

Dear Children, ...

family stories by Patrick Morgan

Dear children,

Since you never knew your grandfather and grandmother who were my parents, I must try to give you an idea of their existence. My father (*James Hewitt Morgan*) was small of stature but big of heart. The affection he gave to all was repaid in kind, for everyone loved him. But his heart, physically, lacked strength and failed him when he was still under forty, leaving my mother a widow with three children (*Hewitt, Vera* and *Patrick Morgan*) at the age of thirty-four.

My mother (*Martha Leavitt*) was an Edwardian. She was beautiful, charming and learned how to be difficult. She also had a great regard for truth, which she would at times fabricate out of whole cloth if she found it suitable to do so. Let me first tell you about her.

1) Your grandmother, Martha Leavitt:

Her childhood was complicated by her parents divorcing. In doing so, they became pioneers of a sort, at least among their own social group. No one was sure how to cope with such a situation. Oscar Wilde had not yet proclaimed that good divorces were made in heaven. But who could spot a good divorce anyway!

Mother's mother (*Heleen Elizabeth Gandy - "Bonnemamma"*) had been brought up in the glamour of nineteenth century New York society. Photographs of her abound, some clipped from the society column of the daily press, all showing her clad for one of the lavish costume balls that were then in vogue. The one I have always preferred shows her as a pistol-packing mamma, her dark eyes flashing, her tiny waist broad-belted and holstered, the starkly plain dress, all giving a rather alarming potential. Especially when, suddenly, one notices her lips. They are as thin as a slice of prociutto. Slight, but not mean. Overall, the impression is that of Bonnie Parker's fore-runner.

She and my grandfather (*Henry Young Leavitt*) could not hit it off. His folk did not particularly hold with city ways. They had reared him on their ample country estate in Western Massachusetts. His genial, easy-going nature was not attuned to grand scale entertainment. He played banjo, wrote his own music and sang his own songs, several of which were published. He was very much of a do-it-yourself man, in search of some simple harmony of life. A sort of well-to-do Victorian hippy.

Shortly after they were wed, he plucked his bride from the metropolis of her childhood and

transplanted her to rural New Jersey, where distraction was rare and entertainment, slight. But her hankering for fun soon quit when she suddenly found she was pregnant.

These months must have been the quietest she had ever known, punctuated only by the occasional visits of her young sister-in-law (*Emma Leavitt*), who resembled her brother both in temperament and in looks. She was an active, athletic girl, more fond of camping and fishing than of formal parties. These two women soon found they had mighty little in common. But through the years, they were obliged to put up with one another, for my grandmother's sister-in-law eventually married my father's oldest brother (*William Fellowes Morgan*). This quirk of circumstance gave a somewhat ingrown look to my branch of the family tree.

After nine long, long months, the baby was finally born. The fuss-muss of pregnancy and the final pangs of childbirth turned my grandmother off. She craved no further children, nor felt much maternal love toward her daughter, the only child she ever bore.

After she had idled for the forty days that peasants still claim are necessary to good health, my grandmother's restlessness returned. This led to startling solution. She decided to raise violets, not for pleasure, as would become a Victorian lady of leisure, but for the trade. In other words, to raise them in quantity for the New York market.

An embarkation to Cytheria on her part might have been less shocking to her close friends, her many acquaintances and to her rather stuffy in-laws, whose code could more readily sanction an affair - if discreetly piloted - than a blatant venture into the unknown sea toward that other world, known as the commercial. For at this stage of social evolution, a lady was not supposed to compete with tradesman. It simply was not done. Hillaire Belloc wrote of this epoch:

"It is the business of the wealthy man
to give employment to the artisan."

Did my grandmother choose this project innocently or vengefully?

Having given a good deal of idle thought to this, I end up thinking it was more through a sense of self-preservation. Her parents had lost their only son in his youth and a belated effort to replace him had recently resulted in their acquiring another daughter, their fourth, to bring up. Their social life was costly and the prospect of bringing up and bringing out yet another daughter in the style that they, the parents, were accustomed cast a black cloud on their financial horizon. Their life style had always

required not only daily maintenance but worthy contributions to civic charities. To the budding art museum, for instance, it was not a question of giving an annual membership, but of becoming a fellow in perpetuity; they believed in doing things right. They ran through most of their fortune in their lifetime, and left but a pittance for the children to inherit.

It seems likely - in view of subsequent events - that my grandmother wanted to have a mite of security and hoped she could achieve this through her own industry, knowing little help would come from home, and suspecting things were on the verge of collapse as far as her marriage was concerned. She proved right on both counts. Not long afterward, her husband took to the bottle; with his banjo and his bottle, he sought to combat the loneliness his wife's coolth imposed on their quiet daily life. My grandmother had spirit; maybe she could have made a go of things had she had a bit of compassion as well. But this she was apparently born without.

She was granted a divorce, but the terms must have been left somewhat vague according to today's standards. No specific provision seems to have been made for the wife and child, who were allotted, oddly enough, to her ex-husband's parents (*Henry Sheldon Leavitt* and *Martha Ann Young*). These good people lived on a large rural estate in the township of Great Barrington, where the Berkshire hills rise slowly to their particular beauty, crowning the green pastures and nurturing impatient brooks.

During this Babylonian captivity of theirs, my mother depended especially on the devotion of three people; Manny, Ned and Harry.

Manny was an old Swiss nurse of eighty years who had been with the family most of her life and had brought up the children. As well as grandpa, there was an older sister, now married and living in South Africa, two younger sisters and a brother. Grandpa had always been Manny's favorite; now she gave all her love to this little girl, his daughter, while maintaining a guarded coolness toward the divorced mother of whom she was deeply suspicious.

Manny ran the large and gloomy house that was heavily burdened in full Victorian style that suited the taste of the elderly couple who, now, seldom ventured out much further than the garden. Roses had been the old lady's hobby, but she no longer tended them with loving care. She preferred to sit indoors, advancing her crewel work. But she remained a fresh air fiend and threw open all the

windows, so the garden's fragrance was wafted by the breeze amongst the bric-a-brac.

Unfortunately, her husband had succumbed to poor circulation as well as a bit of rheumatism so these drafts added to his discomfort considerably. His wife ruled her realm more by force than by persuasion but he had learned to get his way through indirection. For a while he had her convinced that all this fresh air was increasing her deafness, which, indeed was augmenting, much to her annoyance, for she hated, being bitten by curiosity, to face the isolation of the hard-of-hearing. Eventually, she either saw through this gambit or else decided to have fresh air at all costs. Whatever the reason, the results were the same; the old man had to work out a new ploy.

Luckily for him, Manny had an odd talent and was willing to play in with him. It has occurred to me over the years that mother's account of Manny makes her definitely favor the men, so no doubt, she was a ready ally. Had my mother had a brother, she would surely have ranked but second in Manny's affection. But having none, she basked in the love the old nurse so readily gave her; love that her own troubled mother could not give. Her mother was a cold fish.

Manny's strange talent was an ability to conger up a genuine sneeze at will. A recurring tea-time ritual intrigued my mother. As the family assembled for tea in the red room, the long windows were open wide and on certain days, the heavy curtains would belly out in the breeze. At such times, when Manny entered, the old man would say in an urgent low-low voice, "Sneeze, Manny, sneeze, loud!" So Manny would oblige repeatedly until the old lady would ask the maid to close the windows. She maintained it was not the draft as much as an allergy - possibly to rose pollen - that Manny suffered from. Nevertheless, she acquiesced, for Manny now ran the household for her and was, in consequence, invaluable.

As well as Manny, there was Ned.

Ned was your grandmother's somewhat older cousin; he had charm and was good-looking. His family lived in the city; Ned preferred country life and came to visit his aunt and uncle as often as he could. He liked to ride; in fact he enjoyed all outdoor sports indiscriminately. Ned was thoroughly extraverted; his enjoyment of life was total and highly infectious. During his frequent visits, the old mansion lost it's gloom and the days seemed to quicken their pace at his approach. At his departure, the clocks ticked the hours loud and long until his return.

He was roughly a decade older than your grandmother, but their age difference seemed to shrink when they were together, for he enjoyed sharing his enthusiasm with her. He taught her to skate when winter sheathed the duck pond, and when snow deepened, he put her on a toboggan behind his horse to give her hair-raising rides that might well include upsets, occasionally demanding a bit of first aid from Manny, who took a dim view of these jaunts.

Ned wakened his young cousin to a pitch of happiness and fun as she had never known. She naturally adored him, and between his visits, showered him with elaborately hand-decorated cards enclosed in over-sized envelopes, as if St. Valentine's day fell spasmodically throughout the year. She became proficient beyond her years in water-color painting, but was hesitant to do free-hand drawing. She preferred to trace designs culled from books.

Their happy times lasted not quite three years. Ned was to go to college that fall, but fell sick toward the end of summer. His lungs clogged. Before he could be moved to a sanatorium, he died one night in his sleep, and never received the last large envelope addressed to him in a childish hand.

There remains the story of Harry.

Harry was the farm hand who looked after the pack of hounds that once accompanied their master on daily outings. Except, of course, on Sundays. Now, the hounds were simply let loose each day to exercise themselves chasing an imaginary fox through the wooded parts of the estate. Except, again, on Sundays when they would loll about the farm yard in memory of the old dispensation. But hounds have no calendars of accuracy and one day their instincts or their memory went afoul of the week's duration. From then on, they were wont to observe the Sabbath on Mondays.

Harry had been employed on the estate ever since he was able to work. It was generally conceded that he was the illegitimate son of a former parlor maid who subsequently ran off with a traveling salesman well known in the village as a philanderer. It was my great-grandfather who saw to Harry's being reared by the farmer and his wife; he also saw to his education as it was. Harry was held to be "smart in the head" but was never much of a hand at "book learning". He soon gave up his schooling - or, more likely, the school soon gave up Harry. The farmer was given a monthly allowance for Harry's board and keep, and Harry was given a growing amount of chores to attend to as his

capacity for work increased. As soon as it seemed right, he was put on the farm payroll, modestly at first, but with proper raises in pay as he grew. His devotion to his benefactors was deep and simple; Harry felt he owed them everything. And, indeed, he did.

As Harry grew, more work was put to his shoulders and more pay to his pockets. The farm was running full tilt then, and the farmer sorely needed extra hands to get in the hay, milk the herd of Guernseys and help in the lambing season. But now some of the fields lay fallow and many of the pastures were taken in juniper, hardhack and young white pine. The big barn sheltered only three cows, just enough to supply milk, cream and butter to the two reduced households; some chickens to supply eggs, broilers and an occasional roasting fowl; and a few ducks mainly to give a show of life during the summer to the pond which was in view of the big house. The days seemed longer with less work to fill them.

When the gloom of the big house became too pervasive, my mother would escape to the farm, unless a French lesson from Manny or a piano lesson from the little old maid who lived down the road was impending. Her favorite haven was the hayloft of the big barn where she could day-dream, or look to see if a hen had "stolen her nest" in the whereabouts. There was as well a sense of kittens, if you could find them; the farm cat was forever producing, but was very furtive about concealing her litters.

Harry understood the little girl's loneliness and contrived to meet her whenever possible. Bit by bit he explained to her the things he knew in nature. One spring he showed her where the arbutus carpeted the pine barrens. She began to collect wild flowers and to learn their names. Harry took her bird nesting and started her collecting eggs, showing her how to pin-prick the ends and blowing them clear, unless - alas - the embryo chick was already too developed to pass. For her birthday that fall, she asked for two butterfly nets. "Whyever two?" and she simply answered, "just because." Harry also took her to the brook below the duck pond where he showed her, by burying your hands in the brook-bed gravel, you could tickle the tummy of as passing trout with your finger-tips, holding him spell-bound; then suddenly flip him onto the bank of the stream.

Of the three, Manny, Ned and Harry, it was always of Harry your grandmother spoke of the most. Possibly this was because of the devotion of old nurses is easy to forget after its necessity to life's endurance has abated; and maybe Ned's early and cruel death blocked her thoughts of him. But possibly what riveted my mother's memory to Harry was the unsolved mystery of his departure.

The circumstances of Harry's departure were never totally cleared up. One of the circumstances was a petty theft of some jewelry from the big house. The jewelry was insured, so the company asked to have the case investigated; it was thought to be an inside job. Harry was put under some suspicion, along with the others. Now the villagers had never liked the "pampered bastard son" of the wench who took off with that "no account philanderer"; they were happy to contribute a number of non-conclusive incriminations. My mother and her family put no stock in these and urged the authorities to look elsewhere; they were sure of Harry's devotion and honesty.

Harry was deeply hurt by this doubt cast on his integrity. Reassurance from his benefactors did not suffice to heal his discomfort, which had gone deeper than they knew.

One day they found a poorly expressed--and therefore, all the more sincere--note, proclaiming his innocence, repeating his eternal devotion and saying farewell.

Then, within a few days, the big barn caught fire and burned too the ground. The villagers again inconclusively but vehemently insisted that it must be Harry who had struck the vengeful match that caused this sudden disaster. No member of my family was able to believe this.

The jewelry was never recovered.

The barn was never rebuilt.

And Harry was never heard of again.

This Babylonian captivity was made endurable to my mother through fate providing her with these three people who gave her love and affection as well as confidence to face what life might have in store. But what about her mother during these years? It can be supposed that for her nothing was stirring - not even a mouse.

Mind you, her cool beauty, her cultivated manner must have been noticed by the older guests who came to the big house... But even the most dashing Victorian gentleman might hesitate to throw his hat into such a risky ring as that of wooing her with serious intent. Attractive as she was, she was still a divorced woman, and what is more, a woman encumbered by a small daughter, at a time when "help the handicapped" was not yet a popular slogan.. Besides, these occasional guests were almost all married couples who came in two by two, preoccupied by their own survival, like those other animals. There was certainly very little cooking for my grandmother, especially when you consider her young

sisters-in-law who both came home in school vacations, off and on, bringing their friends, all just younger enough to not include my grandmother in their house parties. They were all outdoor-minded, anyway, which my grandmother was not. On the other hand, she was well read, which they were not. Their ambiances were hopelessly different.

The situation was made more kinky on another front. My grandfather had not only remarried, but had reformed as well. His new wife (her name?) was warm, unpretentious and understanding; she made him happy, and in his happiness, his craving for drink subsided. Naturally, his parents wanted to receive him, but this was unthinkable while they still harbored his first wife.

Wheels were secretly put in motion to solve the situation, but they creaked so loudly that all those concerned soon became aware of what was going on. My grandmother had the spirit to bring things out into the open one afternoon at teatime. She said if she could find the means, she would like to depart.

No one asked her to reconsider. They simply redoubled their efforts to find the means.

Between the families, an adequate solution was arrived at. Her family settled some money on my grandfather outright. His family contributed a fund for her daughter, the income of which she could use until her child came of age. It seemed the four year visit was to end on a happy note. Not to pry or prod, they said, but to keep in touch, could they be given an inkling of a future address? They supposed it would be somewhere near New York so not to be too far from her family, yes?

My grandmother said she doubted if such would be the case for she was thinking very seriously of quite another destination. When she disclosed to them her intention, they were indeed taken aback. "But," they asked, "what about your child's Christian precepts?"

Her proposed destination was China, and that is just where the spirited lady took her ten year old daughter in the year 1886.

2) Your Grandfather, James Hewitt Morgan

Your grandfather had a far less disrupted childhood than did your grandmother; his parents reared six of their eight children and lived in happy, affluent accord. Their house on Fifth Avenue, opposite St. Patrick's Cathedral, was spacious; there was, as well, a country place in New Jersey, where their eldest son, as it happened, met his future wife, my mother's aunt.

My father's family lived well, for his father (*David Fierce Morgan*) was a smart, capable financier who amassed a very, very tidy fortune. When, eventually, the doctors ordered him to retire and move to Washington, he somewhat voided the purpose of the move by having a direct phone line installed to keep in close, constant touch with Wall Street. This private line was the first of its kind.

Summers, he sent his wife to Europe to take the "cure". She (*Carolyn Fellowes*) and her sister (name?), who had also married prosperously, went each year to Baden-Baden where they put up at the large fashionable hotel, drank the waters and submitted to the regime, including the mud baths. During these summers, they met many people of prominence, none more so than the Empress Eugenie, who took a liking to the two sisters and suggested that they come see her sometime - at Versailles! And indeed, shortly after the Empress' departure, they received a letter from one of the ladies-in-waiting commanding their presence at a reception the following month. Accommodations, reservations, passage, all had to be altered in a hurry to permit an earlier and longer stay in Paris to have a suitable wardrobe created for this momentous occasion.

They found the reception brilliant in every sense. The lights, the jewels, the champagne and what conversation they could take in, all sparkled. The ladies-in-waiting wore green and were adored with diamond jewelry. The Empress was clad in pure white and wore all the famous emeralds. I was never told what my grandmother wore; I am afraid her taste in dress was never the most pronounced of her talents.

These summer trips were abruptly ended by her sister's tragedy. It seems the sister had one son who was "a bit odd". He was kept in Germany with an attendant, a little man in white, to look after him. Once, when his mother came to see him, his attendant went to fetch something or other, leaving him alone briefly. On his return, the attendant found the boy's mother strangled.

"And that," said my older cousin, as she finished telling me this horror story some sixty years

later, "is why grandmamma never returned to Germany. I always thought you knew."

She did return, however, many times to the British Isles, taking her younger daughter (*Alice Morgan*) along for company. In England, they both fell under the spell of a man of God who had founded a splinter group of faith healers that believed positive thinking cured all ills and that taking was the outward, visible sign of dreadful, inward doubt. His persuasiveness was magnetic and both mother and daughter joined up. My grandmother, being already a bit hard of hearing, was apt to cup her ear at his lectures, lest she miss one of his precious words. Noticing this, he admonished her, saying, "People might misinterpret your gesture and suppose you thought yourself somewhat deaf." Such a non-positive thought obviously would come under the category of sin.

Her daughter soon married and brought up both her children (*Caroline Mildred Carter* and *Bernard Shirley Carter*) in this faith. Over the years, she was accredited with several cures and lived a long, well-wishing life. However, two of her grandsons died very young of causes that other cousins felt were possibly avoidable had normal medical care not been withheld. Who knows?

Your grandfather was the "last run of shad" in his family, fully half a generation younger than his oldest brother. At the age of twelve, he was sent to boarding school where his closest brother, both in age and in devotion, was already enrolled. These two remained the greatest of friends throughout their short lives; they each died in their thirties.

Your grandfather's brother (*Lewis Henry Morgan*) had flaming red hair, for this reason was nicknamed Pat. (Do most Irishmen really have red hair, I wonder?) When your grandfather arrived two years later, he was promptly called Mike, simply because his brother was Pat. Later Mike was changed to Mickey, but Pat remained Pat until his dying day. Mickey, in spite of his slight build, became a football hero at school. Let me pause to explain how this came about.

The rules of football were somewhat different then than now. For instance, if the team having the ball was unable to gain the necessary ten yards in four downs, they might still keep the ball if they could afford to lose twenty yards and did so by the last down. This could be of great strategical advantage under certain conditions.

The particular condition I would like to recreate is that of the "big game" against the

"traditional rival". The score is 6-7 in the opponent's favor, with little over one minute left to play. And they have the ball. Now, if they can keep the ball for the remaining moments of play, they will automatically win. But it is their last down, with four and a half yards to go. So, rather than buck the line again, it is safer to lose the twenty yards, and this is precisely the play that is called. The ball is passed to the fullback who is ready to retreat the necessary yardage to keep the ball for a couple more plays until time runs out and their one point victory is assured.

But very suddenly two uncalled for things happen in very close succession. The first is that the fullback slightly fumbles the pass and so is delayed a moment in his retreat. Almost simultaneously, your grandfather breaks through the defense and pins the retreating fullback where he has only lost fifteen yards. So the opponents lose the ball deep in their territory. On the second play, the home team kicks a field goal, time is up, the game is over, and the score is tipped 9-7. Your grandfather has become a hero in less time than it takes to boil an egg.

From school, both Pat and Mike went on to college. Though your grandfather was younger, he tagged along with his brother's friends who accepted him at first as a mascot, then later as a true friend. In a while, ties were drawn closer still, for they all joined the same club, which amounted to a world within a world.

This inner world involved a good deal of social drinking; at this your grandfather did not excel. He had a light head and a weak stomach. So it happened on various occasions, when the pace was too much. Pat and the gang of friends would "check" Mike at some convenient, comfortable spot, such as a chair in the lounge of a warm, friendly hotel, and continue their razzle-dazzle 'round the town. Mike, forever trustful, waited in relaxed assurance of their return. By that time, he was usually in better shape than they, and certainly more rested; so it was up to him to get the group back to college, avoiding at all costs the campus cops. One of the gang, thirty years after Mike's death, remembered and told me with vivid remorse of the one time they forgot to fetch Mike. He also spoke of Mike's generosity of spirit and concern for others that he still could not forget. Father gave to all his relationships a memorable and vivid warmth.

At that time college could be as much of a social trip as an occasion for education. Colleges were undercrowded and you could take learning rather non-competitively. A "gentleman's C average" was sufficient; anything above, indicating a dedication to some life's purpose, seldom as yet

crystallized in gentlemen of that era. Time's winged chariot was not a bug-a-boo; life had leisure. Years later, when I was ready to go to college in the roaring twenties, my mother told me that father had "always said" you went to college primarily to make the friends that would do you the rest of your life. This idea brought me up short until I remembered mother's interpretations were apt to be more dramatic than accurate. Father's college friends did remain his closest as it happened, but had he lived for more than fifteen years after graduation, he might easily have found others as sympathetic in later years. Who knows?

Needless to note, there was more to those years than clubs, sports and the pursuit of happiness. Learning did somehow creep into the picture too.

Of father's academic life, I remember but one incident, namely, when he spoke up in an anthropology class. This particular class was much over-subscribed that year, for word had gotten around that it was a "gut course". The professor had at first been flattered by the tremendous registration, but soon realized the glitter was not gold. He naturally became wary; and his wariness bred a protective pomposity. Came the occasion one day when the professor stated that such and such an archaeologist was actually a full-blooded American Indian who had taken an English name. Despite the vast class, my father, while raising his hand for humble recognition also found himself on his feet, blurting out, "But, Sir, he had no drop of Indian blood." The professor was already tied up in another periodic sentence when this interruption hit him broadside. He paused, glowered, and asked condescendingly to whom he had the honor to owe this untimely remark. Father had little wish to involve himself further in what had rapidly deteriorated into a hostile, very public and surely disadvantageous confrontation. But the die was cast; hating the sound of his voice, he gave his name loud and clear. "So," said the professor, "You share the same family name as the one this Indian assumed. I suppose you will tell us you are therefore related?"

"Yes, we are," said my father without overtone, and sat down, leaving the professor suddenly at a loss.

After class, it was established amicably that indeed the archaeologist in question was my father's great-uncle and that he had in fact been adopted into an Indian tribe, given an Indian name, and had lived among the tribesmen for several years; all this, at a time when few, if any, went out to befriend the natives. So, it became supposed he was one. Incidentally, he was well ahead of his time also with certain notions he put forth on primitive society. He is our best claim to fame; unless you consider our pirate relative who dangles far out on a collateral branch of the family tree, the Robin Hood of the Carib Sea.

Though college life seemed all beer and skittles, serious matters were bound to break through on occasion; they always do. I am thinking of what happened in Spring vacation of Mike's junior year.

Pat had graduated previously and had discovered his future lay in architecture. He was already apprenticed to a New York firm. In discussing their future, Pat and Mike decided without hesitation to become partners, though Mike had no great talent. But he had a good sense of business. Pat already showed marked talent, but was not, shall we say, of a practical bent. So the two devoted brothers decided then and there to prepare themselves to complement each other in a future firm of architects that they already envisioned as a reality. Father was to handle the business end; Pat was to be front man.

Apart from this decision, Mike's life that vacation was totally of the moment, enjoying the heavy-duty entertainment that New York's elite offered itself: an incredible formality of occasion that obtained at the receptions, the balls, and the thoroughly chaperoned less formal moments when the young were allowed to survey one and each a bit more closely.

Well can you imagine, as Mike cruised around this ambiance, suddenly there came the moment of truth; beautiful, serene and magnetic. The fact that she was almost a year older than he, bothered him not at all. What bothered him most was the peaceful, languid assurance that accompanied her loveliness. Every myth I ever heard about her was beautiful.

Before father returned to college for the Spring term, a college was then divided like Gaul into three parts or terms, not two semesters, he proudly introduced Pat to his girl, Camilla (*Camilla Leonard*)

Pat and Camilla were married within a year.

I must pause, now, to tell you a legend that grew in credibility as our family tree grew increasingly cross-branched. The legend was simply this; whenever a member of my father's family met a descendant of the three Young sisters, they fell deeply in love. I know nothing of the three Miss

Youngs; they antedated the Civil War. Indeed it seems their descendants were fantastically attractive for not only did they marry copiously into father's family, but overwhelmed the Saxon nobility also. When mother's great uncle took his three beautiful daughters to Europe, they never finished their "grand tour". In Dresden the little Saxony nobility picked off all three girls; our blood runs through the veins of most of the Saxon families of note. I met only one of these relatives, whom I was told to call Cousin Josie. I was also told she was Freifrau von Something all of which was supposed to impress me. But now, Cousin Josie was merely another refugee from Germany, sitting out World War II in New York. She was then far too young, but valiant, and could still rip off a smooth Viennese waltz on the piano after dinner.

So it happened that shortly after these devastating descendants of the Miss Youngs were invading Saxony, others began to move in on father's family. The recurrence of this is what gives our family tree its peculiar gnarled look: it also gave birth to the legend.

These romances mostly took place in the Thousand Islands, where both families were wont to spend summers, at first under canvas, then, later, as they married, under the more permanent roofs of shingled cottages. Eventually, when the fourth "intermarriage" was announced, a family friend who happened to be there on a visit, asked quite seriously, "Don't you folks ever get to the mainland?"

Before leaving the "legend" behind, let me add that at approximately the age of fifteen when I was home on vacation, I met, suddenly, a descendant of a Miss Young. The impact was truly instantaneous and somewhat frightening for its immediacy and strength were totally new to me. present were her father, my mother, as well as my older brother (who seemed to be well insulated against such shock), so she and I had little chance to talk together, but we sure looked each other over plenty. She was a year older than I and lived with her family in Salt Lake City, of all impossible places. How far can you be from where a guy is in school, namely, Massachusetts? I had scarcely two crowded days of vacation left anyway, so you might say I was saved by the bell, the schoolbell. We met again years later, after we were each married, at some Boston family occasion or other; she still seemed very beautiful.

When I was in my twentieth year, and at the Thousand Islands, Uncle Pat's daughter (*Camilla Morgan White* - "Nunnsie") told me she had invited the last Miss Young descendant of my age to stay, and asked me for dinner the following week to meet her. I remember I put on my white flannels, my school tie, new sports-jacket, white shirt and socks, and dancing shoes - though not in that order. I took my newest Charleston-beat phonograph records along too, to be properly prepared for any turn of

events, like dancing. I drove off in my boat (it was only a put-put with a Ford engine, but it was shapely and made good time when not too heavily loaded). I arrived at their dock just as a fat moon was beginning to show; it was a warm, windless evening. My cousin had arranged to have dinner served on the verandah, lit by Japanese lanterns. I also noticed she had asked the cousins from the neighboring island to come witness the holocaust, for I recognized their launch at the dock. It seemed to me that I was about to become sacrificed alive on some pagan altar of legend. In which case I was glad to have dressed with careful choice for this finality.

My memory now brings this tale to a turn for the worse; the structure of the whole evening collapsed. my destiny turned out to be plain as a pipe stem. But I still hoped she might be a "beautiful person", since they are known often to come in a plain wrapper. But it became evident that she had little to offer and what offering she had was delivered in a sadly nasal voice.

The elements then entered into the deflation; the heavens opened. A sudden squall blew out the paper lanterns and instantaneous pelting rain drove us indoors to finish our dinner. As dinner eked its way out, I was increasingly glad to have brought my 78's (long-playing records were not yet invented and, since no one on the Islands had electricity, the machine was hand-cranked; I guess they all were back then).

Dinner and coffee once finished, we repaired to the "other" room where the phonograph stood. Scarcely had I put on my newest and proudest record than the older cousins said they really preferred fox-trots to this "modern music" and forthwith withdrew to peace and quiet elsewhere in the house.

My destiny, now we were alone, told me as how she was reared in Washington, DC - or, more accurately, in Annapolis, because her daddy was in the Navy. Earlier, because of this, they had moved around a lot, so she was really "just out of high school; almost". She said she could tell me lovely things about high school, but I quickly suggested we dance, as an alternative.

The Charleston? Oh, of course she'd heard of the Charleston; why it's the newest thing. What would I ask to give her a lesson right now? The moon had reappeared, the thunder storm had missed us, and it was still unpleasantly hot and humid in spite of the squall. "Any lesson I give, baby, is strictly for free; I don't want to lose my amateur standing."

"I just don't know for sure what you might be meaning by that," she said in her drawling, nasal voice.

Of course, she knew perfectly well how to Charleston. Fortunately, I knew a couple of steps

she didn't, and these she was glad to assimilate.

Now the Charleston is somewhat of an athletic event if you give yourself up to it utterly for a nounce. The white flannels were far too heavy for this activity under such hot and sticky conditions; they clung to me and then, somehow, my underpants, just as I was exuberating in a fine scissor-step routine, seemed to suddenly strangulate. I gave a surprised yelp and fled to rearrange matters more comfortably in privacy. I was very embarrassed; this had never happened to me before.

On my return, she made some crack about the disadvantages of manhood, showing an awareness of situation I wished she could have spared me. Frankly, I was unused to this kind of gambit in mixed home-based conversation. I was afraid of losing my cool. But then came a final straw to break my spirit otherwise. She was shuffling through my records to replay one, when she clumsily let two slip through her fingers. They crashed to the bare floor where they smash-landed. She did say she was sorry but with no show of sincerity. I became sullen as we tidied up the mess; after all, these were my special records that I had brought.

Then she suddenly decided we should join the others; and when we did so, she invented a headache and went upstairs. The cousins looked at me in obvious disappointment. I had unquestionably betrayed their legend.

The Thousand Islands made a beautiful backdrop to romance. The air and the water were clean beyond compare in those pre-pollution days. The weather was warm but given to sudden storms blown down from the Great Lakes. These squalls were violent but of short duration; they moved on as speedily as they came. What especially took your heart were the sunsets that reflected enormously over the broad water after a storm had passed.

There was a big island on which was the village of Thurseau that gave the island an industry; farmers came to sell their milk to the cheese factory there; it was their one outlet. The farmers dwelt mostly on the northern part of the island where the soil was richer. The glacier had honed this Northern end smooth, baring the grey granite that rose abruptly from deep water. There were places where the channel passed within arm's length of the granite shore, that guarded the inner land from erosion. This end of the island was a favorite picnic spot.

The glacier that smoothed the north exposure, scuffed up the southern side in its departure, leaving a series of rough, narrow points, separated by long marshy bays. Off the broadest of these bays clustered five very small islands. They confronted three rocky fingers of the big island's bluntest and broadest point. These small islands, exposed to the fury of the great autumnal Southwest winds, were wooded in misshapen pine, twisted and stunted into looking like the trees in a Hiroshiges woodcut. There were also great sturdy oaks whose venerable strength the winds could not contort.

It was in this tiny archipelago that your ancestors settled - for summers only.

Among the first to come were my mother's aunts and uncles (offspring of *Henry Sheldon Leavitt* and *Martha Ann Young*), the outdoorsy ones. They camped on the next to smallest island, Deer Island. It was really these people who messed up the appearance of our family tree.

The older of the two sisters (*Maris Lewis Leavitt*) was musical, charming and deeply in love with an equally charming, eligible New Yorker. But, alas, when he asked her for her hand in marriage, his request was refused. Her parents categorized him as a "fast man" and for their daughter's "own good" withheld consent. The young man later married and raised a family in a totally respectable manner. Be it said, however, that someone else's son grew up to bear him such a strict resemblance that pretense was of little persuasion. Mother's aunt was heart-broken to lose the love of her life through an adamant parental decision; but such were the ways of those days of abject obedience. She eventually dwindled into the wife of a persistent beau (*Thomas C. Thacher*) of lesser allure. He was vigorously attentive; he surrounded her by buying an island on either side of their camping site, and would swim daily from one of his islands to the other in a show of prowess. But this budding Leander suffered a setback one day that would have mortified a more sensitive swain. As he swam by, he suddenly developed a cramp, and called loudly to shore for rescue. Everyone within earshot set out in skiff, canoe or punt in helter-skelter haste. The danger and the excitement vanished before the rescuers reached him, for he had reached, unknowingly, the far tip of the treacherous shoal that stuck way out from the end of Wolf Island, just enough under water to be a blind menace to boats using the narrow channel between the islands of the bay. As his rescuers rushed to his aid, he suddenly rose from the water and stood before them far from shore but scarcely more than knee-deep, a ludicrous sight. His drama turned into a farce.

It was their children who gnarled up our tree, for their daughter (*Hope Thacher*,) married a nephew of father's (*Bernard Shirley Carter Thomas C. Thacher*), and their son married my sister (*Thomas C. Thacher Jr. and Vera Morgan*). The legend was operating on all cylinders, a tiny bit incestuously, one might say.