

A SEED WAS PLANTED THE SUNDAY AFTERNOON  
THAT ONE OF MY DAD'S FRIENDS, THE ART DIRECTOR  
OF A SEATTLE ADVERTISING AGENCY, PAID US A VISIT.



As I watched him scribble some quick sketches of Barney Google, Moon Mullins, and Andy Gump, I couldn't wait to borrow his "magic pencil" and try my own hand at drawing these comic-strip characters. It looked so easy and such a lot of fun. I couldn't have been more than six years old at the time.

Well, the two men sure came up with a good way to get rid of me in a hurry. I moved over to the creaky rolltop desk, found some thin sheets of paper and remained there until dinner, slavishly tracing the visitor's sketches, quite sure the pencil was magic. It was a major discovery, and I was floating on air with excitement. During the weeks to follow, I copied every single comic in both the *Seattle Times* and the *Post Intelligencer* and soon had them all memorized. Not very creative, but certainly persistent!

As soon as my teacher discovered the doodlings, she took me by the hand and marched me around to the other classes, where she announced: "Henry Ketcham from the second grade will draw some cartoons for you on the blackboard." She even urged me to demonstrate my new-found skills to the big kids in the fourth grade room!

In due course dozens of yellow slickers were festooned with the Ketcham (memorized) originals, and I was commissioned to decorate all the apple boxes that served as bodies for the popular homemade “skate-mobile” (a cross between a skateboard and a scooter).

My first commercial assignment came when I was a ten-year-old. Jim Neidigh, a classmate from one of the neighborhood’s well-to-do families (his father had a steady job), said he would pay me twenty-five cents cash if I would draw a hundred cartoon heads for him. Here was a golden opportunity to earn enough money with my own two hands to pay for extra lunches! However, it was a frightful experience and took me all of two days. I suffered horrible frustrations, and my homework went entirely neglected. I realized then that every artist needs someone to negotiate his business affairs for him.

As the years ticked by, I signed up for whatever art courses the schools offered, did regular drawings for the school paper, and accepted most any request for a funny drawing. It was a splendid ego massage; I received as much attention from the girls as the muscular athletes and was never out of breath or suffered a pulled ligament. Besides, I was too skinny and basically chicken for body-contact sports and too dense for intellectual jousting. Humor seemed to be the easiest way to “fit” into the community. Happily, during those grim days of the twenties, I developed a knack for seeing the lighter side almost to the point of blindness when it came to the hard facts of life.

Looking back on my artwork gives me the willies. I don’t see how I could have made such an impression with junk like that. But it worked, and I kept at it on a semi-regular basis—meaning whenever I found spare time between classes, homework, the track team, golf, Hi-Y, school theatrical productions, Yell Team practice, lawn and garden maintenance, and cleaning my room! I also worked a noon shift flipping hamburgers at the Grizzly Inn, a popular hangout across the street from Queen Anne High.

A proud papa Weaver Ketcham shows off his firstborn, several years before the youngster became attracted to the “magic pencil.”



It is virtually impossible for an imaginative student to devote meaningful time to any single subject during such a critical period of development. Life then is one continuous smorgasbord; a nibble of this, a dab of that, a sample of one thing, and a smidgen of something else. Absolutely days of glory, but busy, frantic, and confusing. Oh, that we could do it all over again!

As a matter of fact, several of my friends are still at it!

## FAMILY HISTORY

Unraveling the tangled web of family origin is an awesome and frustrating task unless, of course, your predecessors were able to read and write, kept diaries, or, better yet, were thrown in jail or held public office, thus becoming a part of recorded history. I have little knowledge of a European beginning and will only risk picking up one thread, which is dated 1800.

The family Corkhill ran the Custom House near the town of Ramsey on the Isle of Man, a speck of rock in the middle of the Irish Sea. This imposing wooden structure was built on the strand not far from the lighthouse, and at low tide eels were in abundance and easily dug from the sand with pole and sickles. When the herring were running, every man in town would leave home to join the fishing expedition, and the women would run the island businesses.

Apparently this beach-boy lifestyle became a bloody bore for father Corkhill, so in 1822 he took his wife, four children, and Aunt Ella to Liverpool, where they boarded the sailing ship *Massasoit*. Eight weeks and four days later they sailed into Chesapeake Bay. In due course they managed to find space on a lumber wagon that was dead-heading west, and, for what must have been another cramped and uncomfortable adventure, they clip-clopped their way across the Allegheny Mountains into Ohio and finally settled in Steubenville.

In no time at all, a local boy, Andrew McDivitt, swept young Eliza Corkhill off her feet. They subsequently raised two boys and two girls and moved to Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, where a Ketcham, William B., finally enters the picture and marries Harriet McDivitt.

One of their sons, Albert Ravenswood Ketcham, was to become my grandfather, some years after he had wooed and won the trembling hand of a young lady from Mt. Pleasant, Miss Laura Weaver. Miss Laura's daddy, Brigadier General James Baird Weaver, in a singular claim to political fame, was elected to Congress in 1878 and served three successive terms. He was also an "incorruptible but uninspiring" candidate for President of the United States, running on the Greenback ticket. He lost in 1880 to James A. Garfield and in 1892 to Grover Cleveland. He did, however, account for thirty-five percent of



Great Grandfather General James B. Weaver, a popular two-time loser.



Bapa King takes a breather from cutting driftwood logs to introduce his grandson to a crosscut saw. He also loved to treat the lad to tall tales of the Deep South, along with generous helpings of grits and chitlins.

the total vote in the twelve western states and was given twenty-two electoral votes.

Once their four offspring were old enough to travel, the Ketchams moved west to Seattle, Washington, where young Weaver, Albert Junior, Ernest, and Laura went through school. Their neighbors in the University District were the Kings—Nellie Helt, a young Ohio native, and her husband, Henry Richard, who hailed from Covington, Georgia. They had recently

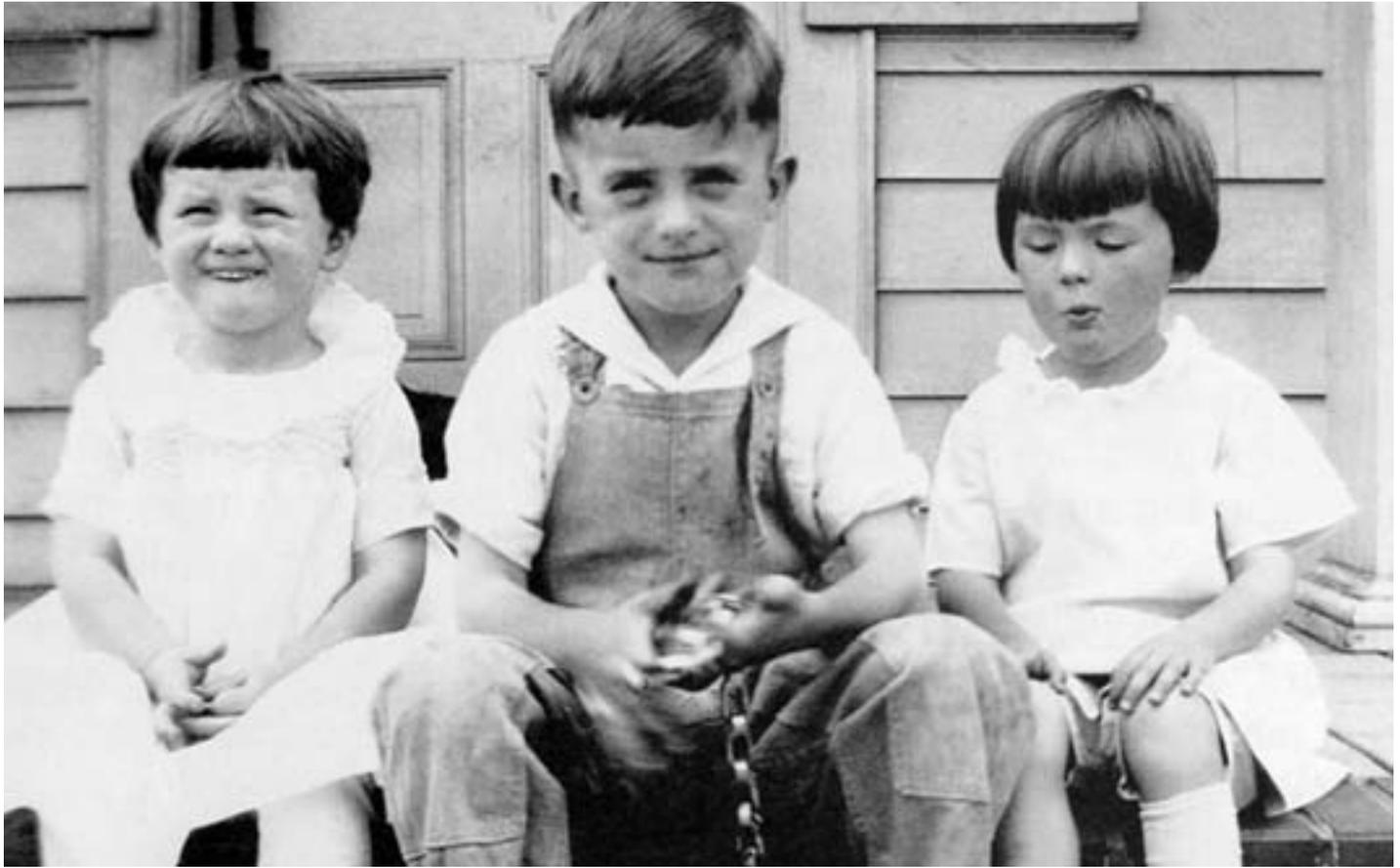
arrived from Miles City, Montana, with their two offspring, Chester and Virginia. The fickle finger of fate soon beckoned, and Weaver Vinson Ketcham waltzed down the aisle with Virginia Emma King. Eventually they celebrated the arrivals of Henry, Joan, and Virginia. And we are still here! Though I am a bit out of breath from the above, shall we proceed?

## SEATTLE IN THE TWENTIES

My sister Joan is two years younger than I, and we grew up as two normal, well-behaved, insecure, terrified kids. Dad served in the Navy during the first World War and was by nature a stern disciplinarian. I don't know what prompted it, but one evening he brought home a horsewhip—a stiff, tapered thing about three feet long that he solemnly placed in the corner near the front door. My first thought was, “Oh, boy! When is he gonna bring the horse?”

The rules were quite simple: no whipping above the knees. Now maybe this is as it should be on horses, but on skinny little underfed kids it's murder. However, it did stimulate the circulation on cold afternoons, and I developed various techniques of fancy footwork that to this day have given me the reputation of being an “agile” dancer.

In all fairness, I must point out that Mother was a sweet, loving softie who seldom raised her voice in anger. Dad had realized that his gentle, redheaded Montana lady was not a believer in things like “discipline or punishment,” so to serve in his absence, he had supplied this symbol of raw violence, hoping it would scare the whey out of the two Ketcham ragamuffins. From all reports, Joan and I were capable of “acting up” and causing enough commotion to call down the wrath of the gods, but the ugly horsewhip was only half-heartedly switched around our ankles on very few occasions. It caused no more than a slight, tingling sensation—though Joanie insists I screamed bloody murder.



The Ketcham tribe took themselves seriously, and Grandfather Ketcham saw to it that his three sons were raised toeing the mark. All of these menfolk had exceptional humor, but they also carried a steely glint in the eye that translated into “State your business and don’t mess around.” Aside from stern warnings, the horsewhip, and a good swat on the fanny from time to time, I don’t have any memories of “trips to the woodshed.” I got along very well with Dad, and we enjoyed each other’s company. He was always supportive of my cartoon ambitions, although he constantly was after me to “just draw that vase over there on the shelf the way it really looks.” He wanted me to learn the craft correctly, to understand good drawing before I went off the deep end

Sister Joan, her five-year-old brother, and our nextdoor neighbor, Jerry Johns, try their best to accommodate the photographer. Judging from the costumes, this photo and the one below must have been snapped on a Sunday.





into caricature. He was right, I was an impatient schoolboy. I am grateful now that he lived long enough, as he put it, “to bask in the reflected glory of Henry’s success.”

The Seattle First Methodist Episcopal Church was the theological service station for the Ketcham family, and, like clockwork, we arrived by streetcar every Sabbath morning for spiritual refueling. Paying regular homage to the Lord was ingrained in us from the beginning: grace before dinner, prayers at bedtime, and we went to Sunday School religiously (Is there a better way to go?).

Anyhow, it was as much a part of the schedule as taking a bath and brushing the choppers.

When I began wearing long trousers, I moved up to Junior Church where I became an instant fan of Rector Harry Wilson’s spirited readings of such non-church stories as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Moby Dick*. I was also enamored of raising my soprano voice with fifty other whippersnappers to belt out some rousing Methodist hymns. “Rock of Ages” and “Throw Out the Lifeline” immediately come to mind. Later I took my turn teaching simple Bible lessons to the kindergarten set and was even called upon to offer short “sermons” from the pulpit in the big auditorium upstairs.

There were also monthly Friday-evening vespers with potluck suppers, and quite often Mr. Wilson would treat a full house of a hundred

Above: A quorum of Ketchams pose beneath a Seattle plum tree in Manga’s backyard. From left to right: Manga, Aunt Peg, Maud Sullenberger (Manga’s sister), Albert III, his father Albert R. Ketcham, Jr., my young sister Virginia, Dick, Bapa, and the letter-sweated teenager with visions of Disney dancing in his head.

Opposite: A portrait with Mother, as Henry and Joan watch the birdie with suspicion.

or more devout WASPs to a movie, shown on a huge beaded screen. The church had a soundproof booth and one 35mm projector, and while the reels were being changed we'd sing our heads off to "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," "I've Been Workin' on the Railroad," "K-K-K-Katy," and other musical jewels from the Top 50 of 1928.

Of course there was no sound and no color, but a piano player, loaded with creative arpeggios, always accompanied the action, and the evenings were memorable as we feasted on such celluloid classics as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* with Will Rogers, and laughed hysterically as the swarm of Model T Fords petrified the horses and the knights in shining armor.

Harold Lloyd comedies were regular fare, but for some reason or another we never did see much of Clara Bow, Jean Harlow, or Gloria Swanson.

Prohibition was in full swing when I was nine years old, and the Sunday School teacher felt prompted to trot out a blue card for each of us children to sign. It was a Temperance Pledge, of all things. I dutifully tucked it between the pages of my Bible and eventually had it neatly framed and hung in my bar.

Grandmother Ketcham and her sister Maud were Carrie Nation clones, and for all I know founding members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Although they refrained from barging into waterfront saloons armed with axes and bent on total destruction, the Weaver sisters made their point loud and clear on the home front, much to the despair of Grandpa Albert K., a whiz at three cushion billiards and an enthusiastic brandy sniffer. They blamed the acrid pollution of his Blue Boar tobacco for the wilted house plants, the discoloration of curtains and wallpaper, and relegated him to the cellar for his pipe-puffing. My grandparents were a little like Maggie and Jiggs, a popular comic strip in the twenties and thirties, but Grandpa was no wimp. If his wife hadn't been such a sensational cook and housekeeper, I feel sure he would have flown the coop early on. I'm glad he didn't. He

was a marvelous grandfather with a great sense of humor. We'd sit for hours at checkers, and he taught me how to play caroms, a sort of miniature billiards where your fingers are used to propel small wooden rings around an enclosed board.

Before retiring one evening, Grandpa absentmindedly placed a bottle of beer in the ice box. The next morning sister Joan was doing the dishes when Grandma entered the kitchen for her bowl of hot cereal and milk. In utter horror she spied the suds, dramatically grabbed the bottle by the neck, and, as though christening the USS *Ticonderoga*, shattered the thing to smithereens on the kitchen sink, demanding of everyone within earshot: "Who brought this WHISKEY into my house?" Poor Joan was so disturbed that, within the hour, she had gathered up all the vanilla extract and aftershave lotion in the house and had tossed it all into the garbage can.

Aunt Maud, Grandmother Ketch's older sister, "came to dinner" and graced the guest room for the next five years. She also was devoted to the cult of Abstinence, but somehow these two elderly Iowa girls were lured into attending a large afternoon gathering of society matrons where they were served "delicious fruit punch decorated with exotic flowers floating in a bowl."

Watching them help each other out of the taxi was as good as any Mack Sennett comedy—hats at a jaunty tilt, glasses slightly askew, laughing and giggling their way through the front door, loving the whole wide world for once in their cloistered, Puritanical lives. Nary a soul, of course, would ever remind these prim and proper ladies that they had both been gassed to the eyeballs.

Incongruous handles have been attached to long-suffering grandparents since Year One. These are pet names, the first feeble utterances of infant grandchildren that, once applied, seem to last a lifetime. Grandmother and Grandfather Ketcham were no exception: they were called Manga and Bapa.

Sunday dinner at Manga's was a tasty ritual that afterwards usually found us sitting around the fireplace, listening to family stories of earlier days

in Iowa, and singing to the accompaniment of Manga's guitar and Dad's mandolin. In a sincere effort to broaden my musical appreciation, Manga would open the old Victrola and ply me with records of Madam Schumann Heink, Harry Lauder, and Enrico Caruso. This stuff never really grabbed me, but one fine day Bapa gave me a broad wink and showed me where he kept his small collection of recordings by the Mound City Blue Blowers and The Two Black Crows. This I *did* appreciate!

I couldn't believe my ten-year-old eyes when I saw the big Atwater Kent console being delivered. She was a beauty, housed in an attractive wooden cabinet and packed with vacuum tubes, speakers, wires, switches, and knobs, carrying a price tag of \$49.95. It was about the only article in the house we ever bought brand new. How on earth my dad ever paid for it never occurred to me; I was too absorbed in the magic of this box that brought glorious sounds into our living room from as far away as Salt Lake City. And when the local station became affiliated with the Red and Blue Network, it opened up an exciting new world and made it easier to endure the cold and wet Seattle winters. Don McNeil's Breakfast Club from Chicago was a morning must, as were the news bulletins reported by H. V. Kaltenborn and the sporting events by Graham MacNamee and Ted Husing. The entire country paused to hear the daily episodes of "Amos 'n' Andy," and every Thursday on CBS my ears were tuned to the Major Bowes Amateur Hour, hoping to hear some poor off-key tenor get the gong.

I can't truthfully complain that we lived under much tension or nervous strain—but I bit my nails, sucked my thumb, and wet my bed until I was nearly fourteen.

## SEATTLE IN THE EARLY THIRTIES

My youngest sister, Virginia, was born on 16 October 1932, and Mother died ten days later from complications of the birth that led to

peritonitis. She was a loving, vivacious girl of only thirty-four years. Dad had been unemployed for months, Joan and I were threadbare, and now a housekeeper and a nurse were needed. The strain must have been unbearable.

Joan, of course, was very close to Mother—helping in the kitchen, learning to sew, and spending hours together in mother/daughter talks; I was all over the place riding my bike, playing ball, hanging out with my pals, and finally dragging into the house just before dark.

I was terribly depressed but didn't shed a tear until the day of the funeral when the three of us sat near the coffin, half-listening to the eulogy and last rites. Father appeared shattered, drawn, and hopelessly lost. I guess it was only then I fully understood what had happened and suddenly burst out crying.

My mother had been a fastidious writer. She sold several short stories to magazines and kept a diary from the day she entered high school. As I was only twelve when she died, her collection of daily happenings and thoughts has given me insight, understanding, and appreciation of from whence I came and the nature of the cast of characters involved. I have been fascinated, appalled, saddened, surprised, and uplifted by her periodic entries and feel that I have finally gotten to know my mom.

I discovered a hint of the sensitive nature of this young lady in the following bit of poetry she wrote shortly before her marriage:

It's just two years since you told  
Me you were in love.  
You didn't say exactly who she was,  
But I guessed.  
And later you confessed.  
It's queer how quickly time goes.  
It seems like yesterday that  
We were in the throes  
Of high school work and play.  
And now it's college and business  
That we talk about.  
It's fun to wonder what the

Next two years will bring.  
Do you remember all we've done  
Together?  
We've braved all sorts of weather,  
You and I. But our love has only  
Had one season—Spring.  
It seems to keep on shining  
Sweet and true, just like  
It did when we found it, new  
And beautiful.  
Somehow I feel it's always  
Going to be that way with us,  
No matter what some others say.  
Idle gossip and opinion are  
Incapable of breaking love  
Forged in friendship and true loyalty.  
As long as we keep our purpose  
Straight and well in sight—And cling tight

To the causes and the works that count  
And never lose the vision of our Lord—  
We'll get along alright.

Virginia King  
October 4, 1916

Grass grows quickly in the misty Northwest, so Henry and his rotary cutting machine clattered about the neighborhood on weekends servicing regular customers. Cutting: fifty cents. Trimming: two bits extra. Those precipitous Seattle lawns were definitely a challenge. I've had remarkably good luck playing in the streets, but three times I've been run over by lawn-mowers.

About this time, a young man born thirty miles down the road was making a big splash with his intimate singing technique, something they called "crooning." Harry Lillis Crosby was

This was my first real taste of the free-enterprise system, and if the Xerox copier had been invented sixty years earlier I might have remained in the newspaper business.

