

## 5. The Nest Begins to Empty

In the fall of 1944 Bobbie Jo began exploring various possibilities for going to college the following fall. She applied for a scholarship to Hiram College, at Hiram, Ohio, where her grandmother Pearl Miller had attended. Hiram College had also been the recipient of a Miller family endowment of unknown proportions.

Several letters were exchanged between the Shaeffers and the Admissions Office of Hiram College. Excerpts from several follow:

November 28, 1944

Dear Mrs. Shaeffer,

Your letter responding to my inquiry concerning your daughter's college plans arrived this morning and I have thoroughly enjoyed reading it... You see, I also belong to a Hiram family whose contacts with the college go back several generations. I am so glad that you are interested in Hiram as a possible college for Bobbie Jo. I confess to a prejudice in favor of small colleges in general and Hiram in particular but I also have sound reason for believing that an undergraduate training at a good small college followed by specialized professional training at one of the great universities is as fine a preparation for life as one can have...

We will be very happy if Bobbie Jo decides to enter Hiram next fall and are anxious to cooperate in any way we can to make it possible for her to do so. There is always an especially warm reception waiting here for the children of Hiram people. However, I have a pretty good idea that Bobbie Jo is one who will win her own warm welcome wherever she goes.

Very truly yours,

Charles A. Henry, Admissions Office

January 30, 1945

Miss Bobbie Jo Shaeffer

303 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street

Cripple Creek, Colo.

Dear Bobbie Jo:

Mr. Kelker has, I think, already acknowledged the receipt of your application for admission and for scholarship but I also want to let you know of my pleasure at this indication that you are planning to be with us here at Hiram beginning next fall. Yours is a Hiram family and for that reason, as well as for a good many others, we will be especially happy to have you here.

I am very confident that you will never regret your choice. The college here is unusually well equipped to give you the training that you want and, unless you are a very different person from what I think, you will find that both the students and the faculty are your kind of people...

I wish that your home were not so far distant as to make your attendance at our Scholarship Day competition pretty well out of the question. There are, however, some larger awards available for upperclassmen so it is possible that you may be able to get more than the \$100 a year provided by our general scholarships during your last three years here at Hiram.

With kindest regards to you and your family, I am

Very truly yours,

Charles A. Henry, Admissions Office

During the summer of 1945 Bobbie Jo was invited to spend some time with her best friend who had moved to Long Beach, California. Her parents agreed she could go and she did. She spent a lot of time on the beach and got very suntanned (photo, right). On the train coming home, a lady approached her and said, "My husband and I agree that you are quite the most beautiful mulatto we have ever seen!"



That summer, while she was in Long Beach, BJ wrote the following letter to her dad:

*Fathers Day  
June 17<sup>th</sup>  
1945*

*Dearest Dad,*

*I am writing especially to you today as I have missed you so very, very much and especially on this day. I couldn't tell you even if I were there—and am sure I can't express myself on paper—how very, very much I love you.*

*I want to thank my wonderful mother for choosing you—out of all the fellows she could have chosen to be my father. You have been perfect in every way—so understanding, sweet and considerate. I can never thank God enough for giving me such a wonderful father and mother. I have been wanting to answer your sweet letter every day, but just haven't gotten around to it.*

*We went to the show last night and saw "Between Two Women"... It was pretty good. Now we are cooking our dinner. We went to Public Market early yesterday morning and stood in line for an hour and fifteen minutes and finally got a chicken. Then we went around to the other farmers' stands and got some wonderful fresh vegetables, so I guess we are really going to eat.*

*I was really surprised when I heard about that raise. Not only surprised but awfully jealous. Gee, I wish I were home and working. As much as I kicked I sure DO miss that weekly check. I don't think that your dumb girls deserve it, but if you could see what they are hiring out here you would feel very lucky, and they do deserve a little more money considering that you make \$30 a week to start with out here. I bet Rosie is sorry she quit, and Elsie, too. Ha! Too bad!*

*I'm reading the best book: "Valley of Decision." I thought I would read it after seeing the good show. That's all I do – knit – read – sleep – take sun baths and go to shows, two a week to be exact. The thing I miss most about Cripple Creek is the blue skies. They are always blue but kind of a drab, light blue out here.*

*I must close as I have to set the table. I'm closing with my dearest love to you and please know that I do appreciate you and everything you do. I hope that this has been a happy day and I have surely wished I could have been with you.*

*Love and kisses,  
Bobbie Jo*

While at Hiram College, Bobbie Jo met and subsequently married William P. Irwin. They were married September 7, 1947 in Grand Junction, since Earl had completed his assignment in Cripple Creek and had been transferred back to the Grand Junction area in 1946. From the videotape Jo reported to John Duncan Shaeffer:

*JO: Bobbie Jo met Bill at Hiram. I believe he was teaching. He was a student, but he was also an assistant. Anyway, they met. She had met another boy she thought a lot of that had known some of our family. But they didn't go together very long, and then she met Bill. So when she came home at Christmas I could see she felt differently about Bill than any boy she'd gone with. She didn't say too much, but I could kind of read between the lines that it was pretty serious. So shortly after that I decided it was time I'd better meet Bill. So I went to Cleveland.*

*JD: That was a long drive.*

*JO: It wasn't a drive. I flew. I didn't stay very long. I saw my cousin, Alice, who was living there, met Bill and met his people. I just stayed long enough to meet Bill. That's just about all. It was a real courtship thing. There didn't seem to be anybody for Bobbie Jo after she met Bill. And it seemed to be the same way with him. So it gradually progressed until it became really serious. And then they were married. Bobbie Jo came home and spent the summer and they were married in September in Grand Junction. They knew an Episcopalian priest they both liked very much and they decided they wanted him to marry them. So he did. .*

*JD: Was Marty in the navy at this time, or was he there also?*

*Jo: He was at the wedding. I don't believe he'd gone into the navy yet. I remember after the wedding, he had such a hard time controlling his tears. He could hardly keep from crying. It was real hard. The Irwins came. And Betsy, Bill's sister, came also. We decided to invite only our very good friends because we didn't believe in inviting just everybody-- just our very close friends. It ended with about sixty. We didn't want it quite that large. We wanted it a little less than 50. But about 60 came. And a lot of people were mad because they weren't asked, oh, dear.*

*Bobbie Jo's wedding colors were all done in orchids and greens. And on the plates we had grape vines. Everything was orchid and green.*



The Christmas that followed the wedding of Bill and Bobbie Jo (1947) the Shaeffers received the following card from their friends, the Davenports:

*Dearest Jo and family,*

*That is the cleverist Christmas card I ever saw. I was so thrilled to hear from you. I love your wonderful spirit, your ambition and zest for living. Everything you do just bubbles with the joy of being alive...*

*I am glad you like your new son. And I think youngsters that get married young are blessed. I feel sure it is the best plan. We, too, love our new son, Jack Rutan. He is very worthwhile... Hope to get to see all of you this summer.*

*Love,*

*Anne*

Bill graduated from Hiram College in August 1947 just before the wedding. Bill and BJ moved to New Haven, Connecticut where Bill started his graduate work in philosophy at Yale. Jo and Earl did not object to the marriage because Bobbie Jo was so young, but felt strongly that BJ should finish her degree. They offered to pay her tuition and buy her books, which made it possible.

The newlyweds had a two room apartment on the second floor of an old mansion. The address had prestige, for it was next door to the President of Yale. However there were 10 families sharing one address while only two people lived in the house next door. It was an exciting time and the beginning of years of studying and teaching.



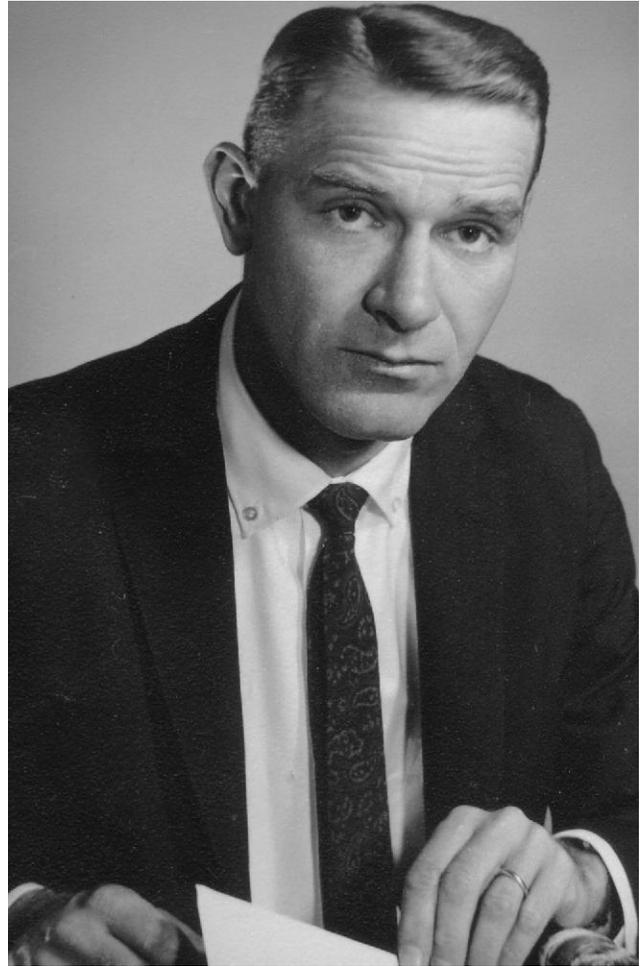
Left: Will Irwin 1943

Will had enlisted in the U. S. Naval Reserve in the spring of 1942. He trained in the Navy Air Corps at Cornell University before the program was ended. He was then shipped to the Pacific theater near the end of WWII, but saw no hostile action. He spent several months at Tsingtao, on the China coast, training Chinese naval personnel, where he was promoted to the rank of Lt. J.G. (Lieutenant Junior Grade).

In 1948 BJ and Bill moved back to Hiram where BJ finished her junior year and Bill taught high school in the nearby town of Deerfield. Their third year of marriage they moved to Cleveland where they both attended Western Reserve University. BJ finished her senior year (1950) with a BA degree and Bill got his master's degree.

Another year, another move: this time to Tiffin, Ohio, where Bill was an assistant political science professor at Heidelberg College, and BJ was a teaching assistant in the biology department. The young couple worked hard and played hard, spending the winter holidays in Cleveland with the Irwins and the summer in Colorado with the Shaeffers.

Right: Will Irwin, about 1961



After two years of teaching at Heidelberg College Bill was accepted into the Ph. D. program of the political science department at the University of California, Berkeley. While there Bill was a teaching assistant in political science as well as a student.

Marty, meantime, had joined the Navy during the Korean War, and was assigned to an ammunition cargo ship, its home port in San Francisco. As soon as the ship docked in San Francisco the sailors were given shore leave. Marty and a friend or two would show up at the Irwin's apartment. "Sometimes we would wake up and find sailors asleep all over the floor," recalls Bobbie Jo. "We enjoyed having this time together. The young sailors were always asking Bill to introduce them to some pretty young students. Bill couldn't find a way to do that, but was very sympathetic." Marty was there to keep Bill company when Becky was born, September 20, 1953 (dads were not allowed in the delivery room in those days). Marty was delighted by the baby. Being an uncle was a new role for him.

In June, 1954 the Irwins moved to Colorado where Bill did field work for his dissertation. While Bill traveled doing his research, BJ and Becky kept house for Earl in Grand Junction. Jo spent the summer on campus at the Colorado State College at Greeley (now the University of Northern Colorado), finishing her BA degree. When she would get homesick she drove home to sleep in her own bed and play with the baby, Becky.

Bobbie Jo recalled: “Mother always said she wanted to travel, but she said that Dad only wanted to travel if he could be in his own bed at night. It took a long time for me to realize that it was the other way around. It was Mother who wanted to be in her own bed at night.”

During that summer Earl missed Jo, but had a fine time being a grandfather. He built Becky a car seat that fit on the front seat of the jeep. “This certainly would not meet today’s safety standards,” explained BJ, “but Becky loved it and always cried when we took her out of the jeep.” Earl gave Becky her first taste of A & W Root Beer much against her mother’s wishes.

In the fall of 1954 the Irwins moved to DeBeque, Colorado, a small town up the canyon from Palisade. The road curved around and around following the Colorado River. Bill taught high school by day and wrote his dissertation by night and on weekends. Bo was born on February 1, 1955. He arrived two weeks early and weighed only 5 pounds. He was named William P. Irwin III, after his father and great-grandfather. Becky called him “Bo” for brother.

Often on Friday nights Jo and Earl drove up the canyon for supper and brought BJ and the babies to Palisade for the weekend. That helped BJ with the babies and gave Bill quiet writing time. Bill would drive to Palisade on Sunday for dinner and to pick up his family. Jo and Earl were wonderful grandparents. Earl was particularly delighted with his first grandson. When Bo was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade he wrote the following tribute to his grandfather: “My Favorite Person - My grandfather is my favorite person because he taught me to build things like a boat and a bed. He has a dog named Vicky. Vicky likes kids. William” (Bo)

In July 1955 the Irwins moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, where Bill joined the faculty at Colorado Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Colorado State University).

A thank-you letter from Bill in 1955 gives a glimpse into the life for the Shaeffer and Irwin families at the time:

*July 2, 1955*

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*BJ is considerably more adept at saying “thank you” than I have ever been, so it has usually been her lot to do so. Perhaps I can express myself better here than I have in the past. It seems that we are about to achieve the degree of independence that we’ve been looking forward to for the past few years. Now seems a good time to thank you for all the help and encouragement that you have given us over the long haul. This last winter, in particular, was weathered only because of you.*

*I hope that hereafter when we get together it will be for fun and fishing, and not a strained parley to devise some means of keeping the Irwins on their feet.*

*Love, Bill*

Less than two years later Bill’s father, J. Preston Irwin, died. Jo received the following letter from Bill’s mother:

*Cleveland, Ohio*

*Jan. 13, 1957*

*Dear Mrs. Shaeffer,*

*Thank you for your kind expression of sympathy in this time of heart-break. The presence and the kindness of a precious family and many loyal friends throughout the closing days of the*

*old year and since the dawn of the new one have been a blessing for which I have thanked God with all my heart.*

*I am trying desperately not to mourn. Were I to do so without restraint, I should be most unworthy of the infinite blessings which have been bestowed upon me during the last 38 years. They have been years of complete happiness.*

*Hence, in gratitude, I must regard the passing of him who has taken my soul with him as a triumphal exit after a grand performance. His devotion to his family, achievements in his profession and service to his fellowmen, quietly given, have left me a feeling of exultation despite the ache in my heart.*

*Sincerely and affectionately, Jo Irwin* [note: Both Bobbie Jo and her mother-in-law had the same name, as did Jo Shaeffer and her granddaughter, for a time, Jo (Ellen) Shaeffer.]

When Earl was promoted to manager of the Palisade, Colorado telephone office, the Shaeffers left Cripple Creek and had rented briefly in Palisade and then in Grand Junction. After Marty graduated from Grand Junction High School he attended one year of college before entering the navy during the Korean War. (That story is told in the next chapter.) During the time Marty was away Jo and Earl bought a peach orchard in Palisade, Colorado, and built a lovely new home.

Jo and Earl planned their new home from the ground up. It later became known in the area as The Pink House, which was quite an unusual color in those days. When Dan Shaeffer and his family saw it in the summer of 2004 it had been painted yellow. (Photo below) But it still retained its charming character.



Jo wrote the following description of what she dreamed their new home in Palisade would be:

*The living room will be 27' long by 13 ½' wide. Books, books, books strewn everywhere. It's livable, not elegant. One extravagance I would allow myself would be beautiful furniture just the kind I want. It would be mainly 18<sup>th</sup> century—it's simple yet elegant and livable and corresponds to my makeup some way. I should carpet the whole of this little cottage in a dusty pink and walls I would have a very delicate blue. Drapes, defying interior decorators, would be a soft, misty, dusty*

*pink, too, similar to walls so as not to draw attention to windows but make them a part of a lovely whole. It's strange when my clothes and life do so depart from the ordinary, I would wish my home to not have a very unusual, striking effect, but the effect of calmness and quiet beauty. That to me is what the word 'home' should signify.*

Most of the above came true. The home was charming, made so through the efforts of both Earl and Jo. Earl was renowned for his beautiful peach orchard in Palisade. During harvest time people would come from as far as Kansas to buy his big delicious Elberta peaches. Several of the trees in the front yard were for household use only. Earl affixed a coffee can on the end of an old broomstick. He would wait till the peaches were ripe enough for the table then he would take that stick and gently push it up under a peach. The ripe peach would let go and its circumference would fill the coffee can. Oh, how delicious! Nothing in the world compares to tree-ripe Colorado peaches. Jo would prepare wonderful peach dishes, pies, cobblers, ambrosia etc. She would also can and freeze peaches for use all year long. And all of this was accomplished while Jo was teaching school and taking university classes.



Left: Jo and Earl on the hearth of their new home in Palisade, Colorado.

Earl loved the orchard. For him it was a dream-come-true to have his own peach orchard. But of course it was lots of work. Marty remembered helping his dad with the weeding around the base of each tree, then making a circle with insecticide to prevent the ground bores from damaging the trees. He said, "I can remember Dad saying, 'Now as soon as we get to the end of the row we'll stop and have a coke.'" We would work and work and when I looked up that row seemed just as

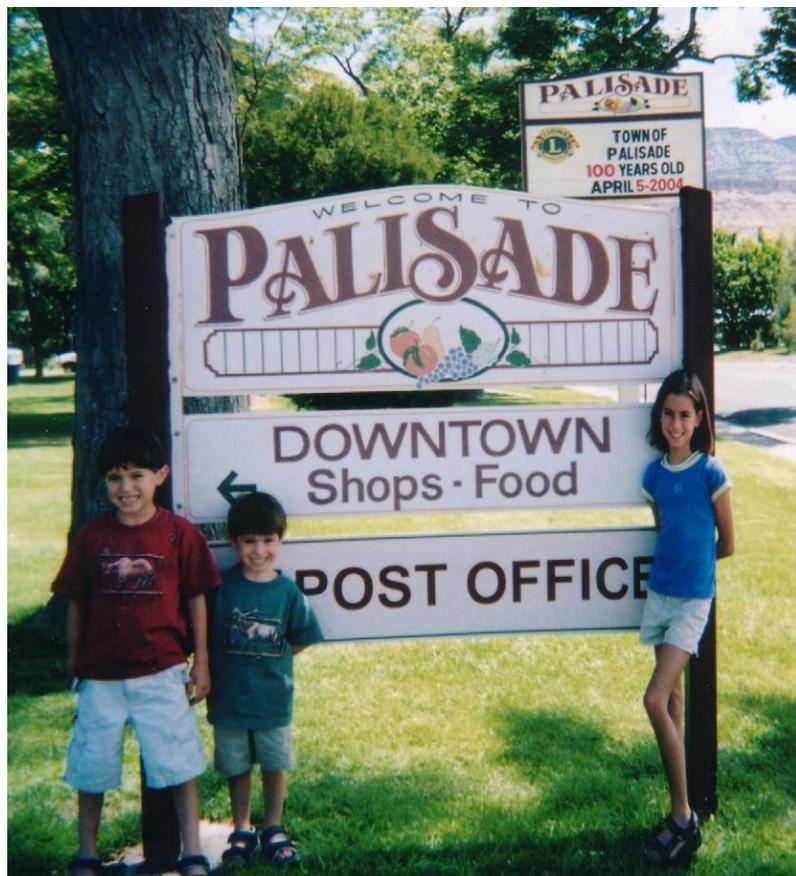
long. But Dad was happy and whistling as we worked.” Break time came too soon for Earl, but not soon enough for Marty.

“Dad was a great mechanic, too,” said Marty. “He could pull out a dead stump of a tree with the jeep, working the momentum of the jeep back and forth till the trunk broke free of it’s deep roots.” Marty said he tried but was not able to do what his dad could. “He would take those stumps that we dragged out of the orchard and he would saw them up by hand to burn in the fireplace,” explained Marty. They also burned coal in the fireplace. There was a small coal mine not far from their home. Marty said, “We drove straight up to the Palisades to the mine, open a chute, fill our trailer with coal, then Dad would sign his name on a clipboard and note how much coal he took.” It was an honor system that worked well for the locals. Coal at that time was about \$4 or \$5 per ton. “We had a fire every night and every morning,” explained Marty, adding that though the new house had a furnace, burning peach stumps and coal saved a great deal on fuel.

The summer after Marty’s first year of college the Shaeffers added a large screened-in porch. Earl hired a contractor to do the work on the condition that he hire Marty as a helper. “He inadvertently chose my life’s career and didn’t even know it,” said Marty. Marty hated the farm work but loved the construction. The only part of the peach business Marty enjoyed was driving boxes of harvested peaches to the co-op. He explained that there would generally be a long line of trucks waiting to be unloaded and that the drivers would congregate in the coffee shop. Every time one truck was unloaded, just one driver would go out and move all the vehicles forward one by one, thereby preserving the continuity of the social hour for the other drivers who would each take a turn at the move-up system.

Earl never made much money with his orchard. He was generally able to meet his expenses, and if he had a bumper crop he could realize a modest gain. But he loved it anyway.

Right: Dan and Angela Shaeffer’s kids in 2004, left to right: Marty, Christopher and Courtney, Jo and Earl’s great-grandchildren.



Earl was afflicted with Bell's Palsy in the late 1960's. It is a condition that causes the facial muscles to weaken or become paralyzed. It's caused by trauma to the 7th cranial nerve, and is not permanent, although Earl's lasted a considerable length of time.

Occasionally Earl could be coaxed to tell stories about the early days of his work with the telephone company. Workers being transported by the narrow gauge railroad that runs between Durango and Silverton were delayed on one occasion by an especially heavy snowfall. All able bodied men got out and shoveled snow from the tracks. A run that today takes the train about 2 ½ hours took four days on that occasion.

Another incident took place after the "Million Dollar Highway" was built between the towns of Silverton and Ouray. Earl was driving a telephone company truck, and stopped to visit with the driver of a state snowplow. He parked it just off the road on a plowed turnout of snow. Since no other traffic was on the road they visited for a few minutes, but when Earl went to return to his truck, it was gone. The underlying snow had given away and the truck had tumbled down the steep mountainside hundreds of feet below. The company was never able to retrieve the truck in that rugged terrain. In 2005 that same road is still frightening to drive in even beautiful weather!

One story the family loved to tell about Earl took place in the spring of 1958 when the family was chalking up the educational degrees. Jo had gone back to school to complete her Master's degree, daughter Bobbie Jo also was receiving her Master's degree, while her husband, Will, earned his PhD and son Marty was awarded his BS degree. Earl, who had only completed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, sat back with a successful smile on his face as all the degrees were tallied up and remarked, "And guess who paid for it all!?"

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