

Happy Growth and Stormy Events in the Next Generation

Since the birth dates of our five children had been spread over a fourteen-year interval, all kinds of joys and problems -- from early childhood to early manhood -- resounded in the family simultaneously. There were Peter and Arndt as undergraduates at M.I.T., studying mightily and complaining loudly but actually, thanks to their excellent preparation by the Cambridge School of Weston, having no special difficulties. Their biology teacher, Hans Biermann, had become their friend and inspiration, and their time in Passaconaway had formed their outdoor habits.

During summer vacations, Peter joined the Trail Crew of the Appalachian Mountain Club and later became its Trailmaster; while Arndt, after one year of being a hut-boy acquired -- to the horror of his mother -- a motorcycle and set out for Wyoming. There, recommended by Hans Biermann, he worked on a ranch, helped drive the cows over the mountains to their summer range, and became a member of the family.

At M.I.T., Arndt got a job in the Biology Department which involved driving a truck to the seashore once a week at 4 a.m. and going out with a fishing crew to pick up squids. The giant nerves in the mantles of squids had were in demand for studies on nerve conduction.

Frank, in the meantime, had reached Cambridge School age, was being educated by the Biermanns, and had shot up to imposing heights. When Arndt tried to bully him, Frank turned around and threw Arndt against the refrigerator. In this way, a new status of mutual respect was established.

Eric proved the most handy and mechanically inventive member of the family and became in this capacity a public menace. He designed and

made a gun, loaded it with powder and shot, and discharged it with a roaring thunder-crack out of the bedroom window. I -- recalling my own explosive exercises -- was amused. Daggie -- probably remembering World War I and the noises of revolution -- became somewhat more upset.

Another Eric escapade proved more bothersome. Hood's milk delivery service had parked its trucks on a steep hill while the drivers went for lunch. Eric, passing by, could not resist the temptation to loosen the brakes and steered one truck after another down the hill. It was done skillfully enough so that no major catastrophe resulted, but Hood was not amused. I was certain that *our* son would never do such a thing. But the police reappeared with witnesses and I had to make amends.

On another occasion, the inventiveness of our children proved more beneficial: a neighbor's boy had acquired a bugle and produced the most horrible racket under my study window. Frank had the splendid idea of pushing a marble high up into the instrument and later we observed gleefully how the poor boy blew and blew -- but not a sound emerged.

On another occasion, Eric proved an instrument of fate: the great Babson estate on Cliff Road had attracted me and I would climb over the fence and sit on a bench by its lovely pond for a while in thought about the next lecture. One day Mr. Babson surprised me during this intrusion. I introduced myself, we had a friendly chat, and the following day I received a gracious letter giving me walking privileges on his beautiful property. After a period, Mrs. Babson died and her husband, in his loneliness, came occasionally to our house to have coffee with us. Sitting outside in the summer with me one afternoon, he began: "What would you do if I gave you a million dollars?" The most splendid plans for a research lab shot through my mind and I had just opened my mouth to unfold them, when son Eric rounded the corner of our house shouting: "Mr. Babson, Mr. Babson! I have to show you something!" Mr. Babson disappeared with Eric and never mentioned the million dollars again.

Our daughter Mai -- being the only girl and at the tail-end of the procession -- possibly had a more difficult youth than the others. Her appearance alternated between a ravishing beauty -- M.I.T.'s Photo Service exhibited her picture for years -- and the somewhat rotund. Her girl friend next door tended to be domineering and her brothers obviously sometimes found her a privileged bother. Like the others, she felt at home in Passaconaway and bravely skied in at an early age, but one winter, when we drove up the icy country road to Passa for Christmas, her courage became overtaxed.

The first car, driven by me, hit a boulder hidden by snow and knocked its transmission out; the second car, driven by Arndt, braked sharply and its handbrake

froze. There we sat in a snowstorm, immobilized. The obvious cry arose: "Cliff Pratt to the rescue!" But how to reach him? Cliff knew about our coming and intended to pre-heat the cabin. Therefore, while Arndt and Frank tried to fix the brake of the second car, Mai and I walked to the fork of the road and separated there. I walked toward Cliff's cabin, Mai towards ours, both hoping to intercept Cliff. Fortunately, I soon found Cliff and -- returning to the fork -- we found Mai, crying in lonely despair. She had walked toward the bridge over the Swift River and suddenly in front of her a dead deer was lying! This, in a howling snowstorm, was obviously too much. But still we had a wonderful Christmas and a snow dragon with a candle in its mouth, created by Ursel, kept bad spirits away.

Every spring -- as Daggie reported to Tante Bezi -- I got spring fever. Taking one of the boys along, I went into the woods, dug up a little tree and planted it in our yard. These are now wonderfully big trees, shielding us against street noises and the blast of storms.

One of our sustaining joys was everyone's love and admiration for Opa Franck. Early on, he had moved from Johns Hopkins to the University of Chicago and was deeply involved in the problems of photosynthesis. After his mother and his wife, Oma Franck, had died, he moved into the University's Faculty Club and then married his old assistant and friend, Herta Sponer, my early tutor after World War I and, later, colleague in the Second Physics Institute in Göttingen. Herta was a Professor of Physics at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Opa bought a lovely little house in Falmouth on Cape Cod, where they spent summer vacations together. Later, after retirement -- he spent part of the academic year in Durham and part in Chicago. At Glen Road we rebuilt the kitchen and created a bedroom and bath for him so that he could really feel at home.

During the summer of 1950, the Liscos stayed at a small lake beyond Lake Champlain and we visited them with Eric and Mai, before bringing our youngsters to their camp in Maine. The crossing of Lake Champlain by ship made a deep impression on Mai -- it was like crossing the ocean to a new world. Fortunately, we found Hermann and Lisa happy and well again.* Daggie got a severe attack of hay fever during our stay but it disappeared like magic when we reached Passaconaway. The same had happened previously when hayfever season struck in Weston. Therefore, as I had hoped, our log cabin proved the proper summer retreat for Daggie's condition.

* Herman Lisco had spent a long stint in a sanatorium in upstate New York recovering from tuberculosis.

I had developed the habit in early years of going on individual walks with each son in order to learn about their special problems and aptitudes. In this way, I could guess that Peter might become a biologist, Arndt a medical doctor, Frank a physicist and Eric an engineer -- each one with originality and promising gifts in his own direction. Since we had little money and a college education was very expensive but cheaper for us at M.I.T., the three older boys became undergraduates at M.I.T., while Eric -- at the tail end of the procession -- wanted urgently to go to Harvard.

Somehow it worked out as I suspected, including the fact that the discipline at M.I.T. was harder and that Eric's ability to charm the apes from the trees might lead to mischief. Peter got his Ph.D. in Biology and went on to become a professor and develop his own excellent institute. Arndt studied medicine at Harvard and became the first heart surgeon in Alaska. Frank became a physicist, got his Ph.D. as a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford and started the profession of "public-interest science" in Princeton. And Eric -- after being thrown out of Harvard for a year for posing as a food inspector and condemning the luncheon -- arrived by a circuitous route as a "Professor of Technical Innovation" at M.I.T.

And Mai? She is the beloved daughter with the warm social understanding. It led her into social work and writing. Her horizons are still unlimited.

Thus I am happy and grateful for our five excellent children and eleven beloved grandchildren and will let them tell their own stories.

* Faculty children went to MIT for half tuition -- \$500 per year in 1955-59 -- equivalent to about \$2000 in 1985 dollars. Living at home as commuters was a significant additional saving.