincent's service in the CCC took place in Vermont.



**The Taylor kids
James, Marilyn, Vincent**

Doris's father Carroll did not think much of Vincent, but the young people continued to date. After two years, Doris and Vincent were determined to be married and came up with a plan to accomplish this, but they would need it to remain a secret. They arranged a trip to the beach at Seabrook, New Hampshire over the 4th of July weekend. They each told their parents that they were going with friends. They did go with friends, but their friends stood up as the witnesses to their marriage before a Justice of the Peace on July 3, 1940.

Returning home from their weekend in New Hampshire, Vincent and Doris immediately had a very serious problem. Following the crash of the stock market and the high unemployment rates during the 1930's, there was a movement across this country to make it illegal for married women to be employed. It was felt that jobs should be made available to the many men who had families to support but were without work.

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as the state is still known, the efforts of this movement were voted down but private companies were allowed to deny employment to married women. The New England Mutual Life Insurance Company where Doris and Harriet were both working, had chosen to have the policy for its employees. In order for Doris to get around the policy and keep her job, she and Vincent each continued to live at home with their parents, not telling anyone that they were married. This situation lasted for about four months.

As the months passed, Doris's father Carroll began to be suspicious that something was different between Doris and Vincent. One day as he was walking along the street in downtown Braintree he happened to see Vincent's father, James Taylor. He asked James if he had noticed anything different lately about their youngsters. James said yes, something did seem different. Putting two and two together, they were sure Vincent and Doris had been secretly married! Each of them went home to confront their offspring and get the truth!

The confrontation at the Bucknam house was quite emotional, with lots of yelling and crying! Doris's father forced her to go to work the next day and tell the truth to her employer which meant she no longer had a job. Both Vincent and Doris were put out of their parent's homes, forced to get a tiny apartment of their own with only a few items for household furnishings. It was a very difficult time for them financially.

Doris's father told her he did not want to see or hear from her ever again! The next months were a time when my mother shed many tears. She repeatedly went to her father's house to knock on the door begging to be forgiven. After six months, he could stand it no longer! He opened the door, took her in his arms and held her while they both cried.

WORLD WAR II

A year and a half after my parents married, the United States entered World War II following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

It was a period of time that was to change the lives of most of the people in our country, indeed in many countries of the world, in one way or another.



USS Maryland

open and capsized within twenty minutes. Thirty-two of the Oklahoma's men were rescued alive, but over four hundred were killed. The Maryland was hit by two bombs dropped by planes, which caused relatively light damage and some flooding. Four men on the Maryland were killed.

When our country entered the war and the men volunteered or were drafted into military service, women all across the country had to step into the jobs vacated by the men.

My aunt Marilyn became a riveter, a job for which she had to learn welding. Such women did much of the construction needed to build for our country a new fleet of ships.

My father's brother James Taylor was on the battleship U.S.S. Maryland which was in Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack.

During the December 7th attack, the Maryland was shielded from torpedoes by the U.S.S. Oklahoma which was beside it and took the full brunt of the attack, being hit by up to nine torpedoes. She was split



Lady Riveters – Marilyn

Gradually, the three Bucknam daughters all moved to the west coast of the country. Evelyn had gone first because her husband Carl was offered a job at the utilities and gas Company in Los Angeles. His job there was such that he was kept out of the military. In early 1942 my parents traveled to California with a cousin in her car. They went to visit Evelyn and Carl but liked it there so much they decided to stay.

They rented a small apartment in Los Angeles and I was born there on December 29, 1942 at the Methodist Hospital. My mother, who was 5 foot 4 inches tall, was always a very thin woman weighing less than 100 pounds when I was born. The most she ever weighed was 134 pounds at the age of 66, just before her first heart attack and triple bypass surgery. As thin as mother was she always had high cholesterol.

During this time my father was working at Northrup Aircraft Company as a tool clerk and attending school. Knowing that he was due to be drafted at any time, he enlisted in the Army, entering the service in Los Angeles in early 1943. That summer he was stationed in Palm Springs, California in the Mojave Desert.

Palm Springs was a small town, not the lovely resort that we know it as today! With so many men in training at the same time, not everyone could be housed on the base. Some families of the men in training were housed in one-room units at small motels. Nothing in town was air conditioned except the neighborhood taverns, so during the day, while the men were on the base taking their training, the women would gather with their children at the local tavern where they could sit over coffee and cold drinks. In the evenings the men, along with their families, would return to the cool of the tavern for dart games and dancing.

In the summer of 1944, Father was transferred to the Fort Brown military base near Brownsville, Texas where he was stationed for a year and a half. This too was a dusty, hot desert town, close to the Mexican border at the very bottom tip of the state of Texas. The soldiers and their wives would often walk across the Rio Grande River to visit the town of Matamoros in Mexico. Apparently Vincent was part of a “ferrying group”, a unit that worked stateside at shipping materials of all description to those engaged in the terrible combat in so many places across the globe.

At Fort Brown, we moved into a furnished apartment, where the former residents had put cockroach poison under the couches and chairs. My parents did not know it was there until one day I had white paste on my face around my mouth. They rushed me to the base hospital where my stomach was pumped. Mother rounded up all the poison at home after that, and we learned to live with the cockroaches.



Gale in casts 1944

When I began walking, my parents became very concerned that my legs looked bowed. Doctors at the base hospital did not know what the problem was, but felt that surgery should be done. So it was, that at one and a half years of age, corrective surgery was done to straighten my legs. Both legs were broken below the knees then reset in a way that straightened them.

I was put into a cast that extended from my waist down to my toes. A stabilizing bar was put between the knees to hold the legs still. It must have been terrible in the heat! But fortunately, I do not remember it. How nice to be able to forget some things!

After some weeks, the part of the cast from the waist down to the legs was removed. Now I could sit up as well as move my still-casted legs. Later the parts of the casts covering my feet were removed. Now I was able to walk stiff-legged in the remaining casts that covered only the legs.

When the last parts of the casts finally came off, I had lovely straight legs. My parents must have been very happy to have all that over with and to think that the problem was now taken care of. However, this satisfaction was short lived. Over the following years it gradually became apparent that my legs were slowly bowing again. What a disappointment and worry that must have been for my young parents!

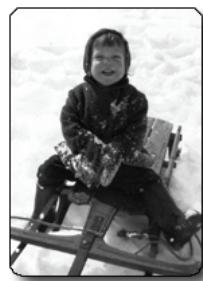


Father & daughter
Vincent & Gale



Carroll, Gale, & Doris

In December 1944, being scheduled to be shipped overseas, my father was transported to Ft. Meade, Maryland where he waited with his group to go to Europe. Since mother and I could no longer be with him, we moved to Braintree, Massachusetts where we shared a small house with mother's sister Harriet.



I have two vivid memories from that time of living in Braintree. I remember standing in a tall, dark hall crying. Mother told me that next to our small house was a larger house, another boarding house, where a little boy my age lived. One day mother took me over to that house to play with him. She was certain they would answer so left me there in the hallway knocking on their door. But the family was not home. I was unable to get out of the house since I could not reach the handle on the front door. I cried and screamed until an elderly lady who lived on the third floor, and was unwell at the time, came down the stairs to open the front door for me.

My other memory from that time is of sitting on the floor under the table and looking up to see something live hanging over the edge of the table above my head. I began screaming "Big bug! Big bug!" Mother rescued me from the lobster that she had been about to put into a pot of boiling water for dinner. I've never been very fond of lobster, maybe that is the reason!

Just before father was shipped out to Europe the war there ended on V-E Day. Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945 was the date when the Allies formally accepted the unconditional surrender of the armed forces of Nazi Germany and the end of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

My father's group was rerouted, traveling by train from Maryland to California. From there they were shipped out to the war in the Pacific. They traveled across the Pacific Ocean on a battle ship so full of men that they had to sleep on the open decks. Flying fish would occasionally leap out of the sea and fall on them as they slept, a rather disturbing experience for men already nervous about the possibility of meeting up with Japanese ships on the open seas.

Once they reached their destination at Manila, the capital of the Philippines, in May 1945 they waited for some time to be shipped to Japan as part of the invasion of that country. I do not know if they were engaged in any shooting, but the mission of driving the Japanese from the Philippine Islands was in process at the time of their arrival. Manila itself was liberated February 23, 1945, and was the second most heavily bombed city of WWII, after Warsaw in Poland. So in May the clean up of the ruined city was still being done.

Pictures taken by my father showed the bombed out ruins of Manila with human bones still lying in the streets. I don't think I ever saw those pictures because they were later torn out of the album, but the writing is still on the pages where the pictures had been.

Following the unconditional surrender of Germany, Japan had announced that it would never accept an unconditional surrender. Instead of that it would continue to fight to the very end. 67 of Japan's cities were firebombed in an effort to bring about Japan's surrender. Finally atomic bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August 6th and 9th. The Japanese surrendered unconditionally August 15th.

V-J Day, August 15, 1945, Victory over Japan Day, was announced on the radio but the formal surrender was signed on September 2nd aboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. It was not until after this that my father and other US servicemen were shipped from Manila to Japan. There my father spent six months in the area of Nagasaki as part of the occupying force.



**San Francisco WWII
Vincent, Marilyn, Doris, James**

In addition to the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki where the atomic bombs had been dropped, I am sure there was across the country much sadness, families broken and suffering by the loss of their men in the war, financial hardship and the shame of defeat. Among the things father brought back with him I remember kimonos, a red and a blue; a ladies hand-held fan, a ceremonial sword and a Japanese flag.

Public transportation during those days of the mid 1940's included only bus and train. Travel by air had not yet come into use for the general public. That was a later outgrowth of the advances in air travel achieved during the war. All over the nation, civilians and returning soldiers alike were crowding buses and trains trying to get to other places, just as mother and I were, anxious to be reunited with someone from whom they had been separated by the upheaval of the war. It was a nation on the move!

Mother and I traveled by Greyhound bus from Massachusetts across the country to Washington State, where my father was to be discharged from the service. She always spoke of that 5-day trip as the worst nightmare of her life! There were no bathrooms on the buses, and rest stops were limited to only a half hour. In that short amount of time you had to use the restroom, eat and get back in the bus. The bus did not wait for you if you were not on board. Lines were long for the restrooms as well as for food. Often mother had to buy just a candy bar and run back to the bus because there was not time to order a meal or wait for it to be fixed. It was extremely difficult for women traveling with small children. Keeping them occupied, clean, fed, getting them to sleep, and keeping them quiet so others on the bus could also sleep. Most people, she said, were kind, considerate of the tired, restless children. But some were not.

As it turned out in the decades ahead, my mother never had opportunity to return to Massachusetts again until 1988, on the celebration of the 50-year reunion of her high school graduating class. By that time only three cousins out of her whole extended family were still living.

MAKING A LIFE AFTER WAR

Father was discharged from the Army in February, 1946 at Fort Lewis, Washington. That August he re-enlisted, this time in the Army Reserve Air Corps, for three more years.

The three of us settled in a former military housing area named McLoughlin Heights close to Pearson Airfield in the city of Vancouver, Washington.

During the war many small houses had been quickly and cheaply built around military bases. These houses, which were sometimes referred to as "cracker boxes", now became homes for many of the returning soldiers.



Our first house, on East 6th Street, was one of these, a tiny plain brown cube of a house with a little front porch. Inside were hardwood floors that my mother kept sparkling clean at all times. In fact people said that Doris's floors were so clean you could eat off of them! All her life mother's house was immaculate.

Mother always loved Sweet Peas. I think that where ever we lived, she always had them growing on strings beside our house.

We moved a lot during those years, and in addition to that first little brown house, I remember two more houses where we lived in Vancouver. Memories from that time in my life include, a Fourth of July. Father had firecrackers, which he put under a coffee can. When the firecracker exploded, it blew the can way up into the air. Not a very safe thing to do, according to today's standards. I doubt that at that time there were any laws governing the use of fireworks by the general public.

It was common at that time to remove a child's tonsils and mine were removed when I was five. I remember being in a crib in the hospital. Mother said that I refused to speak for a whole week and she began to wonder if I would ever speak again.

For Christmas I was given a beautiful golden colored Cocker Spaniel puppy. Not long after, he was hit by a car and killed as he followed me across the small, neighborhood street. I was heart broken!

The chicken pox also made a visit to me while we lived in that house. What a mess I was! There is nothing quite like having cold calamine lotion dabbed all over your hot, feverish skin! It was a miserable experience, which I remember well.

Another memory from those days is that of my father teaching me to hitch hike. It was very common for people to hitch hike in those days since few had cars. Although I do not remember mother being with us that day, she may have been. Father taught me to put out my leg and pull my skirt up above my knee. A sure thing for getting any motorist to stop, and it worked! I think the very first car stopped for us.

In addition to all this, we had an earthquake! My father and I were sitting at the table one morning eating bowls of cereal. The milk in the bowls began to slosh from side to side. Father yelled, "Earthquake!", and ran out of the house dragging me along behind. At a neighboring house a little dog was so frightened, it got its head stuck between the boards of a picket fence while trying to get out of the yard!

Kindergarten began for me at Lieser School in 1948 at the age of six. The class photograph for that year shows me in the front row of children sitting on the grass, all of us with our legs crossed in what we used to call "Indian style". Now a days this is called pretzel style, or "crisscross applesauce". It is obvious in the photo that my legs had become quite bowed again even after only 4 years since the surgery had been done to straighten them. Lieser School still exists in 2008 as a day care center.



First grade was at Harney Hill School, on Brandt Rd. This school no longer exists but the neighborhood of Harney Hill does and houses there still look like the one we had at that time.

Watching old movies made during the 1940's and 50's, you may notice how many people were smoking, which was very popular then. Mother took up smoking because it was fashionable to do so, but she quit a few years later.

Mom worked at Jantzen Beach sewing the well-known Jantzen swimming suits. But Jantzen Beach was not just a factory for bathing suits; it was also an amusement park with a large swimming pool.

We had no car at that time so when our family went swimming at Jantzen Beach we walked across the river on the bridge made of steel grate. It was a frightening experience for me because you could see the water rushing along below your feet and it made me dizzy. Jantzen Beach is now a super-center with a large mall.

At some point we had a large black and white collie dog named Richard. I remember climbing onto the sofa and then onto his back to ride on him. He must have been very patient!



Gale & Richard

My father's desire was to become a teacher, so he enrolled in a small local college to prepare for that, but he had a drinking problem. Mother said later that she thought he had started to abuse drink during the time he was in Japan. As time passed my father was borrowing money from friends to get his drinks, and after a while his friends would no longer loan money to him.

Father's solution to this problem was to move away, find new friends and work in another place. He felt that the logical place for him to go was to San Francisco where his sister Marilyn was living. She invited us to live with her for a while, but mother did not want to move. She had a job and little Gale was now attending school. She refused to go with him. Off he went saying he would send her money as soon as he had work so that we could join him later.

Weeks and then months passed during which he did not send any money or even telephone. Of course in those days a long distance telephone call was quite a rare thing, usually done only in an emergency.

Meanwhile, mother had a hard time making ends meet for the two of us on just her income. After four months had passed with no word at all from him, she went to a lawyer and filed for divorce on the grounds of desertion. When the divorce papers were served on him at his sister's apartment, mother received an angry phone call in which he said that he would be at the hearing and make sure she could not take his child away from him. When the date of the court hearing came, father did not appear nor did he contest the divorce. Mother was awarded full custody of me and the divorce was granted on April 18, 1951 in Vancouver, WA.

I do not remember the events of my father leaving us or of the divorce. It is as if my father was there in my life for a short time, and then he wasn't. I have no memory of talking with mother but surely she told me something as an explanation for why he was no longer with us. Over the years he was rarely mentioned, and then only in a way that cast shame on him for leaving us.

I was never to see my father again. I grew up with a vague image of him as a bad person, someone to forget about. Looking back now, he had been in and out of my life because of his military service and then had left me again by choice. Perhaps I had chosen to "desert" him in return by forgetting him. In my mind he became like a dream, as if he had never been quite real.

Years later mother told me more about him when I pummeled her with questions. To my surprise, she was not unwilling to talk about him. She said that my father was a person who loved to be in a social setting. He loved to dress well, to go dancing and to be out with his friends. I believe that mother later missed the social parts of the life she had with Vincent.

Mother was a very shy, self-conscious person. Vincent's friendliness would have given her entry into a group, breaking the ice for her, which would have enabled her to become more social along with him. But his friendliness was also the part that caused their marriage to fail, the socializing going along with drinking so that it became a divisive issue in their marriage.

Years later mother told me that she asked me when I was about 10 years old, if I wanted the photographs of my father that were in our photo albums. Apparently I told her I did not want them, so she tore them out of the albums, and cut him out of some pictures, like the one at the right. Consequently, I grew up with no picture of my father. The only picture in my memory was of a dark haired soldier dressed in khakis, but without a face! What does a child of 10 know of what she will want later in life?

There came a time after I was grown that I longed for a photo of my father!

Following the divorce, mother had a very hard time making ends meet, sometimes we had very little to eat. After a while mother and I shared a small 2-bedroom house with another divorced woman who had two children, a boy and a girl. Us children slept with our mothers and the arrangement helped both our families with expenses.



Other memories of that time include pretending that I was too sick to go to school one day so that I missed the school bus. Mother made me stay in bed all day, which was very boring so I never did it again. She must have stayed home from work that day which would have shortened her paycheck.

One time I got into trouble for climbing into my doll buggy, something I had been told not to do. I was small and could fit right into small places such as that. Mother threatened to take the buggy away from me if I did that again. Well, guess what? I did and she did!

There was a coal stove in the living room. Coal briquettes were delivered by truck, dumped into a bin outside, and then carried into the house in a bucket. The top of the coal stove was the perfect place to heat the coffee and the clothes iron if the electricity went off during a storm. The fire in the coal stove always burned down during the night so that the house was very cold the next morning. When we awoke, mother would turn on the gas oven in the kitchen stove. We would dress quickly, trying to catch as much heat as we could in front of the open oven door.

It was in 1951 while sharing the house with the other lady and her children that mother met a gentleman who was to become my stepfather. The other woman was dating a truck driver who brought along a series of different friends to meet my Mom. One of these fellows was Dale Berglund. Soon Dale was the only man who was coming around.

The summer after she met Dale, mother and I made a bus trip to southern California, to visit her sister Evelyn and her husband Carl and their daughter Gini, who was a year younger than I. Gini and I had great fun together on that vacation. I don't know how we paid for that trip.

HOSPITAL DAYS

It was also during that year of 1951, that a gentleman who was a Shriner saw me, noticed my bowed legs and put mother into contact with the Shriner's Hospital For Crippled Children in Portland, Oregon. In more recent years, the word "crippled" has been removed from the names of all Shriner's hospitals because it is thought to be offensive. But the varying diseases of the bones, birth defects, and other illnesses did cripple many of us who were treated there. I was hospitalized at Shriner's twice for extended periods of time.

The hospital was a two-story building, and built into the side of a hill, so that the first floor was at ground level in the front and the second floor was at ground level in the back. The patient rooms were large wards with numerous beds in each ward.

These wards were on the second story with the girls' two wards at one end of the building and the boys' two wards at the other end, and "never the twain shall meet"!

The wards at each end consisted of two large rectangular rooms laid out in an "L" shape, one part of the "L" being the ward for older children, ages 12 to 14, and the other ward being for the younger children, and including a tiny nursery for maybe two babies at a time. At the corner of each "L" was the nursing station, so the nurses could see down the length of both of the two wards from their desk at the nursing station. All the wards opened onto the huge back yard with patios and paved walkways in the garden areas.

On the lower floor of the building was the outpatient clinic, the workshops for making braces, the physical therapy gyms and therapy whirlpool, the x-ray department, laundry and probably other things having to do with the physical plant. The second story held the kitchen, the gymnasium with a stage, the operating rooms, a lobby at the center and the wards for the children at the two ends.

My first hospitalization at Shriner's Hospital was in 1951 while I was in second grade at the age of eight. It was at this time that we were told the name for the diagnosis of my bone problem. It was being called Vitamin D Resistant Rickets, which I will now refer to as VDRR.



Glenda & Gale

Two other eight-year-old girls who had VDRR were also hospitalized at the same time I was. One girl was Jane Bond, or Janie, from Bend, Oregon. The other girl I remember as Glenda, but Janie remembers her as Shirley. For the purpose of this narrative, I will refer to her as Glenda. Janie and I were the same in that our legs both bowed outward away from each other, while Glenda's legs both bowed to the right. After being admitted, the three of us were hospitalized over a nine-month period for purposes of research and observation.

My first night in the hospital was frightening. The ward seemed big and strange. There were about 20 children in the younger children's ward where my bed was. It was a long rectangular room with beds and cribs lining the walls. The bed that I was to use was at the end of the ward closest to the nurses' station in the outer hall, and right next to the bathroom. As the night nurse put me to bed she warned me that no one was allowed to get up to wander around during the night.

Luck would have it that I woke up sometime in the wee hours of the night needing to go to the bathroom. But being afraid to disobey what the nurse had told me, I fell back to sleep. The next time I awoke, my bed was wet! When the morning nurse discovered my wet bed, she was disgusted that an eight-year-old girl like me would do such a thing. As I cried, I told her I had been afraid to disobey. She told me that was silly and I was not to do that again! I didn't.

As I said before, two other girls my age having the same medical problem that I have, were hospitalized at the same time I was. Since none of us had surgery at that time, we three were called "up-patients", meaning that we were not confined to bed. I remember playing jacks while sitting on the floor under a table and pushing each other around the halls in a big wheelchair made of wood.



Danny Kaye & Janie, seated

The three of us had the run of the younger girl's wing of the hospital and the large outdoor yard in back of that wing. In good weather we went outside to play. One game we often played was "Mother May I". Children who were confined to bed because they were in casts, were also taken outside. Their beds were pushed out the big French doors onto the patios so they could enjoy the sunshine and fresh air.

During the school year, there were two ladies who came every school day to give us grade appropriate lessons. Both of these ladies wore a uniform sort of dress made of a stiff aqua colored cloth which made a rustling sound when they moved. Funny that I should remember that cloth so well!

One visitor, entertainer Danny Kaye, was a real treat. He made everyone laugh with hand tricks, games and stories. Everyone loved him!

Nutrition was a big item, of course. Each afternoon after school, we were given a cup of eggnog to drink as a snack. I hated it! It didn't take me long to figure out a way to get around drinking it. Being an "up patient" I would go to the cart and get my cup when the nurse first began passing them out in our large ward. She would go from bed to bed around the room until everyone in all the beds had a cup of eggnog. If I was quick, I could take the cup into the bathroom, pour it down the toilet and return the cup to her cart without her knowing what I had done.

Either someone told on me, or she suspected what I was doing, because one day she caught me in the act. After that I had to stand next to her and drink ALL of it! UGH! To this day, I do not like eggnog!

Since little was known at that time about our condition, medical treatment for the three of us girls consisted of being given a variety of medications and then having blood drawn several times daily, to determine what changes, if any, the medications made in our blood chemistries. There was one day in particular that I remember because the man drawing my blood could not get the needle into the vein. At least nine times he poked me, “fishing around” for the vein while I screamed. Probably my veins had collapsed. He finally gave up and I remember it as an experience of torture.

The three of us were also x-rayed numerous times until we each had very large files of x-ray films. This was done to monitor any changes that might occur in the bones due to the medications. I remember the x-ray technician who was there in that position for many years, and I did not like him but I do not know why. Years later, Janie told me that she had liked him.

I remember some very nasty medicines! All three of us girls had trouble swallowing pills, so tablets were crushed and capsules were broken open. The powders from these were put on soda crackers for us to eat. It was a very evil smelling and evil tasting experience! I can still remember some of the smells and tastes if I try hard enough! Mother told me that I was sick with nausea and vomiting much of the time during those months, probably because the dosages were incorrect or even toxic, meaning they stay in the system and build up over time.

I do not remember the hospital experience of being sick. Instead my memories of that time are mostly good ones, with the exception of the odor and taste of some drugs and the constant blood tests. Believe me, blood tests today are a “piece of cake” by comparison!

When we were discharged from the hospital, each of the three of us returned to our homes with instructions to take Vitamin D every day in an oily liquid form. Research up to that point in time had shown that Vitamin D had some effect on the rickets in our bones. Because the taste was so awful, we were to camouflage the oil by drinking it in orange juice. But just like oil and water do not mix, oil does not mix with juice either. Instead the oil floats on top and as you tip the glass to drink, it floats away from your mouth to the bottom of the glass. This means it stays in the glass until the juice is gone, and the oil ends up being your last swallow! It was many years before I was able to drink orange juice without having a very strong imagination that I could smell and taste that oil!

During the following several years, each of us girls returned periodically to the out patient clinic for more blood testing and x-rays. For the blood draws we had to go without breakfast until after clinic visits.

By the time we finished waiting in the clinic lobby for our turn to see the doctor, had blood drawn and x-rays taken, we were starving!

Across the street from the hospital was a Diner, an old silver railroad car, which had been made into a restaurant. Mother would always take me there for a late breakfast after our appointment. That diner was the “silver lining” in the “cloud” of those clinic appointments!

In addition to our clinic appointments, all three of us girls were admitted to the hospital later for surgeries, but never again at the same time.

Because I never saw or heard from Glenda again, I do not know anything more about her.

Many years later Janie and I did have contact with each other again, but I will get to that part of this tale later. Suffice it for now to say that Janie had numerous surgeries in her future while I had only one.



Waiting for clinic appointments