

NOVEMBER 6, 1967WILLIAM D. LOTSPEICH

My parents met in Leipzig where they were both university students in the golden age of Germany shortly after the turn of the century. Leipzig was one of the intellectual capitals of the world, and my father - like so many of his fellow-countrymen - joined the trek to Germany for graduate work. His field was philology, the study of language and the history of words. Mother was in Leipzig with her family. Her father was a classics professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and was there on sabbatical leave. His daughters took the occasion to study at the great University too, and Mother received a Masters degree in German. As a result of these years in Germany both my parents were fluently bi-lingual; father spoke classical high German, Mother too, but in addition she knew the colloquialisms of the market place, and could use words like doch properly.

Following his return from Germany Father spent a couple of years teaching in secondary schools before his appointment as Instructor in German at the University of Cincinnati in 1907. As was the custom in those days, a young man didn't marry until he could support his wife, hence Mother and Father were engaged for five long years. During the interim Mother kept busy teaching modern languages at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa.; in fact she was the modern language department, and this experience convinced her she had the stuff to be a teacher.

Finally in 1907, Father felt secure enough in his job to embark on marriage, and they settled in an apartment in Cincinnati near the university. A year later their first child was born. When he came of school age they looked at the schools in the neighborhood, and didn't feel very enthusiastic about any of them. So Mother decided to teach him herself. It is significant of Mother's sense of adventure and confidence that she felt competent to undertake the education of this young child on the basis of having taught modern languages to college students. How foreign to the educationists concept of teacher certification today! Word of her new action spread among her friends, and several said, "While you're at it, won't you take Johnny too?" and before she knew it Mother had a school in operation. This was the casual and totally unplanned way a most

remarkable school came into existence in 1916.

This school soon became the focal point of our family's life and the perfect expression of Mother's remarkable personality. Not only did she found it, but for its first thirty-three years she taught actively in it, was its beloved principal, business officer, public spokesman and central animating force. And now, fifty-three years later, it still goes strong. In the interim all five of her own children, most of her grandchildren, the girl who was to become my wife, and nine to ten thousand Cincinnatians have had their primary education there.

By the time of the school's beginning we lived in a modest stucco house half way up a hillside dead-end street in a suburb near the University. Mother and Father built this house in these early years of their marriage and it remained the family home for all their lives. At first all the school classes were held in the house, but as the numbers grew, a deep vacant lot next to the house was acquired, and over the next ten years three wooden school buildings were built in this enlarged yard. The school continued to grow and by the late 1920's it comprised a hundred boys and girls from grades one through eight.

Each of these wooden buildings contained two classrooms for twenty or so pupils. They were of simple construction with lots of windows. There was no heat in them, and the windows were open wide all winter. Indeed the school was called, "The Clifton Open-air School", for Mother believed that the ends of health and mental alertness were best served by plenty of fresh air. This philosophy also carried over into our family; we children slept on an unheated sleeping porch the year around.

I remember the classes in winters in those schoolrooms with teacher and pupils bundled in coats and caps sitting in heavy woolen blanket bags up to the waist, reciting, writing or reading. Many of us cradled small pillow-like canvas bags inside our woolen sacks. These contained a chemical mixture that produced heat when water was added. A few moments holding this bag warmed the fingers enough for the next bout of writing. To be sure we were a healthy lot, but maybe we had to

be to survive.

In addition to these three schoolhouses, classes were also held in our home: in the sun parlor, living room and around the dining room table; there were handicraft classes in the basement, and art classes in the two attic rooms. It was always a relief to go into the warm house for a class, and I suspect Mother had this in mind as she made up the class schedules. Even she had to admit it was good to get warm once in a while.

Lunch for the whole school was served in the house; there were two sittings to accommodate the whole student body. In addition to our big dining room table, which sat twelve or so children with a teacher, card tables and folding chairs were set up in the front hall, living room and sun parlor. Two remarkable black women prepared and served these lunches. One of them, Amanda, came when I was five months old, remained with the family for thirty-five years, and became an institution in her own right. I was always Amanda's special favorite. She practically raised me. Even in her later years when I was a Medical School Professor I was still "sugar" to her.

Amanda and Addie arrived at the house at 7:00 each morning. Promptly at 7:30 the whole family - five children in all - sat down to breakfast. By shortly after 8:00 Father left for his walk of about two miles to the University, or on rainy days he took the street car. Mother went up to her study for last minute attention to school matters, children got themselves ready for the day, Amanda and Addie cleaned up the breakfast and started on the noon lunch.

By 8:15 our little black mongrel dog "Jerry" had taken up his station out front at the entrance to the yard through the privet hedge. As children arrived with their parents he sniffed each one; if it was one of our students, he wagged his tail in greeting; if a stranger, he barked with authority. That remarkable dog knew every student and teacher who belonged to the school.

The school day ended at 3:00 P.M. We children played till supper, Mother shopped or worked in her study, and Father returned from the University around

5:00 P.M. Amanda and Addie prepared and served dinner for the family, and we all sat down around the big oval dining room table at 6:00. The food was wholesome and plentiful. Good animated conversation was the order of the hour. Now tired but relaxed after our busy day we shared its experiences. The children were not only to be seen, but heard. Mother and Father's lives were full of extraordinary interest and they shared themselves with us fully. Occasionally at dinner when they had something to say privately to one another, they would say it in German. There was always lots of laughter at these dinnertimes; I recall them as full of good fellowship and fun.

By 7:00 we were finished and in the living room. We could listen to a favorite radio program for fifteen minutes before going to our rooms for homework. Just before we did, Amanda and Addie departed for the street car ride home. They always said a friendly "Good night" to everyone and left by the back door. Theirs was an arduous thirteen hour day and the routine never varied year after year, - for Amanda at least - during the thirty years she was actively with our family and running the school dining room. Amanda was an integral member of our family and entered our lives in many ways.

By 9:00 or so, we had finished our homework. Mother had long since gone to bed, but not to sleep. Although full of energy, she gave of herself so completely during the day that she was bone tired by evening and usually went to bed right after dinner. In her later years at the school she would sometimes even have supper in bed. She would write letters, read some, and then indulge in her favorite activity of being read to by Father.

Mother and Father had separate bedrooms. Mother had a big double bed, and at the end of these evenings when the homework was done, we children would climb onto her bed, or get ready for bed and get in under the covers with her. I can still feel the warmth and coziness of those times. Mother would often tell us a story, or we would all tell a section of a tandem story and there was lots of laughter and fun. Sometimes Father would put down the novel he'd been reading aloud to Mother, and read all of us a story or some poetry.

Finally about 9:30 we would scoot off to the sleeping porch and Father would come out to tuck each of us four boys in and kiss us goodnight. On rare occasions if one of us didn't feel quite well, or had been bothered by a bad dream recently, he could stay in Mother's bed and go securely to sleep nestled up next to her large warm body. Later after he was sound asleep Father would lift him gently to his bed without waking him. I can still remember my surprise at waking in the morning to find myself in my own bed when I had gone to sleep next to Mother in hers.

These ends of the evening with Mother in her bed linger in the memory of my childhood. She was like a great ample hen protectively covering her chicks with outstretched wings and these evenings in her bed somehow symbolize for me her unending capacity for love and understanding. She cherished these precious times with us as much as we did. She created an atmosphere of openness so that each of us felt free to talk, and she and Father talked too about themselves. And mixed with the atmosphere of love was always the fun. Love, humor, activities of the mind, and creative discipline; these stand out as hallmarks of our home. And so it went as the days passed in those years in Cincinnati when school and family were intertwined.

In wintertime our hillside street was perfect for sledding. Mother arranged with the city to block off the bottom of the street each morning at 11:00 for the half hour recess period. She, or one of the other teachers, stood at the bottom of the hill while the laughing children ran for a good start at the top, belly-flopped on to their sleds and at the bottom skidded to a sideways stop before the saw horse barriers. On these winter days the children's sleds were left leaning against the side of the house where they could be easily grabbed by the running child eagerly on his way from the back yard schoolhouse to the street out front.

This recess sledding, and the sleds stacked against the side of the house, feature in an early memory of an incident which illustrates Mother's remarkable ability to reach children in ways they understood and respected. It also underlines her sense of humor and zestful energy.

James, a strapping fifth grader, was acting up and out of sorts with school that winter morning. At last he announced solemnly his intention to go home. Mother agreed that if he felt that way he'd better go, and said she would walk with him to the street. James picked his sled from where it leaned against the side of the house, ran into the street, bellied-flopped onto it and was off down the hill. Mother, not to be out done, picked up a sturdy big sled too, flopped down on it on the snowy hillside street and was away flying after James. Having all her two-hundred and fifty pounds in her favor to augment the excellent form of her start, she passed James as they both raced down the hill, and there she was waiting for him when he reached the bottom. Having been beaten at his own game in a way he could only admire, he was receptive to the idea of returning to school. And I can remember him and Mother walking hand in hand and laughing back up the hill each pulling his sled on the return to class.

The public school was a few blocks away. Mother had acquired the use of a playfield right next to the main playfield of this public school. Often, as they went past, the public school kids would taunt Mother's students about being sissies and going to a second-rate school. Naturally these often led to arguments about the schools with nose to nose rejoinders such as: "Yeah? oh yeah"; "Sez who" Sez yer ole man". "See that line"? Step over it and I'll sock ya".

During one of these encounters it was the relative merits of the teachers that was in question! The argument ran: "Aw yer teacher's no good"; "I'll bet she's as good as yours" "I'll bet she ain't;" "I'll bet she is". Then the public school boy threw down the ultimate challenge: "See that telephone wire up there? I'll bet your teacher can't kick a football over it". "I'll bet she can, d'ya want to see her do it?" "Sure, this'll be good". Whereupon Mother was summoned and presented with this latest challenge to her's and the school's honor.

Mother rose to the occasion with a twinkle in her eye. A football was produced and with good punting form she triumphantly kicked it over the wire. The only answer from the public school boys as they retreated in astonished awe at this unexpected demonstration of prowess,

was a muted: "Gee whiz, that's some teacher!"

Mother's philosophy of discipline was a mixture of firmness - she could be very stern when the situation required it - humor and a number of unorthodox tactics. Such was her respect and love for the students, and theirs for her, that her methods for discipline worked. For the minimal problem, humor coupled with her ability to appeal to the child at the level of his understanding, worked very well. The incident of James and the sled is a good example. Or, I recall one morning after the opening recitation of the Lord's prayer my friend Chilton said: "Mrs. Lotspeich, Billy didn't have his eyes closed during the prayer". "How do you know, Chilton?" was her reflex reply.

For major misbehavior in a whole class, she had a very effective technique; she would simply announce that she was leaving. Obviously the class was not in a mood to hear the story, or consider the geography lesson she had carefully planned and knew was interesting, and therefore she had better ways to spend her time. Before she walked out, she would ask the class to think about the meaning of its misbehavior, how necessary attention is to accomplishment, etc. Then she would say, "I don't care what you do, just sit quietly till the end of the period and work on what you want to". Then she would leave an abashed and very subdued class.

It is interesting to me that I can never recall a class misbehaving after she left. They remained ashamed and quiet until she returned just before the end of the period, and with a mixture of solemnity and resolving forgiveness dismissed them. Then it was gone; next hour it was as if it had never happened.

To be sent to her office by another teacher was a sobering experience, but an educational one. The incident that sent you was discussed: its consequences and meaning; then there was a little talk about character and honesty, or industry, and after it all there was always the resolving coda of forgiveness, or trust; the reassurance that you were good, intelligent, capable, honest and that she had faith in you; so you left her office feeling ashamed -- yes, but also resolved and absolved. We never felt guilty for long, instead we knew that she had faith in us, really loved and trusted us.

For the most major infraction of behavior Mother's ultimate sentence was to send you to bed; yes to bed! There were the four of her own boy's beds on the sleeping porch, my sister's in her own room, and Mother's and Father's in theirs; all were available as needed. The only times I can remember all or most of them full were after major group misbehavior such as a fight or a whole segment of a class having fallen down miserably in its work after a succession of such failures. No homework for a few consecutive days and you were sure to land in bed.

This involved getting undressed and into pajamas and into bed with blinds pulled and door closed. There was the parting admonishment to, "lie there and think it over". If one had been slated to pitch the baseball game that afternoon or go to the children's concert, or do anything in any way privileged, to be sent to bed represented the ultimate catastrophe. It was an extremely effective measure, and it too - after an hour or two, ended in a resolving, summarizing, evaluative little discussion in Mother's study on the second floor of our house. Many's the time I can remember climbing into my bed at night after it had been occupied by an errant and hapless student that afternoon.

Mother's philosophy of discipline was a very creative one; she practiced it at home and school. She believed children need to know their limits; that they are happier and freed of unnecessary anxiety if they do. To this extent she felt children could not be given unlimited freedom of choice in how they spend their time or in what they want to work on at school. Thus, although allowing a child as much freedom of choice as she felt he could stand, she could not go all the way with the progressive educationists. There was a lot of chance in her school for the child to express his interests and aptitudes, but she loved to tell the story of the unhappy child who was asked by his parent what the matter was, and who answered through his tears, "I don't like my school, do I have to do every day exactly what I want to do"?

In those early years of the school Mother assembled a remarkable group of teachers, all women, as I recall, and all capable people with strong personalities.

They worked well together. Although Mother's personality tended to command a group, she didn't destructively dominate it; she was a generative person who brought out the best in others and let it grow. She tolerated, indeed fostered, strong people around her. For this reason the quality of the teaching was first-class at the school, and all those early teachers stayed with the school until they retired or moved away, or became sick. I remember among this group a vivacious french lady who taught French, teachers of fine art and hand-craft, and a beautiful lady who taught us "nature study". Long field trips with her to collect fossils, see wild flowers, trees, or salamanders were a treat for us all. To miss one of these by being sent to bed was a terrible blow. There is no doubt that her early influences leaned me toward both medicine and a reverence for life.

In addition to being an active classroom teacher and able administrator of the school, Mother was for her thirty-three years its main secretary, business manager and accountant. It was only in the later years that she really had significant secretarial assistance. All correspondence with parents and business contacts she wrote in her own hand; all report cards were written personally by her, including thoughtful comments on each student; and the school's accounts were kept in her neat handwriting in a big ledger book. She wrote out all the bills, addressed the envelopes, stamped and mailed them herself. I can remember her in the long summer vacation at our summer home in Michigan sitting at a table on the porch writing out the school's accounts, adding up the columns of figures, worrying over why they didn't balance, and exulting over the discovery of the missing dollars.

She had that capacity so often seen in great leaders, but always surprising when encountered, to have large ideas and carry them forward, and at the same time to carry along so much detailed knowledge, and to have great capacity to concentrate on doing detailed work.

She was an effective public speaker. She had a broad range of interests and spoke on a variety of them: travel, language, music, and how to bring up children. For many years during my childhood at the school she gave delightful informative little talks on the program at the children's concerts of the Cincinnati

Symphony Orchestra. After the orchestra members were tuned up and quieted down to play, she would appear from the wings of the great stage in Music Hall, walk to the center of the stage next to the podium and wait a moment for the children to be quiet. She had a sense of style in her dress. She was always an imposing, beautiful woman, neatly groomed, carrying her large frame with dignity and grace. Her golden blond hair was immaculately combed up from the side into a bun on the top of her head, and on these children concert occasions she wore a rather broad brimmed hat at a slight angle, just rakish enough to suggest her sense of self-confidence, and well being. She would tell about the music the children were about to hear, bringing in biographical material on the composer, program of the composition if there was any, sometimes a personal reminiscence about the circumstances surrounding the first time she heard the number, and how it struck her; perhaps it has been under Nikisch at the Leipsiger Gewandhaus. And maybe there would be some special orchestral feature of the composition that made it unique or important in the history of music. These little talks recurred before each number; they were gems. The children listened as if they were being told an exciting story; nowhere in her career was her ability to talk to children with appealing directness better illustrated than in these childrens concerts notes. They had the same interest and skillful charm as Leonard Bernstein's.

Many of her speeches were given in the evening, and as time went on she became more and more in demand for talks on "How to bring up children", or some related subject on the education of children. These were full of good common sense, and practical illustrations distilled from years of experience. Those I heard her give to parents groups were both charming and useful. They must have been helpful to parents in meeting quite specific situations with their children. As usual her deep love for children and her sense of fun in life were apparent and got across to her audiences in full measure.

She had one of the most ebullient personalities I've known; it wasn't at all polyanna, but simply the expression of a person who felt joyful about living and had a flare for doing so. On these evenings when she

had been out speaking she was usually home by 9:00 or 9:30, just as we children were finished homework and getting ready for bed. As she came in the front door we would run down the stairs to greet her, and Father would have come from the living room to the front hall. There were hugs for us and then one for Father. His invariable question at this point was "Well, Helen, how did it go?" And her invariable answer was: "Best talk I ever gave".

The relation between my Mother and Father was a remarkable one. She was a big, expansive person with animal energy to spare and with more ideas than she could possibly service. Father was a quiet, scholarly, deliberate person with a sense of the practical, but also with a capacity to work for an ideal in his and other's lives. They worked very closely together and complemented each other's personalities in many ways. He helped her to bring her ideas into the realm of the possible, and his ideas illuminated hers in many ways. On the other hand, she creatively pushed him into more outwardness than he might have had. This wasn't always without some friction. Although meticulous and careful in her own way, Mother hadn't the patience with the kind of prolonged and often tedious attention to detail that scholarly research requires. She was basically not this kind of intellectual; so it sometimes had an abrasive effect when she would urge Father to undertake a piece of popular writing that offended his standards of scholarship. She knew, however, when to retreat from these ventures.

Without the molding restraint he imposed, I doubt that her own creative energy would have been as effectively channeled into tangible accomplishment. He never restrained her to the point of killing her freshness of spirit; rather in the beautiful way they worked together, the form that her life and acts took became more complete than it might have without him.

In his turn, I wonder that he was able to become what he was. The energy requirements of being her husband were prodigious. But, although he was less outward going and often yielded the center of the stage to her, he was a very strong person in his own way. He was full of understanding and able to use it therapeutically with his children and students. So there was

ample strength and fulfillment in his own life to allow him and the marriage to survive. Without these the strains which were there might well have broken him and the marriage. Instead it not only survived, but became a creative masterpiece.

By the late 1920's the school had long since outgrown the capacity of our home and the three out-buildings; Mother felt it should seek larger quarters. Father heartily concurred. A few years earlier a group of Mother's parents had started a girls college preparatory school called Hillsdale, and had built a low one-story Georgian building to house it on a spacious site in the country east of the city. Mother decided to build her new school in the same shingled Georgian style on a lovely piece of land next to the new one; so with the financial backing of this group of parents her new school was planned and built. They decided that it would remain an independent institution under her ownership until her retirement, at which time it would become part of the corporation of the girls school, and thus under the jurisdiction of its Board of Trustees.

Within ten years, by virtue of its continuing academic success and Mother's good business management, not only was all her original loan paid off, but the other school's as well. Her school earned enough to supplement my Father's meagre professional salary and give the family modest financial comfort.

Now expanded to some two hundred students from kindergarten to sixth grade, the school moved into its beautiful new country quarters for the opening of the academic year in September 1930. New teachers were added, so soon the faculty numbered sixteen. There was a fine community room done in tasteful Georgian style; this served as library, assembly room, lunch room, classroom, and site for parent's meetings, plays and parties. The new kitchen was an ample institutional one fully equipped and under Amanda's capable command; her staff was increased by two women and two men who waited on table. One of the parents became school secretary, there were much expanded facilities for arts, crafts and music, and sports flourished on the new playfields developed on the spacious open land surrounding the school. And at the center - as administrator and teacher - was Mother, dominating and animating the new school.

This expansion and the new quarters that housed it excited her creative imagination, and released the new energy to drive it ahead. The simplicity and set of values of the old school continued quite naturally into the new one. And today under its able headmaster and faculty, and with additional buildings - the latest, a new one for the nursery school marking the school's 50th Anniversary - it stands as a symbol of an ideal of education, of a view of love and life all translated into practical effective action.

Mother retired in 1947 after giving the school birth and its first thirty-three years of life. She lived on for another nine good years. She continued a vigorous schedule of public speaking, devoted increasing time to the League of Women Voters and developed a more active interest than she could before in politics and the affairs of the city. Indeed she ran for City Council on the ticket of the Charter Party, and although unsuccessful after a vigorous campaign, she thoroughly enjoyed the experience. She was in her element - all 250 pounds of her - on a soap box in Fountain Square.

One October morning in 1955 she had a date to address an assembly at the Girls School which she had had such a role in starting. With her usual careful thoughtfulness she prepared for this talk and made detailed notes in her neat handwriting on several sheets of letter paper. The talk was about values in education. That morning she got up, bathed, used her usual touch of cologne, cleaned her room and dressed, leaving everything about herself and the house neat and clean. Father drove her to the school. She mounted the stage with some difficulty but full of the relish she always felt in such situations, and was introduced. Because of an uncomfortable arthritis in her hip it was increasingly painful for her to stand for long periods, so she had asked to be allowed to speak sitting down. So, there she was sitting in a comfortable easy chair getting under way in another "best speech I ever gave" before an adoring audience of former pupils. After she had been underway about ten minutes and was well into her subject, she simply stopped in mid-sentence, slumped back in her chair and was gone.

It occurred to many of us that she had planned this setting for her exit as she had planned everything

else about her life. It seemed completely right that she should come to her end in the midst of what she loved doing most. It had the imprint of her sense of the appropriate, her style, and her flare for drama.

William D. Lotspeich
