**Leslie Walter Trowbridge, 1920 - 2012**

Dad completed his first autobiography in 1991. Then as he approached the end of his life, he felt it more urgent than ever to record his recollections of his long life full of adventure. In fact, during his rehabilitation for a broken hip, he recruited his therapists to take dictation and to transcribe recordings of his stories so that he could publish one last book before he died. But time ran out. So it seemed to me a fitting tribute to tell some of these stories at his memorial service.

In the spring of 1934, Leslie was turning 14 and his brother Bob was 12. They lived on a dairy farm in central Wisconsin and had always helped out with the chores—feeding the animals, milking the cows, harvesting the hay and corn, stacking firewood.

A little over 250 miles away in the big city of Chicago, an event was going on that was attracting millions of visitors. Signaling the end of the Great Depression, it was turning out to be a huge celebration: the 1934 World’s Fair, dubbed “A Century of Progress.” Leslie and Bob’s parents decided to go on a road trip to see the fair, and let the two boys look after the farm. So they loaded up the Studebaker and set out for Chicago.

Leslie and Bob had been helping to milk the cows for years already, so their parents were confident that the boys would be conscientious about the twice-a-day milking. The boys were proud of their new responsibilities and started thinking of about other chores as well: why not try some land clearing? That sounded like fun.

They had watched their father clear trees on their 60-acre property to turn forestland into pasture and cornfields. After felling the trees and making firewood, you needed to remove the stumps. And the standard way to do that, in those days, was to blast the stump out of the ground, then fasten a chain around it and have their two draft horses, Doll and Babe haul it away.

Using a heavy steel bar, the boys dug a hole underneath the stump. Then they fetched a stick of dynamite from a box in the shed. For smaller stumps, a half stick was enough, so they broke it in two. Then they attached a blasting cap with a fuse, unwrapping a bit at the end so they could light it with a match.

Their dog Teddy loved being outdoors and always wanted to be at the center of activity—he ran around in circles barking with excitement. Bob stood back as Leslie lit the fuse and quickly tossed the dynamite in the hole . “Run, Bob, run!”

The boys ran as fast as they could, but Teddy, his attention fixed on the smoking fuse jumped up on top of the stump, barking excitedly as the smoke curled from the sparking fuse.

After running a couple hundred feet, the boys looked back and saw the explosion. With a deafening bang, the dynamite went off with a bright flash and a huge spray of rocks and dirt. The stump lifted up and sent Teddy tumbling in the air. When it settled back down and the smoke cleared, there was Teddy, still standing and still barking. A bit stunned perhaps, but he seemed no worse for the wear.

So the boys proceeded to wrap the chain around the dislodged stump and hooked it up to Doll and Babe. Giddyup! The two horses dragged away the stump.

The boys were quite proud of their work—little did they know how displeased their father would be about risking life and limb with dynamite while their parents were gone.

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You could generally count on a few inches of snow on the ground for several weeks during the winter in central Wisconsin. There wasn’t much in the way of hills, but that didn’t stop Leslie and Bob from developing an interest in skiing. All you really needed was a couple of slats of poplar lumber that was relatively soft and could be shaped with a draw knife. So under their father’s direction, they shaved the slats, thinning them and carving a tapered point at one end.

But how would they get the tips to bend up, so the skis would stay on the surface of the snow? Their mother had an idea: she prepared a large tub of boiling water. Then the boys placed the tips of the skis in the water and left them submerged overnight. In the morning, the tips were pliable and could be bent and secured on a jig until they dried out. After a couple of days of drying, the skis were ready to be removed from the jig and voila! They held their shape, with nicely curved tips.

Now the boys needed to figure out a way to secure their skis to their rubber galoshes. They found some scraps of heavy canvas that were ideal: by screwing on loops of canvas to the top of the skis, they could slip their galoshes into the loop and were ready to go.

The only thing they needed was a ski run. But that too was something they could build. Using some scrap lumber from the wood pile, they nailed together a platform about 6 feet high with a ramp that sloped down to the ground. By constructing the platform at the top of the alfalfa field, the ramp connected to an icy patch in the field which extended their ski run down to the frozen creek on the neighbor’s property. The only danger was going under the fence at the bottom without getting tangled up in the barbed wire. This required quickly ducking underneath the bottom wire of the fence. But it was a style they developed quite handily. So during the winter days, Leslie and Bob would take a break from their chores and have a few quick ski runs down the alfalfa field.

Later, they recruited their younger brother Charlie to drive the Studebaker along the country roads while they were towed behind on their skis, holding on to long ropes attached to the bumper of the car. Often, there was enough snow on the shoulder to ski, as long as you kept an eye ahead to avoid skiing into a culvert.

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Dad attended a one-room schoolhouse called Stepping Stone School and walked or bicycled the 5 miles from their home every day. There were only about 20 students altogether, spanning grades 1-8. Dad remembers his teacher’s name, Miss Ada Schulz.

He had only one classmate in 3rd grade, a girl who required more time to master her lessons. So at the end of the year, Miss Schulz thought it best that she repeat the 3rd grade. That would mean that Leslie would be the only student in the 4th grade. Leslie wasn’t a child prodigy, but his teacher decided that he should skip 4th and go directly into the 5th grade.

As we were growing up, whenever something came up that Dad didn’t know the answer to, he took on a kind of professorial tone of voice and made something up. A useful trick, by the way that I picked up from him. But on those occasions when we were skeptical, he sometimes said, “That must be something they covered in the 4th grade.”

During his last three years at Stepping Stone School, Dad rode his bicycle. He liked to tell us that it was an uphill climb in both directions. In any case, he eventually figured out a way to mount a gasoline-powered washing machine engine on his bike which saved him a lot of pedaling.

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When Dad became a teacher himself, he taught Physics to 12th graders at University High School in Ann Arbor, while finishing up his PhD at the University of Michigan (1959-62). In one corner of the classroom he had his office and on the other side there was a door to an equipment storage room. This was a marvelous room, with shelves from floor to ceiling filled with all kinds of physics, chemistry and earth science demonstration equipment: a Van de Graaff generator for producing giant sparks of static electricity, lenses, mirrors and prisms, for doing experiments with light, chemical reagents and all kinds of scientific glassware: test tubes, flasks, condensers and pipettes. It was amazing. And Dad always cultivated curiosity in his children. Often on Friday afternoons he would select some item from the store room and bring it home for us to investigate over the weekend. It felt like Christmas all year.

Dad had access to liquid nitrogen from the University supply store, so once we were treated to a quart of liquid nitrogen in a thermos bottle. What great fun it was to put a rubber ball in the liquid for a few seconds, then take it out and drop it on the floor, watching it shatter like a glass Christmas ornament.

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Dad was emphatically NOT a fan of spectator sports, especially not a fan of football, basketball or baseball games on TV. In fact, he had a disdain for televised sports, which he considered a waste of time. But his friends loved to talk sports, so among them, he kept this opinion to himself.

For years after his retirement, every weekday morning, Dad religiously went out for mid-morning coffee at the local K-mart. There he met his buddies, men in their eighties who cherished this morning routine. They loved to review the previous day’s games they had watched on TV. They talked about the playoffs or the world series or the championships; they knew the names and the statistics for players on both college and professional sports teams.

But Dad saw their gathering as an opportunity for teaching science. And he always had a little science tidbit at the ready for sharing with them—one perennial question was whether water going down a bathtub drain swirls clockwise or counterclockwise and whether it goes the opposite direction in tubs south of the equator. In fact, Dad gave presentations at the Kiwanis club in which he actually set up a demonstration of a makeshift drain and showed that water had no such preference for direction of flow. His friends loved it; they always looked forward to his next science lesson over coffee.

In the corner of K-mart you could could get free coffee in a styrofoam cup, sweeten it with sugar from a glass jar. You didn’t need to measure the sugar; you just let the little hinged metal door swing open while you poured. There was non-dairy creamer and red plastic stirring sticks for dissolving the creamer and stirring up the sugar from the bottom of the cup.

Then one day, the K-mart announced that they were closing down. What would this mean to Dad’s daily routine? I asked him, “Dad, what are you going to do now? Where are you going to find your morning cup of coffee?”

“Oh, I won’t miss it.” he said. “That coffee at K-mart is the worst coffee I’ve ever tasted! They must have boiled it in the coffee maker for days.”

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Last September Dad suffered a fall and broke a leg bone near his hip. He needed surgery followed by several weeks of rehabilitation. This meant that he was introduced to many staff members at the Bonell Community—from nursing assistants to physical therapists. He was still keen on reading science articles, keeping his mind active by writing summaries of the articles he read, organizing them and sharing them with others. He tried to engage his caregivers in discussions about topics in science, sometimes at the expense of concentrating on his assigned rehab exercises. He thought Vicki was the best therapist he ever knew because she showed interest in space and black holes and dark matter.

Dad was a subscriber to the magazine Scientific American for 62 years; probably the most loyal customer the publisher has ever seen. He always looked forward to receiving the latest edition in the mail. He was especially fond of the articles about astronomy and cosmology and the origin of the universe. These ideas always stimulated and stretched his imagination. He loved books by Steven Hawking and Carl Sagan and Brian Greene about space and time, black holes and supernovas. He watched the Cosmos series several times and was fascinated by the Nova TV programs.

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Leslie Trowbridge was the consummate lifelong learner and teacher. These are roles that he passed on to his children and grandchildren and we are all grateful for it. We will miss him, and we will cherish the memories and stories he so carefully recorded.

Dad was always conscientious about documenting the events of his life. He was proud of the adventures of his wife Dorothee and the accomplishments of his children and their families. He was also an inveterate picture taker who filled many albums and slide carousels of with photos documenting their world travels and teaching experiences.

My brother Tom has been especially diligent about preserving these photographs in digital format and assembling slideshows. Thank you, Tom for your work on today’s memorial slideshow.

My sister Edie is the person most responsible for our parent’s care during the past dozen years. This has enabled them to continue an active and healthy life that has made it possible for Dad to indulge in reminiscing and writing. She has also been Dad’s greatest advocate in negotiating the complicated maze of health care and insurance, hospitals and tests that seems so much a part of care for the elderly today. Thank you Edie for your devotion to your mother and father during these recent years.

Thank you, Bob Mitchell for your fine woodworking job in constructing the beautiful red cedar urn for Dad’s ashes.

Finally, thank you everyone for your presence, and your kind words, thoughts and prayers in remembrance of our father, Leslie Trowbridge.