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Two Legs to Stand On

John D. McKee

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

E. Castetter
DEAN

June 5, 1952
DATE

TWO LEGS TO STAND ON

by
John D. McKee

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ABSTRACT
OF
TWO LEGS TO STAND ON

By
John D. McKee

A Creative Thesis
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

The University of New Mexico
1952

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The purpose of this thesis is to present in autobiographical form some of the problems of the cerebral palsied and my own solutions to those problems. I have attempted to present the psychological and social implications of cerebral palsy as they apply to myself and, by extension, as they apply to anyone who is under a handicap. I have not attempted to write a strictly chronological autobiography. Rather, I have attempted to make of each chapter a dramatic unit, using a problem or an achievement as the central theme for each chapter and ranging forward and backward in time as the theme dictated. Under this scheme the thesis is divided into three sections and eighteen chapters within those sections.

Part One is entitled "In the Beginning" and except for the introductory chapter and the chapter called "The Narrowest Hinge of My Hand," is concerned with my childhood: the circumstances of my birth, the story of my first two independent steps, the sensations accompanying my first operation and the events leading to that operation, the story of my mother's faith, determination and patience as she made me walk after that first operation, the story of how I learned to fall and some advice to others who must learn the art, and finally a chapter about my relations with my father and some adventures we had together.

Part Two is entitled "The Widening of the World" and is concerned with my adjustment to the world outside my home. Here are chapters on my experiences as a Boy Scout, as a drummer in

the grade school and high school bands, and as a debater. A chapter on athletics seemed necessary since I have gained much from athletics, both as a participant and as an observer and reporter. "A Fine Romance" is an exploration of my experience with girls and my unresolved problems in regard to sex and marriage. Part Two concludes with a tribute to some of my high school teachers and the story of their influence on me both as a person and as a beginning writer.

Part Three is entitled "College and Beyond." It is not so much the story of my college career as it is of the people I met and their influence upon me. The first chapter is the story of my problem in getting to college, the loneliness of the first real break from home, and the people who dispelled that loneliness. The remainder of the college impressions form a companion-piece to the chapter on high school teachers and influences. There follow two chapters concerning rather special physical accomplishment, one on learning to swim and one on learning to drive a car. The last chapter is subtitled "A Final Testameny" and is intended to be just that: a summing up, an attempt to express the philosophy evolved from what has gone before.

I have attempted to make this a genuinely creative work. If I have succeeded, there is more implied in this thesis than is stated. If I have succeeded, the story of those who have helped me is at least equal in importance to my own.

#

TWO LEGS TO STAND ON

By

John D. McKee

A Creative Thesis

**is partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English Literature**

**The University of New Mexico
1952**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	iv
PART	
I. IN THE BEGINNING	1
CHAPTER	
I. GAITS AJAR: INTRODUCTORY PROSPECT	2
II. EARLY ARRIVAL: WHYS AND WHEREFORES OF CEREBRAL PALSY AND THIS BOOK	9
III. THE NARROWEST HINGE OF MY HAND: HANDICAPPED IS AN UNFORTUNATE WORD AT BEST	20
IV. THE GREATEST GIFT: MY PARENTS GIVE ME COURAGE	26
V. THE FIRST TIME: MY FIRST OPERATION IS MY FIRST GREAT ADVENTURE	34
VI. MY MOTHER MADE ME WALK: HER PATIENCE AND DE- TERMINATION START ME WALKING WITHOUT HELP	40
VII. DOWN WENT MCGINTY: I LEARN TO FALL--AND SOME ADVICE TO OTHERS IN THE SAME BOAT.	46
VIII. MY DAD AND I: SOME ADVENTURES IN THE LITTLE WORLD.	52
PART	
II. THE WIDENING OF THE WORLD	62

CHAPTER

I. A FULL LIFE OF MY OWN: SCOUTING,
DRUMMING, AND DEBATING 63

II. PLAYING FIELD TO PRESS BOX: I'M NO ARM-
CHAIR ATHLETE 73

III. A FINE ROMANCE: BRUSHES WITH THE FAIRER SEX. 86

IV. HERE THE COURSE WAS PLOTTED: SOME HIGH
SCHOOL TEACHERS, AND I BEGIN TO WRITE . . 92

PART

III. COLLEGE AND BEYOND 99

CHAPTER

I. NO LONELY YEAR: I GO AWAY TO COLLEGE 100

II. THE SAILS ARE SET: SOME PROFESSORS AND
SOME FRIENDS 108

III. WATER BABY: I SWIM OFF THE YELLOW RIBBON . . 114

IV. THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU JUST CAN'T DO: I
LEARN TO DRIVE A CAR 122

V. TO MOVE A MOUNTAIN: A FINAL TESTAMENT. . . . 133

PREFACE

I have attempted here to present a picture of my life as a cerebral palsied person, not so much from the point of view of the peculiarity of that life as from the attempt I have made at normality in all departments of living. I can hope for forgiveness for drawing certain general conclusions about all life from this one life of mine.

Grateful thanks are due to Dr. C. V. Wicker, Dr. Willis D. Jacobs, and Professor Julia Keleher for their invaluable guidance through this subject.

Special thanks are also due to the American Medical Association and its editors for permission to reprint "The Greatest Gift," "Down Went McGinty," and "There Are Some Things You Just Can't Do," the first of which appeared in Hygeia, and the latter two in Today's Health.

PART I

IN THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER ONE

GAITS AJAR

One of the problems of cerebral palsy is that it requires constant explanation. When I was too small to do my own explaining and rode in the buggy with my baby brother, people used to stop us on the street. They'd cluck their tongues at me sympathetically and ask Mother, "What is it? Infantile paralysis?"

And Mother would say, "No, it's spastic paralysis." The sympathetic one would look blank, cluck a few more times, and move on.

The explanations continued even after I started to college. Before my sophomore year began, I went up to look for a room. I found the one I wanted, a big place with a pleasant dormer window and a curiously angled ceiling. I wanted the room, but the Weisenses were not sure they wanted me for a renter. They disapproved of smoking, but Mr. Weisens' white walrus mustache was stained yellow with the juice of snuff. Still, I didn't smoke then. That couldn't have been their objection. More particularly, they questioned me about drinking. My legs were erratic enough without my changing the use of alcohol; besides, Kansas was at least nominally a dry state then, and it was not worth the effort

for me to look up a bootlegger. These thoughts ran through my mind as I convinced the Welanses of my sobriety.

Large and German and jolly, Mrs. Welans said to me later, placidly and with the complete innocence of an overgrown child, "You know, I saw you go by here a lot last year. When I saw you fall so many times, I thought maybe you had a bad case of jake-leg." It took some more explaining to prove that I was not a victim of the staggers and lurches induced by Jamaica ginger.

Perhaps once in a lifetime the most commonplace observation opens vistas and permits a person to go on his way reassured and unafraid. Recently I was sitting in the car on a sunny downtown street in Albuquerque, waiting for Dad to come out of his office and take me home.

While I sat there, I watched people going past me on the high sidewalk. The top of the car narrowed my perspective so that, by sitting well back in the seat of the car, I could frame just feet and legs in the window. Gradually I ceased to be interested in the persons attached to that parade of feet and legs. I limited myself to what was framed in the window. I watched the feet--some of them rising smartly off the pavement, to be set down again in almost military precision; some of them slapping down violently, with the toes pointed out like a clock saying ten minutes to two, as if the persons were prepared to go away

4

in all directions at once; some of them shuffling aimlessly, so that I didn't have to look further to guess that the person to whom the feet belonged slouched from his head to his heels. Everyone who went by that window had a distinctive, personal way of walking.

It occurred to me then that there are as many different ways of walking as there are persons who walk, and that a person's method of locomotion is almost as distinctive as a fingerprint. There is the ramrod military manner, the sailor's rolling gait, the well-balanced, feet-apart tread sometimes associated with following a plow, the traditional toed-in tread of the Indian in his heel-less moccasins, the swish and slap of the school girl's huaraches, and the human parenthesis of the man who has spent his life in the saddle.

I seemed to realize the veriest of commonplaces that afternoon, and to realize it for the first time. I said to myself, "Why, Jack, you have nothing to worry about. Everybody walks funny."

I suppose I should have reached such a conclusion long ago, but I hadn't; and when I did, it took a great load off my mind. It is more than mildly disconcerting to listen to your footsteps and hear what is to you a perfect walking rhythm, and then to catch sight of your reflection in the

more about human beings as a little boy in a hospital ward than I have learned in all the time since. For in the wards you see humanity stripped bare. The pain that people endure, the elementary living that is forced on them by the smallness of their world--these things tear away the conventional wrappings of humanity and let you see it raw. I doubt exceedingly that pain ennobles the spirit. Oftentimes, however, it may reveal a spirit whose strength and power might have gone unsuspected otherwise.

As for me, however, I accepted with equanimity the needle-pricks in the finger-tips for the blood count. I even accepted the daily early awakening and the seemingly constant temperature-taking. I did rebel once, however, when I awoke one morning to find a nurse attempting to introduce a rectal thermometer. She said she was only trying to let me sleep a little longer, but her procedure was an affront to my six-year-old dignity.

When the morning finally came for the operation, my only untoward feeling was one of resentment. Surely, I thought, somebody had got the cards mixed up, or else why did that little girl across the aisle from me--the one for whom the doctors were going to build elbows and knees out of the jointless bone with which she was born--why did she get to go to the operating room before me?

The vague feeling of apprehension which was to precede

plate glass window of a store and see a slightly overweight little man rolling and stumbling hurriedly over the pavement. It's no wonder many normal persons associate such wayward walking with drunkenness.

In a sense the medical profession and I have learned about cerebral palsy together. We don't know all there is to know about the subject yet, but, because of increased interest and research in cerebral palsy, all of us, doctors and patients, know more about it than we did when I was young. I try to read all available publications concerning cerebral palsy. I discuss the subject with doctors, and I try to keep abreast of developments in the field by working as a member of the Board of the Cerebral Palsy Day School in Albuquerque. Now when the curious one asks me what is the matter with my legs, he is likely to get a rather complete lecture.

I have been under the care of chiropractors, osteopaths, general practitioners, orthopedists, neurologists, and physical therapists. I have learned something from each of them, even if, as it was true in some instances, they could not help me.

As late as 1940, another of my college landladies sent her doctor up to my room to see me. A self-assured little man, he immediately had me lie on my back and put my feet on his chest, with my knees bent almost to my own chest.

"Now," he said, "push."

I nearly shoved him out of the room. With a bewildered expression on his face, he came back to the bed. "I thought the muscles in your legs were atrophied," he said. If that doctor had known anything at all about cerebral palsy--at least about spastics--he would have recognized the spasticity, and he would have known that muscular atrophy is not a characteristic of the spastic. If he had examined my legs before thus testing their strength, he would have seen thighs that would do credit to a fullback and calves as hard and taut as those of any athlete. He would have known that lack of muscular control, not lack of muscular strength, is one of the symptoms of the spastic variety of cerebral palsy.

Whether my walking has improved remarkably over the years, or whether it is simply that cerebral palsy has been getting more publicity of late, or whether I have become better known in the restricted area in which I move, the questions have grown fewer; and except when I fall or must go up steps on my hands and feet because there are no walls or rails against which to balance myself, I am stared at much less these days.

But I really don't mind the questions. I sometimes think of myself as a sort of one-man missionary society for the understanding of cerebral palsy. Of late years the

cerebral palsied have come out of the shadows, and there are local, state, and national organizations, a great part of whose work lies in telling the public about cerebral palsy. But I am, thank God, a walking illustration of cerebral palsy, and I owe what help I can give to the cerebral palsied who is neither walking, nor talking, nor even sitting up.

I would rather answer questions all day than fall in front of children. Children cannot be blamed for curiosity. If adults stare on occasion, what can we expect of their offspring? But children are so unashamedly and honestly brutal that I become tense with fear of them whenever I pass any on the sidewalk, and I often fall because I am trying so desperately not to.

No one can blame the children. I am past thirty, and many a farcical adult comedy situation has been built on little more than the sight of a full-grown man falling flat on his face.

Because I fall so frequently, I have for years been indifferent to clothes. I have had to be, because a knife-like crease in my pants can disappear in the twinkling of a stubbed toe. I have an affection for sports shirts, an affection born early because it took me so long to learn to tie a necktie. If I kept a bright shine on my shoes, I would spend a good part of my waking hours polishing them.

If I were true to myself, I would continue to be indifferent to dress; but of late years I have fallen less and less, I have learned to tie an acceptable knot in a four-in-hand tie, and I have begun to enjoy clothes. It is all the more disconcerting, then, to be wearing a good suit, well pressed, with a sparkling white shirt set off by a well-knotted tie, and find myself suddenly and unceremoniously dumped into the dust of the pavement by some unseen bump or a sudden dereliction of a hitherto well-behaved leg.

Physically, I have long since become callous to the bumps and bruises of my up-and-down existence. Mentally, I shall probably never be able to accept the necessity of my periodic worm's-eye-view of the world.

Whenever I become too discouraged, though, I can sit in a car on a downtown street and watch the people go by. After watching a surprising variety of locomotion, I can almost always think to myself--concerning my feet and nose--
"We are not alone."

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY ARRIVAL

The weather was near blizzard conditions that day in December. It was the kind of hard, biting cold that a mid-western winter produces. Early in the evening, there was a knock on the door of a small cottage in Emporia, Kansas. A young house-wife, heavy with child, found a little boy standing on the doorstep with home-made pine wreaths clutched in blue, gloveless hands.

His face was pinched with cold, and the wind whipped through his worn, thin coat. Would the lady buy a wreath? She would, and she would invite the little waif to warm himself before the fire. This was a sad way, she thought, for a little boy to be spending his time, and so near Christmas, too.

The little boy did not tarry long, but his face remained in her memory for long years afterwards. Especially would she remember his blue-cold hands and the clumsily-contrived wreaths they held.

My mother always associated the little boy and the Christmas wreaths with my birth, for at 8:30 that evening I made an all-too-sudden appearance into the world. I arrived about two months ahead of schedule, such to the consternation of my mother, and of my father, who at the moment

was on the other end of his run as a Central Division brakeman on the Santa Fe Railroad.

I weighed in at a scant two and a quarter pounds. Officially, I was christened John DeWitt--John for my mother's older brother, and DeWitt for my father--but anyone could see at a glance that all that name was too much of a load for me to drag around, and almost immediately the name was shortened to Jack.

I was born at home and there was no incubator available; so I was bundled into a clothes basket and surrounded by hot water bottles and hot bricks wrapped in flannel. Apparently I thrived on this hot-house treatment. When I was only a few days old, Dad could cradle me in his hand, only my feet and legs hanging down his arm. A short time later, the man who delivered the groceries expressed himself thus: "My, ain't he growed! Why, put him on a pillar and you couldn't of found him!"

My impatience to get into the world, and what are perhaps the results of that impatience, must be my excuse for setting down this premature attempt at autobiography. Autobiographies, I realize, are usually reserved for persons who--full of years, memories, and an extensive vocabulary--have an uncontrollable urge to Tell All. The urge may be traced to any one of several circumstances. The writer might have made a fortune, climbed the Matterhorn, built

bridges in the Andes, or organized a society for the prevention of something-or-other. In another category, there are those who have Known Everybody and who have Done Everything. Lately, it seems, the Teller of All must have suffered the vicissitudes of a chicken ranch, must have roughed it in the woods, or must have grown up--amid alternate tears and laughter--in the wilds of San Francisco or Greenwich Village or some other such exotic place to have lived a life worth telling about.

I have neither done nor have I been any of these things. I just got here a little early and happened to be born cerebral palsied. It seems to me, however, that in telling my own story, I might be telling at least a part of the story of thousands of other cerebral palsied persons and of those other thousands of human beings handicapped in one way or another--persons whose story needs to be told and who are, it may be, neither as articulate as I am nor as fortunate as I have been.

There didn't seem to be anything the matter with me in the beginning. At the age of four months, I weighed fourteen pounds. By the time I was fourteen months old, I was putting words together into sentences.

On the other hands, as the months went on, it became apparent that something was terribly amiss with my body. It was not only that I made no attempt to crawl. I was a year

old before I could ever sit up by myself.

It was about this time that Mother took me to a clinic. The doctor gave me a thorough examination and checked each item on the examination card, "O. K.", until he came to the feet and legs. There he put a big X, and under "Remarks," he wrote, "Spastic. Suggest stretching exercises."

"All I knew from that," Mother says, "was that there was something wrong. I had no idea what spastic meant, and the doctor didn't explain."

Long afterwards Mother told me that while she was carrying me she had slipped and fallen on the icy sidewalk. That may have been what caused my premature birth, and it may also have been what injured the motor nerve centers of my brain and sent me into the world with cerebral palsy. The injury which causes cerebral palsy may occur before, during, or following birth. It may be that, the birth process beginning early, I suffered cerebral anoxia, a lack of oxygen in the brain which is caused by premature cessation of the oxygen supply from the mother to the foetus, a cessation which causes damage to brain tissue.

Whatever the cause, the results are somewhat similar to crossed wires in a telephone exchange. It's as if you rang Smith's number and got Jones. If a cerebral palsied person sends a mental signal to his foot for action, his arm may tighten in sympathetic, or even independent, action.

The wires are crossed somewhere.

I am not only peculiar in respect to normal humanity; I am a somewhat strange specimen among cerebral palsied persons. I gather, from conversation and from reading, and also from the surprised comments of a cerebral palsy specialist who recently examined me, though monoplegia and paraplegia--the loss of the use of one or two limbs--is not uncommon--triplegia certainly is. In my case, the spasticity settled only in my right leg and arm and slightly in my left leg. My left hand and arm were left entirely free of the paralysis, so that, for instance, while I use only the index finger on my right hand for typing, all the fingers of my left hand are called into action.

Add to this peculiarity the blessing of speech. Approximately 97 per cent of the victims of cerebral palsy have defective speech, if they can talk at all. When the paralysis hits the muscles of the throat and tongue, the muscles which control swallowing and speech, even breathing and digestion sometimes become problems.

Correction or alleviation of the cerebral palsied person's speech difficulty is the first step in his rehabilitation. For communication is even more important than the ability to walk or use the hands, and if the cerebral palsied person is to be made a useful member of society, he must first be taught to talk.

Until not long ago (and, in fact, there are probably still some instances of it) the cerebral palsied were looked upon as mentally defective. It is true that some cerebral palsied children are not educable, but that fact is not inherent in cerebral palsy itself.

Still, parents have hidden cerebral palsied children away in their homes, because they were bewildered and ashamed at what they had brought into the world. Cerebral palsied persons have been committed to homes for the feeble-minded, simply because they have been unable to express themselves and demonstrate their intelligence.

Circumstantial evidence is against us in many cases. The average victim of cerebral palsy is often not attractive to look at. His facial muscles may contract uncontrollably, so that he grimaces and grins for no apparent reason. Unable to swallow correctly, he may drool continually. He spills his food and struggles painfully with each word he utters.

I have been spared the facial contortions and the drooling, the garbled speech and the inverted breathing, but I still have to watch myself carefully when I eat in company. Eating out could have been one of the hardest things for me to learn. But in this, as in all things, my parents refused to let me think of myself as different from my brothers or from other normal people.

At home with my family I was perfectly relaxed. If I spilled something at the table, it was only as if one of my brothers spilled his milk or dropped his bread butter-side-down on the floor. Once in a while, if I was having a particularly tough time and was spreading my food around the dining room with a lavish hand, Mother would say, "Why don't you sit on the floor, Jack? Anything that falls up, we'll hand down to you." In the laugh that followed, the tension was broken, and I could usually finish my meal with a minimum of spilling.

From my own experience it seems to me that my parents' attitude is the only one to adopt with the problem of cerebral palsy, and my cerebral palsied friends who have solved their problem take a remarkably similar view.

I met Hubert Shelley when he was going to McPherson College and I was attending Kansas Wesleyan University. Hubert's walking problem was as difficult as mine. His speech was so troublesome as to make recitation a chore. Penmanship, in his violently shaking hands, was a scrawl. Yet he was in his junior year in college, and when I met him, he was returning from Iowa, where he had hitchhiked to attend a national students' meeting.

We met in the college dining hall, and since our conversation was not merely finished by the end of the meal, I invited him to my room. Hubert had had trouble

getting the food from the plate to his mouth, and the area around the plate showed it. But the only reference he made to his troubles came when we were ready to leave. "I'll be ready to go," he said, grinning and reaching for a drink with both shaking hands, "just as soon as I spill some more water."

The preceding, then, is by way of introduction to some of the problems I brought with me when I appeared on the scene two months early, on December 22, 1919. These are but a few of the problems which my parents faced then and which I now face. Many of the problems have been conquered; some of them remain unsolved today. But the mystery of why I am as I am and the continuing challenge the mystery presents have always intrigued me.

This will be the story of one person's struggle with what the world chooses to call a handicap. It will also be the story of what has been done, by myself and by a great many others, to overcome the handicap, and it will contain, too, something of a fairly simple--and, I hope, unpretentious--philosophy I have evolved from being from the beginning different from my fellows.

There will necessarily be much about my body in this story, because my body has required more time, more attention, more study, and more intimate knowledge than does that of most persons. My body is not only the carriage of my mind

and spirit and personality: its very difference has helped to shape them. If there is anything at all that makes this record worthwhile, it is that difference.

The wearing out of a shoe sole at the center instead of at the toe, the longer and yet longer times between falls, even the first time I willed my toes to move and they moved--not the leg from the hip or knee, not even my foot, moving from the ankle, but the toes, moving independently--these are real little miracles, perhaps worth recording for their own sakes.

There must have been some dark days indeed between the time Mother took me to the clinic and the time I was two years old. Most of the progress which has been made in the treatment of cerebral palsy has taken place in my own lifetime, and in those early years, at least among the doctors who saw me, diagnosis was usually the end of the line. Treatment was by trial and error if there was any treatment at all. The long struggle to get me on my feet was begun almost entirely by my father and mother.

With a pillow behind me and a pillow propping me up on either side, I could sit up by the time I was a year old. Sometime between my first and second birthdays, I began to sit up alone, and by the time I was two--way behind schedule--I had finally begun to crawl. Although it was a red-letter day when I finally began to get over the floor under my own

power, part of the difficulty I was to have later became apparent then. When I crawled, I thrust my arms ahead of me. Then I drew up my legs, both at the same time, with the action originating from the hip. There was no reciprocal action between arms and legs, or between the legs themselves. It was to be years before any sort of reciprocity, necessary almost above all else for walking, was obtained.

But I was crawling. At last I was moving, regardless of how awkwardly. Now at last there must be at least some hope for my walking.

The day I first hunched myself across the floor marked a beginning and an end. It was the end of a period of black bewilderment and despair for my parents, when but for hope and faith there was no evidence at all that I would ever move from my bed, and the beginning of an almost equally frustrating period, when for years I did not progress beyond crawling, and it did not look as if I ever would. But it was a beginning in more than that. For I could move about. I could crawl about the house, and later, out in the yard, and my world began to expand. Of course, I still had to wake Mother or Dad in the night. It would be several years before I could turn over in bed by myself.

I sometimes think that the greatest difference between me and the rest of mankind is simply that I started more slowly than people normally do. I can hope, at least,

that I am a tortoise of sorts. Though I was left at the post when the race began, and though there is very little likelihood that I shall ever pass any of the field, at least I shall finish. For, though I move slowly, I have done most of the things that human beings do. Gradually I am accumulating the experience of a full life, and if I live long enough, I have no doubt that my life, in the end, will have been as full, as interesting, and as useful as will the lives of those who have come into the world more fully equipped than I.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NARROWEST HINGE OF MY HAND

Some time ago I was a willing guinea pig in the psychological research of a cerebral palsied friend. In the process of the testing, I remarked that I did not consider myself handicapped.

My own research recently led me to the report on the tests I had taken. I found my remark had been set down as an indication of a defense mechanism. Obviously, I had not made myself clear. I have many defects--unruly legs, an arm and hand which must be continually coaxed, weak eyes--but I hope I know a defense mechanism from a handsaw!

I doubt seriously that I will ever climb a mountain, or pitch a no-hit baseball game, or challenge Ben Hogan's supremacy on the golf course. A door-to-door selling job, complete with heavy sample case, is not the ideal occupation for me.

On the other hand, I have gone on camping trips, and I have climbed some pretty good-sized hills. I could pitch a passable three innings of baseball when I was in grade school, and I have puttered around rather ineffectually, but with a great deal of enjoyment, on a miniature golf course. Not only that, but when I was a boy, I sold door-to-door such various things as light bulbs and wall cleaner.

I realize, as perhaps no one else does, that I may never be able to do many of the things I would like to do. But in that predicament I would seem to be a member of the majority, and my handicap thus becomes something of a symbol of normality. I know, too, that I am now doing daily a great many things which I once considered impossible, and I do not doubt that I shall continue to improve physically until age puts its natural brake on my activities.

In the beginning, doctors said I would probably never walk. They considered it something of a miracle, in fact, that I so much as learned to crawl. At a little before the age of six, after many false starts and an operation, I learned to walk. Now, four operations and a great deal of physical therapy later, I have walked my way through grade school, high school, and college, and I have held jobs which required the walking of several miles daily.

I went to Boy Scout camp two summers. One of my favorite ceremonies at the camp was the ritual of the Yellow Ribbon. When a Scout learned to swim, great ceremony was made of cutting the yellow ribbon from around his neck--the yellow ribbon that marked him as a novice. I was never the star of the Yellow Ribbon ceremony. I wore my badge of aquatic ineptitude throughout my two terms at camp. But in 1948, at the age of twenty-nine, I learned to swim.

Because I fell often and unexpectedly in my early

years, I did not so much as walk the downtown streets alone until I was a senior in high school. Yet I spent four college years away from home. I gained confidence as my independence increased, and I roamed the streets of a city much larger than my own with complete unconcern.

Because of the hypertension of my muscles and because of the rigid reaction of my muscles to any startling situation, a reaction which continued into adolescence, my parents said it was obvious that I would never drive a car. In this one thing their faith in me wavered. In October of 1949 I passed my tests and got a license to drive.

These things, I suppose, may seem minor illustrations of the point I am trying to make, but these same achievements have opened doors to new worlds for me. They have widened horizons which have seemed foredoomed to the narrowness and stifling stagnation of invalidism.

When you have been mentally and chronologically an adolescent but in physical abilities yet a child, and one day for the first time you tie an acceptable bow in your shoelace, and, for the first time, the knot stays firm throughout the day, then you may realize something of the magnitude of walking three whole weeks without falling. When, after years of having someone else tie your necktie for you, you spend an afternoon before a mirror tying and re-tying a four-in-hand knot until you finally learn how to do it, you have cut

another strand in the web of dependence. When you have done that, you may realize what a gigantic advance you've made when you can go through the intricate ritual of shifting gears and getting a car underway.

Suppose for years it has taken you at least an hour to bathe, and you cut the time to half an hour. Suppose only the index finger has escaped the paralytic stiffness of your right hand, and suppose you teach that finger to take its part in typewriting. You would join me, then, I think, when I agree with Walt Whitman:

"The narrowest hinge of my hand puts to scorn all machinery."

Even if I had not made the physical progress I have, I still would have the compensation of development in other directions. If I had been an active child, I might not have gained my early and still sustained love of reading. If I had been able to participate in organized sports, I might never have learned the intricacies of more than one or two athletic events. I might never have acquired the ability and inclination to write about them. If physical travel had been easier, I might never have attempted consciously to broaden my outlook and deepen my philosophy.

All of which is at least part of the reason I do not consider myself handicapped. Handicapped is an unfortunate word at best. A person is handicapped only when he fails to

look on his particular problem as a challenge to be met. Once he accepts the challenge, what could have been a handicap becomes but one more obstacle--of which there certainly are many besides physical ill-being--to the achievement of one's dreams.

If I am handicapped, then everyone is handicapped. Everyone has problems of personality, of capabilities or the lack of them, of desires just out of reach, of visions tantalizingly obscured by clouds of his own making. This one lacks education; that one, initiative. This one is burdened with a crutch, that one with his fears. Indeed, I strongly suspect that the only true handicap travels under the soft and pious name of resignation.

I insist, therefore, that I am not handicapped. I am merely different. And my difference is of no more real importance than the individual differences in temperament, capabilities, and personality which give to each person his own shape and color in the human crazy quilt.

By no means is this to say that I do not have my doubts and fears. I learned long before I read it that a cerebral palsied person is a creature of alternating high-flying elation and profound depression. I have tried to school myself to avoid such an emotional see-saw, but I have not always succeeded.

None is not a see-no-evil philosophy concerning my

physical deficiencies. At times it seems as if I have come to the end of my progress. I was in such a mood for a while when I was deciding to write this book, and I discussed the problem with my mother.

"After all," I said, "maybe there are some things I can't do." Mother has seen me defeat all the difficulties I have surmounted so far. She and Dad have driven and encouraged and urged me into doing things I would never have attempted otherwise.

She looked me in the eye and said, "Name one thing you can't do."

"Well," I said, thinking of certain times of loneliness in my high school and college days, "I can't dance."

"You've never tried," she said, and she left it at that.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GREATEST GIFT

The last bell rang and I got up to leave. Another parents' day at the second grade was over, and I was in a hurry to join my mother in the back of the room. I hurried down the aisle, holding to the desks on either side to make sure I didn't fall.

Another mother came up the aisle like a ship in full rigging. She crashed into me, said something apologetically and went sailing on up the aisle.

Mother swooped down on me, helped me to my feet, and said, "Can't you look where you're going, Jack? You might have been hurt!"

When we got home, she stood me up in front of her and said, "I'm sorry I spoke to you that way, Jack, but when that woman knocked you down, I just had to say something or burst, and it was too late to say anything to her."

That was one of the few times I ever saw either of my parents show their feelings when I fell or got bumped; and they had more than enough opportunities, what with my being born spastic.

Fortunately for me, my parents made me feel that I was missing none of the adventure of living. I went to Sunday school and church with them. I remember the fiddle

squeaking and the guitar and drums beating out the rhythms of the square dance at the open air pavilion at Shoft's Chicken Dinner Farm. I remember sitting in the dugout on Sunday afternoons and cheering Bud, who played second base for the Hardy town team. I went to a carnival one time and rode with Mother on the Ferris wheel. It stopped when we were at the top of the wheel, and I looked out and saw all the twinkling lights of the carnival and, fanned out away from me, all the lights of the town below. I remember how Mother laughed when I asked her, "Momma, do we have to get off now?"

I sometimes went on my mother's hip, and sometimes my father carried me. I graduated to a cart, and later, when my brothers were born, I shared the buggy--but where my family went, I went.

By the time I was five years old, I must have crawled a couple of thousand miles on my hands and knees. My shoes had to be repaired every week, and, even at that, they had to be replaced every month. I used to crawl around the front yard of our home in Nebraska and once almost made friends with a rattlesnake before Mother discovered us and killed the rattler with a hoe.

But the thing I remember most and best before the operations is the fire-lit fall evening that I tried my first step. This was in the Brace Period. There had already been

the White Pill Period, the Osteopathic Period, the Chiropractic Period, and the Electric Shock Period. There was yet to come the He'll-Grow-Out-Of-It Period, and finally, the Operations Period.

My parents were determined to see that I got every possible opportunity. If there was a chance that something would help me walk, let me play with the other kids in the neighborhood, they were going to take that chance. They never gave up, even for a little while, and Mother said she prayed a lot.

The Brace Period came with our move to Concordia, Kansas, and the consequent addition of yet another doctor who thought he might know how to help me. The braces were steel and leather affairs that could be locked at the knees. With them on I could stand up and walk around, as long as I had something to hang on to. The big problem was lack of balance. Like most spastics, I had almost no sense of balance, and like most spastics, I was deathly afraid of falling. As long as I was holding to something, I was all right, but put me alone in the middle of a room and I went rigid with fright.

"He seems to have no control of his muscles," the doctor said. "If there were only some way we could teach him to control the muscles of his legs and feet, perhaps he could learn to walk."

Dad thought about that. He thought about it all that week, and the next Saturday afternoon, he said, "Mary, get me a pair of Jack's old shoes." Then he went down in the basement, and when he came back, he had a can of gray paint, a paint brush, and a heavy carpenter's pencil.

Mystified, Mother and I followed him out the back door, I with my braces locked, stumping along stiff-legged, holding Mother's hand. Dad spent that afternoon outlining my footprints on the back sidewalk with black pencil and painting in the outlines with gray paint. Then he planted some lengths of steel pipe on either side of the walk and strung heavy, insulated wire between the evenly spaced pipe lengths at just the right height for my hands.

"Now, Jack," he said, "as soon as the paint dries, you begin walking. You will practice putting your feet down in those footprints, and maybe some day we can take those braces off. What do you say?"

What did I say? I could hardly wait till the paint dried!

At first it was fun. I clung tightly to the guide lines, and hour after hour practiced putting my feet in those gray prints. But the game soon wore off, and often I hung swinging to the guide lines, petrified because I had stubbled and started to fall.

"How did the walking go today?" Dad would ask when he

got home from work, and Mother would say, "He walked a long way today, DeWitt. He did fine. He started to fall once, but he caught himself and went right on walking."

Or she would say, "Jack's getting lazy. I had to take the vegetables out to the porch to peel them today, so I could watch him and make sure he walked."

After I learned to walk between the lines, however, and was at least a little less afraid of falling, they left me alone a good deal of the time, patrolling my beat. There are some things you can't learn with your parents hovering over you, and out on that back sidewalk, with nobody holding me up as I wobbled the length of the walk and back, I got my first small taste of independence.

That was how the score stood, on that gray fall afternoon in Kansas, over a quarter of a century ago. I was, at long last, on my feet. I was walking, after a fashion, but I could never have any sort of independent existence as long as I had to lean on something or hold to something to maintain my equilibrium. There were not always going to be walls or doors or bannisters to cling to.

I had been out walking between the lines, missing the painted footprints as often as I hit them with my erratic feet, but still plodding uncertainly up and down the walk. Any time I got tired or downhearted, I could quit, for I was alone this day, but something of what I had learned,

something that had been instilled in me since my birth, would not let me quit. If I had not been told there was something better, if I had not been gently pushed and helped and goaded on, who knows but what I might right now be flat on my back in a bed from which I could never rise?

At any rate, I had walked until twilight came and the weather turned chilly. Then Mother came out and helped me into the house.

We had a winding, open stairway, leading from the living room, the first step of which protruded from the newel post and made a convenient seat for a five-year-old boy. As a matter of fact, it was one of my favorite places in the house. It wasn't exactly a chair, but it was a good place to sit.

It was something out of the ordinary, and it gave me a feeling of private ownership. Perhaps that was because no one else ever sat there or could, my little behind being the only one that would fit the seat.

Mother brought me into the living room, unlocked my braces, and set me on the stairway ledge. The sudden change from the nippy air of the out of doors to the enveloping warmth of the big, pot-bellied German heater was almost too much for me. I grew drowsy and daydreamed. I saw myself grown up, walking down the street straight and tall between Mother and Dad, swinging my arms naturally at the sides,

keeping my knees straight without benefit of braces. I saw myself pitching a baseball game, quarterbacking a football team, running races, jumping, climbing trees.

The room was cheery with the red glow from the stove and the light of the old-fashioned three bulb brass chandelier, and the smell of supper cooking on the stove came deliciously from the kitchen. It was the in-between time of day, when play was done and there was still a little time for dreaming before supper and bed.

I sat there with all the warmth and dreams around me, and I looked at the big library table only two steps away. Could I walk to it? After all it was only two steps. Just two steps without guide lines, without a chair or a wall or a person to cling to.

Two steps into nothing, or two steps that might mean the beginning of walking wherever I wanted to go. I might fall and hit my head on the table. I might get one step away from the safety of the stairway and freeze with fright. I might fall. I might fall. I might fall. The thought kept pounding through my head, and I was shaking with fear. Because I had fallen--become overbalanced in a chair, or pulled myself up to a table or a chair and had walked, hanging on, and had tripped and fallen--and because I did not know yet how to fall, I had hit hard and it had hurt.

But another thought was hammering to get in. I could hear Dad say, "Pick 'em up and lay 'em down, Jack. You won't fall. You can walk." I remembered Mother watching me from the back porch, and how proud she was when I tottered the length of the walk and back, missing the footprints only twice. I was going to walk. My mother and father said I could.

Suddenly I quit thinking. I pulled myself up slowly, clinging like grim death to the newel post. I stood there for a moment, gathering my courage and listening for Mother. I wanted to be sure she didn't know what I was doing. If I fell, I wanted to be able to crawl back to the stairway and sit down before she discovered it; and if I made it to the table, I wanted to surprise her.

Pans were rattling reassuringly in the kitchen. I took one step and wavered. I stood for a split second on one foot, unable in my sudden panic to bring the other foot forward.

Then the trailing foot came around, and I fell forward, reaching for the table. My fingers clutched at the edge of the table and I pulled myself erect. I made it!

My parents have given me many things, but the greatest gift they ever gave me was courage--the courage to take two steps.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRST TIME

The first time they shave your legs, it is only light fuzz they are removing, and the pull of the dry razor is hardly noticeable. When they paint your legs with iodine and wrap them in layers of wet bichloride bandages from crotch to toes, you really don't mind the damp discomfort.

I was all eagerness the first time. Dad had gone to work for Donald Bolman at the Concordia Mercantile Company. Mr. Bolman, a tall gray man who walked with exaggerated erectness because of the way a broken back had healed, introduced Dad to Dr. Frank Dickson, a pioneer specialist in the surgical treatment of cerebral palsy. Dr. Dickson had said that he could make me walk, and here I was, a little less than six years old, in a ward in the old Christian Church hospital in Kansas City, being prepared for my first operation.

I remember the last words Dr. Doty had said before Mother and I boarded the train for Kansas City. Dr. Doty was our family physician, a fat, kindly, cigar-smoking man. "Whatever you do," he had said, "don't let them operate."

Dr. Doty was a good man. It was he who had put me in braces and had gotten me finally on my feet. Once a week for a long time I had gone to his office for a series of

electric shock treatments which he had hoped would help me. From a cabinet with a complicated collection of dials on its inclined panel, Dr. Doty ran a current into my legs through what looked and felt like soaking wet sofa pillows. My legs reacted, as I know now they had to react, being spastic, by flying straight up in the air. Dad must have taken quite a bit of electricity, too, because he finally had to hold my legs tight against the treatment table so that they would get the full effect of the shock. Dr. Doty was trying everything within reason to get me walking, but surgery seemed to him too drastic a step to take.

Nevertheless, here I was, my legs like twin mummies under the sheet, awaiting my first real adventure. For adventure was the word for that first operation--adventure tinged with hope. For the first time in my life, I had some assurance that I would some day walk--really walk, not merely stumble about a room, from door-jamb to table to chair to wall.

Repeated sojourns in the hospital have taught me to bear pain and, what is worse, the awful boredom of a hospital bed. My days in the hospital have shown me great souls in little, twisted bodies. They have shown me selflessness beyond measure in the doctors and nurses who have trained long years for what is often a dirty, back-breaking, sleep-robbing, thankless kind of work. I think I learned

other, later visits to the operating room was completely absent the first time. The white-haired doctor with the ruddy face and the gentle hands had said he could make me walk. To do this, he would have to put me to sleep and get his fingers inside my legs and straighten out some muscles and nerves. It was all very simple, and very wonderful, I thought. When did we start?

I had drunk a bitter draught the night before, and I had been bathed this morning. I was clean inside and out and not yet overly hungry from having missed breakfast. I was ready. I was impatient. I had pestered Mother about as much as I dared by the time the two orderlies appeared with their rubber-tired cart.

I don't remember a bit of fear the first time. This time, when they put the ether cone over my face, I did not have the almost uncontrollable urge which I had on succeeding occasions to fight it. The first time, there was no little ball of nerves where my stomach had once been. There was no congested breathing, no troop of iron-shed butterflies flitting around my insides and somehow managing to kick great holes in my peace of mind. The first time there was no need for a hypodermic to make the butterflies yawn and go to sleep. The nurse may have given me a shot to quiet my excitement--I don't remember--but she didn't need to quiet my uneasiness that time. I hadn't any.

Mostly it's the smell I remember after the orderlies came. You know the smell if you've ever so much as walked down a hospital corridor. It's always the same, that of a strong antiseptic mixed with the unmistakable sweetish odor of ether. I don't remember the ride in the elevator, but I do remember the operating room, with a lot of masked faces floating around me in a haze. Intensely bright arc lights imbedded in the stern gray ceiling fought their way into my consciousness. The hum of the steriliser and the murmur of the white masks gradually merged after the cone had been put over my face.

"Breathe deeply," someone said, "and count to ten."

"One, two, three, four, five--six---seven----eight...."

What comes after eight? I know very well what comes after eight. I don't have to have Mother standing there telling me, "Nine, Jack. Nine." I know it, but I can't get the word out of my mouth. I think, "If I open my mouth now, I'll never get it shut again."

Besides, there is an interesting set of black and white concentric circles which seem to approach and retire, approach and retire, as I breathe. They get bigger and bigger, fussier and fussier, until at last they fill my whole vision, then my whole head, until finally I blow away the circles with one breath and parachute softly into a

bottomless pit of blackness.

When I left the hospital, I was more helpless than when I had come in. My legs were encased in an A-cast of plaster of Paris from my toes to my hips, with a board between my legs serving as the bar of the A and spreading my legs as far apart as possible. I had lain on my back with my legs spread thus for four weeks, and in the union station in Kansas City when we started home, it was easier for Mother to carry the baggage and let the Red Cap carry the awkward bundle that I was. The awkward bundle was going home to learn to walk.

CHAPTER SIX

MY MOTHER MADE ME WALK

She stood about three steps away from me and said, "Come on, Jack. Walk over here to me."

But these three steps looked like three miles to me. If I took them, it would mean I had walked the longest distance I had ever gone unaided. There were no braces now. The guide lines Dad had built were of no use here in the living room. If I took these three steps, I would be well on my way to learning to walk alone.

"Now it's up to him," Dr. Dickson had said when I was released from the hospital. "He has to learn to walk. He has to do his exercises and learn to use muscles he has never used before."

So there I was, leaning on the living room couch and looking across three steps to where Mother stood. I started to walk. I tripped and fell.

"Get up, Jack," Mother said. "Get up and come on over here to me."

But I was scared. I have said before that I, like all spastics, was afraid of falling. Besides, there was nothing by which I could pull myself to my feet. I was out there in the middle of the floor, away from the comfort of walls and furniture.

"Come on, Jack," Mother insisted. "You've got to get up." I raised a fuss. I yelled and cried. I had fallen once, and I wasn't going to take the chance of falling again.

"The neighbors used to talk about how mean I was to you," Mother said recently. "It must have sounded as though you were taking a beating during those first walking lessons."

That wasn't the only time they talked about Mother, either. If I was out with her, and I fell, she let me get up by myself. People probably considered her thoughtless at best, and more likely they called her cruel. She knew what she was doing. She was doing the kindest thing possible, because she knew I was destined to fall for a good many years. She knew that if I was ever to get away from the house, I would have to learn to fall and pick myself up without making anything big out of it.

But this first time I lay there yelling and crying, and Mother went out to the kitchen. She returned with a fly swatter. "Get up and come over here," she said, "or I'll use this on you." I got up, pulling myself erect with painful slowness, using the couch for leverage. I stumbled and tottered and fell, yelling all the time. I got up again. My track was as erratic as a water-bug's, but I walked into my mother's arms. For a long time after that, the fly-swatter was kept handy for its therapeutic effect.

Mother never let me feel that there was anything

dreadfully wrong with me. I don't think I ever heard her speak of me as "handicapped" or "crippled." Not that my folks ignored the obvious, but insofar as my life as a member of the family has been concerned, or as a member of society, there has never been the slightest hint that I might not some day carry my part of the load.

People who look at a spastic with pity should take a leaf from my parents' book. Certainly the lurching gait of a walking spastic is not a pretty thing to see, but a spastic who is walking at all is making strides toward independence. He has never known what it is to walk normally. Anything he learns to do from the time of his birth is bound to be an improvement over his original condition.

One thing that has helped me more than anything except the operations themselves has been my family's refusal to let me lapse into invalidism. Once in a while I could finagle one of my brothers into getting me a drink of water, or maybe fetching me a book from another room. The more likely reaction, however, would be something like, "What's the matter with you? Are you hog-tied or set in cement? Get it yourself!"

I thank them for that now. My family and friends have always had too much understanding to be sentimental or to allow me to feel pampered, as too many disabled people feel. I am thankful that my family and friends have

not been over-sympathetic or too helpful for my own good. The friends with whom I went through grade school and high school learned finally that I did not want or need help when I fell. In the beginning, I was forever being surrounded by all too helpful playmates. It took no little rudeness, I fear, to get the kind-hearted kids to let me alone.

Often a handicapped person gets credit for courage that is not his, that is only borrowed. So it is with me. It was the indomitable courage of my parents that has made it possible for me to live a full and active life.

Mother had two other boys to care for. When she took me to the hospital for the first time, she was torn between me in the hospital and my brothers at home. I spent four weeks in an A-cast in the hospital that time, and Mother spent two weeks with me and two weeks at home. "When I was home," she says, "I wanted to be in Kansas City with you, and when I was with you, I worried about the boys at home."

Mother pulled me to and from school in a coaster wagon that first year, so that I could start my education on time. Evening after evening, when I came home from school, she gave me the passive exercises prescribed by the hospital. I would lie on my back on my bed, and Mother would put my legs together. Then I would spread them apart as far as I could. With a hand on each foot, Mother would then force the legs apart to their limit and bring them together again.

Taking a foot in her hand, she would turn it out, up, in, and down, saying the words as she did it, and getting my help when she could. With me on my stomach, she would bend my leg up at the knee as far as it would go, then bring it back again to the bed. Over and over again we did these exercises, night after night.

My mother stood three steps away from me with a fly-swatter in her hand, willing me to walk to her. She saw that the life I led was as nearly normal as possible, even to giving me at least some of the spankings I deserved. She strapped me into that first A-cast every night until I outgrew it, so that I slept with my legs spread as far apart as possible to help cure me of the cerebral palsy "scissors" gait. Most important of all, after I had learned to walk, she saw that I was left free to develop as normally as possible and not become a hothouse cripple.

After each of the five operations on my legs, I had to learn to walk again. After each of the five operations, it was Mother who stood on the other side of the room and coaxed me into walking again. I think the fly-swatter went out of fashion after the first operation, but I know that it was Mother's persistence at least as much as mine that put me on my feet and sent me walking.

I have never used a crutch or a cane in my life. I dislike their infringement on my independence, and besides,

I think there is as much likelihood of my tripping over them and falling as there is of the crutch or cane helping me maintain my balance. But through the years, my mother, who knew I would some day walk when almost everyone else must have wondered a little about her sanity, has been a spiritual crutch--a crutch upon whom I have been proud to lean.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DOWN WENT MCGINTY

For some unremembered reason, I had got off my tri-cycle--which for the moment was perhaps a pitching bronco or a racing car or a fire engine--and was standing near the bright yellow fireplug that adorned the street corner. I turned from the fireplug and started to walk toward the tri-cycle. I tripped. I had not been walking long. I had not yet learned to fall, and I toppled backwards.

My head struck the large lug on the fireplug--the one the firemen turn to start the water gushing--and in no time, there was a gushing indeed. There was a large gash in the back of my head, a gash that sent my brother riding for help as fast as he could pedal.

That was only one of the six times I have dented my cranium with something harder than it was, and the six scars are still there, all in the back of my head, and all creating for the barber unexpected problems in tonsorial landscaping. But since I learned to fall, I have never had a broken bone--from falling--never suffered an injury worse than a bruise or a slight abrasion. I have never even broken my glasses, which I have worn since I was eleven years old. And I have fallen many times and still fall occasionally.

After the first of a series of five operations, at least

I began to walk independently. I had thrown away my braces, and though my knees were still bent and I still scuffed the toes of my shoes with dragging feet, I was walking--alone.

However, I was still a spastic, and as a spastic, I fell and fell often. My mother and father and friends tell me they hate to see me fall, "because you fall so hard." That, I suppose, can't be helped. I'm short of stature, only about five feet eight, but even that distance is enough for a body to fall, especially when it falls as dead weight. When I hit, I hit with a decided thump. The important thing is, however, that I do not get hurt.

Many a time I have said, as some solicitous friend stood over me with that want-to-be-helpful-but-helpless look on his face, "Don't bother. I'm not hurt. I don't know how to stand up, but I sure know how to fall."

And more than once I have had somebody ask me, "How did you learn to fall so that you won't be hurt?"

So now I have to back down a little and admit that I never did "learn" to fall. That is, I never consciously set out to discover how, since it must be, I could deposit myself on the deck with the least possible pain and inconvenience. I don't remember the exact time or reason I began to fall forward, for instance. That was a good many falls ago.

I do know that through most of my grade school career

I carried a scab on my right elbow. About the time the wound healed, down I would go again and the scab would start to form all over again. I have since thanked my stars that there was nothing the matter with the ability of my blood to coagulate.

Sometimes I would fall only from the knees down, smacking my kneecaps forcibly against the floor or the wall or the ground. That, take my word for it, can hurt enough to make you sick. Most of the time, though, I caught the fall on that elbow. I think it was then that I began to "learn" to fall.

Here let me say a word to the people who, for some reason or other, must fall, and to parents of children whose legs are likewise unreliable. This may hurt you more than it does me, especially if you are just beginning to get your bumps in this falling business or if your little boy or girl is just beginning to jar the furniture, but I would say that the first rule of learning to fall is to fall.

If your child is an ambulatory victim of cerebral palsy, or polio, or any other disease or accident that makes it certain his life will have more than its share of ups and downs, I would suggest that you get a mat, such as is used in gyms for tumbling and wrestling. I would suggest that you stand little Humpty-Dumpty on that mat every day and let him practice falling.

I would suggest further that you be somewhat paradoxical in your approach. Be firm, but take it easy. Both of these seemingly contradictory injunctions stem from the same reason. It is that same fear of falling which rises to haunt the spastic even, sometimes, after he has had his lessons in falling. And for a fledgling spastic, who has been immobile most of his young life, this fear is especially acute. So that you must be firm with your apprentice in falling until he gets used to the idea. Remember that, for him, falling the length of his body may give him the same feeling you got the first time you stepped off a diving board. Only for your novice in falling it will be the first time every time, and for a long time to come.

By the same token, however, remember that the best motto to depend on in the reeducation of spastic muscles is "Take it easy." The little guy may be scared stiff, but if he is anything like the not inconsiderable number of spastics I have known, he'll have the courage of a steeplejack, and he'll work his heart out for you.

All this may sound a little heartless, but if the spastic or polio victim is walking, he's bound to get his lumps sooner or later. It is better that he learn how to take them. And remember, if your child learns to fall and use a mat, he runs less risk of a cracked head once he gets out on sidewalks, dance floors, and other bone-cracking

surfaces.

The first rule in learning to fall, then, is to fall. The second is to relax. If you feel yourself falling, even if you merely trip over a slight rise in the paving, let yourself go. Drop. It's hard on clothes and not too good for your dignity, but it might save you anything from a sprained wrist to a broken bone. I know. I've had my share of sprains, strains, and bruises, injuries which were my own fault. Nine times out of ten, once you start a fall, you're going to finish it. If you try to stop yourself, you become tense, and it is much easier to injure a tense muscle than it is to injure a relaxed one.

They tell me--naturally, I've never seen it myself--that when I fall, my arms are bent at the elbows, my head is down, and my legs are straight. In other words, I fall "dead" from the waist down, with my body bent at the waist, and take the fall on my right hip and upper right arm, the arm folded against my body. This is not necessarily to be construed, however, as "the" way to fall. There may be such a way, usable to all those who must fall, but if there is, I do not know it. The way I have described works for me, however, and it may work for you or your child.

If you are one of us, then, who spend as much time, perforce, in the horizontal as we do in the perpendicular, I give you greetings and these three operating rules for your

private elevator:

Learn to fall.

Learn to fall forward.

Learn to fall forward relaxed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MY DAD AND I

One advantage of a very small town is that when anything about the town needs correction, the whole population can pitch in and do the correcting. So it was with the streets of Hardy, Nebraska. They had been muddy long enough. It made for sloppy walking, and even the narrow-wheeled Model T's had trouble staying in the slippery ruts in wet weather.

Basic democratic movements all start, I suppose, as that one did--as an anonymous groundswell. After months of grumbling about the muddy streets, one day all the adult males in the town agreed to work for a day, trucks were volunteered, gravel was procured, and all up and down the one main street in Hardy, men stood in the trucks and threw the damp gravel into the street in great, whooshing shovelfulls. My first memory--or perhaps it is only the memory of a memory, told and retold in the family until it seems I remember it--is of kneeling beside Dad in the back of one of those trucks and throwing handfulls of that cold, wet gravel into the street. It must have been early spring, because I do not remember any snow, and I do remember that the day was clear, but cold and wet, as from recent rains.

I was three years old at the time, and I was bundled

up as prettily as you please in my new white eiderdown coat. Mother must have been put out when we returned from our expedition with the front of that white coat smattered with mud and wet gravel.

But I was happy, because I was helping Dad. It is remarkable, looking back on it, how much time I spent with my father. I don't suppose many able-bodied bodys, except, perhaps, farm boys, spend so much time in the company of their fathers as I did with mine.

Dad was distributor for the old White Eagle Oil Company out of Hardy, and I rode the truck with him while he delivered gasoline and oil and distillate and kerosene to the service stations and farmers in northern Kansas and southern Nebraska. I'd go to the bulk station with him and wait while he climbed the slim ladders of the big, round, silvered tanks to check the supply. I sat around garages, smelling the interesting smells of oil and gasoline and hot rubber, while he took the garage man's order.

At about the age of four, I learned that I did not like chewing tobacco. I was waiting for Dad, who was in the back of the shop talking to the owner of the garage. Sitting with his chair tilted back against the wall, a man who used the front of the garage in preference to the barber shop for loafing pulled an unwrapped plug of eatin' tobacco out of the back pocket of his overalls. "What's that?" I wanted to know.

"'Schewin' tobacco, sonny." There was a twinkle in his eye. "Want some?"

The only kind of chewing material I knew anything about was the gum the grocer always gave me when we went to town on Saturday night, so I said, "Sure."

In my memory the tiny sliver of the plug I got was bright yellow where the man's pocket knife had cut it. In my memory, too, the sliver of tobacco burned hot against my tongue before I could so much as bite into it. Tears burned in my eyes, and I spat the unchewed chewing tobacco violently onto the concrete floor. And the man tilted his grease-stained hat far back on his head and laughed with a fat-sounding round roar.

Sunday afternoons, Dad and Mother and I would climb into the gasoline truck and drive to the ball park; or maybe we'd ride in Carmi Myers' big open Maxwell with Carmi and Alice and their two girls, Coraline and Hazel. Dad played second base on the Hardy town team, and Carmi, who had a farm on the Kansas side of the line, played center field. Sometimes we'd drive to Bostwick or Nelson or Superior or Chester for a game. And sometimes Dad would take me into the dugout with him, leaving "all the women" in the car, and setting me down with "Monk" Morris and the Henderson boy, and the two Swedes from north of Hardy and the rest of them and in the aura of that pleasant

masculine combination of odors: hot bodies under flannel and leather softened with neetsfoot oil and tobacco juice.

Dad dressed at home, wearing an old pair of house slippers to the field and changing to his spikes after he got there. There was no grandstand, nor were there any dressing rooms at the ball park. There were bleachers, but most of the spectators sat in their cars, parked along the foul lines. After the game, Dad drove away in his sweat-soaked uniform and bathed when he got home, in a wash tub set in the middle of the kitchen floor and in water pumped from an outdoor pump and heated on a wood-burning range.

The team gave me a much battered baseball, and I used to get down on the living room rug, with Dad's glove on the wrong hand, roll the ball to the wall, then crawl after it, wishing I had somebody to play catch with. Sometimes Mother would roll the ball on the floor with me, and sometimes Dad; but already I was wishing I could stand up and throw the ball, could catch it on the fly.

When we moved to Concordia, where Dad went to work for the Concordia Mercantile Company, Dad didn't play baseball any more, but we had the Concordia Travellers to watch. The Travellers were one of the best semi-professional teams in the midwest, and one year they won the Denver Post semi-pro tournament. They played the best semiprofessional talent in the area plus the Kansas City Blues and such

barnstorming professionals as the Kansas City Monarchs and the bewhiskered House of David team.

Long before I had heard of Babe Ruth or Lou Gehrig, my heroes were people like First Baseman Red Herriot, Catcher Red Gulick, Second Baseman Pop Gleason, and Pitchers Lefty Landrum and Chief White Horn of the Travellers.

Mother had one, then two babies to care for, and she didn't go to the ball games as often as she did in Hardy; but Dad took me, and Sunday after Sunday we'd sit in the grandstand and yell for the Travellers. I became a baseball "wolf," which is a bench jockey moved into the stands. I'd yell for my team and "raaz" the opposition, hitter by hitter, pitcher by pitcher. Baseball was the only sport I knew until I was in junior high school, and I learned it well, in the dugout and in the stands.

When the Travellers won the Denver Post tournament, Dad did one of the first radio re-creations of a game from telegraphed play-by-play reports. Besides selling groceries for the Concordia Mercantile Company, Dad was one of the announcers on the company's Station KECW. The studio was one room in the combination warehouse and office building, tastefully draped in heavy green cloth for acoustical effect. A single, spring-suspended microphone, of the early circular type, stood in the middle of the room, and "artists" and announcers alike clustered around it like a football

team in a huddle.

In those early days, announcers, at least on local stations, had a coy convention which prevented their using their names for identification purposes. They signed off and on with their initials. "This is L. D. M. signing off and wishing you good night until six o'clock tomorrow morning." Dad got into the habit of taking me to the studio with him, and my first radio experience came when I was about seven years old. It was Saturday night, and the show had been Western music played by a group of "visiting artists" (free talent) from Glasco or Belleville or somewhere. I sat beside Dad all through the program, keeping very quiet, as per orders, and when the show was over, Dad suddenly said, "And now, Jack, how would you like to sign off for me?"

I'd heard him do it so often, I knew I could do it, so I nodded my head violently, not daring to speak until the time came. "My son Jack will say good night for us this evening," Dad said, pointing to me.

"This is Jack McKee," I piped, making a little dent in the convention of anonymity, "signing off and wishing you good night until tomorrow morning at six o'clock." Aside from brazenly telling the audience my whole name, I tried to give the announcement the same intonation I had heard Dad give it so many times.

Apparently, I was a success. I did a lot of signing

off after that. I know I signed off a lot of organ recitals, incongruous as it may sound. Organ recitals were easy. There were enough church organs in town, and enough organists who wanted to be heard, that all the station had to do was to run a remote line to a church almost any night of the week, and there went an hour and a half of air time right there. People loved organ music.

The whole operation was extremely informal, anyway. The harried producers of today's split-second-timed affairs would be shocked out of their toupées at some of the things those little Uncle Ezra stations used to do. Before the Federal Communication Commission told the boys they couldn't use phonograph records unless they announced them as phonograph records, Dad used to say, "Well, will you look who just walked into the studio! If it isn't Marion Talley! Would you condescend to sing for us, Miss Talley? You would?" And Dad would announce the song, drop the needle, and away we'd go.

The summer preceding my entry into the fourth grade, the wholesale house needed a new truck for its fresh produce route. Dad was elected to go to the Graham-Page factory in Evanston, Indiana, and drive the truck back, and he took me with him. Most of the details of that journey are hazy in my mind. I remember crossing the Mississippi. I remember I was surprised that the passenger cars on some of the trains

we rode were dull red, like the freight cars at home. I remember that we drove the truck straight off the assembly line, with the black paint still damp on the stakes of the truck bed. I remember that we crawled across the hot mid-western states at fifteen miles an hour, the rustling, golden fields of wheat and corn on either side of the road sending furnace blasts of what breeze there was through the open windows of the truck.

We picked up a truckload of hitch-hiking kids outside of Vincennes, Indiana, and had company for a while. We drove into East St. Louis, Illinois, in the small hours of the morning. The first, and most important, thing to do was to find a garage for the truck. After that we ate and asked about a place to sleep. Yeah, there's a roomin' house about four block from here. Nice place. Might try there.

Dad walked and I wobbled along in the still, dark night, and the yard fences and even some of the houses leaned crazily, blacker against the blackness of the starless night. I wasn't frightened, not with Dad there. I thought only that if I blew hard, some of the houses might fall down, like the towers I built of dominoes on the dining room table at home.

We finally found the house, and the room we got was big and comfortable, with an enormous, white-covered, square-looking bed and two whirring electric fans set diagonally in corners of the room. We slept the sleep of innocence and

immense fatigue.

When we got home, we told my uncle Russell about the nice room we had found in East St. Louis. We described the neighborhood, and he laughed. We asked him why.

"It's funny now," he said, "but it might not have been. You two happened to land in the toughest part of town. It's a wonder you weren't waylaid." And Uncle Russell wouldn't vouch for the reputation of the delightful rooming house wherein we slept.

I remember all these things, but the most important thing is that I made that trip--the longest journey I had yet made--with Dad. Mother and Ellwood and Don stayed in Abilene with Uncle John and Aunt Mabel, but I went with Dad.

Later, when Dad went on the road for the mercantile company, we three boys would take turns going with him, calling on the general stores in Clyde and Rice and Ames, and on the grocery stores and drug stores and restaurants there and in places with wonderful names like Agenda and Falmo and Strawberry and Clifton and Cuba. When I was along with him, Dad always took me in with him, and the first time I went with him, he introduced me to all the owners. I had done nothing to merit it, but the way Dad talked, and his man-to-man attitude toward me, made me feel like a partner in his business.

Dad doesn't like to see me fall. It's an active dis-

like with him, and when I fall now, walking with him, he explodes. "Didn't you see that bump in the sidewalk? If you'd just watch where you're going and pick your feet up!" He isn't angry with me. He's angry at the falling itself. I think it hurts him to see me fall. The explosions are an emotional release. We enjoy being together, Dad and I, and we forget about my legs when we are walking along the street, talking. A sudden fall breaks into that feeling of normality, that feeling of comradeship, and the jarring effect of it hurts us both, I think. My dragging feet and the way my right arm cocks up with spastic tension have always bothered him. "Pick up your feet" and "Put your hand down" became integral parts of our conversation in my boyhood, and the phrases slipped in automatically, in the end, hardly disturbing the flow of conversation.

Dad has been strength to me, and courage. He has instilled in me some of his own strength, some of his own belief that he can do anything he sets his mind to. What independence of mind and spirit I have, I owe largely to him, and what physical independence I enjoy comes directly from his and Mother's constant insistence that physical independence for me was more than a possibility, and from their untiring persistence in finding ways to make it so.

PART II

THE WIDENING OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER ONE

A FULL LIFE OF MY OWN

The Reverend Mr. Holt attracted me to church, except for occasional attendance with my family, for the first time in my life. He did it in a roundabout way. He interested me in the Boy Scouts; then he persuaded Mother and Dad that I could be a troop member despite my legs. Since he was Scoutmaster, as well as minister of the First United Brethren Church in Concordia, and since he was the kind of a man a boy likes to be with, I began to go to church, just to hear him.

About the time I was twelve, I began to go through the first of a series of agnostic periods. It seemed to me that the vengeful God of the Old Testament had very little to do with the Christ of the New Testament, and since the so-called Christian religion seemed to me to be almost more concerned with the wrathful God of Moses than with the loving God of Christ, religion seemed a sterile thing.

But here was the Reverend Mr. Holt. He was an obviously good man but not an aggressively good man. It was the latter point that was important to me. He talked a boy's language at the Scout meetings, and his sermons on Sunday were simple and straightforward, devoid of pulpit pounding. So I joined the Boy Scouts and I started to go to church at the

United Brethren Church.

I had gone to Sunday school all my life. Dad taught a class of boys at the Methodist church, and I enjoyed it. We all enjoyed it so much, in fact, that somehow the superintendent was persuaded to let Dad teach the same group of boys all the way from about the fifth grade through junior high school. But until I heard Reverend Holt, the church service bored me.

Clothesline rope is a good thing on which a spastic can practice tying knots. It is not so small as to demand the finer finger manipulations of string, nor is it so large as to be unwieldy. It provides good exercise for any spastic, but for one who is trying to pass his Tenderfoot knot-tying tests, it is perfect. I passed those tests, and since the other tests on the Tenderfoot level were memory tests--learning the Scout Oath, the Scout Law, the Scout Motto, the Scout Sign and Handclasp, the significance of the badge and insignia and uniform, and the history of the United States flag--I was soon a full-fledged Scout.

I had already pushed the door to active physical participation open a crack. By the time I was in the second grade I was playing in Miss Morris' rhythm band, a collection of kazoes, coffee-can drums, sand blocks, and triangles which brought the boys and girls who played them considerable local reputation among women's clubs.

As soon as my legs would hold me, I joined the others on the playground. Before I was Boy Scout age I had played and umpired playground baseball, played center on recess-time football teams, and had become part of a winning knight-and-rider team. In these games one boy would carry another pick-a-back, his arms looped around the rider's legs. Teams of knights and riders were chosen and would come riding down on one another across the playground. The team that had the most knights still aboard and the most "riders" still on their feet after the clash was declared the winner. But except for a certain lack of euphony and the chance of hurting some big, strong boy's feelings, it always seemed to me more proper that the boy doing the carrying should have been called a war horse.

If I had nothing else, I had a tenacious grip, and if I could stay aboard my own "horse," I could almost always down enough riders to become champion. But it was a no-holds-barred business, and I got my bumps along with the rest of them. People have made concessions to my legs, but among those were not the kids on the grade school playgrounds. By any kind of standard, I never was much good as an athlete, but one of the reasons I was even as good as I was, I think, was that I never worried about falling. I had to have a runner when I batted--to get me to first base. When I got on base, I took over. I could never go into

the complicated gymnastics of a hook slide, but I wasn't afraid to take a big lead and I could throw myself forward on my belly in the best Pepper Martin tradition if a slide was necessary.

I've been knocked out twice while participating in sports. While I was umpiring a baseball game from behind the pitcher, a weak-armed second-baseman tried to cut off a run at the plate. Instead he hit me in the back of the head. Baseballs are precious things to boys. This one had lost its cover and had been re-covered with layers of black friction tape. I didn't blame the second-baseman. Throwing that tape-wound baseball was something like putting the shot.

When I played football, I was usually the center. That way I didn't have to run with the ball or, since we had no set plays such as the pull-out running block for the center, run downfield ahead of the ball carrier. I simply had to stay where I was and see that the defense didn't get through the center of the line. If I was able to get down on my hands and knees after I snapped the ball, the defense didn't get through. But a favorite maneuver in those games was to "dump center." A defensive man would come in from either side and hit high and hard. I'd find myself sitting down with the play swirling over me. But it was a backfield fumble that knocked me out. We tried a plunge through the middle. I snapped the ball and went to my hands and knees, moving to my right and taking a

a guard out as I went down. But the other guard got through and hit the ball carrier so hard the ball went up in the air like a watermelon seed squirting from between thumb and forefinger. Somehow I screebled and covered the ball. I think every member of both teams covered me. As it was with Bret Harte's man of the Stanislaw Society, the proceedings interested me no more.

By the time I reached Scout age, however, playground athletics became more organized and only the big, the strong, and the whole-bodied had a chance to participate. Scouting was timed, then, just right to fill a need that sports had filled before. Once a week to go down to the basement Scout rooms of the church, to drill with the rest of the troop-- I was a little slower than the other boys but no less earnest-- to pass tests and to stand before a Court of Honor and receive a badge, to sing around a campfire, to build a lean-to and sleep on the ground--to participate, finally in all the romantic joys of that boyhood organization--all this was perhaps the most important single moulding force in my life up to this time. To be disabled can be a lonely thing unless one finds a way to break through the wall of loneliness, and Scouting gave me a wedge to break it with. Scouting gave my life direction and guidance, but most of all it gave me a sense of belonging in the world. It put me on the streets pounding strange doors, selling light bulbs to swell the

troop fund. It sent me to camp a week at a time in the summer.

I remember trying to learn to swim in the tepid waters of Brown's Lake, the site of the Scout camp. I remember big, blond Scotty carrying me on his back, in knight-and-rider fashion, when we had to get somewhere in a hurry. I remember, too, standing before the final campfire of the week with a lump in my throat and tears close to the surface as I heard that the camp had elected me Honor Camper. I remember most of all being a boy as a boy should be.

But to Scouting and sports add music. Dr. Wilbur Sherrard, versatile musician, a man jovial and irascible by turns, product of circus bands and concert music, a man who could come down off the rehearsal podium, pick up any instrument in the band, and show you how it should be played, was organizing a grade school band to act as a feeder into his high school organization. My friend David Matthew was going to learn the clarinet. I wanted to learn the clarinet, too. The fingers on my right hand were a problem, but Dad said we'd try. We went to the music store and the man put a beautiful silver clarinet in my hands. Oh, but it was beautiful there in my hands! I could blow it, I could tongue it properly and bite down on the mouthpiece as I was told, but it was no use. There simply wasn't any individual articula-

tion of the fingers of my right hand.

But in the end it was all right. At home Dad had a big, blond-varnished parade drum which he used to play in a drum and bugle corps and in the city band. I didn't need nimble fingers to beat a drum, only nimble wrists. Dad got out the drum, and the day the band was organized he took it to school in the car for me. I was a big frog in a little puddle; I had the only drum in the room. Why, this was better than being third man in the clarinet section.

There was no bass drum in the band so I played both parts, the on-beat of the bass and the off-beat of the snare. This was to cause trouble when I moved up to the high school band later. The bass drummer would just as soon play his one thump to the measure without any help from the snares, thank you. And I did play in the high school band, from the time I was in the eighth grade. I was participating still. I couldn't march in parades or between the halves of the football games, but I could get out to the field early and set up my drum on its rack and wait. I could play for high school assemblies and in music contests.

If I got a feeling of playing on a team from my drumming in the band, there was even more of an athletic analogy in my participation in debate. Here was competition. In music you play for perfection, not against an opponent. In debate you have an opponent. You pit wit against wit and

knowledge against knowledge the way a football player or a wrestler pits muscle and training against muscle and training. Debating also allowed me to compensate somewhat for my lack of a chance to act. There are not many parts in the theater which can be played from a sitting position, but a person can get almost the same thrill of performing for an audience if he stands holding to a lectern and orates on the merits of municipal ownership of utilities and federal health insurance. We took turns debating the affirmative and negative of the questions--debate is a splendid training ground, therefore, for both lawyers and liars--but I preferred always to debate the negative. Rebuttal is much more fun than constructive argument, and easier too.

I know the meaning of defeat. I have been defeated many times. But it is part of my heredity and part of my training that I must never lose a point to life by forfeit. I always thought of debate as a contest which matched my wits as well as my information against my opponent. Thus when my colleague and I were debating a team from Belleville, Kansas, and the Belleville debater quoted from a source that was new to us, I simply started digging into my card file for something that was at least analogous to the case. If we couldn't beat him with information, I reasoned, perhaps we could find a flaw in his logic or a falseness in his original premise.

Unfortunately it was my colleague's turn for rebuttal, and unfortunately he did not reason thus. He did not consult with me about the problem that faced us. He simply got up to speak, and there was a trapped look on his face. "Our worthy adversaries," he said, "have brought into the debate material with which we are not acquainted. Therefore, we are unable to offer a rebuttal on our opponents' final points." We lost the debate. We might have lost it anyway, but we didn't have to lose it because we quit.

Here again I was taking part in the life around me. If the football team made trips for games, well, the debate team went to tournaments and to debates with other high schools throughout the state. And if the fullback wore a letter for his line plunges, I had a letter for my logic and my speaking. The presentation of the letter at the honors assembly on the last day of school ranks in my memory with the Honor Camper award at Brown Memorial Camp.

Mere busyness does not make a life, but busyness in a group and to a purpose is a fundamental part of living which is denied to the solitary invalid. Always there are compensations, and often the compensations come to one unasked and unlooked-for. I could not pass my Scout tests in hiking or tracking but I could pass observation tests provided so that boys like me could clamber up the Scouting

ladder. I could not play a clarinet but I could beat a drum; I could be a part of the thrill of something beautiful coming from the combined and cooperative effort of a sort of unconscious and off-hand dedication. I could not buck a line or shoot a basket or hoist myself over a high-jump bar, but I could gather material, make a case, and present an argument; I could wrestle mentally with students of equal resources and I could get some of the same exhilaration that a runner must get when he breasts the tape a step ahead of his opponent. Out of the material at hand, and with the help of many friends, I created before I was out of high school the basis of the life I was to live. There was nothing conscious in its building; it grew from an unconscious desire to explore and a voracious curiosity about life. I have within me a mental restlessness for which I am thankful; it compensates for the necessarily restricted physical travel. I stumble on strange facts like the man who stubbed his toe on the diamond in his back yard. I proclaim the discovery of an idea new to me like Balboa sighting the Pacific. Out of the material at hand and with the tools God left me after He raided the tool chest, I have created and am creating a full life.

CHAPTER TWO

PLAYING FIELD TO PRESS BOX

I had a 3-2 count on the batter but I had put two men on base with walks. It was the top of the third inning and we were ahead by one run. My sidearm pitch didn't have anything on the ball but the cover, but I could usually control it better than the overarm delivery, so I threw that. I almost beaned the kid with it, and he went down to first to fill the bases.

That was all. I tottered wearily off the mound and waved in my relief. I was about thirteen years old, and I was managing one of those Saturday morning sandlot teams. I wasn't a very astute manager or I'd have pitched myself only in relief. I knew I could go only about three innings. I threw entirely with my arm, because every time I tried to put my back into a pitch I fell flat on my face and three innings was all the arm would take.

Much to my chagrin, I shall never be a professional baseball player. It may be just as well that I was born with cerebral palsy, for if I had had my legs, I might have tried for a career on the diamond--and I'm a runt. It's all right to dream about being another Phil Rizzuto, but Rizzutos come one in a thousand and besides, I wanted to pitch. I'm too old for it now and I've never weighed over 150 pounds in my life. Maybe it's better for me that I couldn't even think

about playing ball for a living.

I have two brothers, but three is a rather awkward number for games. Mother says I once recommended to our doctor that I have six more brothers, so the McKee family could have a ball team all its own. The request may have been extreme, but I do think a spastic should have at least two brothers and/or sisters. Perhaps more than the victim of any other disability, a cerebral palsied person needs companionship and competition within his own family.

But there was always a gang of neighborhood kids in our yard, and if it so happened that the three of us were left to our own devices, we could play catch or One Old Cat or shoot baskets in the back yard or pass the football.

From my own experience, I think that the simple game of catch is one of the best exercises for coordinating the hand and eye. I began playing catch sitting on the front steps of our home, and the distance between my brothers Ellwood and Don and me was the distance to the sidewalk. At first I had no ball glove and could not get a left-hander's glove in Concordia. For that reason Don and Ellwood began by lobbing the ball to me underhanded. Soon, however, they were throwing overhand and I was catching the ball barehanded--with my left hand. The throwing distance was gradually increased after I got a glove and finally I was on my

feet throwing. I stepped into the throw as much as possible, but much of the time I became overbalanced and fell flat. I missed a lot of throws and the front door screen suffered during my sit-down period. But getting the glove increased the efficiency of my bad right hand. I learned to catch as I should have learned in the beginning, putting the gloved hand in front of the ball. I even learned to make cross-body catches, although even today I am likely to reach out and snag a throw to my left side with my "meat" hand.

I even boxed a little with my brothers. It was a rather foolhardy thing to do but I thought I could do just about anything anyone else could do, and my family definitely agreed with that philosophy. My footwork was faulty, to say the least, and it was only because I was willing to take a lot of punches to get in close that I put on the gloves as often as I did. In close I could lean on my opponent and throw body punches. But I'm wearing a gold cap on a lower front tooth because I once forgot to duck while I was boxing with Don, and my jaw pops disconcertingly when I chew because I didn't see one of Ellwood's left hooks coming. What clumsy fisticuffing I did, however, gave me an insight into yet another sport, and the interest and knowledge were to be useful later. I couldn't have blamed the neighborhood kids if they had hated me sometimes. They and my brothers were my guinea pigs. I couldn't box very well but, using what I had

read and what I had seen in the newsreels, I taught them to box. I didn't take part in some of the rousing battles that took place around home, but I promoted them. I guess I knew even then that it is much more interesting--and less hazardous too--to watch a fight than it is to be in one. I'm still interested in boxing, understand, but I'll take mine at ring-side or beside a radio or television set.

I started throwing a football around before I knew anything about the game. I started the same way I had started with a baseball--sitting down. I found it to be good and different exercise, for it requires an entirely different throwing motion from that used in throwing a baseball. It is somewhat like a catcher's throw from home to second--snapped from high behind the ear--and with as much wrist action and quite a bit more use of the forearm. Though I never got so I could throw a fifty-yard pass, I knew how far I could throw and I became quite proficient at leading my receiver and dropping the ball into his arms. As a matter of fact, I think if I had it to do over again, I'd start with the football and graduate to the baseball. A football is bigger and easier to catch. After a person throws a football for a while a baseball feels about the size of an egg in the hand. The person graduating from a football to a baseball can, for a while, do tricks with the baseball that he would never have

thought possible. With football as with boxing, my brothers and the neighborhood boys were my guinea pigs. There was, however, a difference. I couldn't run with the ball--I tried it enough to make sure--but I could center to boys who could run. I could also take my turn in the backfield and pass. But there is a disadvantage to being a one-talent man in a backfield, especially when there are only, say, four boys on a team. The opposition always knows what you are going to do and, like as not, all your receivers are covered and you are dumped abruptly on your pants.

We followed the seasons like a calendar and when it was time to put away the football, we began shooting baskets in the back yard. We had an old barrel hoop nailed to the wall of the garage. The hoop wasn't braced very well and every now and then the ball would hit the hoop, the hoop would spring back, and the ball would sail in a high arc to the other end of the yard. I had to stand up to shoot baskets and I think it was about time. Not until I took up table-tennis at college did I learn more about standing balance than I did out there in the backyard, playing "Twenty-one" against the garage wall. My legs tired rather easily then, but if I got tired I could sit down and play catch, the same as with a baseball or football. But I could do more things with a basketball. I could practice bounce

passes, two-handed push passes, or hook passes with either hand. My arms and upper body gained much in agility from this. I had a hard time with the two-hand set shot under the basket because my right hand wasn't much help in directing the ball and I couldn't snap my right wrist enough to get the ball to basket height. But I learned to be pretty good with a one-hand shot from the left side, snapping the ball up to the hoop almost entirely with the wrist.

I could never have been a championship wrestler any more than I could have been a professional ball player, but I did wrestle with the neighborhood kids when I was in my early teens, and I had a lot of fun doing it. I think, as a matter of fact, that any spastic who has sufficient muscular coordination can get a lot of fun out of this one sport alone, plus considerable exercise. He won't win many matches, perhaps he won't win any, but he'll learn something about how to use his body and he may teach the other fellow a thing or two. I never had enough balance to stand up and meet my opponent. I used to go to the middle of the mat and meet him on my knees. It gave my opponent an immediate advantage but I learned rather quickly that there are ways to overcome such an advantage. Once I was down on the mat, I could wrestle with practically anybody my own weight.

The obvious maneuver for my opponent once I was on all fours was to get astride my back, lock his legs around my middle, clamp a headlock on from behind, and hang on. I

couldn't shake him off when my opponent got in such a position. If I tried to unlock the legs, I lost the support of my arms. I could get up on the balls of my feet and attempt to buck the opponent off as a horse would, but if he was firmly seated and his legs were firmly locked, such tricks gained me little. There were but two ways to break the initial advantage. One was to roll over on my back. This released my hands and my legs to work on both the scissors hold and the headlock. More effective, and sometimes possible, was to somersault. Thus disturbed, my opponent was somewhat easier to handle once I had lit on top of him. Perhaps because of the natural scissors motion of my spastic gait and because the way I walked forced over-development of my thighs, I won quite a few impromptu matches by default when I trapped my opponent into a body scissors.

I have enough competitive spirit to want to win every contest I enter but my won-lost record wouldn't look impressive in anybody's book. What I did, I did for fun and because the set of exercises the doctor had taught me in the hospital got a little boring finally. Of course, there was a victory to be won there too, but being able to walk anywhere I wanted to go was a long range prospect, and I needed actual physical competition to keep my interest high.

I learned one thing very quickly in my extremely amateur venture into the sports world: whatever else was

wrong with me, I had plenty of strength. The difficulty was that the strength was misdirected, as it is with all victims of cerebral palsy. Before my first operation I used to lie on a bed and sweat, trying to wiggle my toes. In that scrambled switchboard that is a spastic's muscular-nervous system, the message wasn't getting through. After that first operation the first and one of the greatest thrills I experienced was to lie in bed and watch my toes move in the open end of the cast.

Most of the fights I had were with my brothers, and most of the fights I had I lost. For though I had the strength, I did not have the agility to follow up an advantage. One night when the folks were gone, Ellwood and I got into an argument. The argument degenerated into a fight, and before I knew it I was flat on my back on the kitchen floor. Ellwood sat athwart my middle pinning my shoulders to the floor with his knees and pummeling my chest with both his fists. Suddenly the anger that was in me at the beginning of the fight deserted me, and I began to laugh. In a flash I saw myself spread-eagled there on the floor with Ellwood sitting on me amidship and earnestly pounding away at me. I was overcome by the sense of the ridiculous, and the harder Ellwood worked at pounding me into submission the harder I laughed. This, of course, made Ellwood all the more angry and he flailed away with increased energy, but it marked a

turning point for me. I have tried since that night never to become angry. I am not at my best under violent emotional stress, and I know it. I have been physically ill with anger, and it has not solved any problem. Violent emotion is painful and harmful, and as far as possible I have tried to eschew the emotional outlook since that night when Ellwood was beating on my chest a rhythm for my laughter.

When I got to junior high school my athletic career was finished. Here was the beginning of organized athletics with formal teams and schedules. There was no room here for an underweight spastic with a three-inning throwing arm and not enough agility for down-field blocking. But I could not stay away from athletics. I watched practice every night, both football and basketball. I went to all the games. And I won a letter.

The letter that I won is probably unique in athletics. I kept score during the season of the junior high basketball team when I was in the eighth grade. I have no statistics to prove it, but I imagine it was the only athletic letter ever awarded a score keeper. Had I know the truth then, and had the awards committee known it, they could have saved the cost of that letter. I got something of more lasting and less sentimental value. I learned to keep a basketball score. In succeeding years I have learned to keep play-by-play accounts of baseball games and find my way through the intri-

cacies of several systems of scoring a football game. Nobody, incidentally, has yet invented a satisfactory play-by-play football score book. It is a job still waiting for some Edison of the sports world.

My years of catch-as-catch-can sports participation stood me in good stead when I began to write about sports. By the time I had reached junior high school, I had begun to haunt high school practice sessions. Often the street lights were on before I started home from the practice field or the court. I followed the coach over the field and stood behind the formations. I knew earlier than most fans about single-wing and double-wing and double-team blocking and brush blocking. I knew that if I wanted to get the most out of watching a football game, I would have to take my eyes off the ball now and then and watch the line-play and the key blocks.

Some coaches won't allow anyone but themselves and the players on the field during a practice session, but I always found it safer and less tiring to stay behind the offensive team at a football practice and follow along with the coaches. It is less tiring for me to walk than it is for me to stand still. When I was covering high school football, I used the perambulating method. When I began watching practice sessions at the University of New Mexico,

however, I had to stay on the sidelines. One afternoon I became tired of standing and sat down on the grass. It's hard to watch a play break when you are sitting down behind the action, so I moved ahead of the scrimmage line and sat down again. I felt fairly safe, because the ball was well over toward my sideline, and I reasoned that if the quarterback was going to call for an end sweep, he'd call it around the other end.

Unfortunately the quarterback had it figured that way too. He reasoned that the defense would be looking for a sweep around the far end or a smash up the middle. He called for a cut-back play around the near end. It didn't work. The blockers were unable to turn the end in and a mass of shoulder-padded monsters came bearing down on me. I flipped over on my hands and knees and started to get up, but the idea of getting out of there in a hurry was too much for me and I started moving away on my hands and knees. Then I was up on my hands and feet, and finally I was up and running, a long stride with my somewhat freer left leg, a short lurching follow-up with my right. Cleats missed my fingers with the clearance of a piston in a cylinder. I could see through the choking cloud of dust the pores on the bare legs going by me. I was caught in a human stampede. Once up and running, I headed away from the play as fast as I could scramble. I escaped, but not before I had had enough exercise to last a

week and a fright which almost made me vow to see all my football henceforth from the lofty safety of the pressbox.

I was assistant sports editor of the high school paper in my junior year. I had a weekly interview with the coach. I wrote a sports column. I covered all the junior high sports. One of my first big thrills in the newspaper business came when, because of a difference in time of publication, I scooped the downtown daily on the reorganization of the North Central Kansas League. It was probably more important to me than it was to the sports man on the Blade, but I thought it delightfully ironical that our paper was being printed in the daily's shop.

For three years I was student assistant in the public relations office at Kansas Wesleyan University. Among my other duties was that of writing sports publicity about the Wesleyan Coyotes. My first job after college was that of sports editor of the Raton Daily Range in Raton, New Mexico. In 1946 I helped establish a sports publicity department in the department of public information at the University of New Mexico. I wrote the copy, oversaw the photography, climbed into the antiquated press box before gametime and made sure that the working press had places to sit, "spotted" plays and players for the visiting writers, kept the other schools in the circuit supplied with program information and special

copy, and covered every game myself. I do not consider myself a sports expert, but I did write a column for the department which had state-wide circulation. Before I turned to other fields, I had made at least a little niche for myself.

From college football to professional boxing, sports have been subject to a lot of adverse criticism lately and will probably come in for much more. There are rotten spots in every activity, I dare say, and it is right that those spots should be discovered and removed. But rottenness gets publicity while the positive attributes of sports are ignored. Athletics has been good to me; in my boyhood it gave me companionship and a challenge. It took me away from a world of hospital rooms and books and took me out of myself. In my youth it gave me a field in which I could excel, a starting-point for my writing, and a chance for a larger audience. In my manhood it has provided me with a living. I am grateful.

CHAPTER THREE

A FINE ROMANCE

On the playground of Lincoln school in Concordia I was a lone chick for a bunch of first-grade girls who clustered around me like mother hens protecting the single survivor of a disastrous hatching. They flocked to pick me up when I fell. They sat me in the playground swings and swung me high and long through the recess period. They were kindness, were these little girls, but entertaining me was no great sacrifice; they enjoyed it. I don't have freckles or a pug nose, but something about me seemed early to arouse the mothering instinct in the girls and, frankly, I enjoyed it, too.

But all my encounters with what Li'l Abner calls female girls of the opposite sex were not so happy. In the first place, I have always been just a little frightened of woman in the singular--of all except Harriet. Harriet moved into our neighborhood when we were both about eleven. She and her little brother soon became part of the gang. We dug backyard caves together, were on the same side in neighborhood mock wars and clod fights, rode our tricycles together as Indians, cowboys, race drivers, and truckers. She had red hair and a track of freckles across her nose. She was

not pretty then, but she became so. We went to the show together every Saturday and thrilled to the exploits of Tom Mix and Bob Steele and Hoot Gibson and Buck Jones--all the glorious Western heroes of the silent picture days. But we didn't think of these Saturday excursions as dates. We couldn't have if we'd wanted to: her brother and my brothers went along.

It was a family thing from the beginning. Her family and my family were great friends and we were always together, but we were together as part of the family. Even when Harriet's family moved away, we used to drive to their home for a visit. I think I must have been in love with Harriet in the end, but I think I must have known even then that it was hopeless. I was a tail on a kite. I went only when and where my family went. Even when we lived in the same town, I never thought of going anywhere alone with Harriet--to a show or downtown for a Coke. Then when she moved out of town, I saw her less and less frequently. We wrote but the letters became fewer and fewer, and by the time I was ready for college Harriet was married.

By the time I went to high school I had become a spectator. I sometimes went to school parties, sometimes even to school dances, but mostly I'd just watch the others. There was no sense of sadness in this; it was fun. Only long afterwards I realized that I had let a large, important, and

beautiful part of growing up slip through my fingers. No, I had fun. When Charlie Wilson came home from college in time to teach the dancers The Big Apple at the Thanksgiving dance, I had as much fun watching it as the others did dancing--even if the baled hay and cornstalks of the decorations did bring on an attack of hay fever.

I did get up courage to ask for a date to the Junior-Senior banquet my senior year in high school. And the week of the banquet I got the mumps.

I found out when I got to college that I could have fun on a date. But I knew long before then that I enjoyed girls--in groups. At a party where I had gone stag, I could have a wonderful time, just talking and listening. I developed a lamentable liking for puns. My own. And though my audience groaned and writhed as the corn grew taller, like moths fascinated by a deadly light bulb they'd come bumping back for more. I had fun in high school. I had fun working on the paper, debating, helping with plays, working on floats for Homecoming parades, helping with the writing of the class prophecy. But while my classmates were pairing and experimenting and preparing for the next great natural step in their lives, I went for nightly rides in the car with my family or, which was more likely, I did not even want their company and stayed home alone reading.

I do not know that I was emotionally disturbed at this period in my life, but I do know that I must have retrogressed into the introversion from which I escaped by learning to walk and to participate in living. After a day in the school room, I wanted nothing more than to be alone. I was moody. I tried to write what I felt and what came out was some sufficiently bad verse. I was looking for answers to all the big questions and, characteristically, I wanted no help in finding them. Now I know that it was all part of that confused and confusing struggle to grow up. It was adolescence. But it was a different journey through adolescence that I had than most persons have, for I denied myself and was denied one of the primary directions of that growth.

One reason for the denial was the restriction of my area of operations. At an age when my friends were learning to drive cars I was occasionally walking the seven blocks to the city library and the seven blocks back. I returned from these trips exhausted but with two books under my arm and with an exhilarating sense of accomplishment. But a person to whom a fourteen-block hike was an accomplishment couldn't very well walk to his girl's house, walk to whatever was the evening's place of entertainment, walk the girl home again, and then return home himself. Such an expedition would require rigorous training, almost, and I suspect the effort would have been, in any event, too great for the

reward.

I listened with something of admiration, a little fear, and considerable scepticism to some of my friends' hyperbolic accounts of sexual exploits. I had a lively appreciation for the budding, high-breasted, long-legged phenomena who earlier had been my boy-bodied, sexless playmates of the school ground. But I enjoyed them, not in any healthy animal manner, but as an observer on a balcony might enjoy a live, moving painting on the floor below him. I had the feeling, even then, in my self-imposed isolation that no girl--no woman--could ever take me seriously as a lover. And for my part, I was a little frightened at the thought of being taken seriously. I had already developed a sort of caution about decisions of living, and balanced against the desire for a normal life in all respects was the fear that I should fail physically as a husband. Besides the fear of physical failure, I did not know that I could make a living. The struggle for physical independence had occupied me too long, and was to occupy me longer. Economic independence is something that has had to wait. And marriage--even the thought of marriage--is waiting on economic independence.

This step-at-a-time approach to life has a sort of prudence about it which may be admired philosophically, I suppose, but a diet of prudence can become tasteless and

even deadly without an occasional salting from the shaker of impulse. My isolation has increased with age and now the girls seem young beyond measure. I do not yet look forward with resignation to a life of celibacy and childlessness, but an old friend put the idea with almost unnecessary and ironic succinctness recently. "I think," he said like an ancient prophet, "you've sinned away your days of grace."

CHAPTER FOUR

HERE THE COURSE WAS PLOTTED

The gray clouds hung low and achingly full and the grass below was of that deep and urgent green produced by a wet spring in Kansas. Through the window of the classroom a lilac bush planted tight against the wall of the building perfumed the air with the most delicate odor of spring. I stood at the window and the sense of all-enveloping beauty was something I had never felt before. I went back to a desk in the empty classroom, took a sheet from my notebook, and began to write. When I had finished, I laid the short essay on Miss Leatherberry's desk and left.

Miss Leatherberry taught French and Spanish at Concordia High School. In my freshman year she was also sponsor of the school newspaper. She printed the essay and, whether I knew it or not, my course was set. With my physical equipment and my mental aptitudes and limitations, my choice of a career was limited. My first two choices--baseball and flying--were out. My mathematical ineptitude was something of a natural phenomenon. I could therefore rule out accounting, insurance, and any number of other professions which depended on keeping numbers and symbols marching in orderly ranks across a page. There was talk of law, but three years of Latin and the prospect of a long apprentice-

ship cooled my ardor for being an instrument of justice.

My basic equipment seemed to consist of an inordinate curiosity about everything, a modicum of imagination, a flair for language, a love of reading, and an ability to make words march where numbers and symbols would not go. I did not then make up my mind to be a writer, but I began to write. Essays and poetry occupied me; fiction I left untried. There was so much to say about actual things and persons observed, so many newly-discovered emotions to be catalogued in attempts at poetry, that there was no time left for fictional creation.

History and politics intrigued me. History textbooks seem to be written with a view to seeing how pedestrian the author can be and still achieve publication, but Miss Evalyn Fields could make a student curious about the things that weren't in the books. She somehow made history alive and as immediate as the current events we discussed in connection with it. In the early 1930's it was not the crime to hate war and militarism that it might soon become, and Miss Fields was a pacifist. She lent me a copy of a play called "If This Be Treason." I don't know now who wrote it or what the action was. The theme was pacifism, and I read the play with mounting excitement. I had already begun to think of war as a particularly stupid business. Emotionally I don't think I was particularly disturbed, but the waste in money, time, and talent appalled me. It still does. I have yet to

find a war in history out of which the gains were not over-balanced by human miseries and economic dislocation. I no longer think that personal pacifism is the answer. There is a certain smugness in a pacifist's ease of conscience. There is a certain moral disparity between the pacifist, who solves his problem to his own satisfaction through the avoidance of killing, and the soldier--no less averse to killing--who willingly accepts the guilt of his nation and the world, at least partly in order that the pacifist may continue to have a clean conscience and bloodless hands.

But Miss Fields fluttered the dust from the dead-dry pages of history and made us think. And so did Bill Skelton. Bill Skelton taught history, sociology, economics and international relations at Concordia High School. He was a little man, young but balding, and his two front teeth were false. He had been a shoe salesman, an ice trucker and a railroader, among other things, and these jobs had kept him in touch with the love of his life--people. A person could almost get by without a book in his classes. What he said and the way he said it was sufficiently vivid that, in a final examination, I found myself quoting his exact words. These words, and others like them, plus his patient, friendly personality, often kept students clustered around his desk long after everyone else in the building had gone home.

What appealed to me most about Bill Skelton, however, was his objective attitude toward the subjects he taught. Far from being a debunker, nonetheless he found some of the glossings of historians distasteful. He did not dress Napoleon in a gaudy suit of glory, nor did he strip him to the sniveling little gangster with a big gun. Rather, he left him for us, half-clothed in the greatness of his military strategy and legal reforms, yet with all the big ego of the little man showing through. Imperialism was imperialism to Bill Skelton, whether it was American or foreign. He made no excuses for our Mexican and Central American exploits. On the other hand, his loyalty to what he perceived to be true American ideals was the quiet kind that is simple and sincere and sure; no soap-box oratory made that loyalty, and none was going to destroy it.

Bill Skelton had only scorn for William Randolph Hearst and Bernarr McFadden. I have seen him take a copy of the old, sensation-mongering Liberty between thumb and forefinger and drop it into a wastebasket as if it were a fish a week dead. He hated scare headlines; he hated shams, the little miserable ones and the ones that make a million dollars.

These are the things Bill Skelton taught me, in a course in history and a course in civic sociology: don't

live a sham; don't be a sham; don't tolerate a sham. Be a practical idealist; don't spend all your time dreaming about a perfect state; work for the improvement of the state that exists. Life is not all "real" or "earnest," and humanity is a pretty good joke at times. People are all right, but they are better as persons. Faith in humanity is tantamount to faith in God. I doubt whether Bill Skelton knew he taught me these things. In the four years I knew him, I don't remember his speaking of them directly. But the ideas were in every word he spoke, everything he did.

I studied French for two years and Spanish for one year under Miss Margaret Leatherberry. Through her I was introduced to Hugo, to Balzac, to Zola, to Rostand. When the second year French class finished its class work ahead of time, she read us Brian Hooker's translation of Cyrano de Bergerac. She read us, too, Noel Coward's A Design for Living and Cavalcade. We went in a body to see Norma Shearer in "Marie Antoinette." We learned from Miss Leatherberry French history and French scenery and French songs. This vivacious, red-headed woman was one of the best equestriennes in Kansas, but she took us farther in imagination than she ever rode on horseback.

When you are learning to write, you need an audience. Miss Gwendolyn Fletcher was my audience, my counsellor, my

greatest help when I first began seriously to "commence author." What I wrote I took to her for criticism, and one of the greatest publication thrills I ever had occurred on the day when, instead of the usual quotation from Markham or Sara Teasdale or Edna St. Vincent Millay, she put a poem of mine on the blackboard. By the time I was a junior in high school Miss Fletcher was sponsor of the school paper, debate coach, and director of the senior play. A high school paper is a newspaper only incidentally. It is a repository for essays, poems, columns, "gossip," and if space is available for news it is printed too. For me this arrangement was ideal. I wrote essays and poems. I wrote a sports column and a terrible Josh Billings-like column of pseudo-hillbilly dialect. I was trying my wings in all directions at once. And I was making the debate team.

But I was also reading Conversation at Midnight and Mark Van Doren's Anthology of American Poetry. I was reading Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsey and listening as the class listened to records of Robert Frost and of Maurice Evans. Miss Fletcher went to Kansas City to see "Mary Queen of Scots" and "Idiot's Delight," and she brought back reports, not only of the plays themselves but of the actors, the scenery, the costuming, the playwright, the directing, the lighting. We saw not only the plays but the excitement of the theater through her eyes.

For better or for worse, in these years my course was plotted. How I was to think and what I was to think were to a large extent determined here. The philosophy I have was shaped here as much as anywhere. These teachers are a few of those whose enthusiasm, teaching ability, and personal interest have helped to plot the course.

MILLERS FALLS

VERMONT

1870

PART III

COLLEGE AND BEYOND

CHAPTER ONE

NO LONELY YEAR

As I stood on the steps of Pioneer Hall and looked north up the broad brick expanse of Salina's Santa Fe Avenue, I felt more alone than I had ever felt in my life before. The year was 1939. I had gone down to Salina to enter Kansas Wesleyan University. Dad had driven me there, had seen me settled in a room just two blocks off campus, and had brought me back to the administration building. Now the beetle-like back of the maroon Ford was disappearing down the avenue, and I was on my own.

It was the first time I had ever been really alone. By the time Mother had left me in the hospital ward in Kansas City, I had had time to make friends with the nurses and the doctors and the other children in the ward. When I went away to Scout camp, I went with the troop. There is no time to be lonely in a Boy Scout camp. There is activity all the time and there are new friends to be added to those who came with you.

At the age of nineteen, then, I was really alone for the first time in all my life. For the first time I was left completely on my own resources. I knew nobody. Compared with Concordia, Salina was a big town. College life, regardless of what preparations I could make for it, was

bound to be a big, new, mysterious adventure nearly comparable to the adventure of the first operation.

I had come very near missing college altogether. What with the five times I had been in the hospital for operations and the cost of getting me through high school and the cost of my brothers' education, the burden of putting me through four years of college might have been too much. In the summer of 1938 Judge Charles Walsh, our neighbor and my friend, found it necessary to be out of town for a few days. For going down to his office and opening it every morning, for sitting in it every day on the chance that his phone would ring, and for locking the office in the evening, Judge Walsh not only paid me money, but he allowed me the full range of his library.

It was in Judge Walsh's office that the Kansas Wesleyan field representative found me. The reverend Mr. Tempelin, minister of the First Methodist Church in Concordia, had come to our home a few days previously to say that, on his recommendation, I had been awarded a two-year scholarship to Kansas Wesleyan. Raynold Plott, the field representative, stayed in Judge Walsh's office most of the afternoon telling me about Wesleyan. When I went home that evening, I was bursting with information about the little college on the Smokey river. Most great things that have come to me have come when all hope seemed gone. Much as I had wanted

to go to college, I knew that it was practically an impossibility. But I thought that with the scholarship, small as it proved to be, there might be a chance for me.

But it was not to be. Finances in the McKee household being what they were at the time, it was simply impossible that I could live away from home for a year. Well, I had had hope but I had not had expectation. The disappointment was not as great as it could have been. There were some subjects I had not had time to take in my four years of high school. Perhaps if I went back to high school as a post graduate this year, perhaps next year--

I did go back to high school. I took another year of French and a course in international relations. I worked some more on the school paper and began to freelance to the two weekly papers in town for the privilege of seeing my writing in print. And I waited and I hoped. Sure enough, by the next fall Dad was running a grocery store in Glaseo, Kansas, the family was on a better financial footing, and if I could get the remainder of that two-year scholarship, college would be possible.

And here I was, in the beginning of loneliness. But it was a loneliness that did not last long. Mr. and Mrs. L. A. Fox, with whom I roomed, were the kind of people a fellow naturally called "Dad" and "Mom." Dad Fox was spare and brown, a dairyman with strong black hair and piercing

eyes under thick, black brows. He had an ironic sense of humor and a love of argument for the sake of argument. We enjoyed each other, Dad Fox and I. We listened to the broadcast of the fights together and argued politics and major league baseball together. The fact that we had such interests in common had much to do with making the home of the Foxes a second home to me.

Mom Fox was a little woman with thinning white hair and pale, kindly eyes. I took my problems and my hopes to her, and when a cold kept me in bed, she made sure I got my meals. And when I told some friends that I was paying ten dollars a month for that big square room at the top of the house, they looked upon me as a plutocrat. Ten dollars was a lot of money.

I made friends with Carl Ramsey, who ran the University Cafe down the block, and with the old lady who ran the combination branch post office and second-hand store, and with the gap-toothed oldster who fixed my shoes at the Wesleyan Shoe Shop and whose white hair was getting a second life and gradually turning a bright red. I found teachers whom I was to learn to revere in the four years I spent at Wesleyan. I found others who acted as counter-irritants and who served their purpose as well as if they had been good teachers. I gravitated to the athletes as well as to those whose interests were in the arts. Before the year was out

I was writing a column for the Wesleyan Advance, called "Sunflower Seeds," a column I was to write for four years. Before the year was out I was a member of the debate team. I think my partner and I lost five debates in one tournament, regardless of which I managed to win a letter.

Once away from home I discovered that I could do many things which I had once thought impossible. Whereas I had missed many days of grade school and high school because of rain and snow, except when the Smokey flooded in 1941 the weather never kept me out of class. Often my shoes and socks were wet, and it was often a wonder, looking back, that I did not catch pneumonia, but I walked from my room to the campus and from class to class across the campus carrying great armloads of books in every kind of weather. Of course, I fell often. The mud of Salina is still on the cover of my copy of John Brown's Body, and the one-volume edition of Shakespeare the folks had given me one Christmas had to be rebound because I tore the back off it in a fall. But I found out I could get almost anywhere I wanted to go under my own power. Often when we had a better use for the nickel bus fare and the hitch-hiking was bad, a friend and I would walk the two miles to town. Impossible? Even a year before I went to Salina the idea would have been fantastic.

I don't suppose there were ever four hundred students at Wesleyan at any one time during all of my four years there.

The classes were small, the campus was small. Unless, wanting to be completely unhappy, you deliberately isolated yourself, you couldn't help making friends. A college the size of Wesleyan is a sort of a laboratory small town, and most of those who go there are small-town kids. Even if I had not since outgrown the introversion of my early teens, I could not help finding friends here. In such a small school, too, there is a personal relationship between student and instructor which makes for more individual development of any student's talent. Rigid departmental divisions are almost non-existent and the accessibility of the president of the institution is taken for granted. Before I was graduated I knew almost all of the faculty personally, and as it had been in high school, often I learned as much or more outside the classroom as I did in it.

As in any small community, there were things and people at Wesleyan that were irksome. There is a certain necessary narrowness about a denominational school which will not admit of full exploration of ideas by an undergraduate. There were bigots on the faculty and among the students, but there were broad, big people theretoo, and the counter-irritation was a valuable thing in shaping a philosophy.

I have in the end, I think, to thank my somewhat chameleon-like adaptability for my lack of loneliness in my first year away from home. I had made niches for myself in

the society of my family and in the society of high school, and I set about to do the same thing in college. I was never one to allow my studies to interfere with my education, and before I was through college I had edited the Advance for two years, worked in the public relations office for three, organized the independents on campus, held office in the Forum Club and the Student Christian Movement, and been a member of a literary club, the Classical Club, and the campus Young Republicans. I had helped write the constitution for the men's dormitory and had been instrumental in getting a smoking room established there. I helped get social dancing established on the campus and made a little extra money by selecting the records and running the record-player and the public address system at the dances. And I found time to write an honors paper in English and to preach a Mother's Day sermon in my roommate's country church.

I sometimes regretted that I hadn't had the chance to go to the state university and get a straight journalism degree, but I don't regret it any more. Besides the undeniably good feeling that comes from being a big frog in a little puddle, I received from my four years at Wesleyan a broad liberal education extending from literature through history, science, and international affairs to philosophy and religion. I received further instruction in my human

education, and the knowledge of all these things plus the knowledge of people would serve me in good stead whether I stayed in journalism or attempted to go deeper and become a serious creative writer.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SAILS ARE SET

When Mrs. Fern Fitzpatrick McCarty found out that lack of finances might keep me from coming back to Wesleyan for my sophomore year, she hustled right down to the public relations office and arranged a job for me. That job made the difference, and but for it I might never have finished my college education. But that great good turn is but one of the reasons I keep a special place in my memory for this doughty woman. She was a fixture at Wesleyan when I arrived there. She loved that little college as one might love a child, and she poured her love into her teaching. She was a strong champion and a good friend.

I had signed up to major in English literature at Wesleyan only because the school did not offer a major in journalism or creative writing, but I found in Mrs. McCarty not only a teacher and lover of literature, but a practical teacher of journalism. In her literature classes she made Beowulf and Browning, Carlyle and Keats live. She had done her master's work on John Gower, but she had a special love for his contemporary compatriot, Geoffrey Chaucer. On a never-to-be-forgotten day the Chaucer class gathered at her home to read Troilus and Criseyde aloud, and afterwards to

eat a specially prepared "Chaucerian" dinner of cabbage soup and meat and pickled vegetables and hard-crust bread cut with a saber. Mrs. McCarty made Geoffrey Chaucer live as a personality in his own right.

As a journalism teacher Mrs. McCarty was not content to have acceptable "copy" in the Advance. We wrote stories about the campus and about the town and sold them to the Kansas City Star and the Topeka Daily Capitol. We found feature stories in such things as the much-exploited Indian burial pit outside of Salina. We were kept conscious of the world outside of Wesleyan.

It is hard to trap in words the essential quality of this bustling, merry-eyed woman. She simply loved life, loved what she was doing, loved those for whom she was doing it. In 1951, after many summers' work, Mrs. McCarty received her doctor's degree. In 1951 she had her first book ready for publication and three more in preparation. In 1951, after a full life of giving to the students of her beloved college, Mrs. McCarty died.

Mrs. McCarty had brought to her teaching an enthusiasm born of a love of people and the works of people. Dr. Francis W. Palmer, whom I next encountered, added principally the joy of scholarship. It is seldom that you meet a man with both breadth and depth, but such a man is Dr. Francis W. Palmer. Dr. Palmer was head of the English department and dean of the

college for two of my four years at Wesleyan. It was with his encouragement and help that I began to write seriously, or at least consecutively, while I was still in college. The man's interests were infinite, it seemed to me. In his teaching field I had courses with him in eighteenth century literature, in the age of Milton, in American literature, and in the modern novel. Yet Dr. Palmer's interests and learning spread far beyond literature, or perhaps they merely include all things in literature. He put no mental boundary between literature and politics, literature and history, literature and philosophy, or literature and art. For him literature was concentrated expression of all human experience.

Iowa born and Iowa schooled, Dr. Palmer was lean and angular. He was addicted to long walks and to camping and fishing, and he walked with the ground-covering strides of a plainsman. He had a natural love for solid things, for good cabinet work and for newly-painted houses. Two of his favorite poets are Sophocles and Robinson Jeffers, a not incompatible pair, but he also had a great love for America's foremost poets of the farm, Robert Frost and Robert P. Tristram Coffin. We in his classes became accustomed to his thinking aloud when he was discussing a particularly philosophical author. Sometimes the American literature class would become a class in Emerson, and sometimes the class in eighteenth century literature would become absorbed for weeks

in tracing the roots of the evangelical movement out of neo-classical formalism. Dr. Palmer brought to all his classes a rather engaging air of gentle scepticism. He encouraged independent thought and intellectual curiosity. He had a rigid fairness about him and an objectivity of opinion that were refreshing.

If I give to my parents their due for their faith and courage in seeing me onto my feet and walking, if I give to the surgeons credit for making that walking possible, then I must give to my teachers credit for shaping and sharpening my mind, for teaching me not what to think--which is a dangerous error--but how to think. There are others who should be on the list: Dr. Edwin C. Howe, the gentle former China missionary who taught history; Mrs. Lillybelle Lewin Carlisle who taught drama and speech and was a pioneer in the midwest in the theater-in-the-round. For the most part, however, my collegiate household gods were a triumvirate. The third member was Raymond W. Derr, teacher of journalism and specialist in public relations for small colleges. A little shock-haired man of boundless energy and ideas, Mr. Derr did more for my self-confidence and for my newspaper style than any other person. He turned me loose on three fifteen-minute radio shows a week for eighteen weeks. I wrote the scripts, did the casting, directed the shows, and announced them. With one or two exceptions, I suspect they

were pretty bad. But the experience was valuable. To write three fifteen-minute scripts a week, whether one is in the mood for it or not, will go a long way toward making a working writer. Mr. Derr created a new kind of independence for me. He sent me to interview Jean Dickenson when she sang a community concert at Wesleyan. He sent me to cover the inquest when one of my friends drowned in the University pool. He sent me out on the street in the dead of winter to do survey interviews. He let me prove to myself that, whatever the reporting job was, I could do it. I have had to prove the point to others each time I have applied for a job since, but the very fact that I first proved it to myself makes each new proof easier. I took journalism courses under Mr. Derr, and in the summertime I worked on the Glasco Sun and the Phillips County Review, but I learned more about journalism, more about publicity and public relations and the difference between them, and more about the actual work of writing in the public relations office than I did in any class or in any summer reporting job.

I learned something else from Mr. Derr, too. I learned to love the Messiah. The Derrs had a set of the Christiansen recording of the oratorio, and the Chief knew the entire score. He was aghast when he found that I had never heard the Messiah sung at Lindsborg. The Lindsborg, Kansas, Messiah is an Easter season tradition with a national

reputation. Mr. Derr set out immediately to supplement the two tickets he had for himself and Mrs. Derr with tickets for all of us working in the office who had never heard the Messiah sung in Lindsborg. Then he loaded us all in his car and delivered us to the place of performance in person. A live person's education is never complete and I may some day hear something that surpasses the Messiah for emotional impact and grandeur--but I doubt it. And but for Raymond Derr, I would have missed that experience. I would probably have heard it on records or the radio, but I would have missed the consummate thrill of that live performance by one of the nation's greatest amateur singing organizations. My favorite teachers have always been friends, friends to whom the work in the classroom was only the beginning of education. I doubt if anybody willingly remains in the teaching profession unless he has some of that dedication which I have been trying to convey in these partial portraits of three people who have helped shape my life and my mind.

CHAPTER THREE

WATER BABY

I went to work for the University of New Mexico department of information in March of 1946. My job was like the two previous jobs I had had since graduating from college. I had been a reporter on the Haton Daily Range and a reporter on the Albuquerque Tribune. I was a reporter at the University, too. And as a reporter I had to do a lot of walking: to the library, to the administration building, to the gym--past the swimming pool. I discovered I had faculty privileges as far as the pool was concerned, but the privilege was of no use to me. I had never learned to swim. Figuratively I was still wearing the yellow ribbon of my Boy Scout days.

So far as I know, fear never entered into my failure to swim. Dinly I remember a picnic with my family and some friends on the bank of the Republican river outside of Concordia, Kansas. I remember that we boys stipped to our underwear--there were ladies present--and went swimming. I remember that the current caught me and dragged me under the water. I coughed and sputtered and swallowed a lot of water. I opened my eyes and saw the sandy river bottom coming toward me. Then someone pulled me out. Mother was frightened and

so were the other women of the party. Dad was not exactly calm. But I don't remember being scared.

I couldn't swim at the Scout camp, but I was the champion at staying under water. I have, as a matter of fact, such a streak of stubbornness in me that I suspect the only way anybody could have beaten me at that game would have been to drown. I liked the water. I enjoyed the feeling of freedom its buoyancy gave my legs. But I simply could not propel my way through it. I could not keep my legs up when I tried to kick. I floated contentedly, face down or on my back, but the minute I moved to go forward my feet sank to the bottom like diver's boots.

There was a municipal pool in the park in Concordia and often I'd sit on one of the benches at the side of the pool and watch the swimmers. My brothers would go around to the dressing rooms and change into trunks while I sat and watched the happy, splashing people. Ellwood and Don had no difficulty in getting around but they had their problems too. Ellwood was too thin; Don was too fat. My respect for swimming grew unbounded when one summer's swimming deepened Ellwood's chest and gave him such an appetite that he began to put solid flesh on his bones and when the same exercise made solid flesh out of some of Don's extra weight.

The idea of learning to swim was in the back of my

mind all the time so that when we moved to Albuquerque and to a house within walking distance of the YMCA, I finally learned. What I needed was a lot of time and an instructor who was willing to take a lot of time to give me individual instruction. I found such an instructor in Dom Tussio. Dom is a burly, swarthy Siciliano who used to be an Air Force cook. As a kid he had sold newspapers on the streets of Hartford, Connecticut. That was where Willie Pep, former featherweight champion, learned to fight, and that's where Dom learned to fight too. When I met him, he was in charge of boys' athletics at the Y. He had a way with boys. He was friendly and on their level enough to make them like him, and he was athlete enough to make them respect him.

Dom took more than an instructor's interest in me. We talked while I was getting ready for my shower; we talked in the pool; we talked while I was getting dressed. He wanted to know why I had never learned to swim before. He wanted to know about cerebral palsy. He was interested in the effect swimming would have on my walking. While I was getting a course in swimming, he was getting, as well as I could give it to him, a basic course in the physiological and psychological reactions of one cerebral palsied person.

I started swimming on my back. I found that the intervening years had given me a better balance in the water

and that, though my feet still had a tendency to drag further below the surface of the water than did the rest of my body, they did not plummet to the bottom of the pool at the slightest provocation. I found, in fact, that my body had a remarkable new buoyancy, that I could raise my head out of the water and look down the length of my body without swamping myself. But I had trouble kicking in rhythm with the motion of my arms. I had spent some twenty-nine years acquiring the reciprocal action in my legs which allowed me to walk passably. Now I had to acquire another reciprocal action, along the length of my body rather than across it, between an arm and a leg, one at a time.

But Dom was in no hurry. He let me get used to swimming around in circles on my back--my left arm is much stronger and better coordinated than my right, and it was a long time before I could swim in a straight line; then he had me walk across the pool in water about waist deep. I was using the same muscles I used every day, this way. I was also using new muscles to counteract the motion of the water of the pool and to counteract the buoyancy which had me walking on my toes and which threatened to pitch me over on my face. For several evenings I did nothing but float and swim on my back and walk across the pool. Only when I was pulled from the pool did I realize how much

exercise I had been getting. The muscles in my thighs quivered. I leaned heavily on Don's arm and against the wall. I was suddenly enormously tired. And after that first session I went home and drank a bottle of milk and ate about a half a box of crackers.

Finally the night came when Don said, "Now watch this and do it after me." And he promptly dived under the water, grasped his knees, threw his body backward, let his feet drop, and stood up. Then he went under water backwards and repeated the operation, thrusting his body forward this time. "I don't want you to be afraid of anything in this pool," he said. "I want you to know, even before you really know how to swim, how to recover your balance if you should happen to trip and fall when you're walking in the pool."

When I had learned that, the rest was simply work. I learned to swim on my back; I learned to swim on my belly. But I always stayed where I could touch bottom if I got into trouble. Then one night Don said he thought I could swim the length of the pool. I told him I was glad he thought so but that I wasn't so sure. But, as he reasonably pointed out, there was only one way to make sure, so I walked along the edge of the pool with him to the deep end. "Now I'll be right even with you here on the edge of the pool if anything happens," Don said. "Don't worry about a thing."

He lowered me over the side and I hung onto the pool gutter for a minute, girding myself. Then I turned around and pushed off. I don't have the inverted breathing problem that many cerebral palsied persons have and that would have prevented me, not only from ever swimming but possible from even getting enough food, since breathing and breath control are a part of swallowing. But I did have trouble coordinating my breathing with my swimming. When the reciprocal coordination of arms and legs is natural to begin with, coordinated breathing must be a fairly simple thing to learn, but when your mind is still establishing the pattern, "Now the arm. Now the leg. Now the arm again," a second pattern to be imposed on that one creates difficulties. I never did learn to breathe correctly when I swim. My best effort is to take in a great chestful of air, put my head down and swim for all I'm worth. Then I pull my head out of the water, use my hands to stay afloat, gulp in some more air, and go forward again. That way I swam the length of the pool. I was strangely, completely confident after I got under way, but I worked too hard at it. I was never so tired in my life as when my feet finally touched bottom.

In many ways learning to swim was one of the most tedious things I ever accomplished. Add to the fact that I

was cerebral palsied the fact that I was twenty-nine years old. My muscles had long since set in their motion-patterns. What a boy would pick up in one session it often took my body two or three sessions to comprehend. I reached learning plateaus more often than a boy would do, too, and when that happened, there was nothing to do but go back to something I knew I could do and keep doing it until my muscles were ready to accept a new assignment.

After that journey down the pool, however, I swam sometimes three widths, sometimes three-quarters of the length every time I went to the Y. There was only one thing left for me to do. Dom thought I ought to learn to dive. It was one of the few things I ever admitted fear of. I was afraid I didn't have enough spring in my legs. I was afraid that, diving off the edge of the pool, I would hang my feet in the pool trough. Dom never could persuade me to dive, so he compromised. "Are you sure you're not afraid of beginning to swim out in the middle of the water, away from the walls of the pool?" Dom wanted to know.

"I don't think so. I'd just as soon start out there as anywhere, now."

"Would you be afraid to let me throw you in?"

"I'm not sure. I don't think so. Why don't you try it?"

And he did. The pool lights spun as I headed for the water. I put my hands up quickly to protect my face from the impact, and just in time. I was going down and down, and I almost panicked before I remembered to use my hands as elevators and started rising. I opened my eyes and the water above me was getting lighter and lighter, looking like kaleidoscopic cubes of lime and lemon gelatin, shifting and shimmering as I headed toward light and air. I thought I would never get to the top. I thought my chest was going to burst. I thought, "This is one time he's going to have to come and get me." Then I thought, "Now just take it easy. It's the same water down here as it is on top. Just push it out of the way." Then there was a flash of light and I had broken the surface of the pool.

I pushed the hair out of my eyes and headed for the side. I was blowing like a porpoise, but I made it. When I finally got out of the pool, I was a little shaky, but I was proud too. I was finally rid of that yellow ribbon.

CHAPTER FOUR

THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU JUST CAN'T DO

Out on a lonely road in Kansas Dad stopped the car, got out and came around to the passenger side. I slid under the wheel. By the time I was sixteen I had learned to walk passably and could get around enough to go to school by myself. Why couldn't I learn to drive? What if both my legs and my right arm were spastic? I knew a man who walked on crutches who drove his car all over the state.

We sat there while we went over again all the preliminaries about how to start the car, how to shift the gears, how to stop and start again. I was already nervous and the waiting only increased my nervousness. I started the car, ran through the gear-shifting without a hitch, and then, for no apparent reason, I "froze" at the wheel. I was terrified. The faster I drove the more frightened I became, and the more frightened I became the harder my tensed leg pressed on the accelerator. To this day I don't know what Dad did, but the car finally stopped. I was drenched with the sweat of fear and Dad wasn't looking so well himself as he got out and came around to get under the wheel.

That was the last time I attempted to drive until the summer of 1949. By that time I had learned to swim, had

become more relaxed generally, and had improved my walking a good deal. Besides, we had moved to a house in the country, about seven miles from the University. It would take me an hour and a half, plus at least one and possibly two transfers, to get to work by bus. Don had been my major transportation for the past three years, but he would be finishing his college work in another year. And Dad was out of town about half the time.

All of these considerations made the problem rather simple: either learn to drive a car or resign myself to getting up at about 4:30 in the morning to get to work. I like my comfort, especially my sleep, and it seemed at the time that it would be less effort to learn to drive than to forfeit that sleep. There were other reasons I wanted to drive, too. The immediate transportation problem was merely the final spark that lit the fuse. In the first place I hate to feel dependent on anyone or anything. I have never used a cane or a crutch and unless I break a leg or something, I don't intend to. I like human crutches just as little as I like those of wood or metal, and depending on others for transportation had rankled with me for years. Through no fault of my own or of the chauffeur of the moment, either he was waiting for me or I was waiting for him, always. Besides, I have never liked to impose on anybody and

in more than thirty years the transportation of John McKee had become an imposing item, indeed.

Still, the problem was no so simple as all that. First came the problem of convincing my parents that I should have a car and once I had it, that I could learn to drive it. Despite his previous experience, Dad was the easier of the two to convince. I had to get back and forth to work and I might as well give my dimes to a finance company as to the bus company. Besides, my erring muscles were behaving themselves much better than they had been on that day in Kansas. Mother, who by her own will, nearly, had got me on my feet and walking, who had agreed when I wanted to go to college, who had only wavered a little in her resolution when I announced my intention to learn to swim, seemed to have reached the bottom of her deep well of faith in me.

"There are some things you just can't do, Jack," she said. "You might as well get used to it. Personally, I think you've done very well to get as far as you have."

Then David Coleman came to see me. Dave is a couple of years older than I am. He is a cerebral palsied person. He walks with his legs pyramided, the apex at the knees, and he has a pronounced speech defect. He also had a large and thriving magazine and greeting card business, and he came to see me driving a heavy Buick.

We talked for quite a while that afternoon but always my thoughts kept coming back to that big car sitting in our driveway. Finally I asked to go look at it. I opened the door on the driver's side. There were no special controls built into the car! Dave Coleman, whose walk is a frightening stagger, whose balance is a precarious thing at best, is now driving his second big car. He wore out the other one covering the whole state of New Mexico in his magazine business. He attends all the teachers' meetings and other educational meetings to get his magazines into school libraries. He is a competent and relaxed driver.

I called Mother out to look at Dave's car. "You don't have any hand controls?" she asked, unable to believe her eyes.

"No, ma'am," said Dave, his eyes twinkling. "I just got in the car and learned to drive." When he left, I thanked Dave for coming. He didn't know then, but he does now, that I was thanking him for much more than his visit.

"If he can do it, you can, Jack," Mother said when Dave had gone. "Go ahead."

The next problem was to select the car. It had to fit in my limited budget; it had to be a car whose repair bills wouldn't be too high in case I wrapped it around some stubbornly stationary telephone pole. I was sure I could drive a car and my parents had been brought around to my

way of thinking but really the only way I could be sure I could drive a car was for me to do it--and take the hazards as they came. Dad and I looked at a number of used cars, even going back to Model A's. I wasn't happy with any of them, though. If they had good engines, their bodies and interiors looked as if they had been pulled through a knot-hole backwards, and vice-versa. Dad had the same idea, and finally he said, "There's no sense in your buying somebody else's garage troubles. Let's look around some more."

We wound up at the Crosley agency and that's where I first saw my own Green Hornet. There were other reasons besides economy and the newness of the car that made us decide on the bright green 1949 sedan. Despite Dave's success with a heavy car, Dad thought I would be better off with a light, highly maneuverable car. Events, as they say, have proved him correct. I sat beside the salesman as he drove my new prize out to the house. I couldn't get over it. That shiny little emerald of an automobile was mine! I was tempted to go out every few minutes and pet it like a pony. For two days, though, I could do no more than admire it. Dad was to teach me to drive, and he was going out of town.

Granted that it was a hot July afternoon when I took my first driving lesson; granted too that the inside of that all-metal little car was like the inside of a pre-heated tomato can, still I think most of the sweat that poured over

my body found its source in nervous tension. I worked harder doing less that afternoon than I have ever worked before or since. We live in an ideal place as far as learning to drive is concerned. Peach Avenue dead-ends into the wall of an irrigation ditch and is practically without traffic. Up and down the short avenue we drove that afternoon, concentrating on starting and stopping and the coordination between left foot and right hand necessary for shifting gears. We put only about three miles on the Crosley that way, but I was exhausted by that time and happy to peel out of my sweat-soaked clothes and get under a warm, soothing shower.

That was the beginning of many afternoons during which I drove slowly, seldom as fast as twenty miles an hour, up and down Peach Avenue. When it rained and the road was muddy, I'd go out to the car anyway and sit there shifting gears. Actually, I was scared stiff most of the time the car was moving. I got calluses on both my hands from gripping the steering wheel too tightly. I banged into a fence post at the end of the street attempting a left turn. It was a good month before I could summon the courage to take the car out on the avenue by myself and drive it up and down, up and down. And I still tired easily because of the nervous tension I was under. But the Crosley and I were both thoroughly road-tested on Peach Avenue. With little or no traffic to

bother me I practiced left and right turns, backing, starting on a grade, parking, and all the other little things that were to become important in driving in traffic.

Finally, with Dad beside me, I nosed my little car out of the avenue and onto the highway. It was like starting all over again. I couldn't get used to the traffic coming toward me. I wanted to pull over on the shoulder and let the traffic go by. Unless I brought myself sharply under control, I tightened up when I saw in the rear-view mirror a car ready to pass me. A horn blast from a passing car could make me jump as if I had been shot. I never drove over twenty-five miles an hour, though, and I had the car under control at all times. Eventually, too, the uneasiness wore off and I began to look forward to those evening drives.

When that happened, I was ready to take Don to school and myself to work, with Don riding in the co-pilot seat instead of Dad. That was a test! Driving into town was just like driving on those evening trips with Dad. Even driving to the campus wasn't bad. But on the campus, with its thousands of cars close-packed as they were-- that was enough to give me the jitters all over again. Don took the position that unless I did something extremely wrong, he was not going to say anything at all. "It will only make you more nervous," he said, "and after we get

where we're going, I can tell you what to do next time." This is an excellent policy but it can be carried to extremes. One afternoon I turned into the parking lot at the journalism building. I started the sharp turn too fast, forgot about the brake pedal, and like seeing a slow-motion picture, I watched a big pine tree at the edge of the driveway come up and smack the front of the car.

That was the first of three badly smashed fenders. They all happened before my reaction to emergency became more or less automatic. I had driven some ten thousand miles before an Oldsmobile failed to stop at a stop sign and came down on the little Crosley like a size twelve shoe stepping on a bug. I received two broken ribs, three days in the hospital, a new pair of glasses, and a new blue Crosley sedan as a result of the encounter. But I have not yet been responsible for another accident. I note the smash-ups here because I do not want to leave the impression that I sailed through this driving business without mishap. I am no more handicapped than anyone else; I am only differently handicapped. But I can't forget that with my special problems there are some things I may not be able to do. Every time I forget and get a little too cocky for my own good, something like a smashed fender or a fall-- on perfectly level ground or maybe down a flight of stairs--

brings me back to my senses. However, while I must recognise my handicap and make allowances for it, I need not succumb to it.

There is one disadvantage to being a spastic that I hate more than any other. I can put up with a shambling walk and a stiff hand. I can bear crawling on my hands and feet up steps that have no wall or bannister for me to lean on. I can tolerate always scuffed shoes and slowness in shaving. But I hate with all my being my nervous and babyish stomach. If I am going to make a speech or do a radio broadcast, if I am going to a party or anywhere among crowds of people, if I am going to do anything that is extremely important to me, I have come to expect a sickening tightness in the belly, sweat in the palms of my hands, near-nausea clutching my throat. If this is stage-fright, I think it must be heightened by spastic tension.

So it was when I went to get my driver's license. When I knew I was as ready as I was going to be, Dad drove me out to the state police office to take the test. I had to wait. There was a string of others who had chosen this time to get licenses. The waiting only increased the tension. In the days when we lived downtown and I rode the bus a lot, I had a system for hurrying the bus I was waiting for. I lit a cigarette, nine times out of ten, the bus would come and I would throw the hardly-smoked butt away and

climb aboard. The system worked with driving examiners, too. This one was a nice guy. All the way out to the car he kept up a continual chatter of questions--not about driving but about what I did, where I was from, and what I thought about this and that.

When I got in the car and put the key in the ignition, he said, "There's no hurry, John. Just take it easy. There's nothing really tough about this. You've been driving for six weeks now and this is no different." I had read the driving manual over again just before I left the house, but I was sure I couldn't answer any questions now. My mind was as blank of these questions and answers as it used to be before a physics examination in high school.

As we drove along, the examiner said, "Make a left turn here....A right turn here....Stop....Park it....Turn it around and take us back to the parking lot." Meanwhile I was doing all the things I had learned to do on Peach Avenue. The examiner asked questions as I drove, questions that, I realized only later, came from the driving manual. After we got back to the police station the examiner asked, "Where is it illegal to pass another car?"

"On a hill," I said, "On a curve, on a bridge, in a school zone, on a railroad crossing, or at an intersection. And it's illegal to pass a school bus stopped for children, and...."

"Okay," he said, getting out of the car.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Is that all there is to it? Did I make it?"

"Make it? Oh, sure, you made it fine. Go on in and buy your license."

Dad had to drive home. I was too excited.

MILLERS FALLS

ERASE

COTTON CONTENT

CHAPTER FIVE

TO MOVE A MOUNTAIN

Now I want to talk specifically to persons whom the world calls handicapped, and to their parents and families. I have, after all, something in common with the polio victim, the heart case, the arthritic, the blind, the rheumatic fever victim, and fellow cerebral palsied persons. I maintain that I am no different from any number of physically handicapped persons. I'm luckier than most, certainly. I don't spend my days in a wheelchair or on crutches, nor do I lie flat on my back in bed and count cracks in the ceiling all day. But if I had been left to "grow out of it," I would almost surely still be crawling on my hands and knees. If my parents had listened to our family physician and had refused to allow that first operation, I might not have been walking yet. If I had listened to the criers of calamity, and they are always at your elbow, I might never have learned to type or swim or drive a car. I might have been a perpetual burden to myself and to my family.

It does not follow, if you are handicapped, that because I have been able to do the things I have done, you can do them. But given at least what I had to begin with--cerebral palsy affecting both legs and my right arm, balanced

by unimpaired speech and the understanding of parents, teachers, and doctors, who worked with me through five operations and countless therapy treatments--you can do these things. You can begin behind the mark as I did and do things for yourself that you never thought possible, and that your family and friends will look on as virtual miracles.

But you need one thing and if you do not have it, you might as well forget about conquering your difficulties. You must have, above all else, courage--or, to put it another way, faith in yourself. In some ways a birth-injured cerebral palsied person is more fortunate than almost any other sort of handicapped person. At his birth the fates have dealt with him almost as roughly as it is possible to be dealt with and still be alive. Anything that comes after that, except for hopeless stagnation and resignation, is bound to be better. There is nowhere to go but up.

All of which has nothing to do with saccharinity as such. Pollyanna has no place in the world of a person who has to fight to walk. All the platitudes about silver linings and rainbows after the storm will not get a bed-ridden person on his feet nor make paralyzed muscles supple. On the other hand, negative belief is easier and worse than positive belief. Resignation takes less effort than resistance. Put the responsibility on fate. Say you can't defeat the inevitable. That, to my mind, is a shamefully lazy escape from

the hard work of recovery.

Half the battle in overcoming any difficulty is won when we believe the difficulty can be overcome. Confidence and poise are more necessary to a person challenged with physical impairment than they are to one who is normal. A track man who hesitates at a hurdle will probably fail to clear it. A physically disabled person who lacks faith in his doctors, who lacks faith in his own ability to meet the challenge, and who lacks faith, finally, in the eventual possibility of a cure, will never be cured.

Shortly after birth, I suffered an umbilical hemorrhage and though the attending physician stopped the bleeding, he expressed the opinion that it might be better for everybody if he did not stop it, if I were allowed to die that way, easily. What came afterwards must have been bewildering and heartbreaking to my parents. The faith I now have in my own destiny I owe to them, as I owe the very fact that I am living and walking today. Theirs is a quiet, unpretentious, stubborn courage that has taken them through all sorts of medical advice and old wives' tales to the series of operations that finally put me on my feet. Theirs is the faith that all things are possible to him who believes.

My parents' faith has almost literally moved mountains for me. With the help of that faith they got me braces when there was no money for braces; they consented to

CONTENTS
E Z E R A S E

the first of a series of operations even after they were told there was only an outside chance that the operation would permit me to walk. All along they have had faith in the doctors, faith in the possibility of success, and faith that a good God would not let me waste my life on my hands and knees. More than that, to me, has been their faith in me. Without that faith behind me I could never have pushed away from the safety of home to begin going to school; I could never have acquired that independence of spirit that four years away from home, in college, have given me; I could not even now continue to look for a livelihood, beat on editorial doors, fill the mail with poor, limping stories, prepare, after eight years of newspaper and public relations work, to teach school if it is necessary.

My parents' willingness to try anything within reason to get me on my feet has been transferred to me. Besides that, my parents have helped me keep an objective view of my difficulties. They have made it possible for me to see beyond my own handicap and to help other people get outside themselves and their handicap and to begin living a spiritually and mentally strong life.

My interest naturally has been centered on the problems of the cerebral palsied. But when you start noticing crippled youngsters at all, it is not long before you stop asking if they are cerebral palsied or what it was that put

their legs in braces or twisted their hands or bent their backs. Since I came to Albuquerque, I have been doing publicity work, when time permits, for the New Mexico Society for Crippled Children. I am also publicity chairman of the board of directors of the Albuquerque Cerebral Palsy Day School. My work with these organizations has proved to me something that I have long believed: the community, the state, and the nation, by overlooking the handicapped person, are overlooking a great stockpile of our most valuable national resource--the people.

If you could see, as I have seen, a little three-year-old boy come into the Albuquerque school almost entirely helpless and leave the school three years later able to begin attending public school, you would see a little of what I mean. You would believe as I believe, that the amount of time and money and talent spent in getting that one boy on his feet was a tiny thing compared with the enormous potentialities he now has as a future working, producing citizen.

I have not done all that I set out to do, but that is simply part of my being a normal human being. The operations and treatments have not given me normal legs, but they have given me a sure method of getting from one place to another. Being thus able to move about has broadened my outlook and my horizons so that if I were confined to my

bed tomorrow for the rest of my life, I could not be called a shut-in now after more than a quarter of a century of walking around and meeting people and taking part in society. For I have found something greater than even the power to walk. I have found, in addition to a healthy faith in my own abilities, the true meaning of compensation.

Reading, a transportation swifter than jets, has taken me to countries unknown but in the mind. Books have gathered up for me the ages, like fruit-pickers in the Garden of Eden, and have placed them within easy reach of my hand. Through the magic communication system of literature, which gathers all time and all places in its net, I have conversed with the greatest minds that ever lived.

Emerson might not have developed into one of the few original American thinkers if an infirm body had not punched and prodded him. Jonathan Swift might not have poured his monumental satire on the world if it had not been for bitter illness and great pain. But the real seed of these men's greatness was not in their pain. It was rather in their supreme faith in their own personal stars. They believed in themselves. I have known a sufficient number of crippled persons to be sure that those who believe in themselves will achieve the goals they set for themselves, at least within their physical limitations and sometimes seemingly beyond.

I have told my story in the hope that someone, reading

it, may find the courage to live his dreams. Some parent may gain new hope from what my parents were able to do. Some gamely stubborn boy or girl, plugging away at his therapy exercises or gulping half a pool of water as he learns to swim, may find here something to refresh the spirit and strengthen the heart. I have attempted, in telling my story, to bring hope to the hopeless and to repay in some measure those who have been largely responsible for my own hope, my own faith, my own success in creating life out of what might have been living death.