

## Betsy Morgenthau

### August 1963'ish'

I was maybe 11 years, summer was coming, and because I did not want to go to camp, Mom arranged that I'd join Jo, Don, and the Brunk boys for 1-1/2 weeks before the Jaeger family joined and we all headed out for a week in the wilderness. I slid right into the Brunk routine. At 3 meals, my own bar stool in line, made us 6 in a row at the kitchen counter. Jo stood on the other side over the sauté pan and burner. Dinners were single dish affairs, two recipes, served on alternating nights. If tonight was ground beef sauté mixed with a can of applesauce, then tomorrow was egg sausage scramble hash, and repeat.

Don's naval officer training was not so far in the rear-view mirror that he didn't appreciate order, and at the same time he had a relatable boyish side which came out especially when he was on the backyard lawn engaged in family baseball practice. Hot Springs County Little League was the highlight of summer in Thermop. Jim threw a whale of a lot of spin balls and with Don and/or the brothers in field, it paid-off on Thursday nights. Regardless of the heat, which hovered on one side or the other of 100, game evenings pulled everyone from their homes, and the baseball bleachers were full by 5, thereafter standing room only. Backyard practice and a family behind him, Jim scored big wins! Perhaps more clear from the vantage point of today, Don cared for the kids in the game more than the win.

In those elementary school years, Uncle Don stood apart on the annual camping adventures that followed my family's arrival (and after we all bravely lined up for Rocky Mountain tick fever shots). On most of them we were joined by the McReynolds family who had 3 more to add to the mix, for a camping trip total of 6 parents, 11 boys, Betsy, and Bootsie the St. Bernard. Into the wilds of Wyoming, we bounced along for hours in trucks with tires made for off-roading. On this occasion, we were heading for a week at Big Horn National Park, Lake Tensleep. There were rules of course, but the Lake was a considerable draw, and after 5 days we'd scouted out the surrounding woods. Some of us walked freely back and forth the 1/4 mile between lake and campground, and we normally all returned, except on day 5. Curt, clad in tee shirt and shorts, did not arrive back for lunch. Excuses were offered — Curt was just behind, coming soon, he was fishing; then someone went to look, then joined by another. Before long the Dads fanned out in all directions while the kids were firmly told to stay put. It impressed me when Don returned, by outward appearance collected; he had contacts and going to next step measures. Whether his/or someone's radio, he requested support from the State. It wasn't



hard to overhear the Moms' comments that he needed to act for help to arrive before nightfall. It was going to freeze, and Curt was out in shirt sleeves. Don made the arrangements then back to search. In 90 min, a helicopter was over the mountain, the rangers a bit behind that but on their way. And about that time, Curt a moment before lost, walked into the arms of one of our own. He arrived back in camp weary and happy, on the arm of whom I can't recall. I don't doubt he's ever been quite so loved!!

### **Flash forward 30+ years, December 25 - 31, 1994**

In December 1994 David, my son, was 9, and he and I paid Jo & Don a visit that spanned Christmas night to New Year's Eve. At the airport we rented a 4 wheel drive and arrived at Jo & Don's toasty Teton cabin to find Jo on a ladder decorating the tree. She'd been busy with other's needs before then and now had time to make festive at home. The scene impressed me as much as the Teton winter. It was truly cold. Jo and Don kept us snug in their cabin or I'm sure I'd have frozen to death walking to the company cabin. By day, the temperature struggled to climb to minus -23, and that cold snap lasted days. What visions I had of skiing with David were frozen on arrival, but David was determined. Don knew just when to jump in the conversation and offered, "I happen to know an "extreme skier", an all-weather guy; son of a friend of Dave's. Don had the most humble way of seeing a need and meeting it with the right words. David was extremely delighted by the idea, Don made a single call, and a young 20 year old answered the phone on Christmas night. Don's snow angel and David were ski buddies all week, 7 hours every day of our stay. Each afternoon when I drove to the slopes for pick-up, I asked, so what did you two talk about on all those chair lifts? The response, "how cold we were".

In the in between hours I explored the endlessly picturesque backroads as I'd never have done without that time to fill. And on a couple occasions I returned midday for lunch with Jo and Don. Once Jo left us to the dishes for her catnap, the tenor of conversation changed. One afternoon I recall clearly, Don reflected on marriage in general, giving thanks for his happy one. "You know Bets, when there's a disagreement and we go our separate ways for a while, I think to myself, "my 'everything' is upstairs, what am I doing nursing a small resentment in the face of a big love?" It was easy see and to hear how Don's humility graced Jo's life and all those around him.

### **Another 15 years after that — October 10, 2009**

Quite out of the blue and on a spur of the moment invitation, I found myself in Jackson for the weekend, the guest of friends. I couldn't come 'n go without saying hi at the least. Thus after Saturday lunch at Nora's Creekside I called, and Don answered. Just as soon as he heard I was in town for just over a day more, Don said, why sure come on by when you can.



I didn't yet realize that it was a Brunk family custom to pitch-in to amass a ready supply of firewood for 7 months of supplemental cabin heat, and my visit happily coincided. Every year in early October dependable son-power completed Don's log-splitting efforts. There had been an early snowfall the day before and arriving at the cabin with my friend-hosts, afforded a picture of almost unreal beauty, and that was before we knocked on the door. Inside, now that the work was done, Jo, Don and their boys were sitting easy in the rustic log chairs around the coffee table, the fireplace aglow. It was a sight from a novel-become-movie; a pastor and his grown boys, the evenly distributed attractiveness amongst the lanky frames, the healthy color of recent physicality, together back home. The impression remains, a love story distilled.