We Remember Mom
Mary Jane Nickel (1927-2020)

A tribute by her children, written by her son, James Nickel

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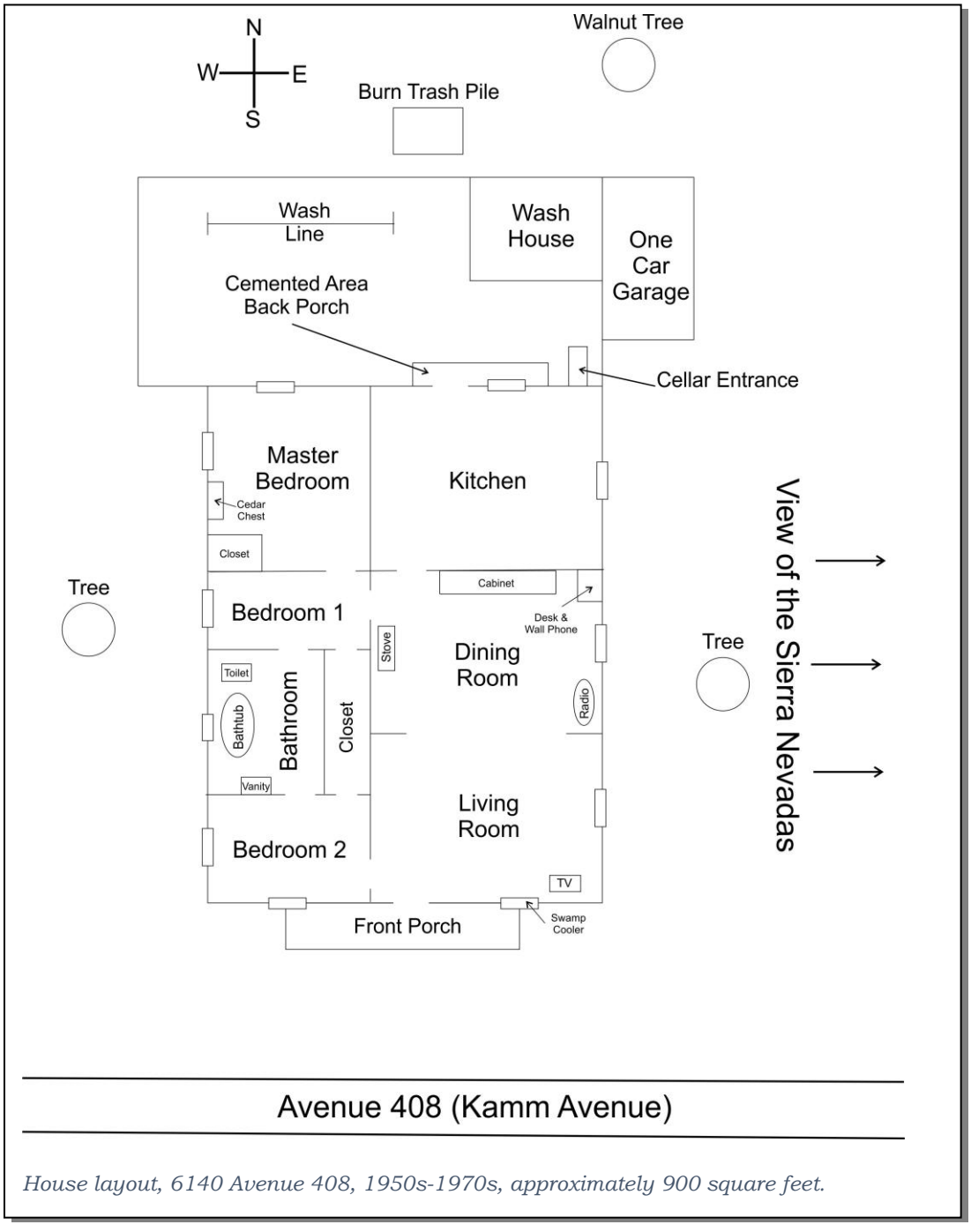

House layout, 6140 Avenue 408, 1950s-1970s, approximately 900 square feet.

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Her Life and Times

Mom was born on April 14, 1927 (though there was a long-running debate over whether it was the 14th or 15th). That same year, Babe Ruth hit 60 home runs, Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlantic, and the Roaring 20s—two years before the stock market crash in October 1929, which brought the Flapper Era to an abrupt end—were in full swing.

She was born in Gray, Oklahoma, in the Panhandle, from the union of Gus (1901-1973) and Agnes (1902-1992) Reiswig, the second of seven children—Willa (1925-2000), Mary Jane in1927, Lucille (1928-2018), Leo (1931-2017), Eleanor (1937-2022), John (1938-2004), and Evelyn (1940-).

In the Great Depression of the 1930s, her family lived for a time in a dugout, a house dug into dirt. They later moved into a two-story house with six bedrooms, two of which housed one hundred baby chicks every spring. To entertain herself, she made her own paper dolls while her brother Leo used his spare time to search the countryside for Indian arrowheads. She also learned to play dominoes and Chinese Checkers. She was a master strategist at checkers, unbeatable, as I can attest!

She experienced the Dust Bowl of the American and Canadian prairies in all its fury, including a locust plague. I remember her telling me her reactions as she listened to the radio reports of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

In 1942, her family moved to California, where she attended the Reedley Bible School, the precursor to Immanuel Schools. She married Dad, Earl Nickel, on November 25, 1944, at the ripe “old” age of 17. Dad farmed on Kamm Avenue on

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20 acres four miles west of Dinuba for 40 years, raising chickens and turkeys and growing corn, cotton, watermelon, Thompson seedless grapes for the local winery[1] and later raisins, plums (El Dorado and Red Beauts), and nectarines. From our house, looking east, we had a magnificent view of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, with Mount Whitney at its peak, about 270 miles distant. Dad also farmed 20 acres on Avenue 400, land owned by his brother Clarence as an inheritance from Henry (H. G.) Nickel (1890-1958).

Mom and Dad attended the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church, where Mom taught the toddler classes. She loved babies and cared for many of the little ones who later became our high school friends.



Dad and Mom, on the Reedley bridge crossing the King's River, 1943.

Mom gave birth to sister Janice on May 3, 1948, and to me on October 12, 1951.

From July 3-5, 1952, the family took a trip to Santa Monica, a suburb of Los Angeles. We witnessed the attempted swim of the Catalina Channel (21 miles), which was televised, by Miss Florence Chadwick (1918-1995) on July 5 in dense fog and very cold conditions. After 15 hours and 55 minutes, with only half

[1] I always wondered if this grape for winery production caused issue with the stand of the Mennonites regarding alcohol consumption.

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a mile to go, she felt she could not go on and asked to be taken out of the water. (Two months later, she tried again. The fog was just as dense, but this time, she made it. After 13 hours, 47 minutes, and 55 seconds, she reached the California shore from Santa Catalina Island, breaking a 27-year-old record by over two hours and becoming the first woman ever to complete the swim.) Being a little over eight months old, how do I remember this? Well, I don't. Back then, if a family went on vacation, they reported it to the local newspaper (either the Dinuba Sentinel or Reedley Exponent) and, behold, we made the news!

In the early 1960s, Mom started working at Poppy Foods, and she later became a USDA meat inspector, a job she loved, waking up at 4:30 AM every morning to go off to work. She started this job because the family needed extra income. Dad had declared bankruptcy in 1959 because the bank called him on a loan. Dad and his brother Clarence had co-signed a loan to start a Turkey farm with their father, H. G. Nickel. His death in January 1958 created this financial crisis. In the spring of 1980, Mom fell down some stairs at work, hurting her leg. This incident forced her into early retirement.



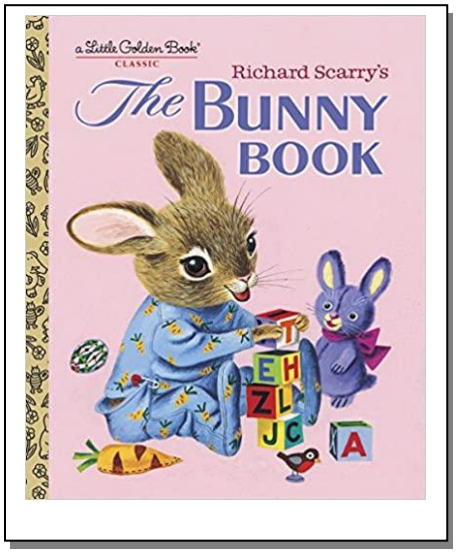
Bierocks.

She was a kind and virtuous woman who worked with her hands sewing, crocheting the most delicate things, making quilts, canning fruit, and cooking. She cooked simple dishes like fried chicken, vegetables, and mashed potatoes, which usually made up our Sunday lunch after church. We enjoyed the delights of German foods, including sausage, bierocks, roll kuchen with watermelon, zwieback, cream puffs, and much more. I never liked borscht; its overabundance

of cabbage and sauerkraut did not tickle my taste buds. My favorite foods she cooked were chicken noodle soup, ribs, and spaghetti. Dad usually helped cook the spaghetti, and he was the master of salmon patties and bean soup. Fish, especially trout, was also a staple. Dad would take me fishing at Avocado Lake in Piedra, east of Fresno on Highway 180, and catch bluegills. Downside: I seemed to always get my fishhooks caught in the rocks! Mom would fillet the fish and fry them to our delight.

Our Experiences with Her

Our parents' training of us was not a self-conscious plan. They gave us what their ancestors gave them, so some parts were missing, but our positive experiences with them outweighed any negatives. Every day, they lived their lives, and we lived with them. Life in a family comprises many "little things," but these things lay an indelible foundation for our later lives and thoughts.



First Memories

My first conscious memory of Mom, in the mid-1950s, was of her reading books to me at night before bed. The book that stood out was the Little Golden Book titled *The Bunny Book*, illustrated by Richard Scarry. Every page had been indelibly etched into my memory, for I recognized it immediately when my wife Lila read it to our children. This storybook engages in "what do you want to be when you grow up" options—policeman, circus clown, cowboy, airplane pilot, fireman, train

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engineer, lion tamer, mailman, owner of a candy store, doctor, lifeguard at the beach, or a farmer with a fine red tractor. But all the baby bunny wanted to be when he grew up was a daddy.



Homestead: 1950.

We also loved the smell of Mom and Dad's cedar chest in their master bedroom. It contained all sorts of family treasures. Speaking of bedrooms, the little rectangular farmhouse we lived in measured about 900 square feet. Our grandfather H. G. Nickel built it in 1918, the year Dad was born. Besides the master bedroom, it had two other small bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen, and a dining/living room. The cellar stored Mom's yearly canning output. At its head, there was a wooden plaque with black painted letters "H. G. Nickel 1918". I vividly remember the taste of her canned pickles. Not insulated, the house was heated during cold winter days by an oil stove. I would sit on it to



Janice and James in the dining room with the oil stove in the background.

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keep “you know what” warm. During the hot summers, a noisy swamp cooler kept us comfortable.[1]

Chicken barns initially adjoined the house on the west side. We had two chicken coops, and we sold the eggs locally. Every spring, we got a new batch of baby chicks, which were kept warm in a circular incubator in the shed that housed much of Dad’s farming equipment. They were soft and cuddly. I couldn’t take my eyes off them … so cute as they swarmed around and chirped. Later, the house was surrounded by plum trees and grape orchards.

Nothing could outdo the smell of plum blossoms in spring, wafting through the farm with the hum of bees pollinating the budding fruit. We spent many hours picking grapes with hook knives. One time, I opened the vine branches, and a swarm of wasps came out. I ran like sprinter Usain Bolt (1986-), dashing home, getting stung along the way, and rushing through the back door. Mom was there and applied the appropriate remedy—lotion and ice—to help heal the stings. When Dad produced raisins, it required additional back-breaking work of turning raisin trays. Up and down the many rows, working in pairs, turning the half-baked raisins with deft, almost instantaneous movement, all in sweltering 100-degree Fahrenheit heat.

Our farm drew its irrigation water from an underground aquifer. Janice and I often walked to the electric pump at the back of our fields to drink the fresh water pouring forth, cupping it with our hands and other times with a tin cup. It was actually tasty—invigorating in its freshness, living water!

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[1] It was fed by water from an outdoor garden hose. The water poured into straw filters. A large fan generated wind, and as it blew through the straw, it produced cool air inside the house.

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We also enjoyed getting candy, including a few free samples, at Peoples Market on the corner of Avenue 400 and Road 56, near the Delft colony.[2] Mom would buy her groceries there, and the owner would credit her purchases and wait for payment at harvest time. During the financial crisis of 1959, Mom had to charge her food purchases, not knowing when she could pay. Knowing the situation, the owner told her, "Don't worry. I know you will pay the ticket when you can."

Children Will Be Children

I must have been four or five when I first became intrigued by gopher holes in our front yard. They were perfect places to store Mom's silverware, so down they went.

Another day, Janice and I were concerned about our baby kittens, for they were dirty. We knew Mom's new washing machine cleaned clothes, so we put them in and started it. They ended up clean but also dead.

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[2] Delft was a small rural town consisting of neatly arranged wood-framed homes. Henry J. Bartsch, a migrant from Delft, Minnesota (Named after Delft, South Holland, Netherlands), founded the colony—as it was called then—in the 1930s. He purchased the land as part of a Mennonite ministry to assist poor families and refugees relocating from Arkansas and Oklahoma during the Great Depression era Dust Bowl. Early residents were largely poor white families fleeing the Dust Bowl, aka "Okies," who worked on local farms (Cotton was a popular crop in the 1950s, and I remember a cotton gin on the corner across from Peoples Grocery.), doing work such as picking fruit/cotton, pruning, driving tractors, and general farm maintenance. My sister and I went to elementary school with many children from this colony.

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After I became a San Francisco Giants baseball fan in 1962, I would go outside and pitch a ball against the west side of the house next to my parents' bedroom window. After Mom warned me not to do that, and since I didn't have Sandy Koufax's[3] control, I broke the window. I ran into my bedroom, found my piggy bank, and gave it to Mom to pay for the replacement window. She saw I understood consequences, so no further punishment was necessary. To this day, I do not remember what happened to my piggy bank, especially its contents.



House in the early 1960s. The window that I broke is behind the wooden ground stake, the far-left window on the lengthwise side of the house.

As a parenthetical tribute to my father, he took me to Candlestick Park on one of our 1960 vacation trips. We stood on the infield turf. In 1962, we flew from Fresno on a twin-engine flight to Candlestick to see a Sunday game between the Giants and Cardinals. I remember we couldn't hear each other talk because of the prop noise. From 1965-1970, Dad and I took regular trips to Candlestick to see games, usually in August after harvest, taking the Greyhound bus from Fresno and staying overnight in a hotel in San Francisco. We saw Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Orlando Cepeda, Juan Marichal, and many others play. Exciting times!

Our neighbors had several pomegranate trees, so every fall we enjoyed eating the seeds from their harvest. We were not careful with the juice, so red stains were

[3] Sandy Koufax was a baseball Hall of Fame pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 1960s.

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all over our clothes. Mom would get upset because you could not get the stains out. To her, clothes were not trivial items. She didn't have many clothes when she was growing up in Oklahoma.

Some "Little Things"

Many small memories of Mom stand out. I would watch with intrigue as Mom would chop off the head of a chicken with an ax. It would run around headless for four to five seconds, spurting blood upward until it collapsed. This off-with-the-chicken-head routine usually happened on Saturday evenings, and the chicken was our entree at Sunday lunch after church. In the mid-to-late 1960s, instead of Sunday lunches at home, we would regularly go to Perry's Smorgasbord in Parlier or the Swedish Mill in Kingsburg. It seemed as if the Mennonite world descended upon these places from 12:30 PM to 2:30 PM on Sundays.



James in the dining room, with our vacuum-tube radio in the background.

Early black-and-white television sets and radios used glass vacuum tubes. If they blew—and frequently did—Mom would take them to town, get replacements, and install them herself.

Mom and Dad would take us to summer brass band concerts in either Reedley or Dinuba city parks. The sound was so harmonious and heart-lifting, especially when they played classics by John Philip Sousa (1854-1932). Dad would often

compete in local horseshoe tournaments at the same park, and Mom would take us to watch. I got pretty good at throwing the shoes, too. Dad was an excellent teacher.



Mom and Janice, kitchen scene (1963).

The Fourth of July required trips to either Reedley High or Kingsburg High football fields for watermelon and the fireworks light show. Smoke and light filled the stadium as patriotic music resounded through the loudspeakers. It was enchanting, replete with oohs and aahs.

I remember watching the original television production of Peter Pan, starring Mary Martin, which aired on March 7, 1955. We watched *I Love Lucy* on Monday evenings. Later, as we switched to color television, we watched the annual Easter presentation of *The Wizard of Oz*, first broadcast on Saturday, November 3, 1956. The flying bat scene near the end always sent chills down my spine. We also watched Saturday morning cartoons. Al Radka (1916-2005), a popular radio and television personality in Fresno, hosted the hilarious *Three Stooges* shorts on Saturday afternoons. Before showing them, he warned the kids watching, “Don’t try this at home!” Eventually, *The Wonderful World of Disney* soon took over Sunday evenings, replacing church attendance!

Although Mom couldn't swim, she made sure we learned how by taking lessons at the Reedley pool. When we went swimming at Blakeley’s public pool in Fresno,

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she would relegate herself to the wading section while Janice and I built up the courage to jump off the towering high dive.

Starting in 1962, Mom helped me build my United States stamp collection. During this time (5th- to 8th-grade years), she also bought me the complete set of the Hardy Boys detective books. I created a library card system and loaned them out to my friends to read.

Before school started, she would take us to Dinuba to get new shoes at Don's Shoe Store. Don, the owner, wore a sharp-looking toupee and meticulously measured our feet for the right fit. We would travel to the big city of Fresno to get our other clothes, including our Sunday church attire. That 20-mile drive up Highway 99 to Fresno seemed to take so long. One landmark etched in my memory before we entered Fresno was the neon sign promoting Madam Sophia's, a palm-reading house.

Mom made sure our teeth, eyes, and overall health were always taken care of. She also bought me a trombone and Janice a flute for band practice at Grandview Elementary School.

For my birthday, we went to the House of Chung in Reedley. I always ordered three things: Pork Noodle Soup, Egg Foo-Yung, and a Shirley Temple (7-UP with a floating cherry).

Every Christmas we would drive through Christmas Tree Lane in Fresno to see the wonder of the lights. Decorating our Christmas tree was also special. I remember the silver tinsel that draped every branch and getting a Lionel train set. I spent many hours watching it run, fascinated by its circular movement around the tracks.

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She also made sure we were in Sunday School and church every Sunday morning, including the evening service, until, as noted earlier, the mutual enjoyment of watching *Wonderful World of Disney* on our color television replaced it. What remains most vivid from those church gatherings is the robust singing of hymns, especially *The Wonderful Grace of Jesus.*

Starting in 5th grade and continuing through 9th grade, she arranged for us to go to Hartland Bible Camp every summer in late July/early August. In mid-July 1962, our family attended a Billy Graham crusade at Ratcliffe Stadium in Fresno.

There were two times when my mother shared in silence with us as we lived through momentous historical events. The first was on November 25, 1963, when we watched the JFK (John F. Kennedy) funeral procession in Washington, DC, on television. I vividly remember the steady drumbeat accompanying the funeral train as it carried Kennedy's casket to Arlington Cemetery. The second was during the early morning hours of June 5, 1968. On the 4th, I listened to Vin Scully calling the game between the Dodgers and the Pirates at Dodger Stadium. I fell asleep before the game ended, so my radio kept transmitting sounds in the background of my dreams. I awoke in the early hours of the next day upon hearing the reports that somebody had shot RFK (Robert F. Kennedy) in Los Angeles. I got out of bed and went into the kitchen, where I found Mom listening to the news too. It was 4:30 AM, and she was getting ready to work. We listened together in silence.

During high school and college, Mom and Dad came to my basketball games and cheered me on excitedly. I could hear Mom's distinct voice bellowing from the stands, "Go, Nickel!"

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As a mid-to-late teenager, I worked in the peach/nectarine/plum fields near Reedley and Dinuba, 15-16 hours a day during the peak of the harvest. Mom always made a nice sandwich lunch, either bologna or tuna, with a Hostess cherry fruit pie for dessert.

After getting married in 1980, Lila and I would receive, at Christmas time, a large shipment of boxes for the grandchildren and us, even when we were living far away in Australia (1982 to 1987). We could expect well-thought-out gifts. There was one exception, though. She kept on giving me Old Spice cologne throughout the 1990s. I have a drawer full of these bottles!

From the 1990s to the 2000s, I knew she was studying the Bible by correspondence at Liberty University and faithfully attending the local BSF (Bible Study Fellowship) meetings, a weekly highlight for her.

Two Incidents

Twice in my life, I experienced situations that could have resulted in my death. Mom witnessed both.

The first occurred when I was around 6 years old. We were at Reedley Beach, and I was out in the Kings River in an inner tube. Somehow, I got caught in one of those swirling eddies. The whirlpool was so strong it started to drag me underwater. I heard my mother cry out from the shore when she saw me go under. (Remember, she could not swim.) A young man, a strong swimmer, jumped into the river, reached me quickly, and pulled me out. I do not know who he was. But he saved my life. I hope to thank him someday in the consummated paradise of the New heavens and New earth.

The second happened when I was 13. In the summer of 1965, our family visited our uncle Clarence Nickel and family in San Jose to see a Giants-Dodgers game. Our tickets were set for Saturday, August 21, 1965. The previous day, we were sightseeing in San Francisco. We jumped on a trolley car, and it began its descent down one of San Francisco's steep streets. I stood on the railing, looking back at some buildings as the car motored down the hill. A few moments later, with one arm on the railing, I swung around, and my head hit a passenger in the same position on the car going uphill. I took a deep dive. My mother saw it and cried out (The second time she has done that!), but I miraculously hung on. I went to Candlestick Park the next day and saw the Giants lose to the Dodgers, 6-4 in ten innings. I suffered whiplash, canceling any sports activities my freshman year at Immanuel Academy High School.



A San Francisco Cable Car.

To this day, I know that angels were above that river and near that Cable Car, commissioned by the Holy Trinity to preserve my life in response to my mother's cry. Deep down, I knew, with an unarticulated, unearthly confidence, that I wanted to steward that gift.

Adventures and Travels

We remember our family travels most. We experienced the wonders of creation, the hope of anticipation, and the pure joy of adventure. Our parents took delight

in these trips, and we caught it from them. Here is one example of indirect training. We saw them living, planning vacations, going to new places, and revisiting old places simply because they enjoyed it. With theological hindsight, I have discerned that they introduced us into the experience of the life and joy of the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the Trinity, as a family of distinct persons, also delights in their creation, in the adventure of doing new things, and in establishing the old ways for our remembrance. Our parents did not self-consciously know that they were introducing us into this participation in the joy of the Trinity, but the Trinity who lived in them accomplished that work through them. We all live, move, and exist in the Christological air of the Holy Trinity (Acts 17:28), the touchstone and sustainer of our existence.

I remember regular H. G. Nickel family picnics at Mooney's Grove Park in Visalia. We relished the delicious meals, enjoyed the family jokes, and went boating on the park's lake.

We observed wildlife and rode on the children's train at Fresno's Roeding Park. As we watched monkeys swing from branches, Dad would say, "There are your uncles."

Santa Cruz was a frequent destination, starting in the mid-1950s. We remember the boardwalk, the carousel, the funhouse mirrors that distorted you into contortions—fat and skinny—the unique smell of the indoor swimming pool, and the scary "Giant Dipper" roller coaster. Dad used to warn us to be careful on the first turn after the great descent. We might fly off if we didn't hold on! My first time eating out at a restaurant was in Santa Cruz, at Sambo's, with Uncle Alvin and Aunt Pearl Kliewer. What an excellent way to be introduced to pancakes! On the walls, you could see drawings of Sambo's life story.

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Trips to Pismo Beach for ocean swimming were also a regular habit of theirs. We even saw the extravagant wealth on display at Hearst Castle in San Simeon.

In the 1960s, the family took, if possible, yearly two-week vacations every August after the fruit harvest. We traveled to many locales in California and also throughout the Southwest, Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest. Janice kept herself occupied by tracking our progress, where we ate, and the prices of meals and motels. In the car, we played games like “alphabet,” where we had to find objects that started with “A,” then “B,” and so on. I would invent a baseball season with a number spinner. I would first create a league, then a schedule, and spin once for each team, the highest number winning the game. As evening approached, we began looking for motels. Janice and I always made our “demands” known: “We want a motel with a swimming pool!” And we usually went for a swim before bedtime.

In 1960, we visited Gray, Oklahoma, where Mom lived as a youngster. The topography was flat. We stayed at Johnnie Plett’s house with his boys. I remember Mr. Plett killing rattlesnakes with his shovel and us sleeping in the basement during raging lightning and thunderstorms.

Visits to National Parks were often the goal of these trips. We explored Kings Canyon and Sequoia in the winter for tubing in the snow and seeing the three-to four-thousand-year-old Giant Sequoias, General Sherman and General Grant in particular. We also explored Yellowstone, Mount Rainier, Crater Lake, and Carlsbad Caverns.

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In mid-August 1962, we drove to Seattle to see the World's Fair. Taking the monorail and then going up 605 feet to the top of the Space Needle were highlights of the trip. We visited that city again during Thanksgiving of 1967, when Mom, Dad, and I flew on a United Airlines Boeing 727 jet, including dinner service, to Seattle to see Janice, who was attending Seattle Pacific College. All four of us, along with Janice's roommate, ate at the Space Needle revolving restaurant. Dad nearly fainted at the cost: $8.

Almost every year, we would drive up the winding road, Highway 41, to visit Yosemite National Park. We would stay in the Camp Curry tent-cabins, enjoy cafeteria food (eggs, sausage, bacon, and pancakes), swim in the pool, watch the wildlife (bears, deer, chipmunks, and squirrels), go on ranger hikes, visit the Indian village, and hike to the waterfalls (Yosemite and Vernal). The highlight of every evening was attending the vaudeville show at the outdoor auditorium in Curry Village. As we watched the singing, dancing, comedy routines, educational talks, and movies, somebody was burning logs up on Glacier Point, 3214 feet above us. At the right moment, a performing couple would sing the Indian Love Song, made famous as a duet by Nelson Eddy (1901-1967) and Jeanette MacDonald (1903-1965) in the



Seattle World's Fair, 1962.

1924 movie Rose-Marie, co-starring a very young Jimmy Stewart (1908-1997). Then a ranger would call out toward Glacier Point, “Is the fire ready?” From high above, we would hear the response, “The fire is ready.” Then, the command upward: “Let the fire fall!” All eyes would turn up to see a fire fall of red embers descending quickly from the peak of Glacier. Snuggling with your parents in the cold of those evenings was an experience you'd never forget.

Finally, there was the magic and joy of Disneyland. We first visited the park in Anaheim during its opening year in 1955. I returned home with a Davy Crockett coonskin cap, and Janice with a Mickey Mouse hat. We returned for regular visits in the 1960s and 1970s. I always cried when leaving. Besides all the fantastic rides and historic/futuristic pavilions, it had the best red licorice ever! Janice and I regularly watched the *Mickey Mouse Club* on television after school. Serials like the *Hardy Boys* and *Spin and Marty* were my favorites.



Lila Nickel and Mom, Wild Huckleberry restaurant, Wenatchee, Washington (2009).

Dad and Mom also made sure we visited Knott's Berry Farm at Buena Park. Dad especially enjoyed going there for free admission and the chicken dinners. We got to experience the ways and buildings of the Old West and even pan for gold.

How Do You Define the Love of a Mother?

We experienced life by living with both our father and mother. We knew the excitement of adventure but also the routine of school and work, the discipline of the ordinary. Both our parents encouraged us. Both wanted us to pursue a college education that they both lacked. Both demonstrated a commitment to hard work and had the connections to get us summer jobs during our teenage years, which helped us fully fund our high school and college tuition/books/living expenses. Both wanted us to experience success in life, no matter where that leads. We hope that our lives have been the successes they desired. More importantly, we want to hear our elder brother Jesus say of us, as He said of her when she graduated from this life to the dimension of glory, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).



Mom and James, at a bus station in California (early 1985).

We remember Mom as a hugger and full of tender love for every member of her family. We thank her for her presence, care, encouragement, and for partnering with Dad as they introduced us to the

wonders and adventures of life and creation. There is no better way to define a mother's love.

Mom graduated to the great cloud of witnesses on September 29, 2020, in Clovis, California, preceded by her husband Earl (1918-2008). We commit her to her Lord. The surety of the resurrection of her body carries us in our grief, a certainty grounded in Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead over two thousand years ago. The next time we see her, we shall share with her in the fullness of the joy and life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as adopted sons and daughters. We shall dwell with our parents in the new creation home that is eternal and feast at the table, immersed in the peace and healing of Triune fellowship—a fullness of inexpressible joy that includes new bodies of glory. She will wear size eight once again and forever.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth;
for the first heaven and the first earth passed away,
and there is no longer any sea.
And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down
out of heaven from God,
made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a loud voice from the throne,
saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is
among men, and He will dwell among them,
and they shall be His people,
and God Himself will be among them,
and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will
no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning,
or crying, or pain;
the first things have passed away."
And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

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And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.”
Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end.
I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.
He who overcomes will inherit these things,
and I will be his God and he will be My son.” (Revelation 21:1-7)

The Trinity in California

The blowing and blinding wind of the Bowl of Dust,
the Great Depression turns dollars into rust.
In a house with floors of clay,
The master of checkers from China lay
dolls cut with scissors from sheets,
while brother Leo for arrowheads seeks.

Through the Spirit in the wind, Paradise West appeals,
California suggests, “Get wheels.”
A family of nine starts the trip
in a one-car exodus using Route 66.

A sense of expectation in the heart is aflame,
Other Mennonites open their arms not in shame,
Reedley is a comin’ as far as the eye sees,
A future and a hope are what the heavenly Father perceives.

Off to Immanuel Mom goes,
learning Bible, other subjects, and making new friends in droves.
On one date, she meets a tall man with handsome, dark hair.
A farmer is he, looking for a wife to share.

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She weds at seventeen,
Her dad's permission is keen.
At the farm, she and Dad arrive,
the revelation of a cooking maestro is made alive.
Quilting and canning accelerate toward sagacity.
Early rising for work with her farmer, a proclivity.

The bedroom chest of cedar, pleasantly wafts a scent,
From oil-fueled stove, comfort and warmth in ascent.
Baby chirping chicks circle in gyration,
through water-drenched straw the fan blows in rotation,
its cool wind favoring sweaty features,
do you sense the dance of the Holy Trinity in this, their creatures?

Lunch box pleasures, sandwiches, apples, chocolates, and cherry fruit pie.
Mom wielding an axe, chopping off the head, providing Sunday dinner, a shock to the eye.
Spaghetti, bean soup, salmon patties, fish,
noodles and chicken in broth—carrots, onions, celery, spices—a savory mix.
German sausage, roll kuchen, zweibach, sauerkraut, borscht, bierocks, and puffs filled with cream.
Gifts that keep giving, every perfect gift from the Father's light-beam.

Participation in the harmony of hymns and song,
Laughing aloud at family stories told strong.
How many Sunday school lessons did we hear?
And how many Bible verses at Hartland camp did we hold dear?

Picnics and concerts in the park, brass bands, melodious singers.
Tossing horseshoes at the stake, scoring much-coveted ringers.
Disney wonders, its history and wild rides, topped off with licorice, red,
the life of the Old West at Walter Knott's farm, panning for gold before going to bed.

We Remember Mom
Mary Jane Nickel (1927-2020)

A tribute by her children, written by her son, James Nickel

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Ageless Sequoia giants, whisper much older truths,
the deep dark caverns of Carlsbad, disorienting the senses of youths.
Space-age needle in Seattle's sky, reaching dizzying heights, all opine.
Tram whisking through the city on rails mounted, starting from the village of Westlake, from 5th and Pine.

Delectable eats at the House of Chung,
Celebrating birth, family singing, sounding a rung.
Christmas lights showcased on a Fresno one-way lane, the boulevard named North Van Ness.
Tinsels spinning in the light, the Lionel running circles, the One in Three and Three in One make their impress.

Of trips and basketball exploits, say the newspapers printed.
Of the joy of reading books, a lifestyle firmly minted,
Of worms on hooks and casting poles,
Of the line stuck in rocks and catching fish from watery holes.

Of the first smell of fresh grass at Candlestick Park,
Of the chilly wind, of strong night breeze sending chills up the back with a bark.
At the high-arching projectiles launched by Mays and McCovey—the fans thunder,
At Marichal's high kick, his art of pinpointing the pitch—baseball, full of wonder.

The grandeur of Yosemite beauty, eye-popping,
the walk to the heights of waterfalls dropping.
The evening drama and play at Camp Curry,
the call of the Indian Love Song, fire falls in a hurry.

Ocean swimming at Pismo on the Pacific,
Oklahoma rattlesnakes squirming terrific.
Midwest lightning flashes the sky ablaze,
Thunder roaring, the room shaking in haze.

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The Bunny Book, punchline at the end,
of grace given when realizing effect, the soul in mend.
Of trombone and flute playing in orchestra pits,
of burst vacuum tubes and replacement refits.
Of free candy samples from Peoples' kind hand,
of generosity extended, knowing hard times will not stand.

The spring smell of fresh blossoms, sweet fragrance from above.
The pump water from aquifers, invigorating the life in love.
The power of sweet grapes, peaches, and plums,
the tongue's sensory organs cry, "Oh, taste the Lord—Father, Son, and Spirit—the good ones."

Of summers in the High Sierras, the passion of adventure,
Of the discipline of the ordinary, building character, initiating venture.
Of trips in cars, planes, and buses, of moments in shared hush,
Of the delight from the habit of study, of a mother's cry, angels rush.

Mom and Dad taught us through their lives:

wonders,

joy, and

anticipation …

Their shared presence guaranteed us an inheritance of delight and full participation.

The sharing of life, the provision of needs—teeth fixed, eyes checked, broken bones set, health assured, the spark behind "Go Nickel"—the joy, the wonder, the hope, the security … all point to ultimate reality for, in the words of C. Baxter Kruger, from all eternity, God is not alone and solitary, but lives as Father, Son and Spirit in a rich and glorious and abounding fellowship of utter oneness. There is no emptiness in this circle, no depression or fear or insecurity. The trinitarian life is a great dance of unchained communion and intimacy, fired by passionate, self-giving and other-centered love, and mutual delight. This life is good. It is right, unique, full of music and joy, blessedness and peace. Such love, giving rise to such togetherness and fellowship and oneness, is the womb of the universe and of our lives within it.