

This was written by Gran's 'beau,' Bert Thomas.

## A MEMOIRE OF CATHERINE EUSTIS 1897-1986



*Illustration 1: Catherine Jane and Father*

I was born on March 16, 1897, in Minneapolis. My mother was from Cincinnati. Father was a jeweler in Minneapolis, and Mother had friends there. And she met him while visiting them. I have the most wonderful letter in which she wrote to her own mother and said, "Mother, I've met the man I want to marry and he's a poor jeweler, and not the professor I thought he would be. And there all my ideas went out the window. His name is Charles Eustis." Before then she had made up her mind to marry a professor. Mother had studied art at the Sorbonne in Paris. She had gone to Europe every couple of years, with her father, who was also a jeweler. She was very thoroughly educated, far more than most women of that time. Mother spoke French, German and some Italian. Before she went to the Sorbonne, she had studied painting with Frank Duvannek<sup>2</sup> in Cincinnati. This was in oils. But she changed to watercolor later when she could no longer carry the canvas and paints and equipment when she was working outdoors. All this education had apparently led her to aspire to marrying a "professor." I don't know how professor's salaries in those days compared with the income of jewelers; but the difference was not great enough to set aside the fact that she had fallen in love with Father.

My father's name was Eustis. He came from Maine. There is a small crossroad in Maine, named Eustis. I have no idea why he came to Minneapolis. But when he did come, it was so long ago that he and his twin brother had the first piano in Minneapolis, and the Indians used to come to listen through the open doors. They couldn't believe their ears.

Father kept the jewelry business with his twin brother George. I think George did the watches. Mother's father was also a jeweler, but a manufacturing jeweler. Father was just a retailer.

The marriage was a long and happy one. I came along and then four years later my

sister Claribel. We grew up together and went to Minneapolis schools.



*Illustration 2: Charles McL. Reeve*

It was during this time that Uncle Charlie Reeve came into our life. Uncle Charlie had two children, a boy and a girl. Aunt Chrissie, his wife, was in a frightful accident before they were born. She was riding in a carriage and the horses ran away. She was thrown from the carriage, and both her legs were broken. They knew so little about setting broken bones in those days, that they just set them so she could have the babies. She became an invalid.

Uncle Charlie was General Reeve, and at the time was Commandant of Fort Snelling<sup>1</sup>. On one occasion he was entertaining his officers at his home, drinking, of course, when his little son, about six years old came to him and said, "Father, is this a saloon?" Uncle Charlie said, "No, this is our dining room in our home. It is not a saloon."

Both children died a couple of days later of diphtheria. So it just wiped the family out. Uncle Charlie was completely undone by this circumstance. Everyone was scared to death of diphtheria in those days, and shunned the Reeves. So my father said, "Charlie, you're going to come and live with us, with Aunt Chrissie."

The experience was so harrowing to Uncle Charlie, that he never again served a drink to any of his officers. And the little girl who died was very afraid of the dark, so they kept a light burning on her grave for years, for heaven's sake. He sort of went off the deep end on the death of the children. But he and Father became fast friends and he and Aunt Chrissie were like members of the family. They later moved to Coronado in California where I visited them when I was sixteen.

Father, Uncle Charlie and Uncle George founded the Apollo Club, a choral group, in Minneapolis, and they used to sing at our house.

Minneapolis is hot in the summer months so we would go out to Lake Minnetonka to escape the heat. It was sometime then when Father bought part of the Breezy Point Club, which a group of men owned. It was on Spirit Knob. And Spirit Knob was where the old

---

<sup>1</sup> Not true – but he was for a time a prison warden.

Indians had a burial ground, and we as little children lived in the club house. We had the most wonderful table, a big round table. It was a poker table. Mother put a top on it but the bags were all there under the table, the bags for the chips. And Mother was not very pleased with those. One time we had a cyclone storm that blew down a big linden tree, and the tree fell right across Sister's crib. The iron crib saved her from being killed, because it came right into the house.

Mother was rather strict with Claribel and me. We were not allowed to go to the high school dances, which caused me some grief. We were permitted to attend a dancing club over in St. Paul, which seems a little strange, because I think of St. Paul as a little on the other side of the tracks, or the Mississippi. It was there I met Scott Fitzgerald. We had a few dates, but that was long before he acquired such a reputation with Zelda. The Minneapolis girls were hard to get. We always had to have a chaperone. Mother had friends in St. Paul so I stayed with them.

Not having dates in high school in Minneapolis was hard on my self esteem. Under my name in the yearbook was "Up above the world so high 'tis better to be loved than honored" and I cried my eyes out over that. Mother didn't want me hobnobbing with Minneapolis boys she thought inferior. Maybe they were, but I liked them.

My sister Claribel grew up and married Torrence Fiske. He was a brain, Princeton, finances. My sister died in childbirth of Scarlet Fever. The child died also of erysipelas, something they couldn't do anything about in those days. So you see there was tragedy in the family.

I thought about Lena Allen today because the paper said that 75 years ago the *Titanic*, the unsinkable ship built in 1911 had hit an iceberg off Newfoundland, and Lena Allen, I remembered, went out and strewed flowers all over the ocean in the Newfoundland area, because her husband had gone down with the Titanic, and so I thought of the first time I had ever seen her. She was a friend of Father's and she came for dinner in Minneapolis. We lived very, very simply in a duplex house and never pulled the shades down. No reason to. We didn't have anything. And Mother said "This is father's friend coming tonight." And somehow I knew it wasn't her friend, even though I was only 5 or 6 years old. Because this perfectly elegant creature came in, poured into a black velvet gown with a square neck and a rope of pearls going

down to her knees, and I was so impressed that I must have stood there with my mouth open and a snuffly nose because she said "Charlotte, blow your daughter's nose", which did not endear me to her. Then she said, "Pull the shades down." So Mother complied. Father came home finally and greeted her happily. She was a self-made woman, whatever that meant, and she bragged she had made 6 million dollars before she ever had a husband and she also said to Father, "Today I went to the bank and wanted to cash a check - a sizeable check -because the cashier immediately ushered me into the office of the president of the bank." Lena Allen looked at him and said "You can't be president of my bank, Ti Harrison! Why I taught you arithmetic; I think I'm going to take my account away from you. You don't know anything."

The check was cashed, I guess. But that night I knew that Mother didn't care very much for her, and that Father was the one who liked her. So then we went around and had dinner.

Later in my life I went on my honeymoon to Alaska, and Father must have written to her, because she wrote from Seattle urging us to come and visit her. So we did. Now this was fifteen years later. She said she could marry any man in Seattle, and she was a plump, rather unattractive woman, I thought. But she had lots of money, and so she was sure she could marry any man in Seattle. She was the only woman member of the Rainier Club. She took us there. The next day we went with her, someplace, and she said, "Catherine, the one thing I cannot have is a child of my own. You should have babies. I've done the best I can. I have a home; it's not an orphanage; it's a home I've created with about 25 children. They are not orphans; they are my children; this is the best I can do."

Then we went on to Alaska, and that is the last I ever saw her. But she was terribly important in my life. Her maiden name was Lena Aaron.

I heard later that she had remarried again. She married a Naval officer. He had married her for her money; and she married him for social position. And neither of them gained what they wanted. And that was the end of her.

This is a story told by my mother about a couple who lived on a farm in Illinois. I think she either knew them personally, or was associated in some way so that she knew the story was a true one.

The couple finally saved up enough money to consider travel. They really were

not very well off; the farm was mortgaged. But they decided they had to live, so they thought they would take the grand tour of Europe. They wanted to do something to make life more attractive. So they saved every cent they could scrape up, and went to England. When they reached England he watched his wife shopping, looking in the windows. He said, "My dear, I have a surprise for you. I have saved a hundred dollars up more than our budget and you have it to spend on anything you want. You seem to admire the English wools so much, maybe this is where you ought to spend it." She was thrilled but hung on to the money. They went through France and Italy. Finally in Italy she saw what she had been longing for, exactly what she had wanted, amber beads. She knew the color, she knew exactly what she wanted. She finally found it in a pawn shop in Genoa, where they were to sail for home but it was \$250 and she had only \$100. She dickered with the pawnbroker and got the price down to \$150. She had to give up. They were back on ship waiting to sail when she told her husband about this. He said, "Let's go back and see if we can make a deal". They were almost ready to take up the gangplank, when up the ramp came the little pawnbroker with the amber beads in his hand. He was waving them around. Everybody aboard the ship was watching this performance, because they were calling in the gangplank and wanted to get rid of this creature. But they went down the gangplank and met the little pawnbroker and he said \$100 and she said "Oh yes". Everyone on board was leaning over the rail watching this. They bought it for \$100. They came back onto the ship and everyone cheered. They thought it was so funny. She wore it that night to dinner. And in the dining salon, everyone was aware of this woman, she had identified herself through the necklace. But then the string broke, and the beads went all over the floor of the dining salon. Everyone got up and went down on their hands and knees and retrieved every bead. She put them in an envelope. When they reached New York, he said, "Now my dear, let's take them to Tiffany's and have them restrung so you may wear them when you get home." They left the beads and went back to the hotel, and as they entered their rooms the President of Tiffany's was calling them and said that he wanted them to come back right away. She said, "Oh no, are they just glass, or are they stolen?" They took a taxi and returned to Tiffany's. The President of Tiffany's said, "I will give you \$15,000 for this string of amber beads. But I can't tell you what they are." She was elated, and said "Oh that's wonderful; that will pay off the mortgage on the ranch." But he said, "Now, just wait. We're going home."

And then he took her to one side and said, "Let's stop in Chicago and check with our c, Gordon Lang. He is with Blackstar and Gorham<sup>4</sup> and we will get the truth." When they came to Chicago, the same thing happened. They took the beads in for restringing and had just returned to their hotel when Gordon Lang called them and said, "Will you come right back I have something to tell you."

His message was this, "I am offering you \$25,000 for these beads, but I can't tell you what they are." They trusted Gordon and said "Yes, we'll give them to you, to do with them what you think should be done." After they had completed the deal, Gordon said, "All right, now I can tell you what they are. These are the beads that Napoleon gave to Josephine, and we have been hunting them for years. The Louvre has offered \$50,000 for their return." If the string had not broken, and the beads gone all over the dining room floor no one would have ever been wiser. Every bead had the crest of Napoleon engraved right near the little hole where the string went through. The crest was a honeybee. They went home, paid off the mortgage, and she had enough left over to buy another string of amber beads. I wonder if Gordon Lang was the one who told that story, because he was a member of Les Cheneaux Club. We used to go up to the Les Cheneaux Club in Northern Michigan every summer to visit Aunt Claribel, who was Mother's half-sister. It was there I first met Bill Lucking. I was just sixteen when I first knew him.

There was another amusing story my mother told me about Mrs. Pillsbury who was one of the dowagers in Minneapolis. She was a very formidable character. She used to give afternoon teas to her friends. And she would often ask someone of interest to talk to the ladies. One day she decided to have a social worker. And the social worker, after the ladies were all seated, served with tea and were listening, announced that she was going to be talking about gonorrhoea. The ladies were shocked and horrified; that was a word that was not used in polite society. Mrs. Pillsbury was suddenly aware that the word was having an impact on the ladies, said, "Oh, my dears, think nothing of it; John has had it for years, and we think nothing of it." The ladies were really stunned by this. Finally someone said, "Well, how does he treat it?" Mrs. Pillsbury replied, "Oh, he just uses a stiff brush."<sup>5</sup>

---

4 *Black, Starr & Gorham, Inc. was a partnership between Black, Starr & Frost and The Gorham Mfg. Co. from 1940 through 1962*

5 *Thinking it was Pyorrhoea.*

I said before that Uncle Charlie Reeve had moved to Coronado in California, and I had an experience there that I will tell you about. He was not really my Uncle, though I always called him that. He was Father's best friend, which made him seem like an uncle.

When he and his wife - Aunt Chrissie to me - lived in Coronado they invited me to spend the winter with them. This was at a time when the old ferries were running to San Diego, years before the bridge went in.

One day Uncle Charlie invited me to go with him to see Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show in San Diego. I did go to the show, but not with Uncle Charlie. A young Naval Ensign had invited me to go with him; I was sixteen years old, and that seemed a little more important. It was all very exciting.

Uncle Charlie went off on his bicycle, with bicycle clamps around his trousers, his cap turned around with the visor down the back. He looked a bit like a tramp. We saw him at the show. He was having a glorious time feeding the elephants peanuts, looking in at the side shows until finally he decided to go to the main spectacle in the big tent.

He walked up to the barker, and instead of a ticket, handed him a crumpled piece of paper on which were written some completely illegible hieroglyphics, and told him to take it to Colonel Cody.

The barker was about to push him aside, but Uncle Charlie drew himself up to his full military height - he was very impressive and commanding - and said, "Young man, you will see that Colonel Cody gets this piece of paper at once; otherwise you will lose your job."

A few minutes later, Buffalo Bill came charging out of the tent in his big hat and costume, threw his arms around Uncle Charlie, hugged him, kissed him, and greeted him like the long lost friend that he was. On the piece of paper was a code message that only Cody and Uncle Charlie knew. It was used when they were scouts in the Dakotas.

From that moment the whole show was for Uncle Charlie, sitting in Cody's box. The horses bowed to him as though it was their own idea. Annie Oakley shot crystal balls, tossed up in the air in his honor. Buffalo Bill acknowledged his presence by name to the multitude in the tent, and Uncle Charlie had to stand up to be recognized.

And there I sat, a nobody, with my ensign - Navy, not Army, to Uncle Charlie's disgust.

Mother told another story, which seemed a little risqué for those times. But here it is: The ladies were talking about the new Rector of the church. They were very pleased with him, and one of them went on enthusiastically, "Oh, they all love him so much they just keep his Rectum filled with flowers."

I have told how we used to go to visit Aunt Claribel at Les Cheneaux Club in Northern Michigan, and that it was there I first met Bill Lucking. He was very eligible. His father had founded the Ford legal department because he didn't want Henry Ford as an only client. I was nineteen when we were married. He was a lot older. He treated me like a child and things didn't turn out very well.

We moved to Detroit and a new and different life. I met many of the important men in the growing industrial world. There was Henry Ford, of course. But also Firestone, and Thomas Edison. I was always fond of Henry Ford and I think he liked me.

There was one time after Bill was born and was perhaps five years old, that Mr. Ford was showing Bill and me around his new museum at Dearborn, of which he was quite proud. At the end of the trip. Henry Ford said to little Bill, "Bill, if there is anything here that you would like to have, just name it and I will give it to you." At this I said a prayer, "Dear God, make him ask for that little music box, which I would love to have." God probably heard this prayer, but Bill didn't. He picked out a little sack of marbles.

When I was a child in Minneapolis, for a time we lived right next to the Freemans. He was the Bishop of Saint Marks Cathedral in Minneapolis<sup>2</sup>. I would go to their house and have dinner with them, night after night. We were part of the neighborhood children and we all played together and I knew Bishop Freeman very well. After I was married and living in Detroit I once went to Washington to visit them. He had been moved to Washington as the Archbishop of the Washington Cathedral. I took young Bill with me. He was more interested in looking down the manholes of the sewers than he was in the Cathedral.

Bishop Freeman told me that on the following Sunday at the Vesper Services he was going to preach on the "horrors of night clubs". And I said, "But Bishop Freeman, how long has it been since you have been to a night club?" After all, he was a railroad man from Yonkers, New York, before he was ordained and I thought he was very worldly. In fact he had

---

2      *This was James Edward Freeman, b 1866 in NY City.*

that reputation! But he said, "Of course, it's been years since I was in a night club." And I said, "Why don't you come with me tonight to Le Paradis? After all. Bishop Freeman, it means "Paradise". But there is one thing I wish you would do for me: don't wear your clerical collar." And he said, "Oh I couldn't do that, I'd have to wear it." So I said, "All right, we'll go early", and - we went!

We walked into Le Paradis and he said, "Well I've talked about Paradise for years but I never pictured it in orange and black." Then the cigaret girl, all legs, came up and offered us a tray *of* cigarets. Nothing much happened. After all here was the Bishop and he wouldn't turn his clerical collar around. But the next day was Sunday and at Vespers he still went ahead with his plan to preach about night clubs and their evil ways. And some woman in back of us started to cry, although I didn't remember anything sad in his sermon. I told him about this later and he said, "Oh Catherine, you should have found out who she was and her name. Perhaps I could have done something for her."

Mrs. Freeman was much annoyed that at all the dinner parties she was seated next to President Calvin Coolidge who was dull as dishwater, and she wished to Heaven she didn't have to bother with protocol, and could sit next to someone who was more stimulating.

Later, Elsie, their daughter, was terribly unhappy with her young husband, who was an Episcopalian minister, and wanted to leave him. And I remember Bishop Freeman saying, "I'd rather have Elsie dead than divorced." And I thought. that was pretty hard, just awful, not understanding. I don't know what happened to Elsie, but I think she died. Did that make him happy?

The time came when Bishop Freeman telephoned me in Detroit and said that he had heard that I was getting a divorce from Bill Lucking and said, "I want to come to see you in Detroit. I want to prevent this from happening." And I said, "Bishop Freeman, I'd love to have you come for a visit, but I don't think you understand, because I don't think you can persuade me to change my mind."

He couldn't have known, but I had gone through hell before I reached this decision in my life. He came, and I found that the reason he was there was that he thought I could introduce him to Henry Ford. He wasn't interested in me. He was just walking over me to get at Henry Ford's millions for the Cathedral.

And that turned me off religion for a long, long time.

Editorial Comment.

The preceding pages are an almost literal transcription of tapes dictated by Catherine during the two or three months before her death. She was amazingly articulate. Her recall of details gives a vital interest to all of her stories about her early life. The only deletions have been my own promptings persuading her to continue. There are no corrections of grammar and syntax. The clarity and continuity of her thought give evidence of her quite remarkable mind.

It is sad that her memoire is interrupted where it is. Now lost will be the details of her divorce from Bill Lucking, her life in Ojai, and her remarriage to Kenneth, her life on the farm in the desert, her ventures into the love life of the date, her association with General Patton and his wife, the final days of her mother and her mother's friendship with W C Fields, and John Muir, the cottage on Lake Arrowhead, and visits of George Gershwin, the move to Pasadena and to Rincon Point.

It is interesting that her dictated words end with a turn-away from formal religion. To the end of her life, she was a supporter of All Saints by the Sea in Santa Barbara, although she was not a member. She rejected the formalism that would separate her from her profound belief in a set of personal values of which beauty was an important element. Did she have a "religion?" Her own life is the best evidence that she did.

- B.T. March 16, 1987