

**ADVENTURES WITH SYLVIA**

by Edgar R. Weinrott

*Dedication*

TO SYLVIA

In appreciation

## *Introduction*

This is not intended to be an instruction booklet for the care of patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. It is merely an attempt to recite a number of anecdotes which my wife and I experienced in the course of a relationship which lasted more than fifty-two years. These are the fond memories that remain after all else has vanished.

In the course of relating these stories for the benefit of our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, I have inserted a few occurrences that preceded Sylvia's arrival in my life and a few since her departure. These almost extraneous events do not convey the powerful influence that she exerted on our life together, but perhaps they have some entertainment value.

The names of some individuals have been changed to disguise their identities . . . good friends will not be deceived in the slightest.

BEFORE SYLVIA. It was along time ago, but there was a time before Sylvia. As is referred to elsewhere, I had a heart condition which more or less eliminated childhood. My parents managed the situation as best they could and provided me with an excellent education: a private tutor until age ten and then private schools. From grades eight through twelve I attended Friends Select School in Philadelphia; this was a super institution. The teachers, especially the head of the English department, developed in me a person who was able to overcome, in some measure, a confining inferiority complex. Attendance at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania was not as formative a period.

With the outbreak of World War II patriotism reached a level not seen since. I attempted to enlist but was rejected. A few months later I was drafted. Matters were not very promising at that time, and the only test for acceptance by the Army was a demonstration of one's ability to reach the Armory. I made the trip and I was in. The group with which I traveled to the reception center in New Cumberland illustrated the situation: my buddy had been refused training in the Air Force just because he had a glass eye. Another draftee was missing two fingers off one hand and there was one who lacked two fingers on one hand and one on the other. Shortly thereafter the Allies invaded North Africa, reasoning, I assumed, that that they had better do the job with what they had since the pipeline did not appear promising.

During the period of basic training in Texas I learned some of the Army wisdom that later served me well. Contrary to what you may have heard, there are occasions when one *should* volunteer. The morning after we arrived at a camp that not been in use since World War I, after eight days on a troop train, I offered myself for latrine duty (I had been told this was an easy assignment). I was directed to the officers' latrine, provided with the necessary materials and ordered to get to work. They were right . . . it was easy duty. In two hours the rooms were clean and there was nothing further to do at that time, so I bravely decided to take off my clothes and shower, figuring that I was not exuding a pleasing odor after all those days on the train with minimal hygienic facilities. I had fully lathered when two officers walked in. They came into the shower room and you really can't distinguish officers from an enlisted men when they are naked. After a few moments one officer asked, "Isn't there an orderly in here?" I saluted and piped up, "Right here, sir". Not a word was said, and I quickly washed away the suds and removed myself from the room. What could they do to me? I was a private . . . could they make me a civilian? Lesson #1.

After an incident generated by my heart condition I was summoned to the office of the surgeon-general of the Second Infantry Division; I had been assigned to that division when there were no openings in the quartermaster corps. After studying my service record the colonel transferred me to post headquarters at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio . . . because of "poor eyesight". Perhaps he felt I did not belong in the military in the first place. On my way back to the barracks I encountered a fellow whom I knew from our brief time in New Cumberland. He inquired what was new and I told him of the transfer. He suggested that I see Sergeant McCormick at headquarters. The sergeant asked only one question, ignoring educational qualifications and business experience, "Can you type?" By now I knew the answer had to be yes, though my skill extended only to the middle fingers of both hands. Lesson #2.

I reported to the office of post headquarters the next morning at seven and was instructed to type endorsements on service records. This was easy work because there was no quota for production and no supervision. On the other hand, it was as dull as dull could be. However, at the next desk was my buddy from the induction center, the one with a glass eye. He had been appointed classification clerk, a position which I came to realize had great potential. His job was to encode in the margins of each man's classification card the duty for which he was best suited. Then, when an order came through for a specific service, using a contraption which looked like an oversized comb, he could shake out the cards of those people who qualified for the position. (There were no computers available in 1942.)

One day my friend told me that the Army, in its wisdom, had determined that the glass eye plus heart fibrillations, of which I had not been previously aware, he was no longer an asset

to the service and should be sent home. This news did not seem to upset him mightily and he prepared for departure. The morning after he left I appointed myself the new classification clerk; there seemed to be no need to concern the sergeant with the change. After all, someone had to do the job. Lesson #3.

This task suited me just fine. It was not only more entertaining, but it permitted the exercise of considerable power over the lives of hundreds of people. One day an order came through for a supply clerk in Mexia, Texas. A friend of mine came from Mexia, so I asked him if he would like to go home. Of course, he said, so I punched up his card and advised him that he was now a supply clerk, and away he went. In the alternative, there were some people who had treated me rather unkindly. To this day they never knew why they became prison guards in Brownsville, Texas. Such might!

One day a couple of friends were assigned to teach close-order drill to a platoon of WACs (Women's Army Corps). There were three squads so they invited me to join them. Now close-order drill was a subject with which I was intimately familiar. During basic training in the infantry I was in a platoon which was not commanded by a second lieutenant; all the others were. We were under the direction of a staff sergeant who intended that his group should outperform the other platoons so that he could demonstrate his abilities to be equal to those of commissioned officers. And we were drilled and drilled and drilled until we were the best trained in the company. Accordingly, all the orders became as familiar as the alphabet. Instructing the girls was no problem.

I befriended one of the trainees, a young lady from Altoona, Pennsylvania; this was no mean accomplishment. There were perhaps fifteen thousand men and two hundred women on the base . . . bad odds. Rita and I attended the movies together and generally spent considerable free time in each other's company. We did not go into San Antonio, because we had been lectured that it was unsafe for servicemen unless they traveled in pairs; there was no mention of servicewomen. This was the war.

After two months I applied for Officer Candidates School, which entailed a physical exam. On New Years Day 1943, I was summoned to the office of a colonel in the Medical Corps who proceeded to ream me out for not disclosing my heart condition. I meekly pointed out that the problem was noted in my service record. This mollified him only slightly, but he did advise me that my application for the School was rejected and that I had two choices: return to my position in Post Headquarters or go home. Since it seemed to me that I was making a small (make that, miniscule) contribution to the war effort, I chose the former. A few weeks passed and boredom set in, so I said goodbye to Rita and my other friends and checked in to Brooke General Hospital for a medical discharge.

Brooke General would not have met civilian standards for hygiene: each morning before making our beds, we would pound that iron bed on the floor to dislodge the bedbugs. This procedure was not entirely successful, at least in my case, because shortly after returning home I was stricken with mumps. This can be a serious matter for an adult, but fortunately I suffered no permanent aftereffects.

My professional life resumed with elevation to the head of the staff in the Philadelphia office, based on fifteen months of prior experience with the firm and the departure of the three more qualified personnel to the armed services. (My salary was increased to \$75.00 . . . per month! Remember, this was 1943).

My social life renewed, involving several girls, to one of whom I became engaged. Her family terminated that association because of my medical history. And then one evening . . . read on.

## IN THE BEGINNING . . .

One night I was attending a dance when a friend (of the female persuasion) said, "There's a girl you should meet, Sylvia Morgan. I'll give you her phone number." Which she did. I recall writing it on the inside of a matchbook cover; those of us who did not smoke were obliged to carry matches for those of our dates who did.

I called Sylvia, who seemed quite upbeat, and made a date. We attended a party at the apartment of friends and, when I returned her to her home before midnight she probably thought she would not hear from me again. That was completely the wrong take. I had called for her at her mother's place and when she opened the door I said to myself, "Now that's what a girl is supposed to look like!" I really did.

The reason for the return relatively early in the evening was my scheduled trip to Boston the next day to determine whether I was a candidate for heart surgery. I offered that explanation, but it probably was not accepted at face value.

Well, I was examined and accepted for the operation, which was scheduled for six months later. During that long period I attempted to conceal my trepidation from everyone, but it weighed heavily. There were three possible outcomes: first, success, which would relieve me of the threats posed by the condition; second, after the chest cavity was opened, a decision not to perform the operation, and third, failure, in which case it would not have been necessary to sew me up.

Sylvia and I continued to see each other with some frequency, while at the same time I had a few dates with another girl whose name was Sylvia. This provided opportunities to confound the relatives with whom I was living, since, when asked with whom I was going out, I could always reply truthfully, "Sylvia." They never knew which one.

At no time during the period of waiting did Sylvia Morgan and I discuss plans for the future. It would have been unfair to make her an instant widow, even if she had been willing to accept a proposal. So we went along . . . suspended. But after about four months, when Sylvia traveled to Florida for two weeks, the duration of our phone calls would have been sufficient to convince anyone that this was likely to become a serious matter. I could hardly wait for her return. To me, it really was serious.

At last April 1947 came around and I went to Boston again. With me I took a new photo of Sylvia that made her look like a movie star; it was kept in the drawer of my night table in the hospital until I was returned to my room post-surgery; after that it was displayed with great pleasure. My mother and father arranged for Sylvia to visit me in Boston; I have no words to describe my elation.

After ten days of post-operative recovery my folks drove me to their home on the Jersey shore for three weeks of convalescence. The first weekend Sylvia came to visit. And also the second weekend. Curiously, I never asked her to marry me; we both simply took it for granted. The only serious discussion was the selection of a date.

For years I've claimed that we were married in a phone booth . . . it wasn't quite that small, but certainly the headcount did not exceed ten. After the ceremony Sylvia's stepfather treated us all to luncheon at the Ritz-Carlton hotel (since demolished). And then came the honeymoon. And you're not permitted to inquire about that.

Just for the record, it should be noted that there was another reason for Sylvia's marrying me: she really had no place to live. Her mother had remarried shortly after we met, leaving Sylvia and her sister Rhoda in their small apartment. Then, three days after my operation took place, Rhoda married and Sylvia could not afford to occupy the apartment alone. At the time of our wedding she was residing with her step-father's sister . . . an arrangement which was not entirely comfortable for either party. Whether this was a major factor in the decision to join me I'll never know.

When we returned from our honeymoon we temporarily occupied my mother-in-law's apartment, since she and her husband were away for the summer. It was at this time that I discovered my bride's penchant for cooking. While her experience in the kitchen had been minimal, during the first week she decided to have a dinner party for her sister, our brother-in-law and my father; to my mind this required considerable courage. Nevertheless, and with little concern (on her part), Sylvia produced a meal that was entirely satisfactory, although the quantities offered exceeded normal portions; this, however, posed no problem for my father.

Soon thereafter we moved into our own apartment on the second floor of a duplex. About a year later Mark was born and we started learning how to raise a child. That is to say, Sylvia did the raising and I did the learning. I had convinced her to stop working, even though our total worth was less than one thousand dollars, so she was able to devote herself completely to our family. For the first twenty years I spent sixty to seventy hours a week providing financial support. This situation was intensified by the arrival of Richard in our fourth year.

## THE FIRST REAL VACATION

For the first several years of our married life we had no vacations, primarily because there weren't sufficient funds. Then we broke out of the routine and once a year we would travel to New York City for excitement we would treasure for twelve months. We would leave home on a Thursday morning and not return until Sunday night. In between we would squeeze in five visits to the theatre (two on Saturday) and four good dinners.

And then Sylvia decided it was time for a change; that was her forte. She tentatively suggested that we try a cruise; I immediately concurred with no hint of protest. Neither of us had any first-hand knowledge of cruising, but we had several friends who did and they encouraged us to follow it up. So Sylvia did. Rather quickly we were booked on a seven-day voyage to the U.S. Virgin Islands. We were advised to take along our best clothes and formal wear, if we had formal wear.

As novices we were unaware of the procedures and etiquette practiced aboard ship; upon boarding we did not hasten to the dining room for table selection. As a result we were assigned to a table with six single ladies of various ages; as the lone male I was somewhat overwhelmed by the rapid flow of conversation. But Sylvia and I greatly enjoyed studying the menus with their dazzling array of dishes; we were seriously tempted to order "all of the above". That euphoria was tempered almost immediately by the inability of our systems to contend with the onslaught. Too much of a good thing.

The avuncular wine steward advised that our travel agent had ordered a bottle of champagne for us, a kind gesture. He said that he had some Dom Perignon but that it was "too green", by which he meant too young. What did we know; we had never heard of Dom Perignon. As a footnote, it was on the wine list at \$5.60 per bottle!

St. Thomas was a wild and wonderful place for us; it was all so new and turbulent. There were shops selling everything at a fraction of the prices at home. Alcohol was especially inexpensive, but the ship's purser advised everyone that we were limited as to the quantity we could import without paying duty. One of the captains in the dining room suggested a way to bring in as much as we desired, subject to one condition: it must all be imported in one container . . .you!

There were perfumes and clothes, linens, glassware, silverware, jewelry, and on and on. After much internal debate I almost reluctantly bought a wrist watch which I am still wearing some forty years later. Then Sylvia and I debated the matter for hours before we finally acquired our first real painting, for forty dollars. She bought some clothing and gifts for our boys and parents, together with some exotic liqueurs that stayed on our shelves for decades.

This was the first of several cruises, most of which were equally pleasant. We sailed to the World's Fair in Montreal on the S. S. Argentina, using the ship as our hotel; in the next episode I'll relate that experience. We sailed again on the Argentina, once on the S. S. Brazil and once on the Victoria, and in a later chapter there is the adventure of our second cruise on the S. S. France; that was something special.



## TWO GENTLEMEN

I have had the privilege of serving many fine clients in the course of sixty-odd years, but there were two who had a great impact on our lives and adventures. Were it not for these two men Sylvia and I would not have had the opportunities to travel and dine in the manner to which we became accustomed. Accordingly, special expressions of gratitude are in order.

### *HENRY*

One day in 1946 as I crossed Rittenhouse Square in central Philadelphia I met Henry, whom I had known socially for some time. After the customary pleasantries Henry said, "I'm starting a business. Do you want to be my accountant?" I'd started in practice only the year before, so that was a no-brainer. The business was the purchase and sale of residential real estate, which immediately after World War II was in very short supply. When Henry commenced business, using his home as an office, his assets consisted of \$2,000 in cash, three mortgaged properties in South Philadelphia, and an old automobile . . . and I still have the books to prove it! The first activity was to locate, somehow or other, homes that the owners were willing to sell. Henry would put down a deposit of \$200, \$300 or \$500 on each property and then find a purchaser; that was the easy part. He would arrange for simultaneous settlements with the seller and the buyer so that his investment did not exceed the original deposit. And he would leave the meeting with a profit of \$500, \$1,000 or more.

After a short time Henry moved to New York City and his interest expanded into other types of real estate. He confected a partnership for the purchase of an entire town in Tennessee, near Oak Ridge. The properties were owned by the Public Housing Authority and consisted of homes and municipal buildings; the PHA put the town up for sealed bids and Henry was the high bidder. He proceeded to sell the houses to the occupants who were renting them and conveyed the other buildings to the township. The partnership walked away with a handsome profit. And then he did it again . . . with another town. (Some years later the transactions were investigated by a subcommittee of the U. S. Senate, and one senator was quoted as saying, "It's too bad that the PHA didn't have the foresight of Mr. Henry.")

After a few other deals Henry and a group purchased four thousand homes on Long Island from the Levitt organization. The procedure was the same: sell the properties to the occupants. That was followed by the acquisition of fourteen hundred more homes in the same area., with the same beneficial results.

Henry was approached by two brothers who were building single-family homes in southern New Jersey. The arrangements required Henry to provide the equity financing and the brothers to handle the construction and sales. Henry was a very loyal person and had retained me to do his personal accounting and tax returns, although obviously he could have found someone in New York. Since he was furnishing the money he had the option of naming the accountant. This was my first step toward the benefits I have noted. I'd had some experience in the field of home construction, but this was the big time. Each of the projects developed by the two brothers involved hundreds of homes, and every one of them was successful. I soon began representing the brothers as well, with Henry's approval.

Subsequently Henry entered into similar contracts with other builders in the south Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania area, providing me with a considerable amount of work. At the same time I would be referred to builders outside Henry's group, and that is how the relationship with Bernie evolved.

## *BERNIE*

Bernie and his brother had been home builders in southern New Jersey when we first met. I represented them on one project and then the two separated; I became the accountant for both of them. Bernie removed his site of operations to the Margate-Longport area on the Jersey coast, beginning by successfully completing a project begun by another builder who had failed. Subsequently, he undertook an apartment development in Mays Landing, an inland location; the units rented slowly and, being as conservative as he was, he built at a rate not far in advance of the rentals. One day he invited me to purchase a one-eighth interest for an amount which we could manage.

The apartments continued to be constructed and leased, and before the last building was completed, an attorney who had served Bernie approached us with an offer from a wealthy client of his to purchase a fifty percent interest; acceptance returned to us all that we had invested and we still owned one-half of the enterprise. My one-sixteenth share has returned many times the original commitment and still produces revenue.

Bernie's next enterprise was a shopping center on the mainland. He submitted to me various figures relative to land cost, construction costs, projected rentals and expenses, saying, "See if you can work up something that would be attractive to investors." I manipulated the data for a while and showed him a projection that might fill the bill. It met with his approval and we then embarked on a search for potential investors. Each of us procured approximately half of the money needed, convincing the prospects that the projected returns represented conservative estimates; in fact, because of the caution Bernie always demonstrated, the returns proved to be much better than the figures shown to the prospects. Beginning in 1975 the project was developed in four sections, so that the construction would not outpace the rentals, and the original participants stayed on through the next three portions of the job. Bernie offered me an opportunity to purchase a five percent interest on the same terms as the others and graciously provided me with another five percent for services rendered; an equal award was made to the attorney for his services. As of this writing, the shopping center is returning a thirty-four percent annual return on the original investment, which, in my case, represents sixty-eight percent!

The center was the first of the limited partnerships. It was followed by professional buildings, and then more apartments, all of which were fine investments. My arrangement with Bernie continued to be half purchase and half services, with results that have been more than gratifying. His two sons have carried on in the same manner with similar success; they are even more conservative!

## *Farewell*

Both of these fine men are gone now, at much too early an age. But the recollection of their characters, straight-arrow, no corner-cutting, honest to the ultimate, cannot be obliterated from my memory.

## MONTREAL EXPO

There was a great deal of excitement over this World's Fair, probably the most since the Fair in Flushing Meadows. Incidentally, we took our boys to that latter spectacle and topped off our weekend by seeing our Phillies play the New York Mets in Shea Stadium in a double-header; not only did we win both games, but we watched with rising emotions as Jim Bunning pitched a perfect game! That really put the frosting on the cake.

By booking passage to Montreal on the S. S. Argentina we eliminated a problem that beset most tourists at Expo, that is finding an acceptable hotel room. Mark, our older son, traveled up without any type of reservation and had to settle for sleeping in the car. Our ship docked within walking distance of the fairgrounds, so we didn't even have to search for taxis.

On the trip northward Sylvia befriended a young lady (mid-twenties, perhaps) and her companion, a slightly older lady, who appeared to be responsible for the welfare of the younger one. While the younger person had a recognizable surname we did not associate it with that of a family which owned major department stores in Philadelphia and New York City. That is to say, not until Sue mentioned that her father had provided her with a letter of introduction to the director-general of the Scandinavian pavilion. The director's response included an invitation to lunch with him in the pavilion. Sue asked if we would be interested in joining the two of them at that luncheon, and, of course, we would.

The four of us arrived at the pavilion at noon, as scheduled, and were duly greeted with considerable enthusiasm by the gentleman who had issued the invitation. He suggested that we partake of the traditional "shmergasbord". As he explained it, one was expected to make five trips to the serving tables, which were laden with more dishes than we could count. First there were the cold appetizers, then the hot appetizers, then the entrees of fish, meat, cheese, etc., followed by fresh fruit and, finally, desserts. That seemed imposing enough, but there was another element: aquavit, a clear, very powerful Scandinavian liquor distilled from potato or grain mash and flavored with caraway seed. By custom, we were advised, when one member of the party raises his or her glass, all the others do the same, gulping down the entire contents and following the aquavit with a beer chaser. As you can well imagine, the affair takes on a rather rosy hue almost immediately; some members quickly fell by the wayside.

The director graciously limited the drinking to one shot, with chaser, for each course, and that was quite as much as the best imbibers among us could handle. The meal, which was delicious, consumed fully two and one-half hours and we were feeling pretty mellow. Then our host asked whether there was anything else he could do for us, perhaps some letters of introduction to the pavilions. We had no idea what that meant, but to our delight we learned the next day. Instead of standing in line for two to three hours to enter a pavilion, we were permitted to enter by a side door and be admitted at once. In most cases we were accorded royal treatment, so that, instead of visiting three exhibits in the course of a day, as we had the previous day, we were able to do ten or eleven in the same period of time; was that ever great! (In 1971 we traveled to the World's Fair in Osaka, Japan. It was fun, but we had been spoiled rotten in Montreal.)

After we returned home we communicated with Sue and her companion for some time and then, suddenly, they disappeared. We were never able to trace them, but we were most grateful for the experiences they shared with us.

## THE S. S. FRANCE

We had previously cruised on the S. S. France for two weeks. One of the reasons that voyage was so memorable was the shocking length of time required to shed all the weight we gained, in my case, nine pounds. Before we dared venture aboard that ship again we had to adopt a strict regime that limited our intake to what seemed a prescription for starvation. Well, perhaps not quite that severe, but punishing enough.

The ship sailed from New York on Monday evening, so we devoted the entire preceding day to packing. In the course of that exercise I found I could not locate proof of citizenship which was required for immigration, neither birth certificate nor voters registration card. Oh well, I figured, tomorrow morning my schedule called for me to work in center city Philadelphia, only one block from City Hall, and there I could secure a copy of the birth certificate.

It didn't work out just that way. At City Hall I gave the clerk my name and date of birth. After a few minutes he returned to say that he could locate no such record. That's ridiculous; I'm here and I was born in this city on the date specified. I could even name the hospital. He searched again. Again, to no avail. Now how can that be? Please try once more. He returned emptyhanded, but he did say that he had found the birth of an Edgar R. Wentworth. That's it! During World War I before joining the Navy my father had changed his name to Wentworth because Weinrott had too German a sound. After the Armistice he changed back to Weinrott . . . but he forgot about me; I had been born in the interim as Edgar Wentworth. The clerk provided a form to have the name corrected in Harrisburg, the state capital, but, of course, that would take weeks. There was no alternative but to travel to the registration office in Norristown, our county seat, for a duplicate voters card. With that in hand we rushed off to New York.

By now we were old hands at cruising, so we dropped our luggage at dockside, hurried to leave the carry-ons in the stateroom and then dashed to the dining room. The line to the maitre d' was short and we quickly had a card with a table number on it. After seeing the assigned location, Sylvia announced that she didn't like that table. Frankly, it looked O. K. to me; you know, it had four legs of equal length and two chairs. That's not what she had in mind; from that spot she could not see the staircase which descended into the restaurant. Location, location, location. In those days the ladies boarded ship with steamer trunks full of the latest designer clothes and every dinner was automatically preceded by a fashion show as they made their entrances dressed in the height of fashion. That's why Sylvia was dissatisfied with the sightlines.

I armed her with a five-dollar bill (remember, this was in the seventies) and she trotted back into line. Sylvia returned with a new table number and an amazing story: the man who reached the maitre d' just ahead of her had said, "Last time I was on board you took good care of me," to which the maitre d' responded frigidly, "But you didn't take good care of me!" Ah, international diplomacy.

The new location was just perfect, directly in front of the staircase; we were happy. Next to us, not more than eight inches away, was another table for two. At dinner the first night our neighbors were a cheerful-looking couple who reappeared at lunch the next day. That afternoon Sylvia said to me, "We have to speak to those people". Always the introvert, I responded, "So speak to them". That was not my department. Of course, Sylvia made the introductions and we promptly found that we had much in common with them. They resided near Norristown, about a half-hour's ride from us, and he and I had the same occupation, certified public accountant. The four of us got along famously, especially because we were all enamored of French cooking. At that time the S. S. France had an absolutely incredible kitchen staff, headed by seventeen (that's right, seventeen) master chefs, each of whom could probably have directed a top-of-the-line restaurant. Never since has there been such an assemblage of talent working together regularly on land or at sea.

Jack, our dining neighbor, had a booming laugh that reverberated through the whole restaurant. One day on deck someone approached me and questioned what I said to Jack that made him explode in laughter; he generated his own fireworks . . . I could have read him the phonebook with the same results. Fran, his wife, explained that he must have given Santa Claus lessons in "Ho, ho, ho."

Fran and Jack were accomplished drinkers. In fact, he could have been captain of the U. S. Olympic Drinking Team. One day as we all sat down to lunch I asked Jack, "What have you had so far today?" The reply was, "Nothing much. Just a couple of whiskey and soda and a Tom Collins." This seemed to us to be a rather considerable quantity for so early in the day, but even more surprising was the mixing of whiskey and gin with no apparent effect. At lunch that day, and every day, they consumed a full bottle of white wine and another of red; this was followed after the meal but while still at the table by four Grand Marniers apiece. Needless to say, we were much impressed. We had no knowledge of whether anything further was consumed during the afternoon, but before every dinner they had a bottle of fine champagne. At dinner there would be another white and another red, followed by half a dozen Grand Marniers for each. And after dinner they usually repaired to one of the lounges for some serious drinking. Before bed the steward would be summoned for a nightcap. And neither of them ever appeared intoxicated! Sylvia and I could not begin to keep up; we would struggle to maintain our poise after imbibing a small fraction of the amount described.

This was for us the one shipboard romance that flourished; I still have dinner with Jack from time to time, frequently with his second wife. Fran died at the age of fifty-three from lung cancer; she had been a smoker who found it impossible to quit. Jack suffered a heart attack which he survived intact, but with a diminished demand for alcohol; he limited his intake to, perhaps, one glass of white wine and one bottle of red, followed by a single afterdinner drink. His second wife, a registered nurse, has been a major force in lowering his consumption, and his intake is most recently reduced to a mere two glasses of white wine and a single post-prandial liqueur. The change has certainly improved his prospects for a longer life, with no damage to the booming laugh.

## DINING TOURS IN FRANCE

In 1967 American Express came up with a great idea: installment purchase of travel. One paid Amex thirty dollars per month for one year and then could select a tour, which included air and land transportation, airport transfers, hotel accommodations and some meals. Even at that time this appeared to be a bargain; now it seems astounding.

We made our first trip in 1968, visiting Amsterdam, Paris and London in nine days. To digress for a moment: when we checked into our hotel in Holland on our very first day in Europe, we were housed in an ancient establishment which had been assembled from several adjoining row houses. On the dresser was a note advising that the hot water would be turned off from noon to five pm. We made a reservation in a restaurant for seven pm and took a nap. When we arose at five pm there was no hot water; we waited. After a half-hour we phoned the front desk to inquire and were advised that the water would be turned on momentarily; it wasn't. Subsequent calls produced the same response. Assuming that the plumbers would have ceased work at five, we waited until six and then I proceeded to drape a towel over my shoulders and assaulted the desk. The clerk was discomfited, and, after making a phone call, offered us the use of the bathroom in the manager's home some blocks away. This hardly seemed practicable so we went to dinner unbathed. After our first experience with Indonesian food (which was excellent), we returned to find that the hot water had been turned on; of course, it required fifteen minutes with an open faucet before the water turned from brown to clear. But the visit to the front desk was a learning experience.

Paris was a whole new world. Sylvia and I had always enjoyed dining, but this was something else. We did not frequent the Michelin starred restaurants for financial reasons, but we did take a flier by having one lunch at Tour d'Argent . . . what a treat! Dining in France, in unrated establishments, was something that seized our imaginations; we resolved to do it again.

By 1971 we decided to seek out a dining tour of France. The travel agents could not find one. Sylvia, always indomitable, said, "We'll make one." So we undertook to do just that. Purchasing a Michelin guide to France, I finally compiled an itinerary of three weeks, with every evening meal in a starred restaurant. A neighbor became our language teacher and Sylvia handled all the correspondence. When my bride first examined the imposing list of establishments, she indicated a lack of ability to consume that much food; I reassured her that I had every confidence in her performing up to the schedule. Without too much difficulty we both fulfilled our assignments.

We placed an advertisement in Gourmet magazine offering a price that represented our cost; we paid our own way. There were some forty responses, but the problem arose between spouses: the wife wanted to go but the husband demurred, or it was the other way around. When the time came to leave we were joined by only one couple; we needed to undertake the trip for the experience. So we embarked on a two-week odyssey encompassing several three-star and two-star restaurants (three stars is as high as the Michelin Guide goes). It turned out to be great fun for all of us, and we maintained contact with that couple for several years thereafter.

The next year was more of a success: there were fourteen of us in the group. In one week we dined in one two-star and six three-stars. (Again we paid our own way.) We traveled in a twenty-eight seat Mercedes bus with a driver and lodged at deluxe hotels. One of the chefs staggered the group with some of his dishes (such as calves' ears), and everyone seemed to have a really fine time. We stayed in contact with some of our fellow-travellers for many years . . . with one, up until the present.

One incident stays in the memory. At one hotel a local artist displayed several of his paintings; two men in the group were much attracted to the artwork so the painter was asked to come to speak with them. Language was a bit of a barrier, but not too much, and the artist invited the men and their wives and Sylvia and me to come to his house to view more of his work. The two prospective customers rode with the painter and three of us joined one of the chefs in his car; now that was a sight to behold! The

chef tipped the scales at a solid two hundred fifty pounds and his vehicle was a two-door Fiat. Is there some reason heavy people are attracted to small cars? Well, the chef drove off for perhaps five minutes and then stopped, dismounted from the auto and said, "Lost" (in French, of course). The driver of the other car stopped and the two of them conferred. After continuing along the road for another few minutes, the chef halted again and the scene was repeated. Mind you, this was all happening at around midnight. Suddenly we came upon a large field that contained several circus-like tents. It was a May Day fair which was going strong in the middle of the night. We all followed the chef into one of the enclosures that housed a bar and he treated us to some of the worst sparkling wine I had ever tasted. Then we entered the next tent where he picked up a gun in a shooting gallery and proceeded to win prizes for Sylvia and the other lady. Sylvia was presented with an ugly plastic monkey dressed in a fur uniform; she treasured it for years. Finally the chef told us to follow him and we hiked across a meadow in total darkness. After ten minutes we arrived at the artist's home. . . I really think the chef knew where he was the entire time.

By the time we arrived each of the two men had purchased a painting (at a four-figure price) and the champagne was flowing. The party went on for another hour and then we departed for the hotel. I can tell you I felt no pain after wine at dinner, wine at the fair and wine at the artist's home. The next morning on the bus I made known that I was not to be addressed for any reason, and I slept.

The following year we almost repeated the tour, but the number of passengers was in danger of falling below ten (the number for discounted fares), so we abandoned that idea and took off on our own. From that point forward we made two, and in a rare year, three trips to France for dinner. Most of the tours ran three to six weeks, covering as much as thirty-five hundred miles. Over the course of twenty-seven trips we became friendly with many of the best chefs in Europe and their wives; I still maintain contact with a few of them.

## THE HOBBY

Our fascination with food commenced during our courtship. We were unaware then of its presence and really gave it only superficial attention, but it certainly was a common interest. And we taught each other much. There are many instances of our preoccupation throughout this booklet.

A case in point: before Sylvia, bread was to me a means of holding together a sandwich; I rarely consumed an unaccompanied slice of bread or a roll. My teacher, however, was quite knowledgeable on the subject and, especially in France, would perform the "sound test" on rolls, rating each item by the noise generated by breaking it open. Loud was good.

During my convalescence from surgery in 1947 (c.f. "In the Beginning"), Sylvia visited me at the seashore. Our family traditionally visited Doc's Oyster House in Atlantic City for Sunday dinner and both my father and I commenced the meal with a dozen raw oysters. Sylvia had never before been face-to-face with an oyster, but she gamely agreed to try one. The second Sunday she had two, and it was difficult to keep her in oysters after that; they became a passion.

On an early trip to France we met a lady who was returning to her native village to retire after twenty-five years in the United States. One of her earliest employers was Charles Bohlen, the U. S. ambassador to France. When he was posted from Paris to America, he had Madeleine accompany him and his family. Subsequently, when Ambassador Bohlen was posted to Moscow, Madeleine wished to stay here, so he found a position for her with a family living in Gladwyne (ten minutes from our home). After a while she moved on to New York, never, as she said, working for anyone who was not a millionaire. Throughout this lengthy conversation she did not mention her occupation. Madeleine also had registered with an agency in New York City which arranged for American families to visit French families; she did not want to lose contact with the U.S.A. When she told us that, we asked if we could be her guests that summer. She welcomed the suggestion and recorded her name and address in our Michelin Guide, the safest place possible.

Early in the afternoon some two months later we did arrive on her doorstep, to find a small home that was not quite completed; landscapers were finishing the grading and there were no screens in the house, which was not air conditioned. Nor had the bedding for our room arrived. We chatted, in English, until late in the day, when, happily, the furniture was delivered. Then Sylvia said to me *sotto voce*, "We can't just leave her here and go to dinner." "So invite her." This turned out to be a clever idea since we had no idea where to dine in Pleugueneuc. After that Madeleine had dinner with us every evening. Our arrangement was for bed and breakfast (for a staggering seventy dollars per week for two), but that quickly expanded to include lunch. French breakfasts, as you know, are rather minimal, so lunch was appreciated. Madeleine would go into her garden and pull up some vegetables and pick some tomatoes and produce a first-rate salad. One day she said, "I think I make you a cheese souffle". She created a souffle with less effort than I would require to make a cheese sandwich. Then it came out: in all those jobs she had been a chef -- in charge of the kitchen, drawing up the menus, making the purchases and instructing the cooks. And she didn't own one cookbook! Once again we fell in with the right company.

A couple days later Madeleine suggested that we drive to Cancale, a resort on the English Channel. There we walked down to the beach to find women sitting behind bushel baskets of *oysters*, sorted by size. One selected the type one wanted and the woman behind the basket would shuck them, set them on a paper plate, squeeze lemon juice over them and present the plate with a plastic fork. Guess who really had a ball!



On another occasion Madeleine stated that, if we would drive her to the city of Dinan (population 15,000), she would make us fish for dinner. We didn't need to be coaxed. We arrived at the fish market, where Madeleine placed her order. Then she said, "It will be ready in two hours. Do you like galettes?" "What?" "Do you like galettes?" "What are galettes?" "Come with me." She marched us down to the end of the huge market where there was a woman tending a very large grill. Onto the grill she ladled a small cupful of batter, spreading it evenly over the surface. With a spatula she would turn it over so that both sides would be a golden brown. Galettes are essentially large crepes, made with buckwheat flour. In a saucepan the woman had sausages, and did they smell good! Sylvia had been raised never to consume processed meat, but this was France. These were not commercially produced sausages; they were created by the local butcher . . . and they had better be good or he wouldn't be the local butcher anymore. The galette was folded in half and the sausage placed crossways on it; then it was rolled up and handed to you - - hand-to-hand, no plates, no paper wrapper, just hand-to-hand. You walked along eating it like a hot dog. *Galettes aux saucissons* is a regional dish found in Brittany and Normandy (now also in Paris), so that every tour we made after that one required at least two days in those provinces, and well worth it.

These were some of the experiences which caused us, almost involuntarily, to adopt *the hobby*. Some folks collect stamps and coins; some collect old cars; in the late sixties we began collecting chefs. Over the years we came to know many *cuisiniers* and their wives (who generally managed the dining rooms) in many restaurants in France, the Orient and, especially, at home. Back around 1990 a friend commented, "All you talk about is food." I responded, "At my age what can I do three times a day that's this much fun?" End of subject.

My partner is gone, but I still pursue the hobby for me . . . and for her. Most restaurant critics are of little value to me unless their tastes correspond to mine. That is not to say that they are wrong and I am right, because what is more subjective than the topic of food?

The method of ingratiating oneself with a chef is amazingly obvious: just express an interest in his/her work. Chefs are no different from authors or composers or designers - - they relish recognition. Sylvia and I learned this first in a restaurant located some miles west of Lyon, France. Apparently a few words of appreciation on our initial visit led, on the second stay, to an invitation to join the chef in the reception area after dinner. He ordered the wine steward to produce a bottle of forty-five year old Armagnac to lubricate the conversation . . . a good start. In our halting French we inquired about and commended each dish we had been served, asking about the ingredients and the procedures of preparation. The locals seem to take for granted the high quality of their dinners; they expected nothing less. Our curiosity set us apart, with the further distinction of being Americans, who were considered to be lacking in culinary fervor. (On one of the later visits, we were treated to Armagnac of the 1914 vintage!)

Over sixteen years and twenty-seven trips to France and Switzerland we came to know most of the three-star Michelin chefs, and many of the two-stars, including Bocuse, Chapel, Girardet, Haeblerin, Jung, Lorain, Outhier, Troisgros, Verger and the widow of Fernand Point. During our last European tour together (1986) I compiled a list of the number of meals we had consumed in two- and three-star restaurants (based on the then current ratings); the total exceeded three hundred.

After Sylvia's illness made it impractical to travel overseas we toured the U.S.A., reaching every state and every state capital except Juneau. It is not possible to enumerate all the fine chefs we encountered during that period, but I have devoted a section of this booklet to Jean-Louis Palladin. And special mention should be made of Thomas Keller whose French Laundry I have visited five times since 2001.

## COOKING SCHOOL

Sylvia decided that she wanted to enroll in a cooking school in France. She selected La Varenne in Paris, and we booked a room in a small hotel on the Rue de Rivoli close to the classrooms. What we didn't take into account was that it was July and the hotel was not air conditioned. During the five-day course I was invited to luncheon at the school twice; I was not impressed. Sylvia was unimpressed by the whole experience and three years later announced that she had discovered another culinary training school, this one in a small village some eighty miles from Paris. We signed on for two weeks and this turned out to be a much better choice.

Yetabo was in a village as French as French can be; it had a few shops, mostly dedicated to food products, a church and not much else. If you took a walk in any direction for five minutes, you were out of town. The school, which had living quarters for seven students maximum, was sufficiently modern to be comfortable. On arrival we were greeted by the chef-owner, Jean, and his wife, Kirsten; we were introduced to those pupils who were continuing their training and to the two who arrived the same day that we did. Also on hand was a collection of dogs, cats and a goat.

The routine was carved in stone: breakfast at 8:00, luncheon at 1:00, wine-tasting at 6:00 and dinner at 7:00. Jean prepared twenty meals a week, with a snack on Saturday midday for those arriving and departing. He did this alone; occasionally, some of the more qualified students were permitted to perform mundane tasks such as peeling fruits and vegetables, but none of the actual cooking. The curriculum consisted simply of demonstration, with Jean providing verbal recipes (in French, of course, accompanied by metric weights and measures) while the pupils dutifully wrote in their notebooks. (I took no notes; I was there not to learn but to consume, in which I succeeded in a highly satisfactory manner).

Jean was an accomplished cuisinier, and he beamed when we would signify our approval of his dishes. He was, in fact, quite a genial person, trying to satisfy our requests within the limits of availability of ingredients. But on one matter he was adamant: we had to assimilate some French culture and that included making an effort to express ourselves in French. He had converted a closet (no distracting windows) to a language center, complete with tapes, cassette players and textbooks; one was expected to devote some time each day to their use. Jean spoke no English, but Kirsten was on hand for emergency translations. It was not until years later that we learned that Jean had worked in Chicago for many months and spoke our language almost as well as we did. Fortunately, we never disparaged his work in English, nor was there any need to.

Sylvia requested that one night the menu feature frogs legs . . . no problem. We watched in terror as Jean prepared twelve cloves of garlic for the nine of us; I had visions of losing the rest of my meager crop of hair. But the frogs legs Provençal were an unmitigated delight, succulent and rich with flavors, and there was no pungent aftertaste; the secret was boiling the cloves for one minute before adding them to the other ingredients. I was even inspired to tell a joke in French: a friend asked a farmer why he had so many children. The farmer answered that his wife was somewhat deaf. How did that relate to the question? Because each night the farmer would ask his wife, "Do you want to go to sleep or what?" And the wife would respond, "Quoi?" (what?)

In spite of his generally gracious manner Jean was combustible. On one occasion he observed Sylvia and one of the other students dipping into the pate before lunch; his temper flared and the two of them were ostracized for that meal; by dinner all was normal. On another day, a particularly hot one (and there was no air conditioning in the kitchen or anywhere else in the school), Jean had labored over a meal that featured filet mignon. As was the custom we each collected our portions in the kitchen and transported them to our assigned places in the dining room; then we waited for Jean to join us, because we are all so well-bred. In he came and blasted us almost out of our chairs, "I stand in the hot kitchen cooking for you and you let the food become cold." That was a lesson none of us ever forgot; Emily Post was wrong.

Two of our classmates became friends for life. Unfortunately, in the case of Peter, his life terminated tragically in an accident at Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba. He was an engineer under contract to the Navy on an inspection trip to the base; a water line ruptured and struck Peter in the back of the head, killing him instantly. He had arrived at Yetabo after completing an assignment in Iran (while the Shah was still in power); like us, he enjoyed the culinary experience greatly and we arranged to meet him there again four years later for another week. He was a native of California and we visited his home after our trip to China in 1979; he came East and stayed with us for a few days while inspecting a project near Washington, D.C. We still miss Peter.

The other friendship has continued to this day; Sharon was a school librarian in Toronto with a serious interest in gastronomy. We did not, however, take her address or phone number when we parted at Yetabo. On our first trip to Ontario Sylvia said, "Let's find Sharon." The Toronto phone book registers last names and initials, no first names, and there were eleven persons listed with the same last name and initial as Sharon. Undaunted, Sylvia dialed the first number, saying, "I am trying to locate Sharon H.", to which the voice on the other end replied, "This is Sharon." Sylvia hit a home run on her first at bat.

Each May thereafter we would travel to Toronto on Victoria Day weekend, so that Sharon would be available for three days. Every trip entailed visits to three restaurants selected by Sharon, and we had a great time. Occasionally Sharon would come to our home and we'd present our favorite dining establishments for her approval. Even now, I travel to Toronto (once to Nova Scotia) almost every year to keep the friendship flourishing.

The experiences at Yetabo were truly fulfilling, and the recipe books are still exhibited to our friends interested in French cuisine. Sylvia benefited significantly from the training there, and it probably was a factor in her search for creativity in cooking. She developed some recipes of her own which were much appreciated by the friends and relatives who were fortunate to be invited to dine with us. Her penchant for producing dinner parties, possibly six or eight a year, had my heartfelt endorsement, because I was invited to every one of them.

## THE LONGEST DAYS

Everyone has days when everything goes wrong.

We were driving a station wagon along the autoroute west of Lyon in France when a truck directly ahead of us dropped a piece of steel onto the roadway. There was no time to swerve and our left front tire struck the metal and instantly blew. Fortunately we were approaching an exit and I was able to reach it with little difficulty, all the while being advised by passing motorists that we had a flat. I stopped in front of an elementary school just as students were leaving for the day. My search for a garage or service station proved fruitless; there was no one available, so I had to change the tire myself. Understand, I am no automotive engineer, but I do know how to change a flat.

Step one: locate the jack. We removed all the luggage from the rear so that I could reach the tire and tools. But the floor was seamless, no handles, no hand grips. Meanwhile, the school children were amused by the dazed foreigner. Ah ha! The spare must be under the hood.

Step two: raise the hood. I ran my fingers under the front of the hood but could find no release lever. Nor was I any more successful searching on and under the dashboard. Then I recalled the age-old adage: when in doubt, read the instructions. In the glove box there was an owner's manual . . . in English! But the index had no listing for "hood". Examining carefully I found "bonnet" --- the booklet had been written for the British. With relief I located the release under the passenger's side of the dash and . . . no tire.

Step three: locate the tire. The manual showed the tire on the floor of the luggage area. Not on the floor, stupid! Under it. Of course. The diagram showed a release lever with an arrow pointing forward; I found the grip and pushed. Nothing happened. I pushed harder. Still nothing. I paused and considered. Finally, in desperation, I pulled and the tire dropped down in its cradle.

Step four: change the tire. This was going to be easy. The jack had made its appearance on one of the earlier searches so we were all set. Except that the lugs had been tightened at the factory with a power tool and I had no such tool. Straining with the tire iron I failed to dislodge the first lug. I simply lacked the force to break the bond. At last, holding the tire iron with one hand I sent a well-directed kick against it and voila! the lug came free. Three repetitions of that procedure loosened the remaining lugs and the rest of the task was a piece of cake.

We loaded the bags back into the wagon and happy . . . no, satisfied, and dirty we proceeded to our destination for the night. We thought that we had had enough excitement for one day . . . but there was more to come.

At the inn we were escorted by a young porter who installed us in room 109. After we arranged our luggage for the night's stay, Sylvia decided, quite reasonably, to use the bathroom. Thirty seconds later she reentered the bedroom, announcing, "There's no toilet seat." Now what would any sensible husband do? I went in to make sure she wasn't hallucinating. She wasn't. I immediately trotted downstairs to find the porter, since he was the only person we had seen since our arrival. I'd like to give a language test to one thousand Americans to learn how many know the French word for toilet seat; I would have flunked that test. After much gesticulating and mention of the word "toilette", the porter was convinced to take a look . . . to make sure that the two of us were not hallucinating.

Sensing the soundness of our judgment in this matter the porter went downstairs for an explanation, since it was the policy of the establishment to provide toilet seats in all the appropriate places. He returned shortly to state that the plumber had been there that day (Friday)

and would bring the seat back Monday. This was of small consolation since we had no intention of awaiting his return. As a consequence the young man traveled downstairs again and returned with the key to room 108. Before we permitted him to transfer the bags we checked to see that room 108 had the required equipment.

The events of that afternoon had taken their toll, so I was unprepared when Sylvia proclaimed that she was unable to flush the toilet. I examined the water closet for a handle or a chain. There was a water closet up above, but, again, no means of releasing its contents. This was most perplexing. Still, we knew that there was a mechanism somewhere. After reviewing the situation several times I reexamined the toilet. Inappropriately, there were four bolts, or what appeared to be four bolts, anchoring the seat to the bowl; two is the customary number. I fingered the first bolt and it was solid as expected; the one at the other end was the same. When I pushed the second "bolt" it compressed easily like a tiny balloon; still no flush. But pressure on the third one, which felt the same as the second, marvelous to say, produced a flood of water from the tank above . . . and that mystery was solved.

Still, the fun and games were not over. Sylvia was ready for a shower, but when she turned the knobs no water came out of the showerhead. There was only one set of knobs, not a second set for the shower. There was no plunger or lever on top of the faucet. There was no handle or lever on the shower head; it was totally unadorned. This was even more baffling than the toilet flush. Repeated observations of all possible sources of the operating mechanism were unproductive. Finally, I place my finger inside the faucet and – Eureka! – a magic ring which, when pulled down, released a flow of water from above. Don't ask me to explain that one.

Dinner that evening was first-rate and we retired thinking that we had earned a good night's sleep. But the adventure had still another reel to unwind.

Saturday morning it was necessary to replace the original tire and wheel on the station wagon, since we had no intention of attempting to traverse some two thousand miles without them. The village in which we stayed Friday night was too small to have a Renault dealer, so we proceeded to the nearby city of Givors. Luckily, there was a dealership open that day and I pulled the wagon into its parking lot. Before I could alight from the car a young man indicated that I couldn't park in that spot; following his directions, I moved the vehicle. The gentleman had an opportunity to regret having spoken to me.

My primary concern was finding a replacement wheel; the tire seemed secondary. Keeping a firm grip on the young man I was escorted into the parts department and was delighted to find that they had the wheel in stock. Our troubles were over until he informed me that this dealership did not carry an inventory of tires. There then ensued a twenty minute discussion among the manager and several employees, all about "pneus". At length, the manager appointed my young man to take me, in his own car, to a tire dealer nearby.

Nearby was an optimistic word. I left Sylvia in the station wagon and accompanied the man on a half-hour's ride to a store which stocked - of all things – Firestone tires, in the size needed. We waited in line quite a while, then made the purchase, returned to the dealership where the tire was mounted and the wheel installed, and – glory be – we were on our way again . . . to some other adventure.

## JEAN-LOUIS

Jean-Louis Palladin was the youngest chef in France to receive a second star from Michelin; he was twenty-eight at the time. Our first attempt to visit his restaurant in 1976 was a failure, because his partner had died and the building was dark and shuttered. We tried again the next year, meeting Jean-Louis and his wife, Regine. The meal was excellent so we returned in 1978. Once again we gave it our personal rating of three stars, and advised Michelin of our opinion.

In 1979 Sylvia requested a reservation, addressing the envelope to Jean-Louis. There was no response, so she wrote again. Still no answer, so we were obliged to remove that stop from our itinerary. The first night in France we were in Brittany at a restaurant we knew from prior trips. The chef, Charles Kerever, toured the tables in the dining room and, when he reached us, we inquired as to the whereabouts of M. Palladin. "He moved to Washington, D.C.," Kerever said. "Good," we said, "the carfare is so much less".

When we returned home Sylvia sent a letter to the food editor of the Washington Post, asking for the location of Jean-Louis' new restaurant. No answer . . . she was having a bad year. Then one day she was watching a taped show on TV and, below the picture of one of the participants, a crawler appeared, "Marion Burros, Food Editor, Washington Post." Sylvia was so excited she called me at work and I was so excited, using the client's phone, I phoned Ms. Burros. She provided me with the address, the Watergate, and the name, "Jean-Louis." Sylvia quickly wrote for a reservation for the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, 1980. When it was necessary to revise the reservation slightly, she phoned the Watergate and made the change. Then she asked if Jean-Louis was on hand. He was and the conversation that followed was priceless . . . if only it had been recorded. Sylvia was speaking broken French and Jean-Louis was speaking broken English and this went on for twenty minutes.

We arrived at the appointed place at the appointed time and were greeted at the entrance by both Jean-Louis and Regine; she was there to have dinner with us. No menu was offered, and the first item was a glass of champagne. This was followed by ten courses, accompanied by four wines. It was such a treat! After that we went to "Jean-Louis" eight or nine times a year, for a total of one hundred forty-three visits. Since menus were never presented, I'd record every dish and every wine; I still have approximately one hundred thirty of those menus.

Friends and relatives accompanied us most of the time, and some of the visits were truly memorable . . . and not just for the food, which was always superb. We were introduced to people, some of whose names we knew from cinema or politics; it was an endless procession. And there were incidents which can never be forgotten. One night Jean-Louis came to our table early and showed us the menu and wine list for a couple who had called in advance to select the drinks, asking him to produce a dinner which could be matched with the wines they had selected. Unbelievably, they had ordered six full bottles! For two people! (They took home the last one, but apparently did justice to the first five.) This was a performance that amazed even the most experienced members of the wait staff. After the meal had been completed, Jean-Louis came to our table while we waited to see the total bill for those folks. They signed an Amex charge slip for \$2,605 in wine, \$500 in food, \$600 tip plus tax and no one in the restaurant knew who they were, nor did they ever find out. (The charge was honored).

On another occasion a table close to ours had been set for ten; "Jean-Louis" did not accommodate "walk-ins" so obviously a party of that size was expected. Since it was not occupied that evening, and since ten represented fully twenty percent of the room's capacity, I asked the chef what he did in such cases. He replied that after closing the restaurant at about midnight, he would usually visit a bistro on M Street for his own meal, reaching his home at about 2:30 am. In the case of a previous incident of a "no-show" he then phoned the couple who had failed to keep their reservation, saying, "This is Jean-Louis at Jean-Louis restaurant. I am here

with my staff. You have a dinner reservation. Are you coming?' He heard the wife say meekly to her husband (at 2:30 am), "Do you want to go to dinner?" That was a highly educational phone call for those people.

Jean-Louis delighted in presenting new dishes. Every meal contained at least three combinations we had never experienced before, even the very last dinners. His talent for matching ingredients was extraordinary, and some of the introductions were eye-openers. One evening the waiter delivered two dishes which he described as "lobster with American Beauty sauce"; American Beauty is, of course, the identification of a type of rose, and the sauce was of that hue. Surprisingly, it was prepared with red beets. Now, if you said, "lobster and beets" to most diners they would stare at you in disbelief. But it worked! Subsequently, we encountered fish and beets at Jean-Louis', a dish which has since achieved currency in many places.

On another visit we were presented with platters of baby eels and barnacles. This, again, was shocking.. Eels perhaps, but barnacles? One envisions pilings and the hulls of boats encrusted with these crustaceans . . . but not on a dinner plate. Jean-Louis had discovered someone in Maine who grew these two items for purposes of consumption; he purchased the production of an entire week. The taste was excellent, but we never encountered them again.

In the one hundred and forty-three visits to the Watergate, plus two to Condom, France, we must have been served almost a thousand different dishes, and we would have been pleased at any time to renew our acquaintanceship with all but perhaps six of them. It is so regrettable that Jean-Louis passed away at the age of only fifty-five . . . there was so much left for him to do, but cancer ended his brilliant career. Much credit is due Regine for nursing him to the end, despite the termination of their marriage some years earlier.

I believe that culinary history will regard Jean-Louis Palladin as a pioneer in introducing European chefs to the United States. Some of the great names in modern cuisine were influenced by him. To name one: Thomas Keller of the French Laundry in Napa Valley. I have the honor to serve with Thomas and other luminaries on a board of the Jean-Louis Palladin Foundation, which has as its objective the development of programs to increase the appreciation and understanding of high-quality ingredients among young chefs and food professionals and to encourage a continuing supply of such ingredients by producers. Other members with whom I have had a long, gratifying rapport are Jimmy Sneed (Richmond, Virginia), Larbi Dahrouch (Wayne, Pennsylvania), Guenter Seeger (Atlanta, Georgia) and Manny and Willette Klausner (Los Angeles, California).

Jean-Louis and Regine have been incredibly kind to Sylvia and me, to an extent that I should be embarrassed to describe. They enriched our lives more than anyone else in their chosen field, and I publicly thank them.

## LOIS AND BETTY

One evening we were dining in our favorite Italian restaurant in South Philadelphia where we regularly did a credible job on the food and wine. On this particular visit the owner, who was always remarkably generous, especially toward us, provided a full liter of wine on the house; a full liter is a significant quantity in our circles. Sylvia and I were diligently consuming our entrees and making commendable progress with the wine when our waitress stopped at the table and said, "Those two ladies over there want to buy you a drink." We were facing a mirrored wall and when I turned to stare at our benefactors they were no one we knew.

My upbringing taught that if someone is kind enough to offer you a drink you should accept it graciously . . . you may use it or not, but fully express your appreciation of the gesture. So here comes the waitress with two more glasses of wine; just what we needed! Immediately, and with only minor difficulty, I made my way to the table occupied by the two young ladies. And let me emphasize the word young, perhaps early thirties. Since they had completed their dinners we asked them to join us for coffee. We four proceeded to become acquainted, providing brief biographies and phone numbers. Thus began a friendship that endures to this day.

Lois was engaged in selling real estate in South Philly and owned a small home there. Betty was a recent graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, probably the most prestigious school of hotel and restaurant management in the country. (Notice how we always seem to fall in with foodies!) Several months after we met, "the girls" came to our house, stayed overnight and Betty prepared a sumptuous five-course dinner, which was accompanied by several bottles of vino. This was a memorable event and everyone we knew was given an account of the activities in glorious detail. That evening we awarded the girls the title of "Visiting Chef Society."

Some months later there was to have been a repeat engagement, but at the time Betty was working a seventy-hour week and really needed a day off. So we opted instead for a meal at a restaurant none of us had ever visited. One of the worst experiences one can endure in dining is the failure of the products to live up to their descriptions on the menu; all the dishes that we were served tasted better in print than in person. After our disappointment the girls thought it would be soothing to have a drink; we concurred. They conducted us to an establishment named Raffles, a spot unknown to Sylvia and me for a good reason.

At that time I was seventy-two years old and had never been in a gay bar. Finding us there was not a complete surprise because some time earlier the young ladies had explained that they were gay, an announcement which provoked virtually no reaction from Sylvia and me; it made no difference. Well, there we were. I took the coats to the cloakroom while the girls escorted Sylvia into the piano bar and seated her on a stool. At the piano a young man was playing songs of "our" era. To our amazement Sylvia stood up, walked across the tiny dance floor and leaned on the piano. That was the first time in at least five years that she had overcome her illness sufficiently to arise from a sitting position voluntarily; at that point she had lost all power to communicate verbally. But the music impelled her and anyone could have read it in her face.

I led her onto the floor where we had danced for a few minutes when a well-dressed man of thirtysomething asked for permission to cut in. He handled Sylvia like a porcelain doll, gently and gentlemanly, so that after a quarter hour she was returned to me wearing a big grin, immensely satisfied.



Then we climbed to the second floor to find a Western scene, a dance floor with an appropriate backdrop, men and a few women dressed in cowboy hats, chaps and jeans, and country and Western music at decibel-busting volume.

The activity was fascinating; I must admit it required some time for me to become accustomed to watching men dance with men. Most of them were really excellent, almost professional. And when they did line-dancing, one would have supposed that they had rehearsed for days.

The girls were engaged in conversations with several of the patrons, because they had both worked there as bartenders previously. At one point Lois turned to me and asked if it would be O.K. for one of the "cowboys" to dance with Sylvia. Of course, I approved and away they went, but slowly. After a few minutes they returned, Sylvia with an immensely satisfied expression. Shortly another man made the same request, with the same pleasant result. And then there was a third. Each time Sylvia came back to me with a smile that said, "This is great fun." In fact, that was probably one of her best days in years.

## THE FINAL FLING

One day in May, 1999, at a time when Sylvia was cared for by a fulltime nursing assistant named Phyllis, the two of them and Lois and I made a trip to Washington, DC. Phyllis came to the U.S.A. from St. Lucia and wanted to see our capital city, which created an opportunity. Lois undertook to drive and did a first-rate job of it. On arriving at our hotel Phyllis fed Sylvia because at that time she was unable to swallow table food, and after that we all went to lunch. Lois started with a martini and Phyllis, tuning in to the spirit of the occasion, had a Bahama Mama. After lunch Lois returned Sylvia and me to the hotel and then she and Phyllis headed out to a drugstore. Some two and one-half hours later they came back from the pharmacy, having found a location that was definitely not a soda fountain. Everyone was in good spirits . . . . and vice versa.

Later, after Sylvia had been given what was considered to be her evening meal, we all dined at our favorite French fishmarket/restaurant. The menu was presented on a blackboard and the three of us who were partaking had an gratifying experience sharing several courses, all of which were excellent. The food was, of course, accompanied by some fruit of the vine, which had some considerable effect on Phyllis, but most certainly made the evening more enjoyable. And just in case the activity might show signs of flagging, the manager treated us to a second bottle of wine.

The next morning we visited two of the Smithsonian museums and Sylvia, who had been in a wheelchair for some two years at that point, was alert and appeared interested in the exhibits. She seemed to appreciate especially the gardens between the buildings, as horticulture had been a subject she had studied. We also visited the Newseum in Arlington, Virginia, an institution devoted to the media, with interactive TV studios in which children could broadcast and receive a tape of their performances; my favorite display was of the front pages of sixty newspapers from around the world . . . THAT DAY'S EDITION.

We had so much enjoyed the previous night's meal that we determined to return for lunch. And a few of the same dishes were available. This time Phyllis was more curious to test her limits and she had two bottles of beer. Lois and I made do with wine.

After lunch irrepressible Lois cornered one of the waiters and said "I'm gay. Where can I find a gay bar?" To this he replied that there were three of them in the next block. Well, the first one was down a flight of steps on which the wheelchair would have been a major problem. At that time it was necessary to move the car because I didn't want another D.C. parking ticket, so I told the girls to proceed to the second bar where I would meet them momentarily.

When I rejoined the group Lois was instructing Phyllis in the proper manner of playing a video game. The screen displayed two pictures of a naked woman, and the object was to point out the differences between the two pictures. When I observed that I said to Phyllis "What are you doing? You're corrupting my wife's morals!" She realized that I was not serious and the beer was having its effect; she was laughing so hard that she went down onto the floor. I helped her up and said "I know Lois is gay, but I didn't know you are" and with that she went down again.

Lois and I engaged in a couple of games of pocket billiards with Sylvia watching to see that no one cheated. Then we concluded we had had enough of this place, but since it was now rush hour, we would wait before beginning the trip home. Accordingly, we proceeded to the third bar. As empty as the second bar had been, the third one was that crowded. There wasn't an empty seat at the bar, which was occupied solely by men . . . except for one redheaded woman. One of the patrons standing nearby tried to convince Phyllis that the redheaded woman was a man . . . and come to think of it, he may have been right Maybe.

Then we returned to Philadelphia and exactly one week later Sylvia died.

## EPILOGUE

The major adventures are finished. The preoccupation with dining continues and, despite the kindness of a hundred and fifty friends and relatives willing to share their time with me (to whom I am inordinately grateful), experiences which used to appear in living color now seem to present themselves in shades of brown and gray. It's so different.

This concludes my tribute to the lady I love.