

AFTERWORD

After transcribing the first year, 1949, I wanted to share it with my grandson, James Shaeffer, who had just turned 13, like I had been in 1949. There were some things I wanted to tell him:

*Clovis, New Mexico
January 24, 2002*

Dear James,

Enclosed is my old diary from the year 1949. I turned 13 in January of that year. Since you are 13 this year, I thought you might be interested in what my life was like when I was 13.

The parenthesis marks () were in the original diary. The other marks [] are what I have just now added by way of explanation. Transcribing this diary brought back many memories. It has made my life much richer just getting in touch with the person that I used to be. I hope you can find time to keep a diary or a journal. You will love it later on.

Here are some things I have reflected on--about what it was like for me when I was thirteen:

- 1. I felt an overwhelming awkwardness in my own body (I was growing fast).*
- 2. I was shy, painfully shy.*
- 3. I had too many feelings and did not know what to do with them (wishing they would go away).*
- 4. What certain friends thought was more important than what mom and dad thought.*
- 5. Suddenly the adult world loomed larger than I ever thought possible.*
- 6. I felt awkward in social situations. I did not know what was expected.*
- 7. I didn't know how to ask for help--wasn't sure what was wrong or how to frame the questions.*
- 8. I thought I would have all the answers by the time I was seventeen, and that life would be almost over by the time I was thirty.*

James, the photos should have been printed digitally. I have lots more photos. So next time you come, let's get out the old photo albums. In the meantime I am transcribing the rest of my diary (I kept it for several more years, then quit) and my sister, Jane's diary. It is fun to compare them. She was 5 years younger than me, and that makes a big difference at that age. I am going to write her biography. She was a wonderful person. You would have loved her.

*Love,
Gram*

Having completed the entire project of transcribing the diaries and also having finished the biography of Jane's life I felt I should make some personal observations. Some of the things I have pondered in contemplating the events of long ago from a 50-year-later perspective:

1. How welcome parental reassurances were, and how necessary to our upbringing. I wish there had been more of that. There were always lots of hugs. They were reassuring, too.
2. How few altercations there were. In fact they were so rare as to be mentioned in the diaries when they did take place. Corporal punishment was common in those days, and our family was no exception. However, I can only recall two instances of my being spanked as a youngster, and none was mentioned in my diary (age 12-16). Jane noted two or three instances of being punished, and I was the instigator, apparently, of at least one of those incidents.
3. How tightknit our family was. Our parents discussed things openly with us. We thought and acted as a unit. In the diaries "we" always meant the family. Our parents entertained and were entertained as a family. Seldom did Mom and Dad do things without the kids. They involved us in their decisions--selling our house, changing schools, etc., because they knew it would impact us directly. Perhaps they involved us too much, but I think it built my confidence that my parents had trust in my judgement. "Use good judgement," was a common injunction to us.
4. How incredibly busy our lifestyle was. We think we are busy today, but I think our parents were no less busy then, and there were fewer conveniences for them. There was just one family car. There was just one phone and we were without one for several weeks when we moved to a new subdivision in 1951. They had, or at least Mother had, high ambition. She had the energy to accomplish her goals, but I question her strategy. Some of her ambition involved getting Daddy to be a physical laborer. It saved money, but it cost him in terms of his artistic production. After we left the Melrose Street house in Chicago, he had far less output in his painting. He did a number of small paintings of scenery he sketched during the trip he and Gary took to the Teton Mountains, but so much more time was spent commuting to his job in the city that he had much less time to paint at home, and in that smaller house, no place to paint.
5. As part of the above: my parents squandered precious energy in two unnecessary moves. What lesson should that be for me? I think it helps me feel less anxious to move from my home in Clovis now that we no longer have kids at home. We can visit them any time! It's easier than a move.
6. How few people met my own incredibly high standards, certainly not myself. I'm not sure where that came from, perhaps from Mother.
7. I note that I recorded trying to "improve" my personality. Funny, I still keep hoping I can.
8. I was five years older than Jane. I note that we each became age-appropriately boy-crazy about age 13. However, she may have been more verbal about it in the diaries. Our peers were also very important. I remember most but not all the people I wrote about.

9. We seemed to do an inordinate amount of shopping. I think Mother must have been a shop-a-holic, as they say. I know Jane always loved shopping. I seldom do. I think Mother just wore me out early with too much of it, and I try to avoid it when possible. The diaries reflect a constant go, go, go, shop, shop, shop, sew, sew, sew.

10. The late hours! I am astounded reading the diaries at what late hours we often kept.

11. The most surprising thing is that my parents let us start dating so early. I was 13, Jane was even younger. Of course, those were in the days before the Church suggested guidelines for dating that are a lot more sensible than what we did then. We had Mutual dances starting at age twelve.

12. Church duties: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was central to our lives. In fact our lives revolved around it. It was the social, religious and, in reality, the practical focus of our lives. It gave our lives joy and meaning but it consumed much of our time and energy. In addition to Daddy being bishop we

- a. attended church weekly, including quarterly conferences.
- b. attended Mutual, Relief Society, Primary weekly. (These were not held on Sundays.)
- c. participated in the stake choir.
- d. made High Council visits - some to distant outlying branches.
- e. participated in welfare projects.
- f. participated in running the welfare farm (Dad was in charge of this for some time).
- g. all enrolled in the church university, Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.
- h. sent Gary on a 2-year mission, and later sent Jane on a mission.
- i. paid a full tithe.

Our parents were not wealthy. In fact they both came from pioneering backgrounds. My father was reared in poverty, my mother in ambition and hard, hard work.* Both of their families put a high priority on education and culture. So we were inculcated with that. Money was always tight in our family. Both parents taught school, and were grateful that they could. They had only escaped the worst of the Great Depression by their training as educators. They provided well for us, however. There are many ways parents provide for their families, and ours provided not only their funds, but their time and a wholesome environment. We always lived in nice houses which were well cared for. We had a rich social life (the church in Chicago was a milieu of educated, professional, talented and ordinary people as well). We were given a spiritual grounding and perspective, and a very rich cultural life. We had season tickets to the Goodman Theater and we attended art exhibits, operas, concerts and ballets. Our churches and schools promoted the arts and we were active and involved in them. Best of all, our parents nurtured us in the warmth of their unconditional love along with a dose of high expectations. Wow! How lucky-how truly blessed we were!

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* From Wagon Trails to Subway Rails, The life of Henry Duncan Weaver & Margaret Holmes, E. C. Shaeffer, Brigham Young University, 1988.