

My official title was Assistant to the Office Manager and actually I assisted everybody. When the big boss was away I composed letters saying he would give his attention to whatever upon his return. When there were big mailings I gathered and stapled in the mail room. When the handy man was on vacation, I used the Office Manager's car and made daily trips to the bank. My real job was opening mail and keeping track of membership dues.

Meanwhile I was reasonably faithful about the night school. I could write "he will be there in an hour" in very fast and perfect shorthand. Although I found it necessary to hum "Oh, the monkey wrapped his tail around the flagpole" -- the Sousa march record to make us type with rhythm -- I could at least type without looking. Since I was so inept, there was small demand for my typing and shorthand skills, and because they weren't used, the "skills" were not honed to much sharpness.

But one day all the real secretaries were tied up and Dr. Emch needed a letter done before he left on a trip. With pad, pencil, and hammering heart I went into his office. Fortunately, he fancied himself an orator and strode up and down the room being eloquent as he dictated from notes, slowly by most standards but not for me. He left for his trip, and I rushed in to get his notes from the waste basket to help me with my first transcription of a real letter -- he had expectorated into the crumpled notes! Ugh! But the letter did get signed and sent.

My college friend Ben drove to Chicago one weekend a month, and I took the train to his parents' home once a month. He had not found a coaching job and was awaiting his "success." We were far from setting a date, but I signed up for instructions at St. Ita's Church to become a card carrying Catholic.

Over Memorial Day weekend Buddy and I decided to spend Saturday at the beach. While we were sunning and dozing we became aware of some commotion -- three young men carrying a small sailboat across the sand and being cheered on by people who knew about their spending all winter making it from a kit.

Buddy and I were "new kids on the block," the right age, and not accompanied by dates. During the afternoon we became acquainted with Stan Craidon, Brown Hardison, and John Williams who treated us to a boat ride -- one at a time because of its size -- and had a very pleasant day. That evening we all chipped in for popcorn and beer and the five of us spent more time together.

As the summer progressed we -- mostly I -- saw a lot of these three. When Ben came for the weekend we all played together. When the boys learned of Buddy's forthcoming trip to Europe, they asked a middle aged couple who had a two-bedroom apartment on their floor if I might be a tenant for the month of August. For about the same amount of rent I had a real bedroom and breakfasts and dinners -- dinners which I ate with Stan, Brown, and Johnny.

When Buddy came back from Europe we picked up another sorority sister roommate, a larger apartment, but I continued

to see the three boys almost every evening. A neighborhood bar we frequented was like our Club, and for a 10 cent beer or two we could spend a couple of hours with the "Club" members -- other young folks like ourselves.

One evening instead of going to the "Club" I went with a friend from college to Riverview Park for the rides. We had a great time, and on the way home we decided to park along along Lake Michigan for a few minutes because it was a beautiful night and we hated to end the festivity. The young man had hardly turned off the ignition when 3 young punks appeared out of nowhere, dragged me out of the car and into the back seat, pushed him over into the passenger seat and one drove off. I have never been so frightened in my life. They took turns driving, took our cash and watches, and returned us to the same general area about two hours later. We dashed back to my apartment building and called the police. My two roommates weren't too thrilled about being awakened, the building manager was furious that police were called to her respectable building, and the police thought we were so stupid to park "last car" that we deserved what we got. Bill, the friend, and I made a couple of trips to a jail to look at some inmates, but they weren't our crooks.

Christmas of 1938 we had a party in our apartment -- a pine branch decorated with toilet paper, jewelry, bridge tallies etc. and the exchange of \$1-\$2 gifts. Over the weekend Ben and I met my parents at a midway point -- at Uncle George's -- and I could hardly wait to get back to Chicago and Johnny.

In the spring Ben and I decided to cool it, I stopped wearing the diamond, and I quit the religious instructions.

On April 1, 1939, I was eligible for a two-week vacation so a co-worker, her friend, and I took a bus trip to California. With our young healthy backs we had no problem riding for an entire day and night or longer until we got to an interesting place. Then we would stop for a day or so and repeat the routine. We "did" the Grand Canyon, World's Fair in San Francisco, boat trip to Catalina, the spectacular Rockies -- for about \$200. I hardly had time to miss Johnny.

But shortly after I returned we were walking in the rain one night -- no makeup, hair plastered down, shabbiest clothes I owned -- and Johnny and I decided to get married. Since I had just had my vacation we decided on May 27 because that gave us the long Memorial Day weekend.

Stan Craidon had married a few months before and Ken Kay had become the new roommate in the Bachelor apartment. Through Brown's business he knew a jeweler who extended discounts, so Brown, Ken, Johnny and I went to the jeweler's the first Saturday after the big decision. We saved so much on the ring that Ken and Johnny and I rushed to the nearest bookie to place a bet. The horse had a romantic name -- but lost.

Because Johnny had many relatives and friends of long duration plus his mother's close ties to the Baptist Church and minister, we were married in Nashville in front of the Williams fireplace at home. Twelve year old Pat played the piano and my father escorted me in from the back part of the house with tears in his eyes. Brown had an emergency appendectomy so Ken

Kay was Best Man and the new roommate was my Maid of Honor.

(Buddy was too broke after Europe to make the trip.) The reception was held in the house and that night the young folks had a party with bootlegger refreshments in the home of dear friends who vacated their house for our "honeymoon cottage."

Johnny was working for the North Central & St. Louis Railroad's Chicago office, so with my new married status I too rode home on a pass. Our first "home" was an apartment hotel almost across the street from the Bachelor apartment. Another new roommate for them was Ted Abbot, and the five "Bachelors" and I remained in touch and stayed close friends, time and distance notwithstanding.

The Bachelors fed us the first night after we returned from Nashville, and I spent all day the next day on our first dinner at home. The eye appeal was terrific, flowers, candles, and a colorful dinner plate of food. Unfortunately dime store skillets have shellac or something for a coating -- John took his plate to the garbage can and I cried.

Johnny had vacation time due so he invited a close friend from Nashville and I invited another sorority sister and the three of them went sight seeing and partied while I worked. The day the gifts arrived from Nashville they "helped" me by unpacking everything, disposing of the cartons and excelsior, and handing me the bowl of tags which they had carefully saved. Everybody had to be thanked for the "lovely gift" because I wasn't sure of anything. This "honeymoon" almost killed me because I left each morning while they were serenely sleeping

and returned each evening to be handed a drink and told to "catch up."

In the fall I signed up with a bowling league from the office and Johnny signed up for a couple of classes at Northwestern on the same night. One night I came home from bowling, opened the door and slammed it shut immediately -- we had been vandalized. I rushed across the street to see if Brown or Ted were home, and there were the four of them having a picnic! Northwestern classes had been cancelled, so John came home and made a cheese dip before joining the Bachelors. Every pot and pan, the mixmaster, knives and cutting board and bowls were completely covering every flat surface in the house. Thank goodness I hadn't called the police.

Shortly after we were married Stan introduced Brownie to the sister of an old friend and it "took." Every weekend she came up to our neighborhood, spent Saturday night on our couch, and cooked a real dinner for us on Sunday. What a treat!

Around Labor Day Hitler marched on Poland, but I'm ashamed to say I was more interested in my bowling score. The five fellows took note and warned me not to say anything negative to Hans -- a young German at our Club -- because he thought Hitler was wonderful. At the time our lives were unaffected.

I had received the ultimatum that I could play as much bridge as I liked but never never to count on my new husband for a partner. At first he watched occasionally, then he almost knocked the person down getting into his empty chair if someone left for the bathroom or telephone. Then it was the suggestion that we invite two over for bridge. As we slowly

grew away from the Club, this became our new inexpensive recreation and enjoyment.

In spite of being an only child, most people would agree I wasn't a totally spoiled brat, but I had my moments. Just before our first Christmas, Johnny walked in with a package and without saying anything he put it on the closet shelf and sat down. After much wheedling I confirmed that it was my Christmas gift -- more wheedling, that it was a watch -- more wheedling, I got to open it. But I made a serious mistake when I said, "You've ruined my Christmas because I won't be surprised." He threw me over his knee and spanked me with his bare hand and scared me to death. After I said I wanted a divorce because I didn't know I'd married a wife beater, and he said it was probably a great idea -- Ken dropped in. We never ever made people uncomfortable with our differences of opinion, so after some coffee and Ken's excellent joke and story telling we were laughing together and being the traditional happy newly wed couple. I still have the watch with the date engraved on the back, and my bratty moments became very infrequent.

In 1940 Chicago leases ran from May 1-May 1 or October 1-October 1. About April Stan and first wife, Trudy, called on us with a proposition. If we collaborated by renting an unfurnished apartment we could save enough to start buying furniture for the home we would want in the near future. Each of us would buy a bit of quality furniture and fill in with junk. We agreed, and on May 1 moved into a 2-bedroom flat with a huge living room, huge dining room, small screened front porch, and large fenced back yard. We made a mistake by buying

a quality couch for the living room which was, of course, community area, and took this opportunity to buy the piano my parents had offered as a wedding present and the bedroom furniture the Williamses had offered. Not wanting to appear extravagant, I chose an inexpensive pine twin or double deck bedroom set which could be used for children later and, to be fair, a spinet of about the same price. What a thrill to have a piano in the house! In the huge dining room we had my card table positioned under the light fixture and it looked like a postage stamp on a bed sheet. Three of us worked, Trudy did all the cooking and marketing, and I paid for a maid one half day a week plus keeping our room tidy and helping with dinner dishes.

Trudy was extremely dedicated to saving money for the dream house. Stan got a dollar every morning for el fare, lunch, and the paper and was to put his change in a dish on the dresser in the evening. He used to stop at the N.C. & St.L. office after work so he and Johnny could ride home together, but if the railroaders were stopping for a beer, Stan had to go home alone.

Every night at dinner we would gather at our card table under the light fixture for Trudy's excellent meal and there would be one small bulb burning. Johnny would stand up and screw on the other bulbs while Trudy glared and Stan and I ate in silence. Then when Trudy bought Stan a cocker spaniel and left the light on for the dog when we all went out, tension increased. Not only did J.C. resent being asked to eat "in the dark" while the dog slept with the light on, he had never lived

with a dog in the house before -- just hunting dogs in the back yard. So under whose bed did most dog accidents occur? Of course!

After a short illness my father died in July of 1940 -- cerebral thrombosis. With all due respect, Stan and Trudy were wonderful about bringing my mother into the household, but the atmosphere did change. There was no entertaining by either couple because the living room couch was the third bedroom. There wasn't enough for two women plus a half-day maid to do, so Trudy went out on comptometer jobs and my mother cooked. Sadly, Trudy was much the better cook and left no question in anybody's mind that she thought so. It was a huge relief to end that year.

One of the few good things was meeting the family who lived upstairs. There was a mother about my mother's age and a daughter near the age of the four of us. Everybody knew or learned the first 3 chords of Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C# Minor, and we summoned upstairs or downstairs to step outside in the hall because it was quicker than calling on the phone.

On May 1 Stan and Trudy moved to the suburb, Riverside, and soon afterwards adopted an infant. We moved to another apartment on the north side of Chicago with the blessing of 2 bathrooms. Again we were lucky to have a family upstairs with a mother because we didn't know anybody not in their 20's.

The time had come when it became impossible not to be aware of current events, specifically Hitler's aggression. Ken and Ted were still single and volunteered for the U. S. Air Corps. Stan and Trudy had the infant which made Stan excused

from service. But after Pearl Harbor in December, we knew John and Brown would be doing something and soon. First they fooled around trying to get into the Marines, but Clover refused to sign some necessary paper. Then Johnny thought his Traffic expertise would enable him to make a contribution as well as rise more quickly up the military ladder in the Quartermaster Corps: again much fooling around with a huge file of correspondence back and forth, and then it turned out he wasn't eligible for what he applied for because he wasn't 30 years old -- a fact included in the very first letter of application.

It ended up that neither Ted nor Ken made pilot, as they'd hoped, but both were active officers in the Pacific. Brownie went in as buck private in Artillery, never left the States, and hated every minute of what he called the caste system of enlisted men and officers. Johnny went in as buck private in the Infantry.

Before leaving for Camp Rucker, Alabama, Johnny got us moved into a smaller apartment that I could afford on my salary which wasn't helped much by his \$21.00 a month. He was military to his fingertips -- beginning when he lied about his age to get into the Tennessee National Guard -- and every time he had spent the minimum required time in one slot he got promoted to the next higher one. After reaching the top of the enlisted line he decided to apply for O.C.S. and finish the War as an officer. After much discussion we decided I would become a Camp Follower after he became a 2nd lieutenant, but there was a huge guilt feeling. A dutiful daughter should not leave her mother alone in a large city with few friends; a dutiful wife

should be with her husband especially when there was the danger of his being killed.

The O.C.S. was at Ft. Benning, Ga., and I left my job a matter of days before his scheduled graduation. Instead of attending the graduation ceremony I divided my time between visiting him in the hospital and trying to find a room for the time after my hotel reservation expired. Sulfa drugs cleared up his pneumonia, and the Y.W.C.A. found me a cot in their dorm with some extremely strange women. (We carried our money and nylons into the shower with us and slept with them under our pillows at night.) A week or so later we celebrated with the next graduating class.

After graduation there were a few days leave in Chicago, a couple of weeks at Camp Wheeler in Macon, Ga., and then Camp Blanding near Gainesville, Fl. In the meantime Brown's wife, Clover, had moved into the same apartment complex and I felt a bit better about leaving my mother. In December my mother joined us for a month that took in John's birthday, Christmas, New Years, and my birthday.

We had a room and bath with kitchen privileges in the large apartment of Jill Roberts whose husband was in the Pacific. As usual, bridge players seem to find each other so I soon had a large circle of friends and thoroughly enjoyed Gainesville.

Everybody felt being involved in W.W.II, a moral war, was the only thing to do, and people like J.C. Williams found training raw recruits too removed from the action. He volunteered for everything he heard about to get closer to the

Front, but nothing happened in spite of his applications. I very much wanted a child, but his idea was that a young widow with a child would have more difficulty making a new life for herself than a childless one, and we should wait. My thought was that nothing could possibly happen (certainly not in Gainesville, Florida), and I wanted HIS child under any circumstances. Women have ways of winning this sort of argument, and it was almost simultaneous that we learned he had been accepted for paratroop training and I was to become a mother in August of '44. He was surprised about one and I was surprised about the other. It was back to Ft. Benning for him and back to Chicago for me. A friend and her baby drove back with me, and we arrived, appropriately, on Mother's Day.

"Daddy" came home on leave the first week of August, and I drank castor oil, jumped off curbs and chairs, and wished fervently for the Big Event to occur during the leave. Finally he had to report to the Port of Debarkation so I tearfully waved him off.

On the morning of August 20 I swore at myself for reading so late and falling asleep on the couch, fully dressed, because I woke up feeling dirty and sweaty and had a backache besides. Shortly after the shower it occurred to me that I had never heard of backache that pained in regular intervals. First my mother and then my doctor told me to get to the hospital, and I wondered what the big deal was about Labor Pains. I found out that evening, all night, and all day until the following evening!

It happened that Johnny's ship didn't leave when scheduled, he broke the Code of Silence or whatever "cloak and dagger" arrangement had been imposed on him and called home the evening of the 20th. He kept calling for news, my mother kept calling the doctor and the hospital, but Jack and I weren't making news that day. However, by the time Jack was 4 or 5 days old who should appear at the hospital but Daddy home on some kind of short leave. A total wonderful surprise !

Things were a lot different in 1944; in addition to mothers staying in the hospital for 10 days, fathers could only see their offspring through the nursery window for fear of infection. In spite of the precautions, Jack came home with a full-blown case of impetigo, and I was weak as a cat from lying in bed for 7 days.

Grandmother Williams arrived when Jack was about six weeks old and it was pretty much an standing-room-only situation. Furthermore, Jack being no dummy had figured out that a little yell brought instant attention. My "cure" was walking him; Grandma Diehl rocked and hummed; Grandmother Williams gave suppositories and enemas. It's incredible what an 8 or 10 pound bit of humanity -- if it's the First -- can do to a household!

Because of my inexperience I sort of retreated from some of the child care and deferred to the more than willing expert in the family. But I still remember how hurt I was when I was holding my feverish infant (head cold), and he held out his arms for Grandma Diehl to take him.

Daily routine was writing the letter for overseas, pushing the baby buggy to the park, and occasionally playing cards. Johnny got injured in the Battle of the Bulge, but he had written about it before the formidable telegram from the government arrived so I did not swoon into the arms of the 98-pound weakling who delivered the message with obvious instructions to wait out the hysterics.

In the summer before Jack was a year old, Grandma became very ill and had to be hospitalized. This might have been coped with except for the fact that the combined stress of husband overseas, daily visits to the hospital, lifting Jack in and out of the tub and the buggy and the high chair, two flights of stairs to climb with baby and groceries -- my back said "ENOUGH!" I was almost immobilized with back pain.

Fortunately a sorority sister lived near me and got me through this period. Rena Williams was then and always will be one of the best friends a person could have. She dressed me, took care of Jack, and kept my spirits up during these miserable days. One remarkable thing happened -- the baby with the acute "pick-me-up-itis" seemed to sense the situation and he was extremely patient about staying in his crib until somebody came to lift him out, eating meals standing in the crib, and doing plain and fancy footwork while I sort of changed diapers.

Grandma came home, my back returned to the home keys, my skinny figure plumped out again, and Jack got back his freedom. Good news on the home front matched that of D-Day and V-E Day and there were high hopes for normalcy again.