

CHAPTER X



In September of 1944 Virginia got the OK to take herself and the children to Allentown. Doris would accompany her. The transportation department at Vultee Field in Downey got her a private compartment on the Santa Fe. In the meantime, during the period prior to her departure, she had shipped all our furniture and belongings to Allentown via Mayflower Moving Company and had rented our house in Rosemead to a young couple and set up arrangements with a real estate broker to collect the rent for us and keep and eye on the place.

With my family about to arrive I had to make some changes in living quarters and the housing department at the plant found me a three story stone house in Summit Lawn on the outskirts of town. It was in a part of the Pocono Mountains and a beautiful spot. Much to my liking, the YWCA summer retreat was right next door on about four acres of land. I had to take a year's lease on the place at a cost \$80 per month. The house was built in 1796 and had been completely modernized by the owner who was a local building contractor of some note. The house had an attached heated garage with a 100 gallon heating oil tank buried in the floor. It had a basement with an electric powered well that produced the clearest and coldest water I had ever seen. The water was so cold it would fog the kitchen water spouts when we drew water during the summer.

The kitchen was all stainless steel and had a

large walk-in refrigerator. The house was equipped with forced air heating and air conditioning. There were seven bedrooms and three bathrooms. We never did use the third floor except for storage. Doris and the children each had their own bedroom and Virginia and I had the master bedroom. To us it was a mansion, we had never had so much room before and the surrounding woods were awe inspiring, particularly in the Autumn when the leaves would turn to brilliant colors. We could look out over Center Valley from our back yard and the Liberty Bell electric car line from Philadelphia ran by just a block from the house. It was called "The Yellow Death" by the locals due to the numerous accidents it had on it's run.

When the moving van arrived I had them put all the furniture in place and all the boxes and barrels of dishes and clothing was just piled in the living room. I got one of the girls from work to go up to the house with me and get all the boxed things put away. The living room had a large stone fire place with the stone facing going all the way up to the ceiling and the actual fire area was gigantic, with a six foot wide opening and a height of four feet. There was no mantle.

The dishes had all been packed in barrels with excelsior and as we emptied them I stuffed the excelsior in the fire place. The girl's name was Bernice Herbert and she ran the employee savings bond department. I had met Bernice at a dinner at the house of one of my mother's relatives from Langhorn who now lived in Allentown and worked at the Vultee plant. The relative's name was Fran Jackson and she also worked in the savings bond department. Bernice's husband, Ed, was in the Sea Bees and stationed in the South Pacific at the time. It took us three evenings after work to get everything put away but the job was made easier by the Dubonette and Brandy drinks I mixed up for our mutual consumption.

On the last night I decided we would celebrate with our drinks and a roaring fire in the fire place. I

had stacked several logs on the hearth. I set a match to the excelsior and it practically exploded. Fire and smoke came roaring, literally, out of the fire place and up the front toward the ceiling. I had not thought to check for a damper and had not noticed the little handle sticking out of the rock fascia. Bernice jumped up and pulled on the handle and things began to calm down but the house was full of choking smoke. We opened all the windows and turned the air conditioning on and to a casual observer on the outside it probably looked like the house was on fire with all the smoke rolling out the windows. Once we were sure there was no more danger I drove Bernice home and she was probably glad to be out of there. I then returned to the house and began cleaning the soot off the ceiling and front of the fireplace rocks. It was hard work but I finally removed all traces of the near disaster.

Within a few days my family, along with Doris, arrived and we had a great reunion. They had used a wicker clothes basket to keep Harriet in on the trip and she was still in the basket when they arrived. For the next few months that basket served as a sort of bassinet, but she soon graduated to a crib. That ensuing winter was the year of the great blizzard and ice storm of '44 and we had a rough time driving as we had little experience with that kind of weather.

One morning I was driving on a country road through farm land on my way to Emmaus when the left front door on a car in front of me open and closed real quick. At the same time the driver made a sudden left turn toward a road leading to a farm house. I hit the brakes but kept right on going and plowed into the side of the other car. The road was so slick that it just spun him around with minimal damage to either car.

The driver of the other car, who turned out to be a farmer who was merely trying to get to his own house, came out of his car cussing and when he saw my California license plate said, "You Godamn Furriners don't know how to drive." He was really mad and was going to

call the police. I said, "Go ahead, you didn't signal, it was your fault." He replied, "Didn't you see me crack the door?" and I said, "Yea I saw it open and close, but what does that mean?" and he came back with, "It means I'm going to turn, you stupid Ass!" With that he got in his car and drove up his drive to his farm house and I took off. I did not wait for the police and he did not have the sense to take down my name, driver's license or vehicle license. I don't know if he called the police or not but I never heard anymore about it. I did however learn that when you saw someone crack their door because they did not want to stick their hand out in the cold air it meant that they were going to undertake some sort of maneuver.

We were invited out to Jack Steed's house for dinner on New Year's day, 1944. Jack was a flying buddy of mine and one of the closer friends I made while in Allentown. He and his family lived on a farm about six miles out of town and it was all country roads once we left town. Virginia and I loaded the kids in the car and took off for the Steed's in a blinding snow storm with visibility down to just a few hundred feet.

We had the car radio on listening to the Rose Bowl game in Pasadena and the announcer, Don Wilson was describing the beautiful weather that day and the purple mountains in the background. It really made us homesick. There was a narrow stone bridge that we had to cross about a half mile before reaching the road into Jack's farm. Just as we entered the bridge, something jumped across in front of us, probably a deer, and I automatically slammed on the brakes which put us into a wild skid. The bridge was only about 30 feet long and the car spun a full 360 degrees and as we exited the bridge we were going in the same direction as when we entered the bridge.

I told Jack what had happened and he would not believe me, saying, "That's impossible, the bridge is too narrow." but when Virginia backed me up he got a tape measure and went out and measured the length of our

car and then said "Come with me." and we drove out to the bridge where our tracks were still visible in the snow. He then measured the width of the bridge which turned out to be four inches wider than our car was long. Jack just shook his head and said, "I wouldn't believe it possible if I had not seen it with my own eyes," whereupon we returned to the house for some much needed drinks.

Another time that same winter Virginia was taking Richy to a doctor's appointment and was going down a hill on the snow covered street when the car started to skid and she made the mistake of hitting the brakes. Completely out of control the car went over the sidewalk and into the basement window of a building. Neither she nor Richy were hurt and a tow truck was summoned to pull our car back onto the street and she shakingly continued on to the doctor's office.

By this time the poor Dodge was suffering a serious case of road rash so I took it to a body shop to have the needed repairs made after which it came out looking like new. We both eventually learned the intricacies of winter driving on the east coast and had no further incidents.



Richy playing in snow in backyard of our Summit Lawn house in Allentown.



Richy warming himself by the fire place in our house at Summit lawn in Allentown.