Footprints on the Sands of Time...

The Life and Times of

Elmo Leroy Fischer
The Psalm of Life
(1839)

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,

By; Henry Wordsworth Longfellow
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In Memoriam

Ruth Eileen Fischer (Nee Rueggeberg), wife of Elmo Leroy Fischer for nearly fifty years until her death on September 7, 1993, was born in Payette, Idaho, on March 31, 1920. Her parents were Reverend Frederick Carl Rueggeberg and Selma Rueggeberg (Nee Heimann). She had one sibling, Erna Marie Rueggeberg, born August 31, 1924.

When Ruth was nineteen months old, the family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, when her father was called to be the pastor of St. John’s Evangelical Church (now St. John’s United Church of Christ). She attended public schools in Baltimore through the ninth grade when the family moved again, this time to Dallas, Texas, where her father served as pastor of St. John’s Evangelical and Reformed Church for a number of years.

Following graduation from high school in Dallas, Ruth attended Texas Woman’s University. She graduated from TWU in 1943 with a Bachelor of Science degree with majors in Nutrition and Institutional Management, after completing internships at Lynchburg State Colony, Brackenridge Hospital in Austin, and the University of Texas also in Austin, she was certified as a Registered Dietitian, a profession which had only recently been recognized and of which she was one of the very earliest members. She had a very successful and distinguished career in her profession which included serving as the first R.D. at both Mckenna Memorial Hospital and Eden Home for the Aged in New Braunfels. She encouraged a number of young women in the New Braunfels area to choose dietetics as their careers and supported them as they pursued educations in preparation for this profession.

In her private life, Ruth was an exemplary wife and mother. For nearly fifty years she was my cherished friend and faithful companion. Her constant encouragement and uncritical support contributed immeasurably to such success as I may have achieved in my life.

As the mother of our three children, Carl, Elizabeth, and Martha, her love for them and her concerns for their well-being and their development into responsible adults was paramount. She exemplified the description of the “good wife”. As found in the Old Testament: She is more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm, all the days of her life. (Proverbs 31:10-12)
Genealogy

I was born on May 12, 1916, in the village of Fischer Store (now Fischer), Comal County, Texas. My parents were Anna (Nee Lueders) and Adolph Herman Fischer. My maternal grandparents were Sophie (Nee Von Linnartz) and John Lueders. My paternal grandparents were Florentina (Nee Schlameus) and John Otto Fischer.

What I know for certain about my more remote ancestors begins with their migration to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. There are bits and pieces of historical data, but most of my family’s pre-migration history has come to me through family lore and legend. In recent years various member of Fischer, Schlameus, and Linnartz families, with the aid of systematic genealogic research and more rapid means of communication have undertaken, with some success, to separate legend and history. More skilled researchers than I have delved into the histories of the several families prior to their coming to the United States, so I will make that point in time the beginning of this account.

All of my great grandfathers were immigrants from Germany, and, with the exception of my mother’s father, John Lueders, were part of the mass migration of Germans who came to the United States in the late 1840’s and the early 1850’s. This was a period of great unrest and turbulence in Germany and in much of Europe. Masses of people were discontented with their lives in the homeland and were lured to the United States by promises of new beginnings and better lives. Though confirmation is lacking, it is likely that our forbears were caught up in the social and economic unrest of the time and were motivated to join the great torrent of migrants who came to the United States seeking the opportunities for better lives which they had come to believe were waiting for them in this new land.

Grandfather John Lueders came to the United States after the Civil War. His reasons for migrating seem to have been personal and are not clear. It has been the cause for much speculation by later generations. Of the family he left behind in Germany very little is known. All we know for certain is that he had already acquired the skill of a master carpenter and cabinet
maker before he left Germany. It was from him that my father learned his trade as a carpenter and my father subsequently married one of his daughters who became my mother.

Great grandfather Adolph Schlameus and his wife, Marie (Nee Schulz) were married in Germany but they had no children until they came to Texas. Great grandfather Herman Fischer and his wife, Ann (nee Lindeman) were married after coming to Texas. Great grandfather Baron Peter Paul Von Linnartz was married in Germany to Maria Sophia Von Brandenberg. They had four children in Germany. Soon after they migrated to Texas Maria died after having given birth to two more children. The Baron then married Louise Orth, a young woman who had accompanied the family to Texas to assist in the care of the younger children. My mother was the grandchild of this second marriage. Of my Lueders great grandparents I know nothing at all. Grandfather Lueders was very secretive about his family and about his life in Germany before coming to Texas.

Great grandfather Herman Fischer Sr. established a general merchandise business known as Fischer Store and gave his name to the community which grew up around it. Great grandfather Adolph Schlameus taught in a number of schools in the area, including the New Braunfels Academy, which is believed to have been the first tax-supported public school in Texas. He also had a good voice and was an accomplished musician and took prominent roles in the musical organizations at Fischer and other nearby communities. The life and activities of great grandfather Baron Peter Paul Von Linnartz are murkier and more difficult to trace. Stories that have come down to us through later generations picture him as unwilling or unable to do the hard work required to transform a Texas wilderness into a productive farm. Fortunately, several nearly-grown sons had come with him to the new world and they provided the strong arms and legs needed to improve and operate the farm. We are given a few glimpses into his life in the History of New Braunfels and Comal County, Texas – 1844-1945. We learn (P. 180) that that he played a significant role in the formation, in 1845, of the Roman Catholic Church in New Braunfels. The muster role of the Captain Gustav Hoffmann Cavalry Company (P. 161) indicates that he was involved in the Civil War on the Confederate side. This unit was later taken into the regular Confederate army and saw action in many military actions including the New Mexico campaign, the battle of Galveston, and the Red River campaign. It is doubtful, however, that
Peter Linnartz took part in all or any of these actions since he was, at age 47, the oldest member of the company and considered too old for the rigorous life of a cavalryman. The same reference however, also lists a J.P. Linnartz, age 22 (Peter Paul’s son?), as a private in the Hoffmann company. Another reference (P. 158) names P. Linnartz, Jr., age 24, in the muster roll of the Comal County Militia Company. Although it is not so recorded in any of the documents in the New Braunfels Archives, it can be speculated that Baron Peter Paul Von Linnartz, who arrived in Texas in 1845, was acquainted with, if not a part of, the group of German nobles known as the Adelsverein which is now New Braunfels and which encouraged German families to leave their homeland and to make new homes in Texas.
The Fischer Store Years
1916-1924

Having been born during the World War I, my earliest memory is of my father returning home after the war. Although not in the military (as the father of two small children he was not drafted), he worked during the war as a carpenter building facilities at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. Because of transportation difficulties and restrictions in a country at war, he was able to return home only rarely. My mother, meanwhile, was left alone with two small children, my sister, Irene, having been born two and one-half years before my birth. The living conditions with which she had to cope were extremely primitive and placed a great burden on her. I did not appreciate the hardships she endured and the sacrifices she made until I was much older.

When my father returned home to stay after the war, my parents bought a small farm two miles from Fischer Store, and this was our home for six years. Although our living conditions were considerably improved, we still lacked amenities which later generations have taken for granted. We had no electricity, telephone, and indoor plumbing. We were dependent for our water supply on a well with a windmill driven pump which was subject to the vagaries of the weather.

Brothers Alfred and Stewart joined the family during the years we lived on the farm. During those years my father tried to make a living for the family by farming and doing occasional carpentry jobs. These were hard years for the family and they must have been a time of continuing economic struggles.

I have few clear memories of those years, but I do not recall having wanted for anything that I needed. I went to school for two years at the Fischer school, walking the four miles to school and back home each day. I have a vague recollection of having helped in the fields of cotton and corn which father cultivated in the rocky soil of the farm, but I cannot have been of much help even at seven or eight years.
A few events of those early years stand out with some clarity in my memory. I remember that my father, on one fall day, came home in a new model T Ford, the first automobile in our family. With the benefit of later hindsight into my parents financial problems, I cannot comprehend how he managed to pay for it. Be that as it may, my siblings and I, whose lives had been restricted to an area which horse-drawn vehicles could traverse, suddenly had a whole new world opened to them.

I also remember the gatherings of the extended Fischer family at the home on the Guadalupe River of our Fischer grandparents. Those events, not yet called “reunions”, were precursors of the later gatherings, continuing to this day, which draws Fischer descendants back each year to the place of their roots. These events were arranged by the grandparents and father’s two youngest brothers who were unmarried and who were still living with their parents. These uncles had two responsibilities: To notify the family that a “Fish Fry” was scheduled and to catch enough fish to feed everyone. The latter responsibility would seem, today, to have some uncertainty about it, but not in those days. At that time the Guadalupe teemed with catfish, and even the worst fisherman could hardly fail to catch an abundance of fish.

Although I attended school for only two years in the Fischer school, I sense that I learned more that is important during those two years, under the teaching of Miss Esther Rice, than I did in all the remainder of my educational experience. It was from her that I learned to read, write, and figure, thereby opening to me the door to all future learning. I learned later that she was only in her early twenties and that she had, at the time, only two years of “normal school” education. In those days, one could get a teaching certificate with no more formal education. I always thought of Miss Rice (I would never have dreamed, even eighty years later and with two University degrees and she long gone to her heavenly reward, of calling her by her first name) as very mature and fully knowledgeable about everything. Her entire life was devoted to teaching in the public schools of Comal County, a career that was not only long but illustrious as well. She was a natural-born teacher.

My family had very little contact with institutional religion during my Fischer Store days. The nearest churches and resident pastors were in Blanco, San Marcos, and New Braunfels, none of
which were near enough for a pastor to come to our community on a Sunday morning. We did at times have services conducted by a Baptist minister from San Marcos whom my parents and others in the community invited. What Brother Long did and said has long been forgotten. I am sure, however, that he sowed a seed in my mind that led to a lifetime of searching for the eternal truths which explain human existence and man’s relationship to the earth and to the universe.

To me, our isolated community, despite its lack of conveniences enjoyed by those living “in town”, is remembered as a place of happiness and contentment. Gardens and orchard provided vegetables and fruits in season and were preserved by our mother for off-season consumption. Meat was cured for later consumption in the form of sausages, hams, and bacon. Poultry, eggs, and milk were produced for the table. Deer, squirrels, and wild rabbits provided fresh meat from time to time. Dry staples such as coffee, sugar, beans, flour, and rice could be bought at the store, and families brought their corn to be ground by the store’s grist mill. A neighbor with a cane-press converted locally-grown sorghum into molasses. Wild black berries, mustang grapes, agarita berries, and even prickly pear fruit were harvested and were used to make jellies, preserves, and wine. This was the era of prohibition, but that did not deter this community of beer-drinking German immigrants. Many families brewed their own beer.

It is possible that that which contributed more to a sense of contentment and comfort to a young boy than anything else was that he sensed that he was part of a close-knit community of relatives and friendly neighbors. These were often brought together at dances, picnics, informal visits, and other social events. At these events children were generally given free reign to pursue their own pleasures while their parents socialized with other adults. While we children were hardly conscious of it, the whole adult community assumed the responsibility of protecting the safety and security of all the children. Also, since the nearest medical doctor was fifteen miles away in Blanco and there were no telephones to summon him, medical emergencies and births brought the support and experience of neighborhood women to the aid of the affected family. There was no pharmacy in our community, and the store stocked only a few basic medicines. The wonder drugs that we take for granted today were not even dreamed of in my childhood.
It soon became evident that the farm could not produce enough income to support a growing family. A world-wide demand for cotton, the result of war-caused disruptions in the growing and transportation of cotton induced many hill country farmers with a few arable acres of land and a vision of becoming cotton-rich, to plant every arable acre in cotton. My parents were among those who did so. Sadly, the cotton boom very quickly collapsed as returning veterans started planting cotton on land in other parts of the country which was more suited to this kind of agriculture. The boom received its final death knell when boll weasels invaded the area and destroyed the crops. The memorials to this era are the cotton gins which were built in every small community and which have stood idle for many years, some of them to this day.

To supplement the family income, our father took odd jobs as a carpenter in the surrounding area. Times were hard after the war, especially in rural America, and employment in the building trade was sporadic and not reliable as a source of income. My recollections of those early days are meager and indistinct, but I do not remember them as particularly arduous or unpleasant. I do not recall having felt that our lifestyle at the time was having been one of deprivation or suffering. I was only vaguely aware if at all, of the economic pressures that bore down on our parents.

When the news came to Fischer Store in 1924 that a large electric generating plant was to be built in New Braunfels and that men with construction experience were being hired, it must have come to our parents as an opportunity for a better life. Our mother was once again left alone, this time with four children (Alfred was born in 1918 and Stewart in 1924) and a farm to run. The decision was made to sell the farm and to move to New Braunfels in time for the three older children to enroll in Carl Schurz School in the fall. A new phase in the life of our family had begun.
Growing up in New Braunfels.
1924-1937

The move to New Braunfels was the beginning of a completely new experience for me and for the family. The next thirteen years, from 1924 until I left for the University of Texas in 1937, were my growing up years physically. More than that they were years in which seeds were sown which were to grow into ideas and convictions which were to form my character and conduct the rest of my life. Of the influences which impacted my life during those early years I will write more later.

My immediate preoccupation, however, was to continue my education in the public schools of New Braunfels. Although I was only eight years old, the principal at Carl Schurz School ranked me as a fourth grader. I skipped the third grade entirely, and thus became the youngest person in all the classes through grade school and high school except for my senior year when one other young man who had special schooling beat me by a few months. Whether graduating a year earlier than normal was a plus or a minus, I cannot say. The immediate consequence was that I was until high school the smallest boy in my class. It also meant that this shy young country boy found himself in competition with a group of students some of whom were almost two years older than he. Along with the age advantage they also had the sophistication of having lived “in town” all their lives. It was only through the efforts of caring and sensitive teachers that I survived my first year in New Braunfels with a minimum of psychological scars. The relative gap in ages narrowed over time, and I became at ease with town culture very quickly.

My parents had their hopes of prosperity realized during the early years in New Braunfels. Father continued to work on the power plant job for several years. Mother ran her boarding house profitably so long as out-of-town workmen were employed on the construction project. So confident of future well being were they that they bought a large two-story house on South Seguin Street—with large mortgage, of course. They had been renting a house across Seguin Street, next to what was then the Walter Faust Home.
Then, in October 1929, the “crash” occurred, plunging the nation and, ultimately, the world into the Great Depression, from which it would not recover for nearly a decade. Millions of people were suddenly out of work, family savings vanished, and the whole economy ceased to function. Banks were closed all across the nation and many people holding payroll and other commercial checks found themselves unable to cash them. Great numbers of young people roamed the country looking for work, sleeping in the open, and going from house to house asking for food. Mother’s boarding house produced a meager income and father found an occasional day’s work. Sister Irene was old enough by then to get a part-time job while finishing high school. I ran a paper route for the old San Antonio LIGHT. Even Al got a part-time job when he was a little older. Stewart, who was only four years old when the Depression started, may have been largely unaware that something unusual was happening. Somehow, the family struggled through the Depression, but it did not escape its effects entirely. Too many missed payments on the mortgage finally brought about foreclosure to the house.

In 1933 Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president of the United Stated and things began to turn around although full recovery from the Depression was still years away. An alphabet soup of emergency programs was quickly enacted and activated. We had the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) in which millions of young men without specific skills were provided employment in public parks improvements and other public work. The PWA (Public Works Administration) provided employment for older men with trade skills on public projects such as dams, bridges, and roads. The NYA (National Youth Administration) offered assistance to young people wanting to go to college or trade schools. It took longer for SS (Social Security) and PA (Public Assistance) to become a part of the recovery program but they were destined to become permanent part of the American culture.

I derived a personal benefit immediately from the “new deal” as this bundle of recovery programs came to be called. I graduated from high school in May, 1933. Having taken typing and shorthand I was offered a job by the Nowotny brothers, George and Pete, to do clerical work in their insurance agency. Whether the fact that their mother and mine were cousins had anything to do with it, I don’t know. My beginning salary was $40 per month which was not bad for a young man just out of high school. Early in 1934 Congress passed a law urging employers to pay
their employees at least $75 per month. This was a “voluntary” program, but those who complied with this “suggestion” were allowed to display at their places of business a decal with the picture of a blue eagle on it. Most employers complied, thinking it would be bad for business if they did not. This program came to be known universally as the “Blue Eagle Program”. for me it meant a raise of $35 per month. This additional amount, insignificant as it may now seem, enabled me to buy a lot in the newly-opened Landa Estates for $500 and which I later sold for $1,000. It also enabled me to help my parents, with whom I was still living at the time, to buy a small cottage on Academy Street. This was their home until father died and mother was no longer able to live alone. I also was able to create a small savings account with which I financed part of the expenses of my first year at the University of Texas.

During our first year in New Braunfels I was generally oblivious of what was going on in the grown-up world. Father continued to work on construction of the San Antonio Public Service Company power plant (later owned and operated by the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA). Mother was busy with the details of furnishing and running her boarding house which, at that time, was a rented building still in existence, next to the present day Faust Hotel. Sister Irene was mother’s helper in this endeavor and I ran errands and did small chores such as running to Naegelin’s Bakery when the bread supply unexpectedly ran out or to the M System store, just across the street, for some other necessity. Mostly, though, I was preoccupied with getting acquainted with my new environment. I learned very quickly that there was a movie theater on West San Antonio Street with an ice cream parlor right next to it. If I could scrape up 15¢ I could see a Tom Mix western on a Saturday afternoon and buy an ice cream cone. Then there was the Comal River just three blocks away. Unless mother had chores for me to do, I would make a dash for the river after school and would stay there, along with other children in the neighborhood, until supper time. An event occurred at this time which remained in the memory of the neighborhood children for the rest of their lives. It was the moving of the Faust Home, a two-story red brick building to a vacant lot at the corner or Coll and Seguin Streets. Since the house faced East at its old location and was to face West on the new lot, it had to be turned 180° in addition to being moved. The house is still in existence. It was used for many years as the office and clinic of the doctors Frueholz. Also carefully monitored by the
neighborhood children was the construction of a huge storm sewer from Academy Street down the center of Coll Street to its discharge point into the Comal River.

Many Sunday afternoons were spent in watching baseball games in Landa Park. The local team included a number of very good players. Apparently, SAPSCO gave preference in employing operating personnel for the new power plant to persons who had, in addition to technical qualifications, a history of baseball playing and competence. Games were scheduled with teams from nearby communities and it drew large crowds. I don’t remember ever paying an admission charge. There was a small grandstand, and there probably was a grandstand charge.

I also discovered the church or, more precisely, the First Protestant Church Sunday School. It was in Sunday school that I first experienced the stirring in mind and heart which was to lead to later insights and convictions. Services at First Protestant Church were still being held in the German language by our long-time pastor, Reverend G. Mornhinweg, but Sunday school classes were held in English. Rumblings was being heard that the church should call an English-speaking associate. In fact, it was not long after we moved to town that such a pastor was called. His name was Reverend Otto Bassler, and it was this minister who influenced me more than anyone else in my early life. He organized a troop of boy scouts at the church and encouraged me, when I became 12, to join the troop. With his guidance and support I worked my way through the ranks of scouting until I attained the rank of Eagle Scout. I was active in the Boy Scouts even through my pre-war years at the University, serving as assistant Scoutmaster of a troop sponsored by one of the University churches. I was also a member of Alpha Phi Omega, the national honorary and service fraternity for Eagle Scouts, and I am now a member of the National Eagle Scouts Association. Pastor Bassler was also the minister who confirmed me.

Not long after my confirmation in 1929, Reverend Bassler left New Braunfels to accept a full pastorate in another city. I was distressed to see him leave. In retrospect I have realized that I had already begun to enter the next phase of my development and that the mentor and inspiration of my boyhood years had brought me as far as he could and that I was ready for a more mature kind of guidance. Fortunately, Reverend Bassler was soon succeeded by two very remarkable people whose influence on me during my late teens and early twenties was to be determinative.
Reverend Herman Borne was called to be the associate pastor of First Protestant Church. He and his wife, Martha, had no children, and they took it upon themselves to minister to a group of young people in the church. The nature of that ministry and the effect it had on me is discussed in more detail in a later chapter. I will say at this point only that they helped me to discover myself and to deepen convictions which guided later decisions for my life.

My high school years were generally uneventful. I took the required courses for graduation. As electives I took typing and shorthand, and those skills proved to be an advantage in future employments. My introduction to civics was minimal, but it was enough to ignite in me a life-long interest in government and led to a major in that field at the University of Texas. I had little interest in athletics, in part because I am near-sighted and, therefore, was not good at athletics. I did take an interest in music, and when our high school organized a marching band I was a founding member. My instrument was the trumpet, and getting even a respectable competence in that instrument required many hours of practice and the instruction of a good teacher. I had neither time for practice nor good instruction, so I was never really good at it. It was good enough however, to gain admission to the Longhorn Band at U.T, but I have never played a trumpet since leaving the University. I graduated in 1933, number 3 in my class. I was its second youngest member.

After working for four years I entered the University of Texas in the fall of 1937. The next chapter takes me through my University and World War II experiences.
At the University of Texas and in Civilian Public Service
1937-1947

The seed of my commitment to a non-violent life style was sown early in my life, although I would have found it difficult to put it into words in those early days. Neither did I have an inkling that I might be called on some day to articulate my convictions with sufficient clarity and credibility to persuade a war-time draft board to grant me conscientious objector status.

It is useful to remember that I was born during World War I, a war that was fought to “end all wars”. During my teen years there was a strong antiwar mood in the United States which lasted right up to the beginning or the World War II. Because of it our government had to make use of subterfuges to provide assistance to the allied nations of Europe during their first two years of war with the so-called “axis” powers. It took actual attacks by the Japanese on the Philippines and Hawaii for the majority of the people to accept our official involvement in the conflict. Even at that late date there were many people, including me, who were troubled by the failure of our nation’s leaders to deal diplomatically with international issues at the root of the war.

My own views were reinforced by religious belief and insight and by secular experience. I had by this time developed a god-concept which rested on the premise that creation is not static but is a continuous process. Anything which obstructs or impedes that process can be defined theologically as sin in rational terms as futility. It was and is my belief that modern wars which bring suffering and devastation on hundreds of millions of people are antithetical to the creative process no matter how noble the causes for which they are fought. It is utterly incomprehensible to me that, a God who had created an orderly universe and everything in it including the people, would condone the horror and destruction his creatures have wreaked upon each other in recent wars. It was and is also my belief that wars will occur only so long as individuals are willing to engage in violence. It follows from this that wars will cease only as individuals make conscious choices to refrain from violence.
My first gentle nudge in the direction of a non-violent life-style occurred when I became a Boy Scout, at the age of twelve. Although Boy Scouts wear a form of uniform, scouting was conceived by its founder, Robert Baden Powell, as an organization whose purpose would be to develop character and patriotism in young men in a peaceful world. Its program of activities is designed to promote a young man’s growth mentally, morally, and physically. Unfortunately some nations later found the Boy Scout organization a convenient tool to introduce young men to militarism.

My first Scoutmaster, the pastor of my church, fully exemplified in his behavior and in his teaching, the original principles of Scouting. His influence and encouragement motivated me to work for advancement in Scouting. Eventually I attained the highest rank in Scouting, that of Eagle Scout.

Looking back on my experience in Scouting I can see how significant it was in shaping my future attitudes and beliefs. I continued to be involved in Scouting while a student at the University of Texas during the late 1930s. I served as Assistant Scoutmaster of a troop in Austin and was active in the service program of Alpha Phi Omega, a national honorary college fraternity for Eagle Scouts. My direct involvement with Scouting ended with the advent of World War II but the story of whom I am and what I have done in my life would be in complete without reference to it.

A second great influence on my life, possibly a defining one, occurred during my late teens and early twenties when a new pastor and his wife came to First Protestant Church. They had no children of their own so they “adopted” a few young people, all about the same age, as their informal family. There were about a dozen of us, a few young women but mostly men. We gathered in their home many Sunday evenings, we went on outings together, we went to movies and other events together, we even produced dramatic productions and presented them at neighboring churches, but most of all we talked. Four of them would eventually declare themselves conscientious objectors. One became an internationally recognized economist and professor at Rutgers University, one became the administrator of Virginia State Teachers Retirement system, one went with a reconstruction team after the war to Austria and stayed
there. Of those who did not become conscientious objectors, one became a marine architect who
designed liberty ships during the war and another became a political figure here in Comal
County.

The pastor and his wife suggested books for us to read and we would discuss them. I
remembered reading during this period and after I had entered the University such books as Leo
Tolstoy’s, War and Peace, Henry Thoreau’s, Walden, and other writings, works by Charles
Dickens and Lewis Sinclair, and Victor Hugo’s Les Miserable’s. The writings of Jane Addams
about her work in the slums of Chicago and at Hull House touched me deeply and made a
permanent impression on me. This was also the era of the “muckrakers” (today we call them
Investigative Reporters) such as Lincoln Steffens and Jacob Riis. They made it their business to
shed light on the sordid and cruel conditions under which vast numbers of people were forced to
live in a newly-industrialized society and the exploitation to which so many were subjected. If
there was a common thread running through all this reading it was that it represented a young
man’s search for truth and understanding about the world into which he had been born and
yearning for a pattern of life which would give his own life meaning.

Among the news stories that were making headlines during the mid-1930s were two that were of
special interest to me. One was the rise of National Socialism in Germany under the leadership
of a man named Adolf Hitler. The other was the struggle of India for independence from Great
Britain under the leadership of a man named Mohandas Gandhi. The two movements stood in
stark contrast to each other. The first was attempted to achieve national goals through the use of
military force. The second sought to gain a national goal through nonviolence. Perhaps for the
first time in its long history mankind was witness to simultaneous demonstrations of two method
of resolving conflicts between nations. One has been the method of choice throughout the long
reach of history and it has had a dismal record of success. The other was suggested two thousand
years ago by a simple peasant, but two millennia more had to pass before someone came along
who was willing to try it.

The rambling thoughts of my younger years were beginning to come together into a coherent
philosophy. Before going further, however, it is appropriate to reflect on how my parents and
siblings viewed the direction in which I was headed. As well as I can remember, they were neutral but supportive. None of them ever spoke a hostile or disapproving word to me. My parents were simple people with little education and I doubt that they fully understood what was in my heart and mind. They followed my activities and movements during the war years with the same anxiety and concern that they did for those of my two brothers who were in the military. I never sensed, then or later, any inclination on the part of any member of my family to be critical or judgmental toward me. After the war my brothers and I went our separate ways--college educations were completed, we married and had families. Job demands took us to different places. We all had successful careers and our children are all university graduates and are prospering in their several vocations. We get together as often as possible for family celebrations and other events. We are still a close-knit family.

It is now time to introduce another character in the saga of my life, one who finally gave me the courage to follow my conscience wherever it might lead. I first saw Ruth Rueggeberg in 1935. I was attending a training event for young Sunday School and church leaders held at Baylor University in Waco. One of the adult leaders at this event was Reverend Carl Rueggeberg, pastor of St. Paul Evangelical Church in Dallas. He had with him his wife and two daughters, Ruth and Erna. I remember being impressed by their parents but I do not recall having taken special notice of their older daughter. A second contact occurred in 1936 when our Boy Scout troop, of which I was by now the Assistant Scoutmaster, travelled to Dallas to visit the Texas Centennial Exposition. I dimly recall one other occasion that I saw her, at a state-wide youth event held in New Braunfels. As on previous occasions, she was only a child in the company of her parents.

In the fall of 1939 I was in my third year at the University of Texas. The Longhorn Band, of which I was a member, took a band trip to Dallas to attend a U.T. football game in the Cotton Bowl. After the game I stopped by for a visit with the Rueggebergs. There I saw, to my great surprise and delight, a very attractive young woman. The “child”, a freshman at Texas State College for Women (now Texas Woman’s University) in Denton and who was home for the weekend with her parents, had grown up! The visit was a short one but it was long enough to begin a relationship that never faltered in more than fifty years and ended only when death took her from me and left me alone but with a wealth of golden memories to console me.
In the fall of 1940, after many exchanges of letters but with very few direct contacts, Ruth and I pledged our love to each other and decided to marry. Little did we know that four years would pass before that would happen. By that time Ruth had her B.S. Degree in dietetics, I was in Civilian Public Service at a state mental hospital in Virginia, and the world was in convulsion. Those years were among the most tumultuous of my life but they were also happy ones as Ruth and I learned to know each other better and to love each other more. As I tried to follow the “gentler way”, she was my confidante, my stalwart supporter, my friendly critic, my patient advisor, and my ever-loving soul-mate. She never complained of our circumstances or chided me for being the cause of them.

Now back to the main story. In the fall of 1937, I entered the University of Texas with the general goal of getting a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. I fell in love immediately with college life. To someone hungering for knowledge, the university was a veritable smorgasbord of erudition and I was eager to feast freely and fully from it.

I had a friend in high places at the University who helped me to get on-campus employment in the Student Life office. My friend and boss was the Dean of Men who had responsibility, among other things, for student housing. He was also the University’s liaison with National Youth Administration. It was in these two areas that I worked with him. The National Youth Administration (NYA), of which Lyndon Johnson was the Texas director, was one of a number of depression-era agencies created under President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. It had as its purpose assisting young people to go to colleges and vocational training schools. It was a huge success, so much so that a shortage of housing was created at educational institutions all across the nation. To cope with this shortage the concept of student housing co-operatives was born. The University owned a number of large, old residences near the campus which had been purchased to provide space for future expansion but had not yet been demolished. These were made available to self-governing student groups at nominal rents. Each unit would operate its house independently and would provide its own food and housekeeping services. A “house mother”, recommended by the Dean’s office, was employed and a manager was elected from among the unit’s members to manage its business affairs. About fifty such units were formed at
U.T. and they were tremendously successful. More than a thousand students were housed in them. The same thing was happening all across the country. Ruth lived in one at TSCW and I lived in two at different times. With the meager financial assistance provided by NYA and the co-ops, hundreds of thousands of young people managed to get college educations during difficult times.

I was deeply immersed in these programs, especially the co-ops, providing guidance to groups desiring to organize units and serving as a clearing house for communication between units. Furnishing units without much money was one of many challenges and I became well acquainted with second-hand furniture stores all over Austin. It was a busy time for me but it was gratifying to be a part of something that was helping many young people get an education.

I was not so busy, however, that I neglected my primary reason for being at the University. By this time I had decided on a two-track curriculum. One track would lead to a B.B.A. degree and the other track would lead to a B.A. in government. I reasoned that if I could later go to graduate school I would have a broader, choice of paths to follow. After all, the future looked bright, I had plenty of time, and college life didn’t look bad at all! The impending storm in Europe and Asia seemed to us at U.T. as only a very small cloud in an otherwise clear sky and was easily ignored. I was also a regular participant in special events for students offered by churches in the University community on Sunday evenings. Often we would hear some well-known person speak on a subject of the day. On other occasions we would simply get together to discuss some issue of current interest. There would usually be a meal which made them very popular events.

In this way I came in contact with a group of people about whom I had read but of whom I had yet to meet one. They were the Society of Friends or Quakers. I learned that there were a number of Quakers on the U.T. faculty and staff. I came to know them quite well and I discovered that their ideas and mine were very similar. The friends are one of the three religious groups which have been recognized as “historic peace churches”, the other two being the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren. While they are not widely-known as religious bodies they each have charitable assistance components which are highly regarded throughout the world. The American Friends Service Committee has an excellent reputation as an effective relief and refugee
assistance organization. The Quaker form of worship was strange to me and I have never felt comfortable in it. They did have something that I did not and which I coveted. It was an unshakeable conviction of the moral rightness of their pacifist belief, a belief that has been tempered by hundreds of years of persecution and oppression. I read Quaker literature and found in it the answers to many questions that had been troubling me. I also served for a short time as the campus representative of the AFSC and went once to Philadelphia to attend a meeting of the committee.

In late August, 1939, my brother and I and two friends travelled to New York City in my old Model A Ford to visit the New York World’s Fair. On September 1, while we were there, German panzers rolled into Poland. Four days later Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

Surprisingly, the United States managed to stay out of the conflict for another 27 months, which allowed me and many others to complete another year of college. But the die had been cast, and the U.S. had chosen sides. Japan and Italy had aligned themselves with Germany to form the “axis powers”. The possibility that they might triumph became stronger, especially as Germany’s U-Boats began to strangle Britain. Our government had to use a variety of subterfuges to get armaments, foods, and other desperately needed supplies to a beleaguered Britain, France by this time having been overrun and occupied by German forces. A great many people were still opposed to our official participation in the war. Finally, on “the day that shall live in infamy”, December 7, 1941, Japan made our decision for us by bombing Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and other U.S. territories.

The government had already begun to build up its war-making capabilities, but it was not until September 14, 1940, that a universal conscription law, the “Selective Training and Service Act of 1940”, was passed by the congress. I considered briefly going to a theological seminary because students in seminaries were exempt. I asked myself how I could preach against the evils of war if I had run away from one. I decided to meet the issue head one.
As late as 1940 there was still enough of an anti-war sentiment in the country that the peace churches were able to get a provision for conscientious objectors into the law. About 75,000 young men applied for C.O. status under the law during the War World II. These applications were disposed of by the government in four ways. In about one-third of the cases the applicants ultimately accepted induction in to the armed forces on a non-combatant basis. At least 6,000 (the number has never been made public and may have been considerably more) refused to cooperate with Selective Service in any way and were sent to prison. An unknown number were exempted for mental or physical reasons or for other specified disqualifications. Twelve-thousand accepted the governments offer to do “work of national importance under civilian direction”. I was one of the twelve thousand.

Even before the Selective Service Act was passed, I had made my decision. When the “From the President of the United States, Greetings” letter arrived I was ready for it. I filled out the accompanying registration for, and checked off the C.O. block. Every registrant was instructed to submit to a physical examination by a designated doctor. The next step was to appear before a local board for an interview. The board would consider one’s special circumstances and would assign the individual a status as indicated by a number and letter designation. A 1-A classification indicated that one was available for induction into the military. A 4-F classification indicated that one was exempted because of physical or mental disability. There were other classifications for various circumstances spelled out in the law. The classification would be changed to 1-AO if the individual agreed to accept military service as a non-combatant.

Most classifications were 1-A, as one might expect, and were, unless appealed, a final disposition. Local boards routinely granted 4-F status on the basis of a doctor’s report, although they could and did sometimes request additional information. For other classifications the board might require additional interviews, supporting documents, references, records, and anything it seemed necessary to make a determination. Since I was applying for a 4-E classification, I was asked to provide a written statement of my beliefs, how I came to have them, and letters of recommendation from my pastor and others. As the law was originally written, a 4-E classification could only be granted to persons who held their convictions “by reason of religious training and belief!” after the war the law was amended to allow exemption to be granted also on
the basis of “philosophical beliefs”, but my application had to be considered in the context of religious belief. Membership in one of the recognized peace churches was usually accepted as meeting the “religious training and belief” requirement. Those of us who were not members of “peace churches” had to make our cases individually. I was able to do so and, on July 25, 1941, I was issued my 4-E card. I like to say that I am a government-certified Christian.

The call-ups for duty involved the setting up of “order numbers” which were determined by lottery. When one’s number was called, all those having that number were ordered to report for induction. I had a fairly high number, 525, which should have meant that 524 would be called, before I was called for induction. In fact, however, Selective Service took the view that all draftees who had been granted 4-E status should be sent as quickly as possible to civilian public service units. It was not thought politically acceptable to have conscientious objector’s back home living the good life when other draftees were already dying on foreign battle fields. So I found myself, on February 1, 1942, at civilian public service unit number 7 at Magnolia, Arkansas.

At first the government didn’t have a clue about what kind of “work of national importance” they wanted us to do. It was beginning to fight a war, and planning a program for C.O.s. was somewhere near the bottom of its priorities. A basic plan had been devised but the details had yet to be filled in. The “peace churches” had agreed, as part of the deal, to be totally responsible for the running of the units at no cost to the government. Technical supervision was to be provided by a number of government agencies – Soil Conservation Service, National Parks Service, Forestry Service, Public Health Service, and a number of others as were appropriate to the mission of the unit. Many of the units were housed originally in abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps facilities. At first, “work of national importance” meant anything that needed to be done and for which free manpower was not otherwise available. In the early months of the most important consideration seemed to be to get C.O.s. off the streets and out of sight in some remote area.

C.P.S. Unit number 7 was housed in such a C.C.C camp. Accommodations were crude barracks-type building. There were dining halls, shops, equipment sheds, and a small administration
building. Our mission was broadly defined as doing soil conservation work but it also included reforestation and forest fire suppression. Technical supervision was by the Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The department provided the heavy equipment needed to perform our mission which included terracing, creating drainage systems, planting soil retention vegetation, erosion control, planting pine seedlings, and other related activities. Because I had already almost a B.B.A. and had experience in office practices and procedures, I was very quickly pulled away from the field work and put into the camp office.

Nothing in our office was paid for by our government. We had to make do with improvised office furniture and such equipment as we could scrounge. I remember once that S.C.S. engineer, who also had an office on site, got some new furniture for his office. When we asked him for the old furniture he told us that he could not give it to us but that he would tell us where he would dump it. The camp director, also not a government employee, was a very fine and sensitive Brethren pastor who had been given leave by his congregation to manage this Brethren-sponsored unit.

I was glad to be relieved of the “heavy lifting” but my life was not without its challenges. Among other things, it was my responsibility to keep food on the table without much money for a lot of hungry guys. Again, the government did not put up any money for food or any other needed supplies. It was all done through the generosity of the good people of our Brethren Church sponsors. Talk about putting your money where your mouth is! Many Brethren families planted gardens and fed cattle, hogs, and chickens especially for the camps. Most took up special offerings which enabled us to purchase staples and other needed supplies. Every few days a truck loaded with fresh and canned fruits, vegetables, and meats, would arrive on site. Somehow, there was always just enough, although there were days when the pantry was virtually empty. Oh yes, they also gave each and every camper, whether a Brethren or not, three dollars per month for our personal needs. You will understand why I have such a warm spot in my heart for the people of the Brethren Church and why I have cherished for sixty years the little pocket New Testament which was in the kit of goodies that was given to me when I arrived at C.P.S. number 7 and

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which had been lovingly assembled by the Appanoose Brethren Aide Society of Overbrook, Kansas.

It is tempting to go on at length with details of camp life but to do so would be to make this paper much longer than I have intended. There are several books in my library end which deal with the minutia of life in the units generally, and I commend them to anyone who is inclined to pursue the matter. I do want to mention two matters. First, almost every person in camp volunteered as subjects for a variety of medical experiments. I personally, volunteered for experiments in hepatitis therapy, tuleremia immunization, and nutrition. Second, as the front office flunky, one of my duties was to meet incoming campers at a nearby railroad station. The station was in Hope, Arkansas.

I will now move on to the next phase of my experience. Early in 1943, someone in Washington woke up to the fact that there were thousands of young men who were scattered across the country, most of whom had high school educations, many had at least some college credits, some had baccalaureate degrees, some had graduate degrees, and some even had doctorate degrees among them. That someone must have asked himself whether this pool of able, motivated, and mostly, educated young men might be more usefully employed than in doing what was basically “make work”. Many of us in C.P.S., of course, had been asking ourselves that for some time. Very quickly a number of public agencies whose manpower had been drained away by the war began to ask for C.O.s. with skills they could use. A few men with highly-specialized skills were allowed to go to work in Public Health laboratories, agricultural experiment stations, and a few other such facilities. In the end, though, the C.P.S. administration decided that the most pressing need was in the mental hospitals of the country. Here were helpless people who simply had to be cared for and there was no one to do it. These institutions had the added advantage, often, of being, closed communities in which C.O.S. could be kept out of sight. To the men this was something that really looked like “work of national importance.” The word went out to the units that transfer to many mental hospitals might be approved. The response was immediate and overwhelming.
I learned that the church of the Brethren, for which I had come to have great respect, was organizing a C.P.S. unit at Lynchburg State Colony in Virginia, right in the heart of Brethren-land. I immediately applied for a transfer and in June, 1943, I moved to Virginia. Those who made this change enjoyed an immediate improvement in their circumstances. Although the Commonwealth of Virginia was not allowed to pay us wages, it was allowed to give us $15 per month for our personal needs. This was a 500 percent increase in pay! Far more important, however, was the improvement in our living conditions. We were provided reasonably comfortable housing and adequate food, and amenities like laundry service and leisure time and recreational and religious opportunities. To me, personally, a very special blessing was to come. Although Virginia could not pay me for my services, the institution desperately needed a dietitian and food service supervisor and it could pay her. Ruth had gotten her degree in May and, although she had not yet qualified for registration by A.D.A., this was a matter which could easily be ignored under war-time conditions. The Superintendent needed her so badly that he granted me a two-week furlough in December of 1943 so I could travel to Denver, Colorado, marry her, and bring her back with me. The ceremony took place on the 22nd at St. John’s Evangelical Church in Denver where her father was pastor at the time.

After a few days with Ruth’s family, we started a leisurely train trip to Virginia, stopping off in New Braunfels, Texas, to let my parents and my sister and brother-in-law get acquainted with the new bride. Then on to New Orleans, through the Gulf States to Atlanta, and then through the Carolinas to Lynchburg, Virginia. We were about as happy as we could be. When we reached Colony, just outside Lynchburg, the whole unit, which by now included some 35 men and a dozen wives, gave us a royal welcome. Our one room, which was to be our home for the next two and a half years, had been nicely bedecked with flowers and a number of items for our convenience and comfort had been provided. Life was very good and we were very happy to be together.

The work was demanding and stressful, especially for those who worked in the wards. Even with our group the institution was still woefully understaffed. Colony was one of seven institutions which made up the Virginia State Hospital System. Unlike most of the others which were more specifically hospitals for the mentally disturbed, Colony had something of a “mixed bag”
population. Its 1200 patients consisted of epileptics, feeble minded, birth anomalies, and other abnormalities. The work was long and hard but we were allowed more freedom than at Magnolia. We made use of it occasionally to take day and week-end trips, when we could find the transport (sometimes provided by Brethren friends in the vicinity), to nearby historical sites and other places of interest. Those of us with wives to support us were more privileged than our unmarried comrades so we would share our good fortune with them by financing group events. We were a latter day first century Christian community.

A few weeks after I arrived at Colony my prior business training and experience again paid off when I was assigned to the office of the steward (business manager. Virginians are addicted to using old English titles!). This elevated me to the exalted rank of “staff” automatically so we were able to have our noon meals in the staff dining room.

Ruth approached her new position with all the vigor and zeal of a newly minted professional. She reorganized the food services, changed menus, taught employees better practices of preparing and serving meals, and instituted badly-needed improvements in sanitation. She even initiated a class to train the more intelligent patients in cooking and domestic skills with the expectation they might be employed outside the institution. Unfortunately this experiment came to naught. There were just no patients who were that intelligent.

And so months went by. It was December again and we celebrated our first wedding anniversary. We were about to enter 1945. We did not know it yet, but this was the year that war finally ended. In fact, some of the worst fighting and most awful destruction was still to some. We went about our work as usual. Living amidst our patients we had come by some twist of the mind to think of our little isolated community as being normal and the world outside as being abnormal. When the end came in August, 1945, we faced the same challenges of adjustment to a normal society as did the returning G.I.s. We in the mental hospitals decided that the “normal” was not good enough and we were determined to change conditions at least in that area in which we felt that we had become pros.
Over a period of months we had developed a sophisticated network of communication between the units in more than sixty hospitals. As we became more aware of the terrible conditions that prevailed in these institutions and the cruelty and maltreatment to which the patients in them were often subjected, we came to the conclusion that reforms were desperately needed and that we should be its agents. We exchanged ideas about more humane patient control, better evaluation and diagnosis of patients, real treatment regimens, the use of drugs in both therapy and control, good nutrition as an element in the treatment of the mentally ill, and many other issues. Out of this welter of ideas came an organization called the National Mental Health Foundation whose members, at first, were almost all C.P.S. men and women. It broadened its membership after the war and would evolve into the National Mental Health Association which is to this day the leading advocate for the mentally ill and the foremost center for research in mental illness. A very considerable number of C.P.S. men and women went on to become Leaders in promoting mental health and in caring for the mentally. They became psychiatrists, researchers, social workers, institutional managers, teachers, and an array of other vocations associated with care and treatment of the mentally. My own interest in the care of the elderly, whose aging process is often accompanied by dementia, was aroused by my C.P.S. experience.

War World II came to an end with a supper-bang on August 14, 1945, and we in C.P.S. prepared to pick up our interrupted lives. As we were the first to be inducted so we were the last to be released. G.I.S. were demobilized on the basis of accumulated points earned in various ways during their service. There were no points for C.O.s so it was not until January 10, 1946, that I received notice that my obligation to serve my country in “work of national importance under civilian direction” had been fulfilled. No “thank you”, no recognition, no compensation, or benefits for four years of my life. Ironically, Ruth and I stayed on an additional five months, this time with pay. Our superintendent asked us to stay in our positions until permanent employees could be found and trained. We arrived back in Austin in June, in time for me to enroll in summer classes at U.T. After year I finally received my B.S. and my B.B.A degrees, ten years after I had first entered the university. In the mean time, Ruth was doing a dietetic internship at Brackenridge Hospital in Austin and in the food service department at U.T., then the babies started coming and, as they say, the rest is history- our children’s and ours.
Were my comrades and I fools for choosing the “gentler way” of the Quakers? Most people would undoubtedly say “yes” or worse. We made no discernible impact on the war and certainly have not deterred our country from engaging in numerous military adventures since then. In fact, the C.O. has hardly rated a foot-note to the history of World War II. Yet, 75,000 young men said “no” to insanity both inside institutions and in a world at war. All we may have done is to keep lighted the flickering flame of humanity’s conscience. If we accomplished no more, that may have been enough.
In the Comptrollers Office at U.T.
1947-1952

My active career began when I graduated from the University of Texas in 1947. Although I had been working at various part-time jobs since I was thirteen years old, my first position after graduating was in the office of the Comptrollers at the University of Texas, as an accountant. I had worked in this department on a part-time basis during my last year in the university, and when I graduated the Comptroller offered me a full-time job. The Comptrollers office has the responsibilities of handling all financial transactions of the university. Through a system of fund accounting it monitors the budgets of the various departments, academic and auxiliary, which make up the university. It receives money due to the university from all sources and makes payments for all expenses. Not only does it assure that the departments do not overspend their budgets but it also reviewed proposed expenditures to make sure they have been properly authorized. While above my pay grade, the Comptroller works with department heads and the president in preparing budgets to be proposed to the Legislature and the Board of Regents. He relies on his staff, of course, for support in this function. This was the era of the G. I. Bill which brought great numbers of returning veterans to the university. The Comptroller’s staff was deeply involved in servicing these young men and women as they sought to take advantage of the benefits of this legislation. Many of them married soon after they returned home and began families and housing had to be provided for them, all their educational cost were paid for them by the federal government. The university was due payment for all the services it provided these veterans. This required billing the government for each participant in the program. Records had to be kept which satisfied the scrutiny of government auditors. To complicate matter further, there was an influx of foreign students immediately after World War II, many of them from the Middle Eastern nations, who came to the university to learn about petroleum production and marketing. Separate and different accounting methods had to be followed for them.

As a new hire just out of business school I had the professional training for my new job, but I still needed the hands-on experience to become a responsible member of the team. My experience in the office as a part-time employee during my senior year was now helpful but left a
lot to be learned. The comptroller and his supervisors were good at rotating me through the various sections that made up the totality of the office. These included the monitoring of the financial transactions of the academic departments and schools as well as these of the non-academic units of the university, such as student housing, food services, and athletics. Investments and natural resources management were the responsibility of another office. So were the awarding of scholarships and fellowships. In each case, however, the Comptroller’s office would be called on for needed fiscal data. For example, the hundreds of students and programs established over many years by private donors are each separate accounting entities and must be recorded as such. This requires a whole parallel system of accounting.

It was during my years on the Comptrollers staff that I was introduced to the computer which was at the time in its most primitive state. The university had installed one of the earliest main frame computers in the state. It was a very large “punch card” system which required a staff of skilled attendants and a perfectly regulated environment. The equipment depended on for its operation on hundreds of vacuum tubes. Today two or three silicon chips have as much computer capacity as the room full of equipment we had. The six years I worked in the comptroller’s office - from 1947 to 1952- were an experience in accounting practice. They provided me an intimate insight into the financial structure of a great university. It did not, however, satisfy my longing for a vocation which was more consistent with a Christian ministry. When my next job opportunity came along in 1953 I was ready to consider it.

It was also these years that momentous events were occurring on the home front. Ruth completed her internship at Brackenridge Hospital and thereby fulfilled the requirements for registry as a professional dietitian. She also became a mother. Martha became our first born on May 13, 1948, and Elizabeth followed on November 9, 1949. We had a home built on Newman Drive in west Austin. We began a career of parenting as we began our own professional careers. Our family was growing as our careers were gaining momentum. Our lives had become stable and predictable, and we both felt that our careers were launched on paths which lead to successful lives. Little did we know that there would be a dramatic change of direction in our lives which would lead us into unknown waters.
One day in 1952 I received a telephone call from Reverend Carl Burkle, pastor of First Protestant Church in New Braunfels. This is a church of which I had been a member during my younger years and in which my spiritual life had been wakened and matured. Pastor Burkle asked whether he and Mr. Nowotny, President of the church council might come to Austin for a visit with Ruth and me. We were puzzled by the call of course, but we invited them to come. In the ensuing conversation the two men explained that they were looking for someone to serve as the administrator of the church. First Protestant had reached a membership of more than 2,200. There was only one pastor and a part-time clerk and the two were no longer able to meet the needs of a growing congregation. Rather than call an associate pastor, the council had decided to employ a qualified lay administrator and to divide the parish responsibilities between the two. Pastor Burkle would be the pastoral leader of the church and I would have responsibility, under the pastor’s supervision for all administrative function. Ruth and I thought about and discussed the proposal for several days. We both had secure positions which promised advancement in our chosen professions. Our income was adequate for a growing family. We had built a home in Austin and had begun to put down roots in that community. Everything considered there seemed to be no reason to make a change. On the other hand we liked the idea of living in New Braunfels. It offered good schools for our children and a healthy environment in which to grow up. I had always been drawn to the idea of a church – related vocation and had once considered becoming a minister. This seemed to be a natural step in this direction. Many other factors were considered but, in the end, the decision was made to move to New Braunfels.

The next seven years at first Protestant Church were happy and fulfilling ones for both Ruth and me and, I believe, for our children. We had taken a reduction in income but were able to cope with this aspect of our new life without too much difficulty.
Both Ruth and I were thrifty with money, and living in New Braunfels was less expensive than Austin. The family, which welcomed Carl in 1956, never suffered want which more money would have provided. Through the assistance of E.P Nowatny, who dealt in real estate, we were soon able to purchase a lovely home on Guenther Street which was in walking distance of two schools and also in walking distance of my parents who lived on nearby Academy street. Ruth was mostly preoccupied with caring for our young children but was also able to take a position as a dietitian in the recently opened Mckenna Hospital. She was the first registered dietitian in New Braunfels and as such, supervised the organization of Mckenna food service department.

As for me, I had to hit the ground running Pastor Burkle and I had agreed on a division of labor. As Pastor he was, of course, the leader of the team. He was responsible, ultimately, for everything that went on in the church. His focus, however, was on the spiritual well-being of the congregation. He planned and conducted worship services, conducted parish visits, organized the activities programs, conducted funerals, and marriages, conducted confirmation classes and orientation for adult new members, represented the church in the community and in the wider church, and worked with the church council in planning for the future of the church. He met and advised the various organizations of the church and the leaders of the Christian Education Department. He employed the church staff, such as maintenance men and choir director, and supervised their activities.

My role was primarily to provide support to the pastor. I had the specific responsibility of keeping the churches financial records. This included recording members contributions, paying bills, ordering supplies, making deposits, and other administrative functions. I had responsibility for publishing a monthly newsletter for the members and for printing programs and other materials needed for the operation of the parish. One opportunity that Pastor Burkle gave me which gave me much pleasure was to organize a men’s fellowship and to serve as its advisor. I am glad to say that during my first year at First Protestant this organization became quite large and very active. It did very important projects in the church and in the community. It even was recognized by the national church as a model for other churches to follow. The success of our men’s organization also brought me some honors and reinforced some thoughts I had long held about the importance of the laity in the ministry of the church. I was elected to the Board of the
national Churchmen’s Fellowship and, later, to the position of Assistant Moderator of the General Synod of the church. It also led me in time to request that I be commissioned a lay minister of the church.

The arrangement between Pastor Burkle and me worked out well because both parties were committed to making it work. It achieved the purpose of releasing the pastor to do what he wanted and was best at, that is, to be the spiritual guide and leader of the congregation. I, on the other hand, was quite content to give administrative and organizational support to his overall leadership role. During our seven year relationship there was never a time when the arrangement generated tensions between us.

The tempo of activity at the church increased dramatically as planning proceeded in a proposed enlargement of the church building. The project would more than double the size of the building to accommodate a rapidly growing membership and would provide much needed space for the administrative functions of the congregation. Pastor Burkle and the church council included me in the planning and design phases of the project, but my focus was primarily on the fund-raising effort as a support for the boards fund-raising committee.

The planning and construction of this project was our major preoccupation for more than three years. At the same time, Pastor Burkle and I worked together to strengthen the church generally. The men’s, women’s, and youth’s organizations were given strong support, and the Christian Education Program was revitalized. It was a period during which the church grew not only in numbers but also in spiritual depth and commitment. For me it was a time of contentment and personal fulfillment in a vocation I had long considered a calling. I knew that it was only a preparatory step in the direction of a goal as yet only dimly perceived. The goal, not yet fully defined but going back for its inspiration to the years working in a state mental hospital in Virginia during world War II, was to pursue a career in some kind of social service work helping people with special needs.

The year 1956 was an eventful one for the family and for the careers of both Ruth and me. It was the year that our family was complete when our son Carl was born on June 12. It was also the
year that the recently opened McKenna Hospital employed Ruth as its first fully qualified dietitian. She was in fact, the first registered dietitian in New Braunfels. Finally, it was the year that the Altenheim of our church in San Antonio was closed and was reopened as Eden Home for the Aged in New Braunfels. The latter event was to mark the beginning of a twenty-four year involvement in the field of services to the aging. Coincidentally, it was also the year the state of Texas (and other states) began to regulate the rapidly growing nursing home industry. The changing demographics of the post World War II years gave impetus to the proliferation of nursing homes. This growth was further accelerated by the scattering of families which, in the past, had provided care for the elderly members, and by the passage of the Medicare and Medicaid programs in the mid-1960’s. Eden Home was a part of this burgeoning movement. My education and experience, had equipped me perfectly to play a significant role in this rapidly developing new movement.

The old institution in San Antonio known as the “Altenheim” (German for “old peoples home”) was home to some twenty elderly homeless and mostly penniless people. The institution was run at the time by a minister of the church, Reverend Reinhold Maechtly, who was physically handicapped and visually impaired, and who with the aid of a sister, Hedwig, was able to perform the limited duties of superintendent. She was the matron of the facility. When the Eden Home was opened in New Braunfels, the two were installed in the new facility as the superintendent and director of nurses, respectively. Although the two struggled valiantly for several years to meet the challenge of their new roles, it would become obvious in this time that his handicaps were so great that he could not cope. During the first years that Eden Home was in New Braunfels I continued to be employed at First Protestant Church. I began, however, to be involved as a volunteer at the home. In 1958 the Treasurer of the Eden Home Board of Directors died suddenly while attending a church conference. I was asked to come on board as treasurer which was a volunteer position, and I served in this capacity for the next three years while still working at First Protestant. This gave me the opportunity to learn about all of Eden Home’s operation and to become acquainted with the increasingly complex state and Federal regulations pertaining to nursing homes. My education in administration and finance and my experience in institutional management gained during my CPS years stood me in good stead, I was prepared for the next step in my career when it arrived.
In 1959 the Eden Home Board decided to enlarge the Home’s capacity substantially by making use of funds available under the recently adopted Hill-Burton program of the Federal government. This program was intended to bring up to date the existing system of health care facilities in the country and to fill the vast need for such facilities which had developed since the second World War. The focus at first was to upgrade existing hospitals and to construct new ones. It was very quickly expanded, however, to fund the construction of nursing homes as a means of providing post-acute hospital care in less-expensive convalescent care facilities. These facilities were defined in the law as “skilled nursing facilities”. It was under this section of the law that Eden Home applied for financing of a proposed expansion project.

As Treasurer of the Board I was the point man in the negotiations for a Hill-Burton grant which was finally approved. The process of applying for and obtaining the grant, of designing the new building, and the construction phase took 2 ½ years and was finally completed in 1961.

The new project more than doubled the capacity of the Home, but it also added many new administrative challenges. Acceptance of the grant funds entailed knowledge of compliance with many regulations and standards which had not previously been applicable. Because of my role in negotiating the grant I had become thoroughly familiar with the new requirements. I had also been getting acquainted with the standards being set for nursing home licensure and operation by state regulatory agencies.

When the new building was opened in 1961, it had already become obvious that the superintendent of the Altenheim could not cope because of his physical and visual handicaps, with the demands of the new Eden Home at this point. The Eden Home Board decided to create two new positions and to divide between them, the duties which had formerly been performed by one person. There was to be an Administrator whose responsibility it would be to operate the facility and a chaplain who would look after the spiritual needs of the residents, employees, and
families. The former superintendent, who was an ordained minister, was offered the chaplaincy and I was offered the position of administrator. Thus, my happy relationship with Pastor Burkle at First Protestant Church came to an end and I embarked on a new and somewhat uncertain experience. My uneasiness was mitigated a bit however, by the fact that Ruth left her position at McKenna and came with me to Eden Home to be my partner in the new venture.

My first and continuing task in my new job was the recruitment, training, and deployment of personnel. The pool of available people with the experience and training capable of staffing our facility had largely been drained in staffing the newly opened McKenna Hospital. We at Eden Home had no choice but to hire raw recruits and train them on the job for the work that needed to be done. To facilitate this process, the operation of the home was departmentalized according to the functions to be performed with a capable supervisor for each department. Training manuals were written for each department, guidance for which was found in state and Federal regulations. A personnel system was established which defined the training and experience required from each position, the duties to be performed and established salary and wage scales.

The most critical challenge during the Home’s early years in New Braunfels was to raise the money needed to operate a much larger and more complex agency than had been the case with the Altenheim in San Antonio. To begin with, the systems of financing the two were entirely different. When an individual came to the Altenheim, he or she entered into a “life contract” with the Altenheim which agreed to provide lifetime care in exchange for a lump sum payment upon admission. This payment was usually a very nominal one and was based entirely upon the individual’s ability to pay. No one was ever refused admission because of his or her inability to pay. Further, the residents were expected to help as they were able, by working in the home. The home was dependent to a considerable extent on cash donations and contributions of goods and services. When the new home was opened in 1956 it inherited about a dozen “life contract” residents most of whom had already lived a number of years at the Altenheim and had long since used up their initial payments. Some were to live in Eden Home for many years more.

All of this changed dramatically when the new Eden Home opened. It had to have a reliable stream of income to cover vastly increased costs. Licensure by the state was now required and
regulations and standards had to be met. The number and qualifications of employees were prescribed on the basis of bed capacity and stringent fire and safety standards were enforced. Federal assistance was available to build and furnish physical plants, but none was available from either Federal or state sources to fund the cost of operating them. It was not until 1965 that Medicare and Medicaid legislation was enacted. These programs for the first time provided a stable source of income for Eden Home and other agencies like it. Until then the Home had to survive on such payments as its residents and patients could make. A schedule of fees for services was published but these fees were beyond the ability of many applicants to pay all or any part of the published fees. As a church-related non-profit agency, Eden Home has a moral obligation to serve the poor and needy as well as the more affluent members of society. It also had legal duties to do so. As a recipient of Hill-Burton funds the Home had to agree to provide a specified amount of charity service each year for fifteen years. More than this, Eden Home’s tax exemption status required it to provide a significant amount of uncompensated service to indigent persons who would otherwise have to look to the community for care.

Taking all of this into account, it is not surprising that the first five years of Eden Home’s existence were years of desperate struggle to raise the funds needed to keep the facility operational. There were many times when the well almost went dry and the situation appeared hopeless. We did survive, however, and the enactment of the Medicare and Medicaid programs in 1965 and 1966 finally began to mitigate the drought. Through my whole eight year tenure as administrator, however, I never lost sight of my personal goal which was to make Eden Home a model agency of its kind. The daily operation of the agency required continuous hands-on involvement on my part, but I was also very fortunate to find a number of very capable and dedicated people as departmental supervisors who took over the management of their departments with skill and dedication. My dietitian wife, Ruth, had my total confidence as food services director and relieved me almost completely of responsibility in that important department. The several directors of nursing, all registered nurses, who headed that department during my tenure were deeply committed to the care of the elderly and served Eden Home at considerable sacrifice in salary and benefits and their home lives. The maintenance department was headed by a retired captain of army engineers who had broad knowledge and skills in the mechanical and environmental infrastructure needs of medical institutions.
The most indispensable member of my management team was a young immigrant from Indonesia named Bernhard “Bennie” Harst. Bennie and his family came to the United States in the late 1950’s under the sponsorship of Carl and Della Burkle, Kenneth and Betty Triesch, and Ruth and me. They had been part of the ruling elite in Colonial Dutch Indonesia prior to World War II. After the war and the withdrawal of the Japanese occupiers, the indigenous people of Indonesia gained control of their country and the former Dutch Colonial governors and Dutch colonists generally no longer were welcome. Bennie’s family moved to Holland as did hundreds of thousands of other Dutch citizens from former Dutch Colonies around the world. So much so that the small country of Holland was soon overwhelmed by this mass of repatriated citizens. Bennie soon realized that his prospects in Holland were bleak and he and Nellie made the decision to migrate to America.

Bennie had business experience in Indonesia and was skilled in management and finance. His English-speaking ability was limited but adequate and he spoke four other languages. An affable personality enabled him to make friends quickly and to communicate effectively with others. His interaction with our Hispanic employees, of which we had many, was especially effective.

Bennie and I quickly formed a relationship in which the management functions were divided between us. Each of us focused on areas for which our strengths were best suited. He had oversight of personnel recruitment and training, admissions, and payrolls. I gave primary attention to accounting, fundraising, program development, regulation compliance issues, budgeting, and community relations. Ultimately, of course, as administrator, it was I who had to answer to the Board of Directors, but our arrangement worked well during the years we worked together and I never had a reason to question his judgment. It should also be said that this division of labors came about quite naturally as we learned to know each other and did not need to be spelled out in a formal way.

Bennie Harst’s contribution to whatever success I may have achieved in my career goes far beyond just being a good assistant administrator, important and helpful as that was. He gave me the time and space to develop ideas that I had which would improve Eden Home and the services
it was providing for our elderly residents and to involve myself in the broader fields of geriatrics and gerontology.

Over the years I initiated several projects at the home which were quite unique for the time. One of these was to organize a program for high school students designed to introduce these young people to the medical professions and vocation. Although primarily for girls, there were also a few boys who participated in the program. The girls were provided an attractive yellow uniform and were called “canaries”. The boys did not have distinctive uniforms. These young people worked at the home a few hours a day after school and were given the opportunity to work in the various departments. I am happy to say that a number went on to prepare for and to work in the medical field including my own daughter, Elizabeth.

Another project that I initiated and which at the time was a first in Texas and which has not been duplicated very often, was to bring a resident physician to Eden Home as our Medical Director. Dr. Elmer Whitcomb had devoted many years as a medical missionary who had directed mission hospitals in India and Africa. Upon retiring from the mission work he took a position as director of a mining company hospital in Arizona. In the mid-1950’s – 1960’s word came to me that he was interested in getting a part-time position in one of the church’s institutions. The idea came to me that Eden Home’s care of its patients might be enhanced by having a physician on campus. I presented my idea to the Board and it approved the position of Resident Medical Director. I offered the position to Dr. Whitcomb and soon thereafter he and Mrs. Whitcomb moved into an available cottage on the Eden Home campus.

The five years that Dr. Whitcomb served as Medical Director saw great improvement in the health care of our residents. Not only did their medical needs receive more consistent and comprehensive attention, but the Home’s relationships with the outside medical community were strengthened and the special needs of the geriatric patient became better understood. It was during these years that Eden Home sponsored a series of lectures on geriatric medicine to which members of the local medical community were invited.
Dr. Whitcomb also provided valuable input into the training of Eden Home employees, especially those who provided the hands-on care of our residents. He also advised administration on procedures and practices in the nursing and food service areas. His presence on a daily basis alone raised the quality of our services to a new level of professionalism. It was a highly successful experiment and we missed him when age and infirmity forced his retirement.

The continuing challenge to find qualified people to staff our wards led to two initiatives in which I was involved. The first was the creation of a chapter of Red Cross Volunteers or “Gray Ladies”. The Red Cross was invited to come to the Home and organize such a group. It turned out to be very popular with several dozen women signing up for volunteer service in the Home. After a while, though, our success in this area was our undoing. The local hospital recognized a good thing when it saw one and organized a unit to work at the hospital. Many of our volunteers, seeing the hospital as a more glamorous setting, transferred their membership to that unit. Although our unit continued to operate for a number of years, it finally succumbed to the loss of membership. The hospital unit is still in existence and is performing a valuable service for the hospital.

The second initiative was to establish a training program in New Braunfels for Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs). Both the hospital and Eden Home were hiring LVNs from a very small pool. The hospital, aside from being considered a more attractive place to work, also was able to pay higher wages. Eden Home faced a constant shortage of people in this critically important profession. To be licensed by the state, a home had to have specified numbers of LVNs on each shift as determined by the number of beds being licensed.

At least a partial solution to our problem was achieved when a program was negotiated by the superintendent of NBISD, Mr. Curt Schmidt, and the San Antonio Junior College, to offer an LVN program to be held in the evening. Under this program the college provided faculty and served as the certifying educational institution, the N.B. High School made available space for the academic part of the training, and Eden Home and the hospital were the venues for clinical training and experience. The program was very successful and a significant number of young people took the LVN exam and passed it. Again, the hospital was able to attract a majority of
these new LVNs into its service, but some came to work for Eden Home and the pressure on both institutions was lightened considerably.

Benefit came in 1966 not only to Eden Home but also to the whole community when the Home opened the first physical therapy facility in New Braunfels. Two years earlier, the Home had received a bequest of several hundred thousand dollars from Mr. And Mrs. Bihl in San Antonio. The bequest was conditioned on the money being used to construct a permanent building on our campus. After much thought and consultation with doctors and others in the medical community, I proposed to the Home Board that the money be used to construct an addition to the Home to house a rehabilitation center which would be open not only to Eden home residents and patients but to the entire community as well. The Board approved the proposal and the Bihl Center was born; but a building alone does not make a service. A team of professionals is also needed. Fortunately, the core of such a team was found at just the right time. Jack Rainbolt, a registered Physical Therapist, and his wife, a P.T.aide, were employed to organize and operate our new center. Jack was the first fully qualified Physical Therapist in New Braunfels and he continued to work at Eden Home for at least ten years. When he retired other rehab facilities had been organized but our center was the first. By that time we had added other services, such as occupational and speech and hearing therapies, through agreements with nearby colleges and universities.

The enactment of Medicare in 1965 and Medicaid the following year presented both opportunity and challenge. The opportunity was the most clear-cut and its effect more immediate. These two programs, Medicare, for those sixty-five years old and older and Medicaid for the indigent population offered steady and predictable revenues for nursing homes which could qualify. In the beginning Medicare was primarily a convalescent service available for patients who had been hospitalized for acute illness or surgery and who could be cared for in a less intensive and less expensive setting. Medicaid was a program for all ages who needed care for chronic conditions and who lacked financial resources to pay for it. Most of our Medicaid patients were elderly and this program rapidly evolved into one that provided continuum of care for frail and handicapped elderly people. Medicare is an “entitlement program”. Anyone who is receiving Social Security benefits is eligible or “entitled” to receive Medicare benefits. It is funded through a special
FICA tax and premiums paid by the beneficiary. Medicaid is a “needs” program. It must be applied for and one must show that he does not have the resources to pay for medical care. It is funded through appropriations from both Federal and state legislatures and on which it is entirely dependent. It can be changed, and often is, in any session of the state legislature or the national Congress.

Eden home faced a decision as it considered participation in these two programs. It could be all Medicare, all Medicaid, or a mix of the two. Medicare is reimbursed at a higher rate than Medicaid for the cost of care provided, but it is much more strictly regulated. It requires more costly professional staffs and must provide services that Medicaid does not. Medicare will pay for only a limited number of days of care whereas Medicaid has no limit in the length of care provided. Medicare’s recording and reporting requirements are much stricter than are those of Medicaid. Taking all of these factors into account, plus the fact that our staffing pattern as it had evolved over the years could most easily be adapted to comply with the requirements of the Medicaid program, it was decided to qualify for participation only in that program. Our challenge was to maintain a mix of Medicaid and private pay patients which would provide a revenue flow sufficient to pay the bills and the payrolls. In time, pressure from rapidly-growing investor-owned nursing homes made a review of this policy necessary, but during my tenure as administrator, Medicare was not a financial resource for Eden Home.

During the last three or four years of my tenure, the Home settled down into a fairly smooth operation. It routinely got good grades on state inspections and its superior reputation in the community and the state was being recognized. Financing of operations was adequate but not plentiful, due in most part to our inability to maintain an optimum Medicaid private pay mix in our admissions. As more privately-owned nursing homes came on line some declined “Medicaid” patients in favor of more profitable private-pay patients. This meant that many Medicaid patients were diverted to Eden Home. As a non-profit, church-related agency, we found it very difficult to turn these people away. As a result, our patient load tilted more and more toward Medicaid and away from more profitable private-pay patients. We were often the agency of last resort for individuals who were not admitted by other nursing homes. The fact
that these were often ones who were sicker and required more care further compounded the problem.

Looking back on these years, I have at least two regrets. The first is that there never was enough money to provide adequate wages and benefits for employees. All I can say is that I am deeply grateful that there were people who were willing to work at Eden Home despite the personal sacrifices they made. I remember them with affection and offer them my belated thanks.

The second regret also is related to the paucity of money with which I had to contend. Although the Home had been in operation almost fifteen years when I left, there had never been a surplus of money with which to fund plant depreciation, renovations, major maintenance and replacements and expansion of the facility. Regrettably it remained for future administrations to deal with these inevitable problems. I comfort myself with the fact that I presided over the transition of an institution still functioning on a very primitive basis to one which was fully organized and structured and ready to meet the needs of frail, elderly people in a new age of social economic and demographic change.
During my final years at Eden Home I became more and more involved in the growing field, state wide and nationally of the institutional care of the elderly especially in church-related and other philanthropically-sponsored facilities. This service, as it became more sophisticated and recognized as a distinct discipline, was being referred to as geriatrics. My education in government and business and the experience I had bringing Eden home into the new world of publicly- financed care of the elderly qualified me to take a leadership role in the development of this new discipline. I was drawn into a fledgling organization called the Texas Association of Homes for the Aging which was organized to provide legal, regulatory, and legislative support, public relations, and educational and training opportunities to its non-profit members of which there were about 150 in Texas. Through the 1960s the association had only a few dozen members and was run by volunteer leader, most of whom were also administrators of member homes. There was no central office, no organized program, and no planned membership recruitment effort. While the association services were much needed by its members homes as they endeavored to meet the challenges of the new order, they association was simply not structured to provide those services.

When I was elected president of the association in 1966, I proposed that a central office be established with a full-time Executive Director. I laid out a plan for financing the office and its activities. The plan called for the payment of dues by each member home based on its bed capacity. The association adopted the plan but with misgiving about its chance of success. The few homes that were members would not be able to carry the load. To make it work other homes had to be persuaded to join, and that would happen only if they received benefits worth their investment.

In 1967 the association decided to establish a central office with a full-time Executive Director. It immediately faced two challenges. The first challenge was to find a director with the qualifications needed for the job and who was foolish enough to undertake it. The odds against
success were daunting and no reasonable person would be expected to risk his family’s financial security on such a shaky venture. When I was offered the position my reaction was to reject it out of hand. The thought of moving away from New Braunfels where we had expected to live the reminder of our days, where our daughters had gone through grade and high schools, and where our son was still in school, and where we had many friends was one that we simply could not entertain. Ruth and I spent many hours considering the matter, and I consulted at length with the officers of the association, at the end, I agreed to take on the job with certain conditions. The office would have to be located within the commuting distance of New Braunfels so we would not have to move. My commitment would be for a period of five years during which the association would support me in an aggressive campaign to make the organization viable. The members of the association pledged themselves collectively and individually to provide the funds needed to pay my salary and the expenses of the office.

By the end of 1969 the decision to establish a central office for TAHA was final and I had agreed to operate it. The next steps were to choose a location for the office and to find suitable housing for it. Choosing a location was not difficult. As a state wide association of member facilities many of its concerns would require interaction with the state government and the several state agencies which had regulatory powers and responsibilities with respect to nursing homes. The logical choice for the location was Austin, the state capital. This would require a round-trip commute for me of at least a hundred miles, but Ruth and I would live with that. Since my activities would involve travel to all parts of the state as I visited member agencies and those we wanted to become members, I could begin many trips from New Braunfels as well from Austin.

Finding housing for the office was another matter. With our limited resources prospects looked bleak. At this point we had the good fortune to enter into a good relationship with another much larger and more powerful group, the Texas Hospital Association. At the suggestion of one of my members who also operated a small hospital and was a member of the hospital association, I consulted with Ray Hurst, CEO of THA and put before him our needs and our aspirations. I argued that hospitals and nursing homes, in the new world of Medicare and Medicaid, would find it mutually beneficial to work together on many issues which affected both of them. Ray was receptive to this argument and had, in fact, had discussions along this line with his own
members. The fact that TAHA was exclusively for non-profit agencies was no problem. This was before the advent of the privately-owned chains of hospitals and most of his members were community-based public hospitals. The Philosophies and missions of the two associations were similar.

What developed was a kind of partnership with TAHA very much the junior partner. However, the arrangement gave TAHA an immediate entry to the legislative and regulatory scene in Austin. THA provided, TAHA a small two-room suite in their headquarters building on Highway 290-east, and I worked out of those two rooms for the five years that I was Executive Director of the association. My office came fully furnished and all I had to do to make it functional was to have the telephone connected and purchase stationary and other office supplies. There was only one thing lacking. I realized that I would have to be away from the office much of the time visiting homes throughout the state and meeting with government officials and regulatory people. There was clerical work, routine correspondence, and other details to be taken care of, and telephone calls to be answered. Someone needed to be in the office full-time. Once again my lucky star beamed its rays on me. The wife of the administrator of one of my member homes, which was located in Austin, offered to be my secretary on a temporary basis. The “temporary” soon became permanent. She became in time my colleague and valued coworker. She was a skilled office worker and had an amiable disposition. Through her husband’s involvement in TAHA she had already become acquainted with many people in TAHA and had an understanding of what the association was all about. What she did not know she learned very quickly. I trusted her even to discuss with members their problems and concerns with her when I was away. She worked with me the full five years of my tenure and I can truly say that, except for her my life would have been more difficult and my efforts less effective.

With the office on track and rolling the time had come to do some serious thinking about the purposes and goals, immediate and long term, of the Association and about plans to achieve those goals. The long term purpose of TAHA was to be an advocate for the non-profit segment of the nursing home and retirement industry in Texas and to provide support for its members as they sought to deal with the problems and issues they faced in a rapidly-evolving new environment. For that purpose to be achieved, however several other things had to happen. The
first of these was to strengthen the organization through the recruitment of new members. We had fewer than three dozen members at the time out of approximately 150 eligible homes in the state. To be able to speak for a majority of non-profit homes in Texas we would have to more than double our membership. Also, we desperately needed the income additional members would bring to a free-standing independent association. Being subsidized by THA was needed to get us started and was welcomed with gratitude but we did not want to rely on that help indefinitely.

To approach the member recruitment I decided to divide the state into seven regions and have the TAHA members in each region organize themselves into chapters. In this way there were organized chapters of members in every part of the state although some of them had no more than three or four members at first. The chapters chair person was the point person for the association in his or her region and the one who took the initiative in recruiting members in the region. The chapters met on a regular basis and I would usually meet with them. In addition to being the foot soldiers in membership recruitment, the chapters were also very useful as a communication network on which local concerns could quickly be transmitted to me and, conversely, I could very rapidly call on the members throughout the state when their support was needed to promote the broader concerns of the association before the legislature and regulatory agencies. As the association grew, this chapter structure became an increasingly useful tool in achieving the goals of the association. There was a problem which I had to contend early on. The Texas Nursing Home Association representing primarily the privately-owned homes in the state, but which was open to all nursing homes, had admitted a number of non-profit homes, into its membership. The TNHA focused on state reimbursements for Medicare patients and regulation compliance issues. Other issues such as education and training of personal and quality of care were not high on its agenda, and it had no interest at all in protecting the tax exempt status of the non-profits. In time as TAHA became stronger and more effective, most of these non-profit agencies came to recognize that TAHA represented their interests more fully than did TNHA.

The recruitment of new members continued to be a major concern throughout my five-year tenure but I am glad to say that the membership of TAHA more than doubled during that period. This was a time of much building of new homes and enlarging old ones. The new homes almost in every case would become members when they opened. Old homes which had not previously
joined began to see benefits of membership which justified the dues. The boom in the building of new non-profit homes brought the tax issue to the attention of taxing authorities. The exempt status of a few homes was challenged and the Association was able to help them defend their exemptions. To advise us on this and other legal issues we had retained as our legal counsel the same attorney retained by the Texas Hospital Association. As counsel for THA he had already handled tax exemption cases involving non-profit hospitals. He was especially competent in this field of law and TAHA was fortunate to have had his competence and experience available to us. Several exemption challenges were raised during my tenure and all but one were settled out of court. The one that was litigated established criteria for tax exemption which are still in effect. TAHA’s successful involvement in these cases convinced a number of former TNHA members that their interests would be best served by TAHA.

Other steps were taken during the early months to bind the homes and their board members, administrators and staff into loyal, enthusiastic, and effective teams. Committees were established to deal with the various aspects of the association’s mission. Literature was prepared for distribution to members, non-members, and the public. Seminars and conferences were planned and conducted. All of these required my involvement and leadership. I had resolved at the outset to visit every member home during the first year and I was able to accomplish this. I also planned and conducted in each of the five years of my tenure a retreat for senior staff personnel of member facilities. This event was always held at Mo-Ranch, a beautiful retreat center owned by the Presbyterian Church near Kerrville, Texas. This event, which had bath recreational and educational elements, did much to strengthen the ties of fellowship and friendship.

Increasing the membership of the Association was important because it made the organization more secure financially. It also made the association more credible as the voice of non-profit homes. I could hardly claim to speak for non-profit facilities when only one in five homes in the state belonged to TAHA. It was a necessary first step in the development of the organization. It made possible the creation of an infrastructure through which the mission of the association and its member agencies could be accomplished.
The mission of the association, as I viewed it, was three-fold: (1) advocacy, (2) education and training, and (3) public relations. The last component, that is, enhancing the public’s perception of nursing homes, would follow naturally, I believed, if we were successful in accomplishing the first two. My efforts therefore, were focused on them.

The purpose of an advocacy program, commonly called lobbying, is to influence decision makers in government to act in ways that are consonant with the interests the advocate represents. To be successful an advocate must have two things, access and credibility. My major targets of TAHA’s advocacies efforts were the Texas Legislature and the two state agencies which had regulatory powers in nursing homes: The Texas Department of Welfare and the Texas Department of Health. The counterpart agencies of the federal government also impacted our Texas homes, but advocacy at that level was left to the American Association of Homes for the Aged (AAHA) of which TAHA was an affiliate and which our association gave support. Two other entities of government, the governor and the courts, required a lesson level of advocacy, not because they were not important but because TAHA’s involvement with them was not as frequent.

At the outset I had an academic knowledge of the legislature’s process and organization which I had learned as a government major at U.T. I knew what the leadership of the legislature consisted of and what committees had jurisdictions over certain issues. I knew in general how the legislature functioned and as an administrative assistant to a senator during one session of the legislator I had gained some knowledge of the legislative process. Those experiences dated back more than twenty-five years and the legislature I faced was composed of people whom I did not know. My contacts with the legislature in more recent years had been infrequent. Fortunately, I had someone on whom I could call for help. Our legal counsel, Dean Davis, who was also the legal counsel and lobbyist for the hospital association, had developed over the year, a network of contacts in the legislature which was available to us. Through his help many doors were opened to us. Also, some issues in which TAHA was interested overlapped ones in which the hospital association had interest and Dean was able to represent both associations at the same time. Both associations benefited from the influence a larger constituency could bring to bear on an issue. Most important to the success of our advocacy activities, however, was the strength of our
grass roots support. Many of our member homes were old, established institutions and were well-known and highly regarded in their communities. The administrator and board members of these institutions were prominent members of their community who were active in civic affairs and in politics. Legislators were likely to know them and to have received their political support. The visit of a group of professionals and business men from a legislator’s district was almost always given a warm welcome and an attentive ear.

Essential as access to decision makers is an advocacy program it is only the first step. The second and an equally important one are to gain the trust and confidence of legislators and regulators. To accomplish this I framed TAHA’s advocacy as being for the well-being of the frail and chronically ill residents of nursing homes. This raised the level of discourse on issues that concerned us from that of special interest to one of general welfare. My goal was not only to gain the confidence of decision makers and the public at large but also to establish a reputation as a reliable and objective resource on matters relating to the care and treatment of the elderly population of Texas. How this might be accomplished requires a brief survey of the status of the nursing home industry in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

The end of World War II in the mid-1940’s left immense demographic and sociological change in its wake, in the world, in the United States and in Texas. A whole new dynamic was generated by the G.J Bill and other legislation designed to help returning veterans reintegrate into a society they had left behind nearly five years earlier. During those five years the predominately rural, agricultural society in which the veterans of the war had grown up, had been replaced by a society in which industry and manufacturing had become the dominant economic and societal driving forces. These changes were basic and for-reaching and nowhere more so than in the way society provided for its elderly members. Before the war the care of the elderly in our society was largely a familial and a local community responsibility. Typically, grandparents were cared for by someone from the next generation, usually an unmarried daughter, and very often soon after one of the grandparents died. Sometimes a married child and his or her spouse would take a parent into their home. If neither of these options was available the older person, usually an older man, might go to a “poor house” or “poor farm” provided by the community if there was one. Of course, people with financial resources had more options but such people were a relatively small
number and may be ignored in an overview of this issue.

The scenarios described above all have social consequences, most of them negative. A daughter caring for an aged and infirm parent was almost the norm in pre World War II society. Couples in rural America were likely to have large families. My own grandparents had fourteen children, twelve of whom live to adulthood. An un-married daughter who became the caregiver for her aged parents may have suffered the ultimate irony of having had to help raise her youngest siblings and then not have the support of her own children in her own old age.

The second option had its own set of consequences. An elderly parent with handicaps and or chronic diseases in the home of a married child and his or her spouse who also had minor children was a prescription for family chaos. Normal family life was disrupted and tensions and conflicts were generated. The parents were constantly torn between the needs of the older person and the needs of the children. Arguments over life styles in a three generation household were inevitable. Scars left from such arguments took long to heal if they ever did, and often left members of the family with feelings of guilt, alienation, and discord between generations.

The ten million young men who began leaving in 1941 to fight in World War II returned in 1946 to a country in which vast demographic and societal changes had occurred during their absence. The war had accelerated the transformation of the country from a largely rural agricultural society into a fully industrialized one. Mass production industries which had turned out vast quantities of war materiel were quickly converted into the production of consumer goods. Millions of women who had comprised most of the workforce in factories and other war–related occupations discovered that they could do jobs which were done formally only by men and they were reluctant to return to their former roles as domestic partner to their husbands. Veterans went to schools to learn professions and trades and many found jobs far away from their family homes. The absence of so many young men for five years created a populations deficit which was quickly replaced on their return by the “baby boom generation”. The close-knit family in which the elderly members were cared for by their children was a casualty of the war never to be retrieved. Government loan programs enabled millions of young couples to purchase their first homes. This created a vast industry in the construction of small homes in which there was no
room for an elderly parent. To pay for these houses, furnishings, and appliances that were needed, the two income family became the norm. This left no one in the home to care for an older and possibly disabled or chronically ill older member.

Scholars have done extensive research on and written hundreds of books about the societal, demographic, and institutional changes that occurred in the United States during the quarter century that followed the ending of World War II. One exemption to this spate of scholarly attention, however, was the plight of the millions of elderly people in our population for whom even the meager care that society had formerly provided was even less available.

The passage of the Hill-Burton Act in the mid-1950 was an attempt by the federal government to deal with these new circumstances were intended originally to provide funding for the rehabilitation of old hospitals and the construction of new ones. The legislation was soon modified to allow the use of Hill-Burton funds for the construction of skilled nursing facilities. Only public and not for profit institutions were eligible for grants from these funds. The concept of the SNF was that patients with acute medical conditions or recovering from surgical procedures would be transferred to an SNF as soon as the patient reached the convalescent stage of his recovery. The SNF would provide a high level of nursing care but would do so at a much lower cost than in a hospital. The new facility thus created soon became referred to as a “nursing home”, and it would in time, broaden its services to include the care of the chronically ill elderly.

To make this new level of care function a vast new body of regulations and standards was needed. The agencies designated to promulgate these regulations and standards and to enforce them Medicare, the Department of Health and Welfare. It was a daunting assignment. Where were the experience and the knowledge to which they could go for advice and guidance? Certainly not in the many “mom and pop” homes which had sprung up all over the county in the hope of getting rich quick. They were managed by their private owner, many of whom had only high school education if that much and had no experience or training in the operation of a medical facility. What they soon found was that there were many facilities in Texas, under the auspices of churches and other non-profit and entities, which, collectively, comprised a reservoir of resources on which they could draw. Most of these facilities were committed to provide care
for the well elderly who were frail and dependant and were not primarily engaged in providing medical care. What they did have were years of management experience and, very often, university education in the caring professions such as social work and the ministry and in such management skills as administration, finance, and personnel. Many administrators had had successful professional or business careers and the board members of these institutions were prominent members of the communities in which they were located. They would have no difficulty incorporating a skilled nursing component into their service programs. To make a long story short, TAHA, its members, and I as their spokesmen were deeply involved in creating the regulatory structure of the nursing home industry in its early days. There were inevitable tensions between us and the public officials with whom we dealt and political pressures sometimes trumped outcomes that we would have preferred, but we prevailed more often than we lost. What we never lost was their respect and their willingness to hear our side of any issue. This is proven by the fact that I and persons from TAHA’s members homes were often asked to sit on study and review committees considering important issues in the field. This was demonstrated most forcefully when I was appointed later to chair a special committee on nursing home affairs at a time when the industry was in serious trouble and a complete review of the regulatory structure was needed to keep it from collapsing. The legislative issue that was always on our agenda was money. Our argument was that if the state wanted quality care for its elderly population, adequate funding needed to be provided. We favored high standards in the nursing homes, but they could not be provided if their costs were not funded. The legislator faced with money demands and limited revenues found it easier, politically, to underfund the care of the poor elderly of the state than some others needs which had powerful constituencies backing them, Medicaid is a federal-state program proving health care services to the very poor. It is funded with contributions from both levels of government. Formulas in the law are used to determine the percentage of the total being provided by the federal government and that to be provided by the state legislatures. If the legislators do not appropriate all of their share the federal cuts its portion too. During the years immediately following enactment of Medicaid, Texas and many other states failed to appropriate their share of their Medicaid funding. Many of the patients in nursing homes are there as Medicaid clients, more than half of the Medicaid load of many nursing homes were Medicaid approved. Nursing homes in Texas were faced with ever more costly standards
and regulation while they were getting less and less payment for the care of their Medicaid patients.

During the decade from 1965 when medicine was enacted until 1975 the situation steadily worsened. The consequences were predictable and severe. Many nursing homes particularly the investors own ones and the non-profit to a lesser degree ran into financial difficulties. Many homes, had been built recently and were heavily in debt, owners had expected to be paid in full for caring for the state Medicaid patients, and had calculated that the profits of their operations would make their mortgage payments, when full reimbursement was not forthcoming; they were faced with financial ruin. Non-profit homes fared a little better. Many of them had networks of contributors developed in times before Medicare and Medicaid. Some had endowments created by bequests and larger gifts which produced revenue from investments. Unfortunately, when government sent the message it was taking over the care of the poor elderly, donors to the non-profit homes began to reduce their contributions or to withhold them entirely in the belief that they were no longer needed. In these circumstances, the homes, mostly the privately-owned ones began to engage in practices to reduce costs which lead inevitably to deterioration in the quality of care. By 1975 the conditions in the homes became so bad that the public became outraged and demanded that changes be made.

It was in response to this that public demand for changes in the operation nursing homes that the Texas Department of Health, which had regulatory jurisdiction at, the time over the operation of nursing, established the Committee on Nursing Home Affairs. This committee was made up of twenty—one members representing the disciplines and interests involved in the operation of nursing homes, and public members. Its charge was to review regulations and statutes pertaining to the field and to suggest ways in which the regulatory structure could be made more effective. I was appointed to the committee as an administrator (I was by that time the CEO of Morning Side Manor in the San Antonio next chapter). I was also asked to serve as chairmen, which I did for three years.

The reversal of the dismal state of the nursing home industry during those three years was due in significant part to the work of this committee. I have a letter from the commissioner
commending me for my leadership in the committee. I mention this only to illustrate the degree of confidence and trust that officials had in TAHA and in me as its spokesman. To be sure, not all my contacts with the legislators and regulators produced actions or decisions that we wanted and acceptable compromises were achieved on many issues. Never did I encounter an unwillingness to hear our side of the story. My success as an advocate for TAHA and for the elderly people of Texas may be judged on the basis of the influential and sophisticated organization that TAHAAH (later THASA) has become.

My next great challenge was one that faced all nursing homes, proprietary and non-profit. It was to improve the quality of care of homes by making available opportunities for the training of caregivers and the education of managers. As I said earlier, the quality of care in the decade from 1965 to 1975 had steadily deteriorated until it could only be described as deplorable. In fact, it had fallen so low that the public outcry became loud and vehement, public officials responded by promulgating higher standards and trying to enforce then but laws and regulations do not provide care -people do, and there were simply not enough qualified caregivers to provide the level of care that the standards demanded. The obvious response to this problem was to create a training program which would provide caregivers with the skills, attitudes, and motivations to do this important work. The vocations which were critical were the hands-on employees – licensed vocational nurses and nursing assistants or aides. TAHA was able to make a significant contribution to the resolution to this problem. The administrators of TAHA member’s homes included individuals with university education in fields which are relevant to the operation of nursing homes such as, social work, medicine, institutional management, and the ministry. Among them, to, were people with training and experience in education. Those resources were tapped to creat a program of training for LVN’s and nurses aides. The medium chosen for the implementation of this program was the junior college. A few of the colleges had already recognized the need for such training and had begun to offer courses that were helpful. One with the most complete curriculum was McClennan Junior College in Waco where professor Wesley Wiley Rogers had given leadership to the program. Using MCC as a model, a universal curriculum was devised and was offered to junior colleges throughout the state. Within a very short time they were making available comprehensive training programs for LVN’s and nurses
aides. The input and support that TAHA was able to give this movement was extremely important to its rapid growth.

In addition to a skilled and caring staff, a nursing home must have a competent administrator. Soon after the enactment of Medicare and Medicaid laws, the legislature required the licensing of administrators. To be licensed one had to pass a written examination. Most individuals running nursing homes at the time were not able to pass the examination without special education in the prescribed subjects. A few universities had programs in hospital administration but they were at the graduate level and were of no use to people whose highest educational achievement was high school graduation or less. Administrators of non-profit homes in most cases could manage the exams with a minimum of additional study, but hundreds of administrators of small prosperity homes needed specific and intensive training.

To meet this need, the networks of junior colleges in the state once more were our salvation, and again McClannan Junior College and Professor Rogers provided the model. A few other junior colleges had by then recognized the need for this kind of training and had to begin to offer pertinent courses, but thus far no comprehensive program of academic and clinical training had been provided.

By this time the Texas Board of Licensure for Nursing Home Administrators had been created by the state legislature (I had served on an advisory committee which provided the legislature with suggestions for provisions to be included in legislation which established the Licensing Board). The board was in the throes of formulating qualifications and standards for administrators. It was faced with the fact that even the weakest standards could not be met by many people running nursing homes, especially the “mom and pop” homes. Administrators of non-profit homes were generally well-educated and could pass the licensure exams with very little additional preparation. I was licensed without taking the exam. It was clear training at the most elementary level was needed and the need was urgent.

To address this need the board appointed a committee to identify and evaluate existing training programs and to enhance these programs and others to be established which would provide
beginning level training for persons with only a high school education. The committee consisted of educators, public officials, representatives of the two nursing homes associations, and prominent public figures with special interest in the welfare of the elderly. TAHA was represented by its president Elmer Luckenbach, and me. Dean James Summers of McClannan Junior College chaired the committee and he and Professor Wesley Rogers were invaluable recourses on whose expertise and experience the committee drew for guidance in its deliberations.

Once more the junior colleges of the state were identified as the appropriate agencies to implement a program of nursing home administrators at the entry level. A unified course was outlined and was offered to the junior colleges throughout the state. The focus of the course was on the standards and qualifications required for licensure. To make sure, however, that the essential material is covered in all venues, a standard text book is required. No such text book existed at the outset, and so one had to be produced, Professor Rogers undertook to write such a textbook, and in remarkably a short time his General Administration in the Nursing Home, was completed and published. While it was intended to be only an interim resource until more thorough books on the subject were written and made available for classroom use, it continued for a number of years to be the primary teaching resource, to pass the licensure examinations.

The challenge of the moment had been to enable the operators of the “mom and pop” homes to gain enough knowledge to pass the licensure exam. At the same time it was realized, especially by the non-profit segment of the industry, that the nursing home of the future would be a larger and more complex organization. Such organizations would require a more knowledgeable and professional management. In response, some colleges and universities had already begun to offer undergraduate courses in nursing home administration. In the University of Texas at Austin and Trinity University in San Antonio, both of which offered programs in hospitals administration, simply modified those programs to include courses specific to the administration of nursing homes. The first school to offer a graduate level course was North Texas State University in Denton where Dr. Hiram Friedsam, Dr. Cora Martin, and Dr. Herbert Shore initiated the program. TAHA worked closely with these three. Dr. Shore, in fact was a member of the organization as the executive director of the Dallas Home for Jewish Aged, I was Adjunct
Professor of NTSU for two years while I monitored a federal grant program made to the university.

The 1970’s and 1980’s saw the proliferation of corporate nursing home chains in which local administrators were employees answerable to a corporate management hierarchy. Administrators of individuals still had to meet state licensing requirements but, as part of huge corporate enterprises, they had to have knowledge and expertise in areas which go far beyond those required for licensing. The administrator with a graduate degree became the norm rather than the exception. Many graduate schools now offer extensive programs in what has become a recognized profession. This has evolved however, from, pioneering work done in 1960’s and early 1970’s in which TAHA was a prominent participant.

Not all of TAHA’s activities were on such a grand scale, however. Much time was devoted to routine organizational matters. There was a constant stream of enquiries to which responses had to be made by telephone or by letter “the old fashion way”. Planning and conducting conferences, educational events, consultations’, and membership promotions were constantly on the agenda. Analyzing new statutes and regulations and advising administrators on their impact on member homes were high priority concerns. Visits to groups of homes, sometimes in faraway places, were needed to give administrators opportunity to voice concerns on issues affecting their agencies. Meeting with public officials to discuss member homes and the aging public in general made TAHA a participant in a broad effort to improve the welfare of elder people. In furtherance of this latter concern, I found myself involved, more and more in boards and commissions, public and private, devoted to identifying problems faced by older people and to finding solutions to these problems.

Two annual events which I planned and conducted were the annual meeting of TAHA and a retreat which combined fun and education. The annual meetings were held at venues throughout the state and were hosted by the local chapters. Although some educational events were scheduled at these meeting, the focus was on the business and organizational needs of the association. Officers were elected, reports were heard, budgets were adopted and dues levels were established, policy issues were discussed and decided, and plans for the future were
developed. They were also occasions for the exchange of ideas and experiences. At first they were attended primarily by administrators, but others in leadership roles were later encouraged to attend.

The second all-association event was the annual retreat. During my five year tenure this event was always held at MO-Ranch, a beautiful conference center near Kerrville, Texas. It is owned by the Presbyterian Church and is ideal for gatherings of not more than 250 people. Housing was completed and an excellent kitchen provided a variety of tasty foods. Recreational facilities included: tennis, volleyball, and horse shoe courts, a swimming pool, and hiking paths. There is also a very pretty little chapel for private meditation on the premises, and group worship was held on a hillside overlooking a scenic valley. MO-Ranch was perfect for meditation and reflection for strengthening relationships, and for building solidarity. An educational component was usually offered, and briefings on current issues were presented, but the emphasis was on individual relaxation and renewal. For strengthening of relationship and building solidarity MO-Ranch was the ideal venue.

The event having the greatest significance for the future development of services for the elderly, which I was privileged to attend was the 1971 White House Conference on Aging. This conference was held in Washington D.C. from November the 23 through December 2, 1971, but it was actually a three year project which include a year of preplanned and preparation and “a year for follow-through on recommendations and for evaluation of resulting action.” The conference was authorized by an act of congress and was actually called by President Richard Nixon. The task of the conference and the words of the authorizing resolution were “to develop recommendation for further research and action in the field of aging.” Its deliberations were to be “directed toward bringing about substantial changes in society’s perception and treatment of its older population.”

There had been two prior attempts to deal with this social problem, “The National Conference on Aging in 1950 and The First White House Conference on Aging,” in 1961, but neither one of these had the same scope nor the same degree of planning an organization as did the 1971. The 1971 Conference was also the first such event held after the enactment of Medicare and
Medicaid and was the first serious effort to evaluate the impact of these two programs of the elderly population.

The structure of the conference was designed to include a broad representation of practitioners, for profit and non-profit service providers, government officials, professionals, academicians, and the public at large. Approximately one half of 3,600 accredited delegates were appointed by the governors of the several state. I was one of these, appointed by the governor of Texas and 537 were appointed by the president as delegates at large. 737 delegates were appointed by interested national organizations. Approximately 600 delegates included conference planners, youth delegates, state agency on aging representatives, and office of economic opportunity advisory committee members. In addition to the voting members a large number of guests and observers were invited.

Voting delegates were assigned to subject area sections. The sections were further divided into numerous sub-sections so that none would have more than 40 delegates. Because of my special interest in housing for the elderly, I was assigned to the section dealing with that subject area. The sub-sections would meet together to hear addresses by recognized experts in housing. At other times they would meet separately to pursue their own discussions and to formulate recommendations which would then be passed on to the section secretariat. The sub-section recommendations were then collated by the secretariat into a whole section recommendation. The final product was finally presented to the assembled section for approval, rejection, or approved with amendments. The reports from all fourteen subject areas as finally adopted are reported in the two-volume Final Report toward a National Policy on Aging. Other White House Conferences on Aging have been held since the one in 1971, but I think it is safe to say that the 1971 conference report has been used by more policy makers in the field of services to the aged than any other source. While my role in this history-making event was relatively small, I feel greatly privileged to have had a part in it. What was most gratifying to me was that TAHA had established a reputation for credibility and was held in such a high regard that the governor chose me to be one of the 122 delegates to the conference that he appointed.
My five year commitment to TAHA passed very quickly and when 1974 appeared on the calendar, I began to think about bringing my tenure at TAHA to a close. I realized that my next employment would probably be my last before retirement. The children were all through college by this time and had embarked on careers which promised to be successful. The financing of retirement was another matter, however. For Ruth and me to be reasonably secure in our later years; my final years of employment had to be ones of higher income, than I had been receiving. Fortunately, an opportunity came at just the right time to satisfy this requirement and which would allow me to finish my career on a high rate.

As I reflect on my experience as Executive Director of TAHA, it is gratifying to be able to say “mission accomplished.” I took a group of agencies without a common direction and purpose and formed it into a cohesive and effective body able to articulate common interest and to advocate this interest with clarity and authority. When I left the office, membership in the association had more than tripled and represented a majority of the eligible agencies. Finances of the association were adequate to meet cost of operate ration and to provide a salary to my successor which would be competitive in the field. An organizational structure had been put in place which with updating over the years and modifications required as the association grew, is still in use today. A foundation had been built on which the association could expand to cope with more sophisticated issues and more complex circumstances.

Most important I left to my successor an organization with a reputation for honesty and integrity and as a trust worthy resource on issues relating to the services for the elderly.
Morningside Manor
1974-1978

When an invitation came in the fall of 1973 from the board of directors of Morningside Manor in San Antonio (later renamed Morningside Ministries) to be interviewed for the position of president and CEO of that institution, it could not have been timelier. Having already decided, after having completed my five-year commitment to TAHA, to seek an administrative position in a major institution which could offer a higher salary and benefits, the position at Morningside seemed just right for me. When the interview was followed by an offer of the position and after consulting with Ruth, it was quickly accepted to begin on January 1, 1974.

Morningside Manor, in 1973, had been in operation for only 15 years, but it had already earned a reputation for the high quality of service it provided for its elderly residents and patients. My two predecessors, Jerry Smart and Richard Blevins, were both astute and capable managers. Morningside, unlike Eden Home years earlier, was a well organized and smoothly operating facility. Located on Babcock Road near the San Antonio Medical Center, it occupied less than half of a very attractive tract of land, leaving ample room for future development.

The physical plant of Morningside Manor in 1973 consisted of two buildings, an assisted living unit and the Powell building, which was composed of several units providing levels of care as defined by state and federal regulation from minimum personal care to skilled nursing care. The maximum capacity of the whole facility was approximately 400. It was staffed by some 300 employees.

Morningside Manor is sponsored by three religious groups: the Episcopal Diocesis of West Texas, the Southwest Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, and the First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio. The board of directors is made up of four groups of six. Each of the sponsoring church judicatories nominates six directors and a forth class is drawn from the S. A. community at large and does not include anyone from the sponsoring religious groups. I, as president, was a voting member of the 25 –member board. The pool of potential
candidates for membership was wide and deep and the board I had for five years was the most experienced, the most highly motivated, and the most intellectually astute group of people I had ever had the pleasure of working with. It included doctors, lawyers, bankers, business leaders, ministers, teachers, political leaders, and church leaders. To be a member of Morningside Manor Board was a privilege which enhanced the reputation of all who served on it. Several mayors of San Antonio had been members of the Board.

I was largely unaware of this dynamic when I accepted the presidency of Morningside Manor, but I very soon realized that if I were to lead this progressive minded group of men and women, I would have to run very fast. They were determined to move forward and they only needed someone to coordinate their efforts and to give direction to their intentions. I had the opportunity to be that someone. The months ahead promised to be busy ones for me.

The staff was well organized with competent leadership leading the several departments. Although I sensed some disquiet among employees over the departure of a known director and his displacement by someone whom few knew, the morale seemed high. I may have been more uneasy than they. After all, I was leaving a situation in which I supervised one employee and was undertaking the challenge of supervising nearly 300 employees.

Before I could walk however, much less run, I had to deal with some unfinished business, which I had inherited from my predecessor. The first item on the agenda was to fill two critical positions on my leadership team. When my predecessor, Jerry Smart, left Morningside to take a position as chief executive of a new state-of-the-arts retirement community in Ohio, he took with him the chief financial officer and the director of admissions at Morningside. Since these two positions are at the very core of an institution like Morningside, the urgency of filling them as quickly as possible cannot be overstated. In my haste to fill these positions, I scored one success and one failure. The person I chose for director of admissions, proved to be capable and efficient. She remained with me during my entire five-year tenure at Morningside and I owe her a great debt for having helped to make my regime a success. My choice to head the finance and accounting department, though he came with glowing reference and an impressive resume, demonstrated early on that he could not cope with the financial and accounting problems of
a large corporation. We limped along for a year until increasing difficulties in the department forced me to ask for his resignation. His replacement was a much happier choice. He was a retired Air Force finance officer who was completely at ease in the computer world and was skilled in managing computer-based accounting systems. Although the early month of his employment had to be devoted to correcting the mismanagement of his predecessor, he soon had the department running at a high rate of efficiency and had me feeling a great sense of relief. He stayed at Morningside a number of year after I left, serving my successor, Robert Freestate, in the same capacity.

The second item on my immediate agenda did not involve the management of Morningside at all. What it did involve was a national convention to be held in San Antonio. The American Association of Homes for the Aging holds an annual convention which takes place in a different city each year. On the invitation of TAHA and Morningside Manor, the 1975 convention was held in San Antonio. Although planning for the meeting was well along when I came to Morningside in 1974, I became the host of the convention, when Jerry Smart left for his new job in Ohio. As the TAHA executive, I had already been involved in the pre-convention planning, but the actual hosting of the meeting was left to me and my staff. Of course, the planning of the program of the meetings lectures, educational events, and conferences, as well as a supplier and provider exhibit show was done by AAHA, we at Morningside were responsible for entertainment events and for time activities.

We arranged tours to historic and other special places and to Morningside and other TAHA homes in the vicinity. Our crowning event, however, was “an evening in a Mexican Village”. The area around the basin on the San Antonio River was decorated to represent a Mexican Village with shops and cantinas around the basin at which our visitors could sample Mexican foods and drinks while enjoying the music of a mariachi band. It was a big success and we heard praises of it at AAHA conventions for years.

As noted earlier, I was fortunate to have inherited a functional organizational with good leadership in most departments, nursing, food service, laundry, and housekeeping, plant maintenance, and administration were all in capable hands, and my daughter, Elizabeth, who had
preceded me to Morningside manor, headed our occupational therapy department. There was a very active volunteer program with a highly motivated and able director. Social services were available, and a full-time chaplain attended to the spiritual needs of residents and staff. Only admissions and finance and accounting were without leadership and required my immediate attention. And the latter continued to require my attention for more than a year.

Looking back on this era of my life, I would be negligent not to acknowledge and express my appreciation for the contribution made by these wonderful people to making Morningside Manor one of the most admired and respected institutions serving elderly people in Texas. More than that, they relieved me of much of the day-to-day operational decisions and guidance required to make an organization function efficiently. I provided general administrative oversight of operations, but it became obvious from the beginning that my role would be one of working with the Board of Directors on future expansion projects. During my five years at Morningside, four major construction projects were planned, financed, and constructed, three of them on a new second, campus. One project, an addition to the Powell Building was under construction when I arrived and was completed soon afterward.

My first construction project came about quite unexpectedly and was not a part of the master plan. It began when I received a call from an attorney in San Antonio asking me to come to his office to meet a client who was considering a significant gift to Morningside Manor. When I arrived there I was introduced to an elderly woman, and another woman who was her companion. In the conversation that followed it developed that the woman was proposing to give 1 million dollars to Morningside to be used to build a model retirement facility for persons requiring only minimal assistance.

One of the units was to be occupied by her and her companion and was to have special features which the woman specified. Another condition of the gift was that the name of the donor would not be disclosed. I reported this offer to the directors in a special called meeting, and after discussing the matter at length, the board authorized me to inform the women that we would accept the offer. Such a facility had not been contemplated but neither was it inconsistent with the longer vision of the board. A sight was already available and construction of the proposed
unit would not compromise future plans. The Morningside Manor Garden Apartments would be built to provide residences for up to 50 elderly retirees.

For Morningside Manor this was a case of pure serendipity. Without a cent of cost to the agency, residences for an additional 50 elderly people would be provided. More than that, the project would be an entry into a gap in the continuum of care which the board had discussed but was not yet ready to address, i.e., independent living housing for retired persons requiring a minimum of services. Not to be ignored, too, is the fact that the net worth of the corporation would suddenly be increased by one million dollars, a fact which would be important in the financing of future construction projects.

For me the project was just another task on top of the others with which I was trying desperately to cope. Still in the first year of my tenure, I needed to get a firm grip on the reins of this vibrant institution. It was urgent that I become better acquainted with the individual members of my board so I could identify the strength of each member and the contribution to our collective efforts that each could make. I needed to become acquainted too with the hierarchies of the sponsoring ecclesiastical bodies without whose support my job would have been much more difficult if not impossible. I was also called upon frequently to be the “face” of Morningside at public events and to be available to visitors who came to see our facilities. In spirit of all this activity, the garden apartments were planned, constructed, and fully occupied in less than two years. Dedication of the new facility was celebrated on October 26, 1975.

My preoccupation with the planning and building of the Garden Apartments did not interrupt, however, the discussion and planning of the boards vision of a major expansion of Morningside Manor which was to establish a second campus on a downtown site. This project had been discussed for two years prior to my coming to the Manor and was to require much of my time and energy during the whole five years of my tenure. It was dedicated just weeks before I retired in 1978.

The Chandler Project began with conversations in 1976, between the Morningside Manor Board and the trustees of the Chandler Trust. The Trust owned a large residence and substantial land on
which it stood on West French Place near San Antonio College. This property had been the home of a wealthy San Antonio banker and his wife. They had no children, and at their death they left their property to a trust which was to use the assets to provide a home for “elderly genteel women”. For many years the old residence was operated as a retirement home for women, and over the years additions were made to it to accommodate more residents.

After the Second World War, provision for the care of the elderly began to change. The old building became obsolete and could not be brought into compliance with newly adopted building codes and standard. Moreover, the original trustee had all died and successor trustees who had not known the Chandlers did not have the same zeal for operating a home for elderly women in a dilapidated building which required constant repairs. The new trustee began to look for another way in which the intent of the Chandlers might be fulfilled. They began a conversation with the Morningside Manor Board. Most of the remaining residents of the Chandler Home when it closed had been transferred to Morningside Manor and some were still living there. These conversations culminated in an agreement under which the assets of the Trust were transferred to Morningside Manor to be used to build a state-of-the-arts retirement and healthcare facility on the Chandler site.

The old residence had been abandoned for more than 20 years and was in very bad condition. It had been vandalized repeatedly. Everything that was removable and could be sold had long since been taken. The garden, once the showplace of the area, was overgrown with weeds and untended shrubs and trees, once beautiful lawns and walks were in a complete state of ruin. The house had become a haven for drunks and drug addicts. To transform this pitiful derelict into a place of beauty and utility was a major challenge, but we were eager to undertake it. There was just one more hurdle to get over.

Monte Vista is an enclave of homes in the near north side of down-town San Antonio. During the last quarter of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, this was the area in which the elite of the city lived. Bankers, lawyers, doctors, business leaders, other professionals, and beer barons built magnificent residence there; many of them are recognized architectural jewels. In a time in which horse-drawn vehicles were the usual means of local transportation, the area was
near enough to the city center that the residents could reach their places of work in a relatively short time. In the evenings they could return again to the city to attend parties and other social events in the excellent hotels and other venues to be found “down town”.

Monte Vista was a distinct community which bordered on the north by Mulberry Street, on the East by North Main, on the south by West French Place, and on the West by San Pedro Avenue. Included within these borders are a number of institutions which help to define the former population of the area. Laurel heights Methodist Church and Christ Episcopal Church were and are today very influential in San Antonio Politics and social affairs. The Texas Military Institute, whose most famous boy cadet was Douglas Macarthur, continues to enroll the sons of wealthy families of San Antonio, although they may no longer live in Monte Vista. Just out of the enclave to the south is Temple Beth- el where the Jewish elite of the city go to worship their God. Across on San Pedro Avenue to the west is San Pedro Park, which has been identified with Monte Vista and is where its families went for outdoor play and recreation. Also in the park is a jewel of a small theatre, The San Pedro Playhouse, to which many Monte Vista families could walk to attend theatrical productions. The evidences of luxury ends abruptly, however, as one crosses the street bordering the enclave. This is especially noticeable as one goes north on San Pedro Avenue. West of that street, one sees only modest homes with few of the amenities of the good life. Here live the people who worked for the wealthy families of Monte Vista—the domestics, gardeners, many nannies and others whose labor made it possible for their employers to enjoy the good life.

The “good life” in Monte Vista began to unravel after World War I as the automobile replaced the horse and the buggy as the common means of local transportation. In the one generation between the two world Wars, the “suburbs” were born and a class of “commuters” was created. The elite of San Antonio quickly realized that they could enjoy the benefits of country living and still attend to their businesses and other affairs in the city. Almost imperceptibly, the character of Monte Vista changed.

The great mansions of yesteryear stood empty and were allowed to deteriorate or were converted into multiple apartments. After World War II the government provided the returning veterans the
means to purchase a first home, this led to the development of huge housing developments of modestly priced homes. The veterans had acquired automobiles, too, and were eager to live away from blighted inner cities and slum neighborhoods. They were not about to move their young families into a dilapidated old mansion in a community of a dilapidated old mansions when they were being offered a brand new house with all the new modern conveniences.

The spiral downwards of Monte Vista reached its lowest point in the mid-1950’s. During the decade of the 1950’s dramatic demographic, economic, and cultural changes were occurring in San Antonio and throughout the country which would bring about a renewal of the Monte Vista area. The young boys from farms, small communities, and the cities who had fought our enemy in Europe and the Pacific had graduated from universities and technical schools, thanks to the G.J. bill and were beginning careers as young professionals on the first rung of corporate executive ladders, and as fledgling entrepreneurs. The technological age was rapidly eclipsing the industrial age. Women had demonstrated during the war that they could compete with men in vocations previously considered the exclusive domain of men, and the phenomenon of husband and wife pursuing individual careers was becoming common. All of these factors created desire for a higher standard of living and provided the means to acquire it. Better and more sumptuous housing was perceived as one of the amenities and an improved standard of living. The small tract houses provided by the G.J. Bill were no longer adequate for a growing family, nor were they deemed appropriate to the new social stature they were acquiring. Some families built new homes in rapidly growing suburbs, which often had the allure of interaction with social peers. Some discovered former elite communities, like Monte Vista and saw in the old homes a value that could be restored and that would preserve their beauty and grandeur.

The process of rehabilitation of Monte Vista, began slowly, but by the 1970’s when Morningside Manor began planning the development of the Chandler property, the area was again a thriving community and was recognized informally as a historical district. The residents, who had already demonstrated their interest in the preservation of historical buildings, became zealous preservationists who were determined to prevent the demolition of any structure in the area. When Morningside Manor began considering options for the development of the Chandler property, one proposal which would have allowed the most effective use of the site would have
required the removal of the old Chandler residence. When the Monte Vista Residents became aware of this they united in opposition to the plan. They quickly organized a historical society and got the San Antonio city council to declare the area a historic site. The effect of this was that the Monte Vista Historical Association now had to approve our plan for the development of the property. The Association made it known that the Chandler residence could not be demolished, and that the restoration of the building must be restored as nearly as possible to its original state. These conditions would have to be a part of our development plans. Parts of the building which had been added could be removed.

It took nearly a year and many meeting with officers of the Association to come to an agreement with our Monte Vista neighbors. The plan finally approved, consisted of three separate projects; a healthcare facility of 120 beds, an independent living component which would be a three-story building containing 40 apartments, and the restoration of the Chandler residence and its conversion into a community service center for non-resident elderly people. This plan, difficult as it had been to finalize, proved to be an excellent use of the property. In hindsight, I can say that the suggestions and proposals of the Monte Vista Historical Association contributed significantly to the beauty and the utility of the project. The completion of the Chandler Complex was celebrated on September 17, 1978, and on January 1, 1979, I received my first Social Security Retirement Check.

While the construction projects alone demanded enough of my time to keep me busy, I could not neglect my responsibilities as chief executive officer of a large organization which was humming with activities. Regular staff meetings, meeting with individual department heads, board meetings, conferences with bankers, lawyers, doctors, medical staff, educators, and religious leaders, vendors, employees, and many others had to be fitted into my daily schedule. I also tried to maintain individual contact with the people for whose welfare, health, and happiness I had assumed the ultimate responsibility. The years passed quickly and brought me deep satisfaction and fulfillment. I was also able to continue some involvement in the affairs of TAHA, especially in the first year during which my successor occasionally needed help or advice which I could supply. Ten years after the enactment of Medicare and Medicaid, these programs had revolutionized the nursing home field but not without severe growing pains. The “mom and pop”
home which was the norm a few years earlier, were rapidly being replaced by corporate chains which were governed from central offices and were run locally by professional administrators. The service motivation became victim to the profit motif as the driving force in this rapidly growing field. Administrators of local units, in order to meet profit projections of their corporate masters, began to skimp on services and quality of care.

State and federal regulations and standards whose purpose was to assure that the facilities were free from fire and accident hazards and were adequately staffed to provide good medical and dietary services, were widely violated. It was this setting that I was privileged to play a role which was to be my most significant contribution to the well-being of the elderly population of Texas.

For three years (1975-1978) I served as the first chairman of the Advisory Committee on Nursing Home Affairs of the Texas Department of Health, having been appointed to that position by the then Board of Health. The Advisory Committee was created by the board in the wake of wide-spread criticism of the way many nursing homes in Texas were being operated and of numerous complaints about the quality of care being provided in them. These criticisms and complaints triggered investigations by the Attorney General of Texas which resulted in the closing of some nursing homes and in the taking over by the attorney general of the operations of some others. The political fall-out and the adverse publicity from these events was such that nothing less than a complete reorganization of the regulatory structure for nursing homes would satisfy the public and restore confidence in the nursing home industry.

To respond to the demands for this reorganization, the Board of Health created the Advisory Committee and appointed to twenty-one respected individuals involved in the nursing home field. The appointees represented a broad range of professional disciplines and also included representatives of the public at large. I was asked to chair this diverse committee.

The committee’s charge was to review all existing statutes, policies, regulations, and standards pertaining to nursing homes and propose to the Board additions, changes, and revisions that would make the regulation of nursing homes more effective. The minutes of the last meeting I
chaired are typical and indicate the scope of the concerns with which the committee dealt. Needless to say, with such a broad range of competing interests represented on the committee, building consensus was a constant challenge.

The Committee is still in existence and, no doubt, is still providing a valuable service. Its first three years were the critical ones, however, and it is no exaggeration to say that the modern nursing home industry in Texas became more healthy and accountable because of the work done by the Committee during its early years. There are still rogue homes that try to get away with cutting corners at the expense of quality care, but there have been, in the last twenty years, scandals in the industry of the magnitude of those that existed in the early 1970’s. The most enduring legacy of our work is that it demonstrated that everyone benefits: for-profit owners, non-profit sponsors, the paying public, and most of all, the patients-clients. When the disparate interests involved work together in a common effort to assure that those who need the services of nursing homes will get the care they need in a humane and dignified manner in an environment that is safe, comfortable, and aesthetically uplifting.
My Journey of Faith

My memoirs would not be complete without at least a brief account of my spiritual life. I was baptized a Christian and confirmed in that faith in First Protestant Church in New Braunfels, Texas. Although I attended other churches when I lived where no congregation of the Evangelical Church was near enough for me to be able to attend regularly, I maintained a connection with that fellowship and its merged successors, the Evangelical and Reformed and the United Church of Christ, all of my life. As I grew older and my faith matured, I began to believe that what is important is not the denomination that one belongs to but how one understands and responds to the teachings of Jesus. I have held many church offices at the local, conference, and national levels, including that of Assistant Moderator of the General Synod of the United Church of Christ. I was a founding member of Faith United Church of Christ in New Braunfels and served as its moderator twice. I am a Commissioned Minister of the United Church of Christ.

After retiring at the end of 1978, Ruth and I embarked on a quest for understanding of the major faiths held by other people of the world. During the fifteen years after 1978 until Ruth’s death in 1993, we pursued this quest by visiting places where such faiths are held and by participating in special events abroad at which the focus was on non-Christian and variant Christian beliefs and practices. We had already been exposed to Shintoism and Budhism when we visited our daughter, Martha, and her husband in 1971 when they were living in Japan. Two weeks in 1981 at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches in Bossy Switzerland, made us aware of the many forms that Christianity has taken through the centuries, from Eastern Orthodox to Roman Catholic, to protestant Christianity in its many variations.

While our quest hardly qualifies as a university course in comparative religions, it provided insights into some of the great religions which have held the faith and devotion of people through the ages. At that remnant of King Solomon’s temple to which devout Jews come from all over the world to pray to their Old Testament God. Only a few steps away are the Al-aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, both of which have great significance to people of the Muslim faith.
Traveling around Israel, we were hardly ever out of sight of a Jewish, Christian, or Muslim Shrine. We traveled to Wales in the United Kingdom to study the “Chapel Movement”. This movement, which became quite strong during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries throughout the U.K. but was strongest in Wales, developed as a protest against the restrictions of the Church of England. As England’s state church from the time of King Henry VIII, it had laws passed by Parliament which prohibited the building of churches by faith groups other than the Anglican faith. They might not have, for example, steeples and bell towers, and they were not allowed to have art windows and other ecclesiastical adornments inside the building. This movement, we learned, migrated with English and Welsh people to the new world and were the founders of a number of our American denominations.

A trip to Italy took us to Rome and to the beautiful lake country in northern Italy where Italy, France, and Switzerland come together at the foot of Mt. Blanc. At the beautiful lakeside community of Verbana-Intra we heard Italian church leaders express the opinion that the relationship between the Vatican and the Italian churches is one of “live and let live”. Italians are a fun-loving people who enjoy art, music, dancing, and other worldly indulgences. Although they profess loyalty to the Catholic faith and accept the rites and sacraments of the church, they do not allow the stricter tenets of the Vatican to deter them from pursuing a more relaxed and convivial lifestyle. Italy is a socialist country but in modified form and they take their religion in modified form as well.

Our trip to Spain was an especially enlightening and enjoyable one. It took us to Salamanca and to the world renowned Pontifical University in that ancient crossroads of the Roman Empire. The university is one of the four oldest in the Western world. Spain has the reputation of being the most Catholic country in the world with ninety-five percent of its people professing allegiance to the Roman church. It was with some surprise, therefore, that we discovered upon our arrival in Salamanca that the leader of our lecture team was a Roman Catholic priest who was the Vatican’s director in Spain of its “office of Ecumenism”. We learned, however, that there are two parts to the Spanish Catholic church – the clergy and the common people- just as in the Italian church. The civil war in the 1930s sharpened this division when the clergy generally sided with the Franco forces and against the elected government. The memory of those terrible
days is still vivid in most Spanish people and remains as a legacy of suspicion of the church hierarchy. The Spanish church also must bear the onus of the inquisition which lasted for nearly 400 years and for its brutal treatment of the indigenous people in its overseas colonies, particularly in Central and South America.

As stated earlier, these forays were by no means exhaustive studies of the belief systems of people around the world. They did strengthen our tolerance for such faiths and provided us with a broadened understanding of them. They reinforced our own convictions that God is everywhere that people acknowledge and worship a force that is infinitely greater than they are whether in a mosque, temple, synagog, majestic cathedral or humble chapel.

Finally, I must confess that after almost a century of searching for the great truths of life I still have questions for which I cannot find the answers. Perhaps this is as it should be and it is in the searching that one’s spiritual life is formed and fulfilled.
Happy Times

I would also be remiss if I did not take at least passing note in this account of some activities and pursuits which brought me great joy and happiness. Foremost among these, of course, were those in which the whole family participated – vacation trips, visits to Ruth’s parents and sister, celebrations of special family events, watching our children grow and develop into accomplished and responsible adults, family reunions, and interacting with our wider family of uncles, aunts, and cousins. An addict to fishing all my life, I spent many happy days at lakes and along rivers. Among my earliest memories were those of setting out trot-lines on the Guadalupe River with my father. In later years son Carl and I fished a beautiful little stream on the family’s ranch at Spring Branch. Also with Carl and sometimes with friends, I fished lakes in Mexico.

Reading was also a much enjoyed avocation and I can safely say that I have read several hundred books in my lifetime. Histories and historic novels have been my favorite reading choices. I enjoyed table games – cards and dominoes – among which an old German card game called SKAT was my favorite. I played this game, off and on, for more than eighty years.

Ruth and I enjoyed classical symphonic music and were financial supporters of the Mid-Texas Symphony Orchestra which performs in New Braunfels and Seguin. We also supported STAGE, an amateur theatrical group which has a theatre in Bulverde. I am a founding member of the Heritage Museum of the Texas Hill Country located near Sattler.

Reunions of the wider Fischer family held every October in the Fischer dance hall were always pleasant occasions which brought together our kinfolk from throughout the United States and beyond. Six generations of Fischers, though they be living in the far corners of the world, still think of Fischer Store, Texas, as “home”.

Politics has been a passion all of my life. As a life-long Democrat I have worked in many electoral campaigns at local, state, and national levels but I myself, have sought and been elected to only one office, that of Democratic precinct chairman. I have held three political jobs. I was
an administrative assistant to a Texas Senator during one session of the Texas Legislature and I
served as chairman of the committee on Nursing Home affairs of the Texas Department of
Health. I was also appointed a delegate from Texas to the 1971 White House Conference on
Aging. I have known all Democratic Governors of Texas back to John Connally (he later
switched to the Republican party) and through Anne Richards. I have been acquainted with all
Democratic presidents beginning with Lyndon Johnson. I came to know President Johnson quite
well during 1937 and 1938, my first two years at the University of Texas, when he was the Texas
director of the National Youth Administration and I worked, as a student, in the U.T. office that
administered the N.Y.A. I also met President Richard Nixon when I attended the White House
Conference on Aging, of which he was the host.

As this is being written, physical disability prevents me from taking an active part in politics, but
my interest in politics and my zeal for the Democratic party has not waned. Keeping in touch
with the political currents of my country and the world continues to be a major preoccupation.

Reflecting on my more than ninety years, I can say without equivocation that it has been a
gratifying and fulfilling journey. There have been downers, of course, and the death of my
beloved wife, Ruth and of my dear daughter, Martha, has brought great sadness into my life. On
balance, though, the blessings I have enjoyed far out-weight the misfortunes and the obstacles I
have encountered. For this I am deeply grateful.