

The Literary Club of Cincinnati
Henry P. Briggs, April 26, 2010

Most of you are familiar with T. S. Eliot's observation about how daunting it can be to learn more about ourselves and where we came from as we grow older: "We shall not cease from exploration, and the result of our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time."

I have personally found important new meaning in this expression in the last year, in substantial part because of the death of my sister, Barbara, at age 86, in a nursing home near Boston last January, then the death of my brother, Loring, at age 84, in a VA hospital in New Hampshire last April, and finally, a DVD from National Public Television that was recently shared with me by my last remaining sibling, Ellie, who is a retired school teacher living in Northern California.

In this Ken Burns documentary a World War II veteran remembers how dozens of his fellow soldiers were killed in Holland on Thanksgiving Day, 1944, when it turned out that a well-meaning commanding officer had inexplicably relaxed his unit's perimeter security so his soldiers could enjoy a richly deserved turkey dinner after weeks of fierce fighting.

After noticing the name of the unit, Ellie realized that one of the men who had been killed that day must have been our other older brother, Stewie, at age 20, whom I talked a bit about from this lectern in 2007. Ken Burns had also revealed in the DVD that a Congressional Committee had secretly held hearings after the war to consider such tragedies, but had prudently determined that it served no useful purpose to press charges in cases like the one of Stewie's commanding officer.

Fortunately, I have been subject to very few nightmares in my lifetime, but the one that has recurred the most often happened three weeks after that Thanksgiving, when I was twelve, and responded to our ringing doorbell, and returned to the living room to inform my parents that two soldiers had come to see them. I especially remember Ellie, age six, sensing that something terrible was happening, and hoping that I might be able to explain to her why our parents were behaving in a heartbreaking way we had not seen before, and would never forget.

It is about our other brother Loring's difficult life after World War II that I want to talk tonight, this third of the five children in our family, and the one all of us always agreed was the most gifted of us all.

Sadly, I now realize that I have learned more about the details of Loring's life in the last year than I had comprehended the previous 60 years.

This sad fact, alas, is because Loring never wanted to talk to us about what happened to him in the war, or afterward, and because it was only after Ellie flew back to New Hampshire after his death to go through his cottage in Sandwich where he lived alone for the last 45 years of his life, that she discovered thousands of letters and other memorabilia that we hadn't known existed, including 250 undated poems that he had painstakingly typed himself that he clearly knew would only be read for the first time after his death.

It is hard to explain what this experience is meaning for Ellie and me, and our perceptions keep changing all the time, anyway. What we do know is that it is drawing the

two of us closer together.

It has also become clearer to us every day that Loring's struggles all these years have profoundly influenced the lives of most of the other members of our extended family in ways we never quite fathomed before.

For example, Ellie and I now understand what it has meant for us that our mother had Barbara when she was 24, Stewie when she was 26, Loring when she was 28, me when she was 35, and Ellie when she was 41, after the Chair of Ob-Gyn at the Massachusetts General Hospital had begged her to stop having any more kids after Loring. There were times, we now realize, when Ellie and I were almost a second and separate Briggs family, with our sister Barbara sometimes playing the role of a surrogate mother, while our parents, visibly aging before our eyes, during and after World War II, did everything they could to protect us from as much heartbreak as they could.

They couldn't teach us skating and skiing and tennis, for instance, as they had taught Barbara and Stewie and Loring, and we didn't see them driving off together to black-tie dinner dances in Boston's best clubs, or golfing and swimming with their friends at the Wellesly Country Club.

We weren't able to climb with them in the White Mountains, or take the family's traditionally rite-of-passage Saco River canoe trip from that beautiful river's mouth in North Conway to its dramatic exit in the Atlantic Ocean, near Portland. We didn't get to Fenway Park or the Boston Garden or Symphony Hall or the Colonial Theater or Harvard football games, as Barbara and Stewie and Loring had on a regular basis. The list of things goes on and on.

Our parents were wonderful, and we adored them, as much as they adored us, and they never deserved the cruel anxieties and heart problems and hip replacements and Parkinson's disease that beset them in their fifties, much too early in life for such active and wonderful couple.

Every time I contemplate all of this, further, I realize that I do so from the perspective of a career educator, who has been an integral part of profound changes in schools and society and the world over the course of my fifty plus professional years.

There is even a chance, which I didn't understand at the time, that a major reason I left Boston at age 34 for a small town near Akron called Hudson, Ohio, to head a well-known school named Western Reserve Academy, was because of so much turmoil in our family. Although I felt ready by then to head a school, and wanted to do so, I now know that I would never have chosen a midwestern one 700 miles from home that was all-boys, all-boarding, far removed from a major city, and clinging to a fiercely traditional life-style that was getting it into serious trouble in that turbulent era of Vietnam and the counterculture.

The fact was that I still loved Boston, and Harvard College, where I had worked for ten years after I concluded my military service, and been granted three promotions and permanent tenure, even though I didn't teach or have a Ph.D.. The fact was that Briggses simply didn't leave Boston in those days, as I was constantly reminded by my relatives, and I was constantly asked whenever I came home when I would finally get those people out there straightened out so I could come back where I belonged.

The fact that a recent history of Western Reserve Academy concludes that my ten

years there literally saved the school is comforting, of course, but the fact that the school's closest neighbors, and its hidebound senior boarding school faculty, never saw the need to change anything, when there were ample opportunities for improvement that anyone with any sense could see, hurt a lot, and contributed to the decline of my first marriage.

Thank goodness that my 20 years at Seven Hills and my 35 years in Cincinnati have been enormously fulfilling and happy, a perfect fit and a true blessing, as far as I am concerned, and that it was a deceased Literary Club member named Bob Norrish who introduced me one Sunday afternoon to a woman named Charlin Devanney when we were having lemonade together on the Tennis Club porch after a match. Were it not for that, I would undoubtedly be back in Boston where I belonged years ago.

If our family had to lose Stewie in World War II, and to have Loring wounded there, both physically and emotionally, on what Ellie and I now know were three separate occasions, we are at least comforted by the fact that this was a necessary war that literally saved western civilization as we know it, while the long-term outcomes of our recent conflicts in distant places such as Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and who knows where else in the future, may not be determined for many more years.

The term "volunteer army" frankly sticks in my craw when I am reminded every night that the pictures of dead soldiers scrolling across the screen of Jim Lehrer's news report are overwhelmingly of young working-class men and women, including disproportionately large numbers of immigrants from racial minorities, many of them born and bred in obscure towns I have never heard of.

Writing this paper has increasingly persuaded me that our country needs some program of required national service that will include all our young men and women—a program crossing economic and ideological and racial lines, and by no means limited to military service—a program as game-changing as General Marshall's GI Bill after World War II—a national draft if that description is clearer. I believe our country is at a point where all of our young citizens need to be required to share some common experience in public service.

What better a time is there likely to be to introduce such a draft than when our citizens and politics are becoming so bitterly polarized, and when the economic gap between our society's haves and have-nots is accelerating at such an unconscionable pace, indeed at a pace that increasingly seems to me to be unsustainable in a strong democracy.

The exact moment I decided to speak tonight about Loring was when a renowned classicist living in Holderness, New Hampshire, wrote the lead piece for a New York Times News of the Week section last winter, her adopted home of Holderness being one of several small towns that are close to the Squam Lake's region, and that are contiguous to Sandwich, which is the village where Loring spent the last 45 years of his life.

Although I have met Ms. Alexander only once, it seems possible to me that she either knew Loring, or knew about him, as she reached back to Homer and the Odyssey for an op-ed piece she called: "Back from the War, but Not Really at Home," a title that instantly made all the sense in the world to me.

"Washed onto the shores of his island home," Caroline Alexander writes: "after ten years' absence in a foreign war, and ten years of hard travel in foreign lands, Odysseus,

literature's most famous veteran, stares around him. . .He has awakened from deep sleep in his own fatherland, but he has not known it, having been long away. Additionally, the goddess Athena has cast an obscuring mist over all the familiar landmarks, making everything look different than it was. "Ah, me," groans Odysseus, "what are the people whose land I have come to this time?"

That sense of dislocation has been shared by veterans returning from the field of war since Homer conjured Odysseus' inauspicious return some 2, 800 years ago...Who is the veteran, and how does he stand in relation to his native land and people?...In theory, Veterans Day celebrates an event as starkly unambiguous as victory-survival. In practice, November 11 is clouded with symbolism, and has become our most awkward holiday. It is far easier to honor the dead soldier than the soldier who returns. It is the Odyssey that most directly probes the theme of the war veteran's return...and there are remarkable scenes addressing aspects of the war veteran's experience that are disconcertingly familiar to our own age. Odysseus returns home to a place he does not recognize, and then finds his homestead overrun with young men who have no experience of war, and want to steal his wife and replace him as leader."

"Today, veterans' tales are more likely to be safeguarded in books and replicated in movies than self-narrated to a respectful throng. Detailed knowledge of the experience in which a veteran's memories were forged is thus made common. To learn these stories is both civilian duty and commemoration. Death on the field and the voyage home—both are epic."

Shortly after Loring's death last April, Ellie flew from San Francisco to New Hampshire to spend a month examining all the papers in his cabin and safe deposit box, accompanied by Loring's public legal guardian, Jane Woodward, who had been assigned by the State of New Hampshire, at Ellie's and my request, to take care of him during the last five years of his life.

Jane Woodward turned out to be one of the most extraordinary and unsung public servants I have ever met, keeping her professional eye on a constant client list of some fifty men and women living all over New England's Granite state, loving them all in spite of the eccentricities that many of them have developed over their hard lifetimes, helping them to retain a sense of dignity, in circumstances where they are mostly alone. Ellie and I will never forget Jane's professionalism and sensitivity in helping Loring.

One of the first packages of Loring's loose papers that Ellie sent me contained a letter that Loring had sent our father in our home town of Wellesley, Massachusetts, in the late summer of 1943, from his basic infantry training location at Ft. McClellan, Alabama, enclosing three \$1 bills and asking Dad to buy our mother a birthday present. "Look at this date, Peter," Ellie had written in the upper right hand corner, so I could note that he was still 16 and in basic training as a buck private when he wrote it.

And that of course meant Loring would have barely turned 17 when he shipped out to Europe to join Stewie in the European war. Stewie would be killed in action the next year, of course, and Ellie and I still don't know how or when or where Loring was when he learned that Stewie had been killed, except that he was far from home fighting a war, and had barely turned eighteen.

Barbara, Stewie, Loring, Ellie and I grew up in an era when many excellent educators believed it was a good thing for bright students to accelerate their progress in their

elementary years by skipping a grade, but our mother, who had been a teacher in Buffalo before she married our father, strongly disagreed with that theory. She thought that good schools should offer enough challenges so there would not be reasons to shorten the experience, and that there should be plenty else valuable to stimulate able kids outside school, anyway, including in their homes.

So she said "No" to skipping grades for all five of us, until the Wellesley public schools finally insisted, only in Loring's case, that he was so brilliant that he really needed to move up right away and skip grade four. This soon turned out to be the reason, of course, that he became in grade 7 the youngest member of his class at the Noble and Greenough School in nearby Dedham, from which Stewie and he and I graduated in 1942, '43 and '50, and that he was in basic training at Fort McClellan shortly after he turned seventeen.

Loring's career at Nobles was a stellar one, as he was the co-valedictorian of his class, with the other honoree being his closest—and almost only—lifelong friend, and an enormously talented fellow who won one of Harvard's three or four most coveted academic prizes when they graduated together after just two and a half years in 1948.

That prescient mother I mentioned earlier, who hadn't wanted Loring to skip a grade in elementary school, also believed that academic accomplishment and musical proficiency are closely linked, which is something I have come to believe, too, so she signed us all up as kids for piano lessons with a legendary teacher in Wellesley named Adele Leonard, although four of us remembered being mercifully excused—merciful for her as well as for us—after an undistinguished year or two. But not Loring. He became so proficient at the piano in such a short time that Miss Leonard moved his recitals from the Wellesley Public Library to the Jordan Hall in Boston next to Symphony Hall, where the caliber of the pupils' playing was vastly superior. Since Loring was higher-strung than the rest of us, we also grew up understanding that the piano was a major emotional outlet for him, and that he could practice on our beat-up old Baldwin any time he wanted. Ellie and I now think that we were too young to understand how truly gifted he was.

Ellie found a letter from Miss Leonard in Loring's cottage last spring, addressed to him at Fort McClellan, a copy of which she had sent to our mother, asking him to contact her as soon as he returned from his military duty, saying that she wanted to take him to meet a couple of her friends who worked at the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Maestro Koussevitzky, she wrote, wanted to begin to involve more Americans in jobs in the upper echelons of the Orchestra, and was opening a place in the Berkshires called Tanglewood, where some summer scholarships would be awarded to young Americans who seemed to possess unusually high promise. Ellie and I haven't been able to find out exactly when it was that Miss Leonard died or moved or stopped working, but we're not aware that Loring resumed any of his musical studies after he got home from the war.

Nobles had plenty of good teachers when Stewie and Loring and I went there, almost all of them well-rounded jocks with Harvard degrees and independent incomes, but foreign languages weren't their strong suit, so Ellie and I were interested to learn that Loring had been transferred from his responsibilities as a rifleman in the Infantry to doing some part-time interpreting, in both French and German, towards the end of his war time hitch in Austria.

And I was amazed, when I was at a class reunion at Nobles ten years after the war, to have our Headmaster, who had taught us a mediocre brand of French himself, and also coached us in three sports, believe it or not, and whom we all adored, tell me that Loring

was one of the most gifted foreign language students he had ever taught, and, uncannily, somehow spoke with a flawless accent, which was certainly a lot more than the Headmaster and the rest of us did. How did he do this, the Headmaster hoped I might be able to explain. Did he have access to a short-wave radio, he wondered, or did we occasionally have native French and German speakers as guests in our home? Had he ever traveled abroad? No one on the faculty had been able to figure out how he could speak such flawless French and German in such a short time.

Next month, I'm co-chairing my 60th reunion at Nobles, an event we are calling our "penultimate hurrah," with a classmate who is the son of the most inspirational teacher I have ever had, a man named Sidney Eaton, who made the English language sing for us, and I remember asking Sid, Jr. a few months ago if his father ever mentioned the three Briggs boys before he died.

"Of course I did," had been Mr. Eaton's response, "Stewie and Peter were great guys we loved, but Loring was something special, a rare talent, incredibly perceptive and sensitive, artistically and intellectually, and it's nothing short of tragic that he has apparently found life so hard since the war."

Surprisingly, Loring was also a very athlete. Since Nobles was such a small school that we didn't have the numbers to field a tennis team, there was an informal school-wide tournament every Memorial Day weekend, which Loring won as a senior. He played first-string defense as a 16-year-old senior on a league champion ice hockey team that upset Exeter, in a game that had to be played at the indoor Boston Skating Club on Soldier's Field Road, because we didn't have enough natural ice that season on our outdoor rink at school. After those games, what fun it was for families to hang around for awhile to watch two Harvard undergraduates named Tenley Albright and Dick Button practice before going on after the war to win two Olympics gold medals each in figure skating.

I'm not going to dwell long on what Loring experienced in the war, since he never wanted to talk about it, except when he just once let down his hair some years later with Ellie when his feet were hurting him one cold winter night in New Hampshire.

He had been wounded three times, we know, but the injury that troubled him the most was when three buddies and he were ordered to drive their jeep through several liberated Austrian villages that their commanding officer believed had been cleared of German troops, but wasn't certain. The Germans had left some snipers in a few of those villages, it turned out, sometimes hiding in church belfries, and the commanding officer needed to know where they were, so he could send reinforcements to eliminate them. When they were ever shot at, Loring and his three buddies in the Jeep were told to radio their headquarters with the locations of the snipers.

One bitterly cold night, however, for some reason Loring told Ellie he never understood, their Headquarters simply didn't send the promised help after the boys in the Jeep radioed their headquarters with a sniper's location, and the Jeep got stuck, and the soldiers had to dive into frozen puddles beside the road for protection, and one of the soldiers couldn't take the long wait, and panicked and tried to run, and was killed by the sniper, and Loring, after he was finally rescued, lay for days in a hospital while doctors conferred about whether they might need to amputate one or both of his feet. That's when one of the doctors learned that Loring could speak French and German, and said: "We need to get this guy out of here, and onto a translating team."

One of Loring's undated poems that Ellie found in his safe deposit box was his only one about the war;

The day was like a childhood camping day at Squam
We walked about the sun filled woods and talked and sang.
We were immensely gay.
Jim Cox was gayest; he espied the good in jokes and
war much better than we could.
An hour before a Jerry truck
had strayed across the lines
And we were tasting wine and meat
the brilliant plunder of the chase.
We stopped awhile to rest, well-fed, supine.
Before we heard the bomb there was no sign.
Some things are better stuffed behind the mind.
I tried to stuff this there, it would not stay and Pouchak stuffed too hard.
He crawled behind a tree
and growled low like a beast at bay.
The medics came and dragged the boy away.
The shock would not have been so sharp
if spring were not so quick to melt the heart
of boys whose hearts get hard in wintertime
when death stinks less and cold's a counterpart
of fear and shocks before the shelling starts.
The blast shook all my sense of time away,
a blinding instant split my life in two
and Cox lay still, his face like yellow clay
and Pouchak found him there
and what could Pouchak do?

When Loring came home from the war in the late spring of 1946, with eight weeks off before the fall term began at Harvard, he quickly did something that was perhaps prophetic, which was to buy an excellent bicycle, and set off alone on what he always felt was one of his happiest experiences, traveling some 2,000 miles through Maine, New Hampshire, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec--spending most of the time in the beautiful and vast French-speaking Gaspé Peninsula. What I strangely remember about the beginning of that trip was how little baggage and food he seemed to be carrying, and asking my mother how he could manage with so little, and her just smiling and shaking her head.

And next, after completing his bachelor's degree at Harvard in only two and a half years, in 1948, Loring was back off by himself for six years to be a night watchman and translator at a headquarters the Marshall Plan had established in Paris, where, in his spare time, he somehow added fluency in Russian and Spanish to his list of languages.

Although the job at the Marshall Plan didn't pay much, it enabled Loring to live reasonably well, because, as a veteran, he could still travel free on trains, and didn't have to pay taxes, and the U. S. dollar was worth so much. What this meant was that he could visit lots of cities and museums--several of his poems are about the Louvre, the Prado and the Uffizzi--and pursue a growing passion for biking, mountain-climbing and skiing in the Alps.

I visited Loring in Paris for a week between my sophomore and junior years in college

when I made my first trip abroad in the hold of a beat-up Greek tramp steamer, and remember how comfortable he seemed in his work and his play and his solitude. He showed me everything he could, and all the natives and I marveled at his fluency and accent. I suspected then that he might want to stay in Europe all his life.

In 1955, while I was serving my three years of active duty in the Army in Germany, at the tail end of the Korean conflict, I was startled to learn that Loring had moved back to the U. S., and been married in Connecticut to a French woman with four kids. It turned out that another veteran from Wellesley, whom Loring had known as a boy, and who had also been wounded in the war, and had also settled in Paris, and had met and married this woman there, had invited Loring one winter to join them weekends working at odd jobs at the ski resort of Val d' Isere. Loring had not previously known that this other marriage was in trouble, and, by the end of the winter he and the woman had fallen in love. It didn't take long for everyone to realize that Loring's marriage wasn't going to last long, either.

Now back in the U.S., Loring got a job teaching and coaching and living in a dormitory at one of Greater Boston's best schools, Milton Academy, the same school where Lou Prince and Helen Chatfield Black and the three Kennedy boys all went, and where Todd Bland, my successor twice removed at Seven Hills, is now the Headmaster. After only two years, though, about the time I got home from Germany, Loring left Milton, for reasons that I have never been able to find out, but can guess.

Several years later, I ran into the retired Head of Milton, at a conference, and asked him if there was anything he could properly share with me about what had happened. I remember his pausing, and then gently saying: "Peter, I'm not sure that discussing this will be in the best interest of the three of us."

Only a year later, Loring got lucky again and landed another good job teaching and coaching at one of the best schools in New York City, Horace Mann, but that didn't last long either, after his wife ran off to England with her kids and a rich faculty member, and Loring was hospitalized with a condition that three different doctors diagnosed as a stroke, or encephalitis, or a nervous breakdown, or more likely some combination of the three.

When Loring left New York following his hospitalization, it was agreed by our parents and Barbara and him that his returning to Wellesley didn't make sense, so he moved to Washington to live in a lovely home that Barbara and her husband had bought, following his move there from Haverford College to be a Vice-President of the Brookings Institution.

Barbara had become an accomplished professional in social work, significantly, having obtained a master's degree in that field from Columbia, after graduating with honors in English from Smith, so she could contribute to the war effort by working with wounded veterans.

It didn't take Barbara long to see how deeply troubled Loring was, and how his mental health was declining, so she began imploring him to seek psychiatric help, finally matching him up with a person she knew in whom she had a great deal of confidence.

Sadly, whatever his reasons, Loring stopped seeing the psychiatrist after several sessions, and she finally felt obliged one evening to take him to a hospital after a scary episode that I never learned much about. It has finally become clear to Ellie and me in the past year how those sad months in Washington distanced Barbara and Loring from each other for the rest of their lives, and I only learned after Loring's death last April how mystified

her three children had been at the time about some of his behavior, and how Field finally had to tell her that he feared that Loring's continuing presence was threatening their marriage.

There was just one fortunate thing, however, that had happened in the early days of Loring's marriage, while he was working at Milton and Horace Mann, and that was that he had surprised his bride by using most of his military bonus to buy a ramshackle little cottage at the end of a dirt road in the charming village of Sandwich, New Hampshire, just a few miles from a beautiful lake called Squam, which was the lake where our family had joyfully summered for over 50 years, exactly the kind of place where the six of them might have been comfortable spending summer vacations and holiday weekends.

Clearly faced with a hard and lonely decision about how best to spend the rest of his life, close to 40 years old, to the best of my knowledge consulting with no one else, Loring did something that still strikes me as being incredibly brave and incredibly smart, for which I will always profoundly love and admire him, which was to move permanently into that little cottage in Sandwich, a location that was as close to Squam Lake as he could afford.

The long and the short of it is that Loring lived alone in his little cottage for 45 years, and, except for the last five of those years after he had become seriously ill, never left Carroll County even once.

It was in 2004 that a couple of Sandwich police officers who loved him finally drove him to the Hitchcock Clinic at Dartmouth to be treated for atrial fibrillation and incontinence, and then helped him obtain the recommended medications that would have made his life so much more comfortable, if only he hadn't secretly decided not to take them, having carefully studied their rare but adverse side effects, with Ellie finding dozens of unopened pharmaceutical bottles he had squirreled away in the cottage when she began exploring it after his death.

The Squam Lake region's history is fascinating, which is in part why many people such as the writer of that Odyssey piece in The New York Times have moved there full-time.

It's the place where Henry and Jane Fonda and Katherine Hepburn made "On Golden Pond" in secret after Henry's cardiologist from Columbia Medical School invited him there for a visit.

There are pictures all over the place of a fat old Cincinnatian named William Howard Taft who loved to drive over from the nearby coast of Maine, and be helped into a boat so he could shoot loons after Sunday dinner.

And pictures of a woman named Rachel Carson who encouraged our Squam Lake Association before she died of cancer to try to bring our loons back, while our neighbors laughed at us, until we finally succeeded and brought back bald eagles and black bears and moose as well. The National Geographic magazine devoting an issue to that.

And Jack and Jackie Kennedy telling Walter Cronkite that the most beautiful 45 minute climb in America is the one up Rattlesnake mountain that overlooks Squam. And the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Presiding Bishop of the American Protestant Episcopal church secretly meeting at Squam during the summers of 1939 and '40, and our learning only later that they were there plotting ways to help Winston Churchill and FDR bring the U. S. into World War II. (That American Bishop was The Right Reverend Henry Knox Sherrill, whose

son was the Rector of Cincinnati's Church of the Redeemer years ago.)

The poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote most of his verses and hymns on an island at Squam, including "All things are thine, no gift have we, Lord of all gifts, to honor thee." and "Dear Lord, and father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways."

When Groton School and Harvard College decided together 100 years ago to give underprivileged kids from Boston, including blacks and Catholics and Jews, a chance to go to a special summer camp, with their own students serving as counselors, a revolutionary concept, at the time, Squam was the place where the residents embraced the idea, and where that camp still exists.

Whether his decision to move close to Squam was a conscious or unconscious one, and whether he knew then that he would stay there for 45 years, is something Ellie and I still don't know, but this Thoreau-like decision probably saved his life, and Sandwich turned out to be a place where the townspeople came to understand his idiosyncrasies, and appreciate his value, and to respect and love him.

Loving the outdoors, Loring quietly began to take care of some residents' properties, summers and winters, and the only thing his clients had to understand was this, that this might sometimes take awhile, because it wasn't his fashion to punch a time clock. His numbers of clients also steadily grew when it became known that he rarely raised his rates. Oddly, he only rarely used power tools, even when a few of his most regular clients kept offering to buy some for him. These were the same clients who also offered to send their carpenters and electricians and plumbers to make modest improvements to his small home, offers he always proudly and respectfully declined.

There was one client who discovered that Loring had grown up loving old western movies, and who knew that he didn't have a TV, so delivered a DVD player and twenty films from Amazon of the High Noon or Shane genre to the cottage one Christmas. When Ellie went through the home last April, she noticed that the packing boxes had never been opened.

Indeed, there was only one modern fixture in Loring's home that was always cutting-edge in quality, and that was a German short-wave Grundig radio, which allowed him to listen to great music, and—regular as clockwork—to listen in the late afternoons and early evenings, in their native languages, to news broadcasts from not only the BBC and NPR, but from France, Germany, Russia and Spain as well.

He remained a prodigious reader, as I accidentally learned one day when I visited Sandwich's tiny library to look up something I needed for a speech, and the town's very part-time librarian walked over to introduce herself, figuring that I must be Loring's brother. It turned out that she had worked in the Boston and Harvard and MIT libraries, and so could get just about anything for Loring that he wanted. "He keeps me hopping," she said with a smile.

One of Ellie's and my saddest and most frustrating memories of Loring is how little we saw of him during those 45 years, even though Sandwich and Center Harbor, which is the small community on Squam Lake where Barbara and Field had their summer home all those years, and where Charlin and I tried to spend a week or two every year, are only five miles apart. Invitations were repeatedly and sincerely extended, and were just as repeatedly and politely declined, and there didn't seem to be much that anyone could do about it.

After Field finally retired from his last position as a senior officer at the Fletcher School of International Diplomacy at Tufts, Barbara and he lived five months a year at Squam, from May through October, yet rarely saw Loring more than a couple of times.

Some of our family's most fun times over the years were joining multitudes of friends for the best corn and crab chowder and lobster bisque in New England at Sandwich's Cornerhouse Inn, but I can't recall Loring's ever joining us. It was only after his death that Charlin and I realized that we were seeing as much of him in our two weeks a year at Squam, which wasn't much, as Barbara and Field were all year.

After Barbara died last January of 2009, Loring's wonderful public guardian, Jane Woodward, agreed with me that she should be the person to tell him, at some time and place of her choosing, but I don't think she thought that the right time and place had ever arrived.

When Loring died last April in the New Hampshire Veterans' home in Tilton, Ellie and Jane Woodward were both there to hold his hands during his last six hours, while the Grundig played Mahler and Mozart, and they read him poems by Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. They will never forget his fight to live. At the last moment, around 3:30 am, Jane says that something happened that was unprecedented in her experience, which was that several of the hospital's day nurses on Loring's wing showed up early for their shifts, and prayed quietly together on chairs they pulled up outside the room.

When I told Jane that we had a tradition in the Briggs family of having family funerals or memorial services at our beautiful little St. Mary's Episcopal Church overlooking the Charles River that separates Wellesley from Newton, she told me with the same extraordinary kindness and tact she always used: "That won't be necessary, Peter. Since Loring has donated his time for years to caring for the little Quaker cemetery near his home in Sandwich, and even doing some research about its history, that is where he wants to be buried. He has always remembered that your parents chose to leave Stewie's body in Holland."

Just two quick remembrances before closing, and I am grateful for your attention, because this hasn't been an easy topic to write about:

Shortly after Loring died, I received an envelope from Ellie which contained four more items she had removed from his safe deposit box.

The first was a solid gold pocket watch with Loring's name inscribed on it that our father had given him on his 14th birthday, purchased from the iconic Boston jeweler called Shreve, Crump and Low, that has operated out of the same space on Boylston St. since 1796. Our father presented similar watches to Stewie and me on our fourteenth birthdays, too, after taking us to lunch at Boston's venerable Locke-Ober restaurant on Winter St., where only men could dine on the ground floor at the time, and a boy had to have turned fourteen to be included. I have never forgotten that day with our father at Shreve, Crump and Low and Locke-Ober's nor, obviously, had Loring.

The three other items were Loring's honorable discharge from the Army, a purple heart, and a letter from a bird colonel who must have commanded his unit in Austria commending him on his valor in combat, and suggesting that his courage on at least one of those occasions had in all likelihood saved the lives of several of his companions.

And there was another occasion about ten years ago, when I was headed for Dartmouth College, late in the fall, to speak to a bunch of aspiring school heads, and when Comair still flew nonstop to Manchester, and when I called Loring on the spur of the moment to ask if we might spend a few hours together in Sandwich before I drove on to Hanover.

Given past experience, it seemed to me that there was no better than a 50/50 chance that he would say "yes," but he did say "yes," and then asked me for some reason if I might meet him around 6:30 at Sandwich's public beach landing on Squam, instead of at his home.

When I arrived a bit late at the beach landing, Loring wasn't there, so I feared he might have forgotten, or changed his mind.

It was an incredibly beautiful night, I recall, with a bright full harvest moon that lit up the entire landscape, absolutely clear skies with stars one could touch, no snow on the ground, and something rare and smooth on the lake that New Englanders love, and don't see very much called "black ice."

And then, far away, across the lake, I barely saw a solitary speck, and then the speck began slowly to come closer, and the speck became Loring, skating alone, slow and graceful circles and figure eights, almost in a trance, his face as serene as I had ever seen it, and I wished the moment would last forever.

After a few minutes, the trance over, he called "Pete," and I turned back, turned on the headlights of my rented car so he could come over and take off his skates, and we shook hands. After a few minutes, when I said I was starved, and asked if he might join me for a quick bite at the Cornerhouse Inn, knowing he might still decline, he said "sure," and we got in my car for the ride there.

As this relaxed supper proceeded, an occasion I never wanted to end, Loring had to use the bathroom, and a lovely girl I didn't know who was waiting table across the room came over and said "Mr. Briggs, thank you for bringing Loring here tonight. We love him and we wish we saw much more of him." And she added that her name was Sarah Smith, and she was the daughter of a neighbor of Loring's named Shaw Smith, whose family lived about a mile further down his dirt road.

When Loring got back to the table, she proudly told him that she had just learned that she was going to be the valedictorian at her graduation from InterLakes (which is the best regional high school in the state), and that she had been admitted early to Tufts that day, with a big scholarship, and wanted to thank him for his help. I will never forget the look on Loring's face.

After that, I drove Loring back to his car, and we shook hands, and I somehow navigated the narrow and winding back roads that meant I wouldn't have to drive all the way back to Concord to reach the Interstate, and it was after I found the Interstate and I knew for sure that I was headed in the right direction, that I pulled off the side of the road to park, turned off the ignition and began to cry.