

I

Childhood and Adolescence

My mother (figure 1.1) was born Betty Jane Tracy on 10 April 1928 in Platteville, Wisconsin, the eldest of five children of Virgil Clair Tracy and Florence Matthews (figure 1.2). A former mining town with a population of roughly 4000 in 1930, Platteville was located in the southwest corner of the state near the Platte River and could lay claim to being the largest urban center in Grant County.

Her mother, who was of German-English descent, was born in 1906, the third of ten children of William Matthews and Antonie Spease. She was raised on the family farm, also located in Grant County, about 6½ miles from the town of Lancaster, and was educated only through the 8th grade in a one-room country school house located about 1½ miles from the farm. This modest institution – despite its obvious limitations – provided her with a sound background in the three basics of reading, writing and arithmetic that would serve her well throughout her life. Her two large framed graduation diplomas, each featuring an etching of the Grant County Court House in Lancaster, hung in the upstairs bedroom of my mother’s house in Wausau until my mother’s death in 2015.

Throughout her life my grandmother put her limited education to good use. She was a prolific writer of family letters and also kept numerous diaries, journals, and scrapbooks in which she briefly recorded family events, jokes and sayings she liked, and various home remedies for assorted ailments. Though mostly a reader of magazines, in her later years she came to enjoy the novels of Pearl S. Buck. Her school arithmetic textbook has also survived and shows that she received practical training not only in basic arithmetic but in elementary business math as well.



Figure 1.1. October 1928. My mother posing in her birthday suit.

In contrast, my mother's father was a city boy who, like my mother, was born in Platteville, where he also grew up. Of Irish and English descent, with a smidgen of French thrown in, he was born in 1905, the youngest of three children of Samuel Moore Tracy and Lillian Myrtle Selleck. His father worked at various times for the railroad, as a store clerk, and as a night watchman for a local hotel, as well as serving in the city's volunteer fire department.

Unlike my grandmother, my grandfather did attend high school but dropped out in the middle of his junior year to work in a local automobile garage, where he also helped to load trucks at night with illegal liquor during the early years of prohibition. His exact reasons for terminating his education are not clear. Doubtlessly, like many adolescent boys, he did not like school, but his primary motivation, as well as his choice of employment, was most likely motivated by his desire to get a car, which by the 1920s was becoming a necessity when it came to dating girls. My grandmother later confessed that this was one of his attractions, since it allowed her to get away from the monotony of the farm and to attend evening dances in nearby towns.



Figure 1.2. May 1927. Wedding portrait of Virgil (age 22) and Florence Tracy (age 21).

The fact that he also allowed her to occasionally drive the car also counted heavily in his favor.

My grandfather had bright red hair and was given the nickname of “Red” by his friends. Though he soon became a skilled auto mechanic who was much in demand, he unfortunately also had a temper and a certain lack of social skills when it came to dealing with employers and landlords, especially if they attempted to dictate how



Figure 1.3. Circa 1950. The Matthews farm as seen from the south field. The resided log house is to the far left. The county and access roads, which are beyond the farm house, are not visible because the farm sits on a rise above the roads.

he should do his job or manage his family. As a result, in the early years he moved in rapid succession from job to job and the family from rented apartment to rented apartment, as well as, on occasion, from town to town. Indeed, according to a summary list made by my grandmother in old age, my grandfather held no less than 34 different jobs between dropping out of high school in 1922 and his retirement in 1969, during which time the family lived in at least 23 different apartments and houses. This constant moving from neighborhood to neighborhood and from town to town also meant that my mother had little opportunity as a child to form friendships with neighbor kids and, as a result, she was often anxious and depressed. In later years my grandmother would frequently characterize her as a child as “a real crape hanger,” meaning that she was always full of doom and gloom.



Figure 1.4. Circa 1950. Closeup of the main house on the Matthews' farm as I remember it. This was actually the backside of the house, as the front entrance was never used.

The Matthews Farm

Fortunately, in the early years at least, most of these towns – which would eventually include Platteville, Prairie du Chien, Muscoda, and Fennimore – were within driving distance of the Matthews farm (figure 1.3) and, over time, this began to serve as a “home base,” so to speak, and as a form of backup security for the family – a role which would soon be put to the test. On 30 March 1930 my uncle Montie was born and by July of that year the ever-widening consequences of the Great Depression of 1929 had spread to Southern Wisconsin, resulting not only in my grandfather losing his current job but in his being unable to find another, thus forcing the young family, now in dire economic straits, to seek refuge at the Matthews farm. Other relatives that were also affected by the depression did the same, and soon there were 14 people living in the original farm house (figure 1.4) and attempting to survive off the farm's meager income. To help relieve this situation, as well as gain some privacy for his own family, my grandfather purchased, for the staggering sum of \$10.00, the log



Figure 1.5. The log house in which my mother and her family lived from 1930-1934.

house that my great grandfather had built around 1903 on the Joseph Matthews' farm for my great grandmother. It was here that my great-grandparents and their four oldest children lived until 1909, when they were finally able to purchase a farm of their own, and it was in this house that my grandmother and great aunt Flossie were born.

That fall, after the harvest, my grandfather and great-grandfather disassembled the house log by log, carefully numbered the pieces, and dragged them, with the help of the neighbors, by horse and sleigh to the current Matthews farm, where they were reassembled (figure 1.5). After replacing the floor, which had rotted, repairing the tin roof, and panelling the interior walls with fiber board, it was finally ready for occupancy and, on 20 December 1930, my mother's family was able to move in.

A floor plan of this house, drawn by my mother from memory in old age, reveals that it consisted of just two rooms, one downstairs for the kitchen and living area and one upstairs for the sleeping quarters. There was no interior plumbing so the family had to rely on the usual

outhouse and on the farm's well and hand pump for water. Since there was also no electricity, they used kerosene lamps for light. Indeed, both of these conditions were equally true of the main farm house well into the late 1940s. As for the conditions with respect to heat during the winter months, these were later described by my mother in a short biographical sketch of my grandmother which she wrote in 1996:

I remember that on cold winter morns the drinking water in the pail would be frozen and sometimes also the bread. However, we slept on feather beds for warmth and wore warm underclothing and, of course, a wood stove provided heat during the day.

It was in this house that my uncle Larry was born on 25 March 1932, just as his mother had been 26 years earlier.

During the years they lived in the log house, my grandfather was able to eventually bring in some income by free-lancing as an auto mechanic and by working for various government programs initiated by the Roosevelt administration in an attempt to provide some form of economic relief, including the WPA (Works Project Administration), and the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). While with the WPA he drove – much to the worry of my grandmother – the dynamite truck for the construction crews, and while with the CCC he brought home the recipe for a tramp's stew, known in our family as "Mulligan Stew." He had tasted this in the CCC camp and had liked it so much that he asked the cook for the recipe and it remained a family standard for many years.

Nevertheless, there were still long downtimes with no employment and, during one of these, he and my great uncle Oscar (figure 1.6) decided to drive out west to see if the employment situation there was brighter. In recognition of the questionable condition of many roads at that time, they had the foresight to stash an extra set of spare tires in the back seat of Oscar's Model A, after which they made for



Figure 1.6. My grandfather (*left*) and great uncle Oscar Matthews (*right*) posing together some time before their cross-country drive out west.

Denver and then for the state of Washington, where they found work picking apples, but barely earned enough to cover the costs of the return trip. All of this occurred roughly two years before the well-known waves of Okies began their westward migrations in their attempts to escape the infamous “Dust Bowl” – an event that has since become an iconic symbol of the 1930s.

On the Move Again

In August of 1934 my grandfather was finally able to once again find full employment and the family moved back to Platteville in time for my mother to enter 1st grade. However, the family apartment was too far from the grade school for my mother to walk, so during the week



Figure 1.7. My mother's paternal grandmother, Lillian Tracy, as she appeared near the end of her life. There are no surviving photos of her dating from the 1930s

she would stay with her paternal grandmother, Lillian Tracy (figure 1.7), who lived much closer to the school. This suited Lillian just fine as she was delighted to have a pretty little granddaughter to dress up and show off to the neighbors. Indeed, she insisted that my mother at this age both looked and talked like the child film star, Shirley Temple, but then again, as my uncle Clyde has observed, what six-year-old girl in 1934 didn't look and talk like Shirley Temple?

However problems soon appeared. Lillian looked down on her son's in-laws – the Matthews – whom she dismissed as just simple “farm folk,” and she especially despised my mother's aunt Ruby and her family, who lived near Lillian's home in Platteville. Ruby had married a man named Raymond Tindell who, even before their marriage, had a reputation as a rogue and womanizer. Her father had opposed the marriage, but Ruby had insisted and was rewarded with



Figure 1.8. Summers on the Matthews farm, circa 1936. *From left to right:* My uncle Montie (age 6); my mother's first cousin, Colleen Tindell (age 8); my mother (age 8); and my uncle Larry (age 6). The baby in front is my mother's first cousin, Huey Tindell (age 6 months). Note my great-grandfather's beehives in the background.

five kids and a life of squalor, since Tindell would periodically disappear and leave her and the children destitute. On several occasions great-grandfather Matthews had him hunted down by the sheriff and jailed for nonsupport, but it made no difference.

Ruby's oldest daughter, Colleen, was the same age as my mother and the two had played together during the time in the log house and would continue to be companions during summer visits to the farm (figure 1.8) – a relationship that would last at least until the end of high school and their respective marriages. There would eventually be other cousins on the Matthews side as well, but they would be between eight and twenty four years younger than my mother and thus more suitable as playmates for my younger aunts and uncles. Being the same age, my mother and Colleen attended the same school and

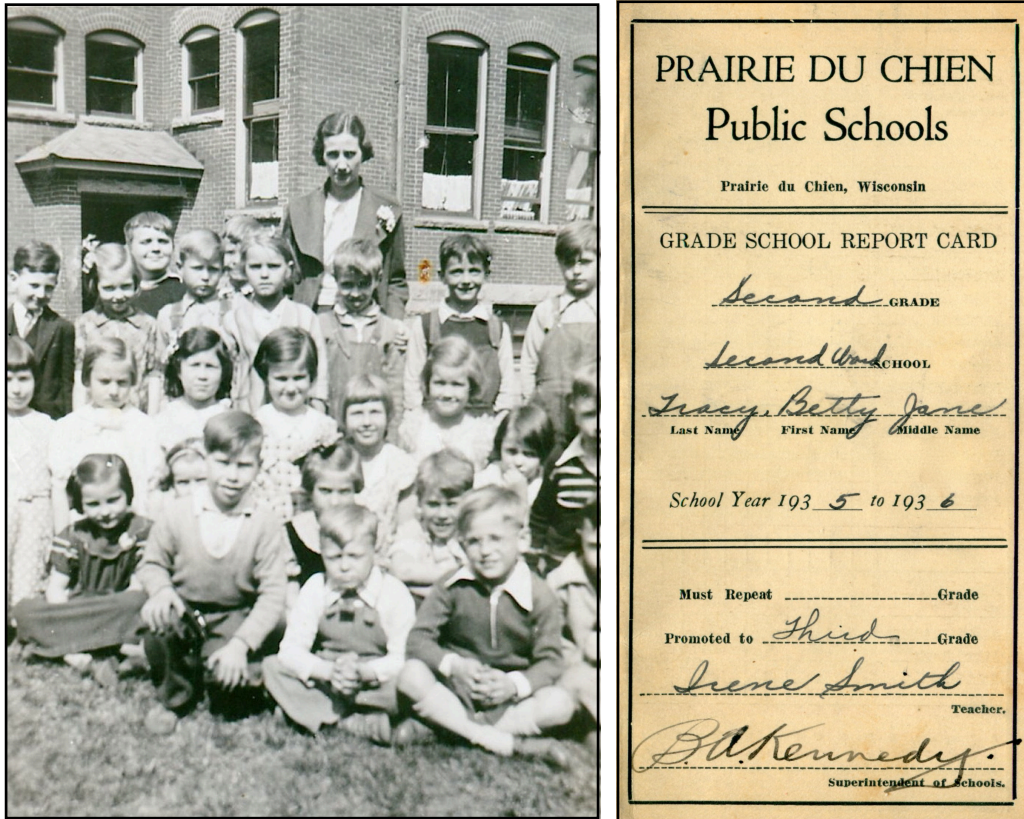


Figure 1.9. *Left:* Miss Smith’s 2nd grade class, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, Spring of 1936. My mother is barely visible peaking over the shoulder of the boy in the front row left who has suddenly decided to rise up on his haunches. *Right:* The front of my mother’s report card for Miss Smith’s class in which she received four A’s and three B’s.

naturally wanted to play together after school as well. But Lillian began to actively oppose this, telling my mother not to associate with such “white trash.” This was very confusing to a six-year old and generally ended with my mother in tears.

This unfortunate situation was finally resolved when my grandfather moved the family to Prairie du Chien that May, where my mother completed her last term of the 1st grade. With a population, like Platteville, of roughly 4000 in 1930 and a location at the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers, the town of

Prairie du Chien could trace its origins back to the French fur trade at the end of the 17th century. But here the problems created by Lillian's social snobbery were replaced by those created by my grandfather's inherent restlessness.

In September of 1935 my mother entered Miss Smith's 2nd grade class at the Second Ward School in Prairie du Chien (figure 1.9) from whom she received four A's and three B's for her final grades despite an absentee rate of 68 half days for the first semester and 45 half days for the second semester. The causes of this dismal attendance record are not known but they doubtlessly reflected my mother's unhappy emotional state. It was, however, the next school year that would prove to be the most disruptive. On 10 September 1936 my aunt Kathleen was born and the next month my grandfather suddenly moved the family back to Platteville, where my mother began the 3rd grade, and then in November to Muscoda, Wisconsin, a village of roughly 900 located further up the Wisconsin river in the northeast corner of Grant County, and then back to Prairie du Chien again at the end of December, where my mother completed the 3rd grade.

My mother's strongest memory of her brief sojourn in Muscoda was how crude the farm girls in the village school were, since they firmly believed that they knew all about sex and the facts of life and that was all they were interested in talking about during recess. Yet there is no evidence of these disruptions on my mother's report card for her final semester in Prairie du Chien during which she received nine A's and one B and was absent only 12 half days.

For the years 1937-1940, during which my mother attended grades four through six, the family remained in Prairie du Chien, and my uncle Clyde was born there on 27 February 1939. In response to this period of stabilization, my mother's grades shot to straight A's for all three years.



Figure 1.10. Two examples of my mother’s grade-school art work. *Left:* “Pussy Willows,” circa 1936, 3rd grade, age 8. *Right:* “Whimsical Easter Bunny.” circa 1937, 4th grade, age 9.

Elementary Education in the 1930s

It is of some interest to examine my mother’s report cards from this period in more detail, all of which were saved by my grandmother, along with a selection of my mother’s grade-school art work (figure 1.10). Each school year was divided into two semesters and each semester, in turn, into three six-week terms. Letter grades were recorded for each term, a final exam and summary grade for each semester, and a final grade for the entire year, for a total of eleven grade entries per subject (figure 1.11). The left side of the report card listed 16 academic subjects apparently covering grades K-12, since letter grades for only a select few are reported each year and several are gender specific subjects, such as domestic science, agriculture, and manual training, that were generally not taught until either junior or

My Mother

| ATTENDANCE DEPARTMENT STUDIES | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | 1st Term | 2nd Term | 3rd Term | Exam. | Sem. Ave. | 4th Term | 5th Term |
| Reading | B | A | A | E | A | A | A |
| Spelling | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| Arithmetic | e | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| Gram. and Lang. | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| Geography | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| History | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| Civics | | | | | | | |
| Physiology | | | | | | | |
| Agriculture | | | | | | | |
| Domestic Science | | | | | | | |
| Manual Training | | | | | | | |
| Drawing | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| Music | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| Writing | B | B | B | B | B | B | B |
| Phonics | | | | | | | |
| Physical Ed. | | | | | | | |
| Effort | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| Half Days Absent | 0 | 0 | 0 | - | 9 | 0 | 3 |
| Times Tardy | 0 | 0 | 0 | - | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Depoiment | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |

A—Excellent; B—Good; C—Fair; D—Unsatisfactory or Poor; F—So far below what is expected that the work should be made up or repeated.

N. B.—This Mark X is placed opposite the trait to which attention is called.

| ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL WORK | | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | 1st Term | 2nd Term | 3rd Term | 4th Term | 5th Term |
| Indolent | | | | | |
| Wastes Time | | | | | |
| Work is Carelessly Done | | | | | |
| Copies; Gets too Much Help | | | | | |
| Gives Up too Easily | | | | | |
| Shows Improvement | | | | | |
| Very Commendable | X | X | X | X | X |
| RECITATIONS | | | | | |
| Comes Poorly Prepared | | | | | |
| Appears Not to Try | | | | | |
| Seldom Does Well | | | | | |
| Inattentive | | | | | |
| Capable of Doing Much Better | | | | | |
| Promotion in Danger | | | | | |
| Work Shows a Falling Off | | | | | |
| Work of Grade too Difficult | | | | | |
| Showing Improvement | | | | | |
| Very Satisfactory | X | X | X | X | X |
| CONDUCT | | | | | |
| Restless; Inattentive | | | | | |
| Inclined to Mischief | | | | | |
| Rude; Discourteous at Times | | | | | |
| Annoys Others | | | | | |
| Whispers too Much | | | | | |
| Shows Improvement | | | | | |
| Very Good | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tuition | | | | | |

Figure 1.11. The interior of my mother's 4th grade report card for the Prairie du Chien school system.

senior high school. In light of all the recent talk about art and music courses being cut from the modern school curriculum for lack of funding, it is interesting to discover that my mother took these subjects in all six grades at Prairie du Chien. Rather what is shocking by today's standards is the total absence of any science courses.

Another subject that my mother took all six years was "writing" or penmanship. In first and second grades this meant block printing but from third grade on it involved learning cursive, also known as longhand or script. My mother was taught using the Palmer method rather than the Spencer method that I learned, and the instruction booklet she was required to purchase in the third grade still survives (figure 1.12). As an adult her handwriting was beautiful and well into

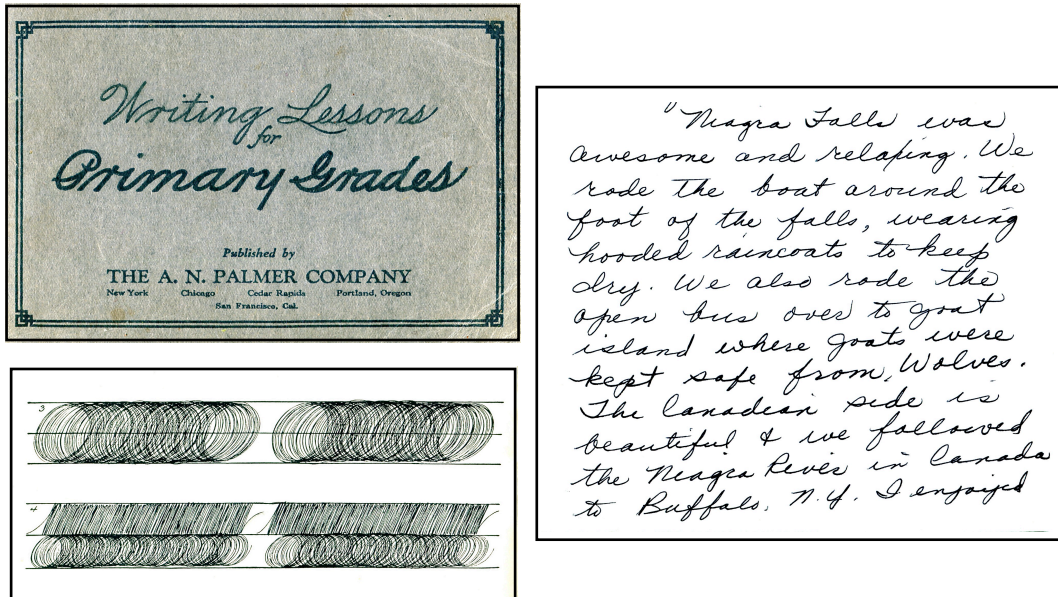


Figure 1.12. *Above Left:* The cover of my mother’s 3rd grade booklet on handwriting using the Palmer method. *Below left:* Typical wrist exercises similar to those she did for years on the note pad next to the phone. *Right:* A sample of my mother’s handwriting in later life describing a trip to Niagara Falls in 1984. This was done on unlined paper – whence the upward slant. Why she thought the falls were “relaxing” is a mystery. “Intimidating” perhaps, but relaxing never.

her thirties she continued to practice the wrist exercises she had learned as a child on the note pad next to the phone when taking messages for my father’s sign company.

The right side of the report card listed three categories relating to student behavior – attitude, recitation (i.e. class participation), and conduct – and each of these, in turn, listed between six and ten possible evaluations of which the teacher was required to check one. My mother always received the highest mark in each category – “very commendable” for attitude, “very satisfactory” for recitation, and “very good” for conduct. Some of the less laudatory evaluation choices are rather shocking by today’s standards when parents are hypersensitive about any criticisms of their child’s conduct. One can only imagine their response if their child came home with a report



Figure 1.13. A quick sketch made by my mother at age 12 of the house they rented at 1520 Fourth Street in Fennimore.

card claiming that he or she was “indolent and wastes time, does careless work,” or comes “poorly prepared, appears not to try, seldom does well, is inattentive, is in danger of not being promoted, finds the work of the grade too difficult,” or is “restless and inattentive, inclined to mischief, rude and discourteous, annoys others, whispers too much,” etc. I somehow doubt that most modern parents would appreciate being told such unvarnished truths about their child’s behavior.

Fennimore and Marshfield

Unfortunately, by 1940 my grandfather was growing restless once more and in August of that year the brief interlude of stability in Prairie du Chien was finally disrupted when he moved the family to Fennimore Wisconsin, a town in Grant County of around 1600 inhabitants located roughly 26 miles north of Lancaster (figure 1.13). Here my mother attended the 7th grade. It is apparent from my mother’s report card that she was deeply upset by this move as her grades plummeted from the straight A’s of the previous three years to



Figure 1.14. The house (No. 214) in Marshfield at the corner of 4th and Walnut where my grandparents occupied the upstairs apartment from 1941-1950 and again from 1953-1956. Now torn down.

eleven B's, one A, and one A-.

By September of 1941 the family was on the move once more, this time to the city of Marshfield, Wisconsin, in the center of the state. On several accounts this move was different from the others. Located roughly 155 miles from Lancaster and with a population of 10,359 in 1940, or more than 2½ times that of the larger towns they had previously lived in, it broke the cycle of moving from one backwater southern Wisconsin town to another within easy driving distance of the Matthews farm. In addition, not only did my grandfather manage to stay in the same town for the next nine years – sufficient time for my mother to finish both junior and senior high school, get married and have her first two children – the family also managed to remain in the same apartment, an upstairs affair located in a large Victorian house at the corner of 4th and Walnut Streets (figure



Figure 1.15. The family completed. Marshfield, Wisconsin, circa 1943. *Left to right:* My uncle Larry (age 11), my uncle Montie (age 13), my uncle Clyde (age 4), my mother (age 15), and my aunt Kathleen (age 7).

1.14). A wonderful studio portrait of my mother and her siblings taken two years after this move by a professional photographer (figure 1.15) shows them dressed in their Sunday best and apparently more than content with their new home.



Figure 1.16. The fourth street entrance to the 1926 addition to Purdy Junior High School, Marshfield, Wisconsin, as it looks today. No longer used as a school, it has since been cut into apartments for the elderly.

Junior and Senior High School

Even more important was the fact that the school system in Marshfield, because of its larger size, was far superior to those of Prairie du Chien and Fennimore and consequently offered many additional opportunities previously unavailable. Under its stimulus my mother once again began to excel academically and, for the first time, socially as well. Immediately upon the family's arrival in Marshfield that September my mother entered the 8th grade at Purdy Junior High School (figure 1.16). Built in what was called "the collegiate" style, this school was completed in 1920 and further enlarged in 1926. Named in honor of Willard D. Purdy, a local Marshfield boy who had died a hero in World War I, it spanned an entire block of Chestnut Avenue from 3rd to 4th Street and was located just one block from the 4th Street apartment.

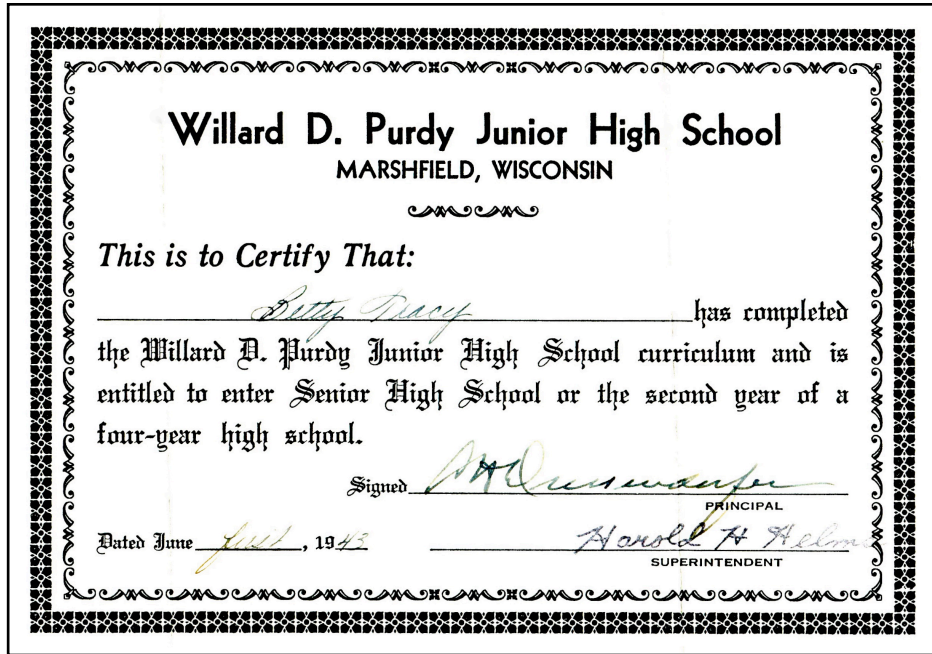


Figure 1.17. My mother's graduation certificate from Willard D. Purdy Junior High School.

As just implied, my mother once again began earning straight A's and by the end of the 9th grade was one of the top ranking students in the school and the recipient of its gold pin award, as described in a letter from the school principal to my grandfather dated 29 April 1943:

Dear Parent:

It is a pleasure for me to inform you about the excellent work your daughter, Betty Jane, has done in school this year. Because of her high scholastic attainment, excellent school citizenship and active participation in extra curricular affairs, she is eligible to receive the "Gold M[arshfield]" pin. This is the highest honor this school can award anyone. It may be of interest to you to know that only fifteen of the three-hundred and seventy-five students enrolled were able to qualify for this award.



Figure 1.18. A picture postcard of Marshfield Senior High School, circa 1953. Alas, though crowned by a dome for an astronomical observatory, a defect in the architect's plans made it impossible to mount a proper telescope. All of my mother's siblings also attended high school here. With the closing of Purdy, it now serves as the city's junior high school.

I wish to congratulate you on your daughter's achievement. I am sure that Betty Jane's record will always be superior.

L. H. Dressendorfer
Principal

In fact the surviving award certificates show that my mother had been awarded a gold pin the previous year as well.

After graduation from Purdy (figure 1.17) my mother transferred in the fall of 1943, along with the rest of her class, to the senior high school where she finished grades 10-12. This was a much larger and newer building that had been completed in 1940 (figure 1.18). It was done in a sort of industrial "art deco" style and sported a tower over

the main entrance that was crowned with an astronomical observatory, though this was apparently only decorative as access was via a spiral staircase in the center of the floor which made it impossible to mount a proper telescope. Located on the east side of town, it was much further from the Fourth Street apartment than Purdy, but still within walking distance. Here, as we will shortly see, the academic successes of junior high would be repeated in spades.

The War

The involvement of the United States in World War II began during my mother's first year at Purdy and ended at the finish of her junior year of high school. Many years later I asked her if she remembered when and where she first heard that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. She was just 13 at the time and, since the attack had occurred on a Sunday morning, she was at home. She said that she was in the kitchen of the Fourth Street apartment when, sometime around noon, she began fiddling with the small radio that my grandfather kept on a shelf near the pantry door in an attempt to find some music and instead stumbled onto a news broadcast telling of the attack.

The war years in Marshfield were typical of those in thousands of American towns and cities. Though only six when the war ended, my uncle Clyde remembers the air raid drills. When the steam driven air raid siren at the power plant across from Wildwood Park sounded, everyone was required to pull down their "green" blackout shades so as to supposedly make the town invisible at night to the imaginary German and Japanese bombers overhead. He also remembers that my grandmother illegally traded ration stamps with one of her neighbors so she could increase the meat allotment for her family of seven, though my aunt Kathie recalls being fed lots of bread and potatoes, with baked beans each Sunday for dinner, and no milk for drinking.

During these years convoys of troops, mostly stationed at Camp Douglas in the southwest corner of the state, and who were en route to or from various training exercises in northern Wisconsin (such as ski patrol), would periodically pass through Marshfield. These convoys would naturally attract crowds of kids and teenagers, and my uncle Larry recalls that the passing troops would frequently toss K-rations to the children in the watching crowds, though he can no longer remember whether these were the breakfast, lunch or supper versions. All three contained some sort of candy or chocolate that would have appealed to the children, but the supper version also contained an allotment of four cigarettes, which may have appealed even more, at least to the more adventurous among them.

The war years, with their constant demand for recycled materials, were also something of a financial gold mine for my uncles Larry and Montie, who were nine and eleven years old, respectively, when the war started. The most lucrative trade was in recycled metal, but, as Larry recalls, the sources of smaller pieces of metal that could be collected and transported by two small boys were rapidly exhausted, so the two of them had to content themselves instead with collecting recycled paper and cardboard, which they sold, at 50 cents per 100 pounds, to Shapiro's junk and scrap yard opposite the old Washington Grade School on Central Avenue. This they would obtain by periodically patrolling the alleys behind the stores on Central Avenue or by volunteering to clear out the empty cardboard boxes left on the loading docks after the stores had unpacked the various goods needed to restock their shelves.

During this same period my grandfather dealt with the rationing of rubber and gasoline by simply not owning his own car. Within Marshfield itself, everyone walked, whether to work, to school, or to do the weekly shopping. If the family needed long distance transportation to southern Wisconsin to visit relatives, he would either borrow a car from work or from a neighbor.

I suspect that my mother did not pay much attention to the details of the war until her junior year of high school. She had begun dating my father in 9th grade and, after his enlistment in the Marine Corp in July of 1944, she, for obvious reasons, began to closely follow events in the Pacific theater, but that is a story for the next chapter.

As for the European theater, she would often tell the incident of her high school German teacher. War jingoism during World War I reached such a pitch that the teaching of German in American schools was banned, but during World War II cooler heads apparently prevailed and my mother was able to take a German course her junior year of high school. Her teacher was a thin nervous man by the name of Alfred Hanisch who happened to sport a small moustache. The symbolic significance of this unfortunate choice in personal appearance was not lost on the more aggressive boys in the class, who seemed to feel that it was their patriotic duty to torment him at every opportunity as if he were none other than Adolf Hitler himself. Their favorite device, when discussing the geography of Germany, was to refuse to acknowledge Herr Hanisch's insistence that the free city of Danzig should be placed in Prussia rather than Poland and, on at least one occasion, they managed to work him into such a lather over this issue that he actually fainted in front of the class. I note with interest that poor Mr. Hanisch was no longer listed among the faculty in the class yearbook for my mother's senior year.

There were also more subtle issues involving two boys in her class that my mother had first met in the 8th grade and who would continue on with her through high school. Both were always mentioned by my mother in later years when talking about the war years in Marshfield, though perhaps their significance became apparent to her only after the war was over and all of the gruesome facts were finally made public.

The first was a boy named Herbert Akioka (1928-2011) (figure 1.19). As may be inferred from his surname, his father, Herbert Sr.,



Figure 1.19. The Akioka family. *Back, left to right: sons Wally and Herb Jr. Front, left to right: Dorothy and Herb Sr.* From a photo belonging to my grandparents.

was of Japanese descent and had moved to the Marshfield area from Hawaii sometime around 1920. His mother, Dorothy, on the other hand, was the daughter of a local Danish-American farmer named Hansen and had grown up near Nasonville to the southwest of Marshfield, as had my grandmother Jensen. Indeed, the two had known one another as children, and I can recall many years later, after they had both been widows for several years, picking up Herb's mother (at my own mother's instigation) at her tiny house on Peach Avenue and driving her down to my grandmother's house, where the two spent the



Figure 1.20. *Left:* A caricature of Ernst Epstein by Herb Jr. done his senior year for the 1946 high school yearbook and signed using the new family name of Kane. *Right:* A self-caricature of Herb done his junior year inside my mother’s copy of the 1945 high school yearbook and signed using his original family name of Akioka.

afternoon in the kitchen eating *Kuchen* and drinking coffee in accord with Danish custom while conversing in the Danish of their childhood.

Like my maternal grandfather, Herb Sr. was a certified Ford mechanic and the two had worked at the same Marshfield garage and become friends. Herb Sr. would later serve in the Pacific as a translator and mechanic for the U.S. Navy and after the war would obtain a degree in optometry and begin a practice in Marshfield that would last until his death in 1970. However, before doing so, he would change the family name in late 1945 from Akioka to Kane (pronounced “Connie” by my grandparents). This was almost certainly done to avoid damage to his future optometry practice as a result of possible discrimination incited by the postwar revelations of the horrors of both the infamous Bataan Death March and the treatment of American prisoners of war by the Japanese, since the

average bigot would be unlikely to differentiate between someone of Japanese descent from Hawaii and someone from mainland Japan.

Herb Jr., on the other hand, was a talented artist, who served as the class cartoonist throughout junior and senior high school (figure 1.20). He would go on to study at the Art Institute of Chicago and would have a successful career as a commercial artist and illustrator, first in Chicago and later in Hawaii, where he would become famous for his depictions of early Hawaiian mythology and history. His later career was always followed with interest by both my mother and my grandparents.

The second was a boy of Jewish descent with a slight German accent by the name of Ernst Epstein (1928-2011)(figure 1.20). His father, Stephan Epstein, was a prominent German dermatologist who, before the war, had been head of the Departments of Radiology and Allergology at the Dermatological Clinic in Breslau, Germany, (now Wroclaw, Poland) until Nazi persecution of the Jews led to his dismissal in 1935. Hearing of his situation, a group of doctors at the Marshfield Clinic offered to sponsor his immigration to the United States if he would agree to establish a Department of Dermatology for them. Thus it was that Dr. Epstein, his wife Elsbeth, and his two sons, Wolfgang and Ernst, found themselves in the relative wilderness of Marshfield, Wisconsin – a place I'm sure they had never heard of until fate conspired to deposit them there.

According to my mother, the entire worldly possessions of the Epsteins arrived in Marshfield in a huge wooden crate large enough to live in if necessary. After it was emptied, it remained abandoned in a field on the edge of town for the duration of the war as mute testimony to the fate of the Jews of Europe. Like his father, Ernst would go on to become a prominent dermatologist, serving until his death as Clinical Professor of Dermatology at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco.



Figure 1.21. Spring 1944. My mother (center) clowning around with her high school chums Rita Koller (left) and Deloris Barron (right).

Close Friends At Last

As already hinted, in Marshfield my mother not only blossomed academically but socially as well. An autograph book dating from her first year at Purdy is crammed with entries by her fellow students and the same is true of her surviving high school yearbooks. More importantly, the new found stability of school and home allowed her to develop for the first time (with the possible exception of her cousin Colleen) close friendships with two girls in her class – Rita Koller and Deloris Barron (figure 1.21). They would remain friends for the rest of their lives, interacting over the years via letters, birthday cards, class reunions and occasional visits.

According to my aunt Kathie, who was in grade school at the time but who shared a bedroom with my mother, she would hang out with her new friends from the moment school let out until 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening when she would wake Kathy on finally returning home (remember this was before television so children of grade school age were generally in bed by 8 o'clock). She would then work late into the night on her homework. This self-imposed schedule and obsession with perfect grades eventually led to what my grandmother would later characterize as a near nervous breakdown, though my aunt strongly disagrees:

A nervous breakdown, my foot, she was merely suffering from sleep deprivation!

A Possible Career Not Followed

During these years my mother also developed a possible career interest in the subject of dress design. This had begun as far back as the 8th grade when she did a project for her domestic science class in the form of a small scrapbook of 17 pages containing selected drawings cut from various fashion and sewing magazines, as well as three original drawings of her own, illustrating select principles of dress design. Most of these concerned the effects on overall appearance of various fabric pattern and color choices, such as vertical versus horizontal versus oblique lines, light and dark balance, shade gradation, transition radiation, repetition and opposition, harmony and complementarity, the use of neutral colors, etc. Each example was accompanied by a short commentary by my mother on the underlying principles being illustrated. It was all rather technical and, not surprisingly, she received a grade of A+ for it.

This was later followed by a commercial correspondence course on the same subject (figure 1.22). When she talked of this later in life,

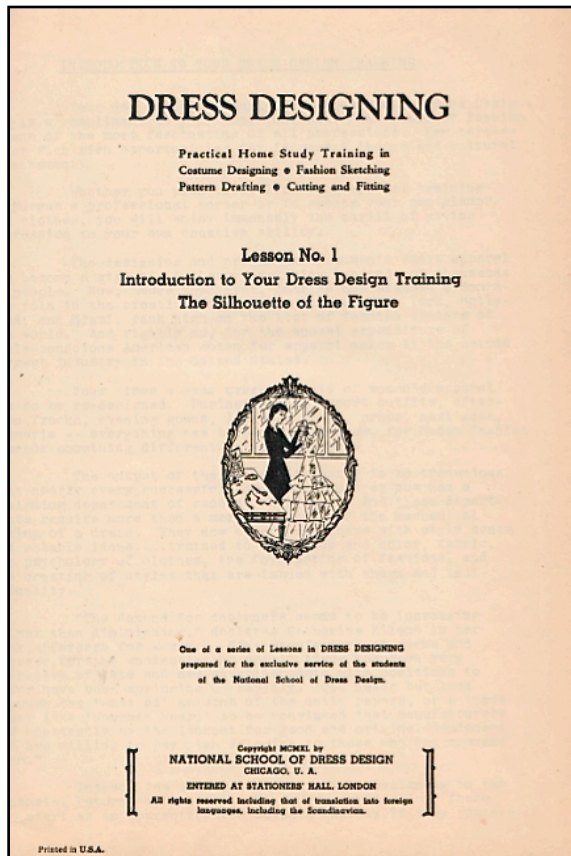


Figure 1.22. Title page of the first lesson for the correspondence course on dress design that my mother began in July of 1945.

I was always given the impression that this was something she had done after graduation and as a possible career interest. Consequently I was rather surprised to discover, on finding both the course and accompanying tools while cleaning out the house after her death, that she had actually begun it in July of the summer between her junior and senior years of high school. It consisted of 26 lessons, of which she was able to complete only 14 before high school began once more. She was always fashion conscious within certain conservative limits, and I now suspect that all of this had more to do with a typical teenage interest in increasing the size and variety of her wardrobe than with serious career considerations.

Nevertheless, she could make clothes from scratch using patterns and occasionally did so for both herself and her children after her

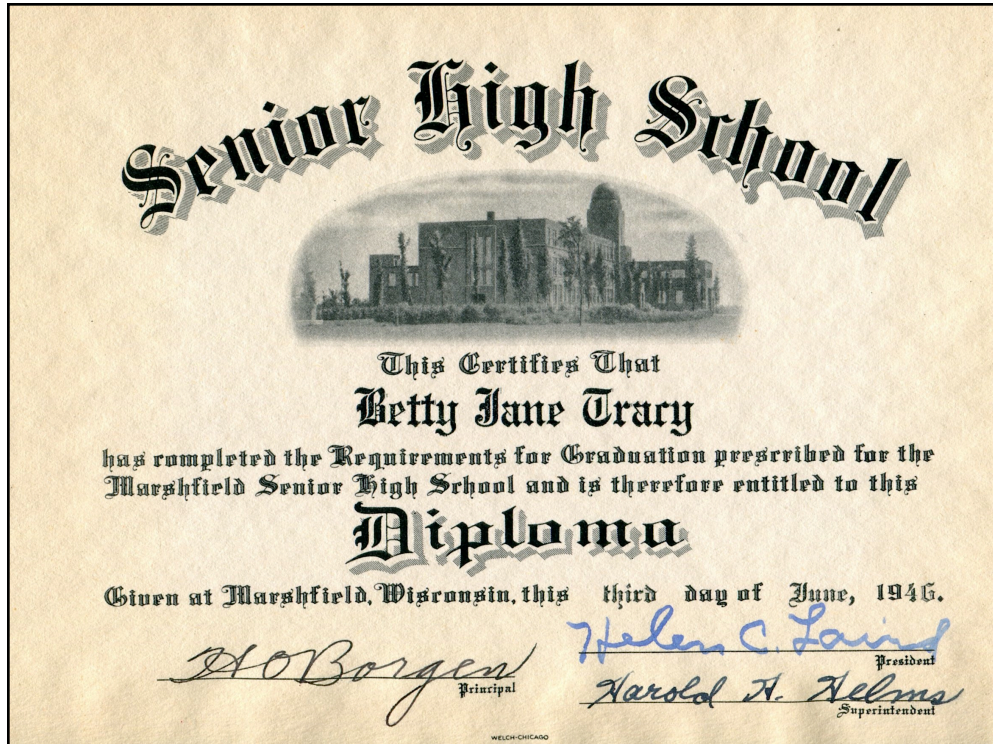


Figure 1.23. My mother's high school graduation diploma. The Helen C. Laird, whose signature appears in blue ink, was the mother of a local Marshfield boy made good named Melvin R. Laird, who later went on to be Secretary of Defense under Richard Nixon.

marriage and, starting as early as the 3rd grade, taught my sister Linda to do the same. Her own mother was a skilled seamstress who, because of limited family finances, often had to alter secondhand clothing to fit both my mother and her siblings, as well as my brother and myself when we were very young and growing out of things at a frightful rate.

Closely related is a surviving oversized scrapbook with elaborate gold covers containing large colored photographs of various female movie stars of the 1940s clipped from magazines. These she collected as a teenager, largely, I think, as role models for hair styles and overall personal appearance. Interestingly, her mother had done the same as a teenager back in the 1920s, though, lacking a gold covered com-

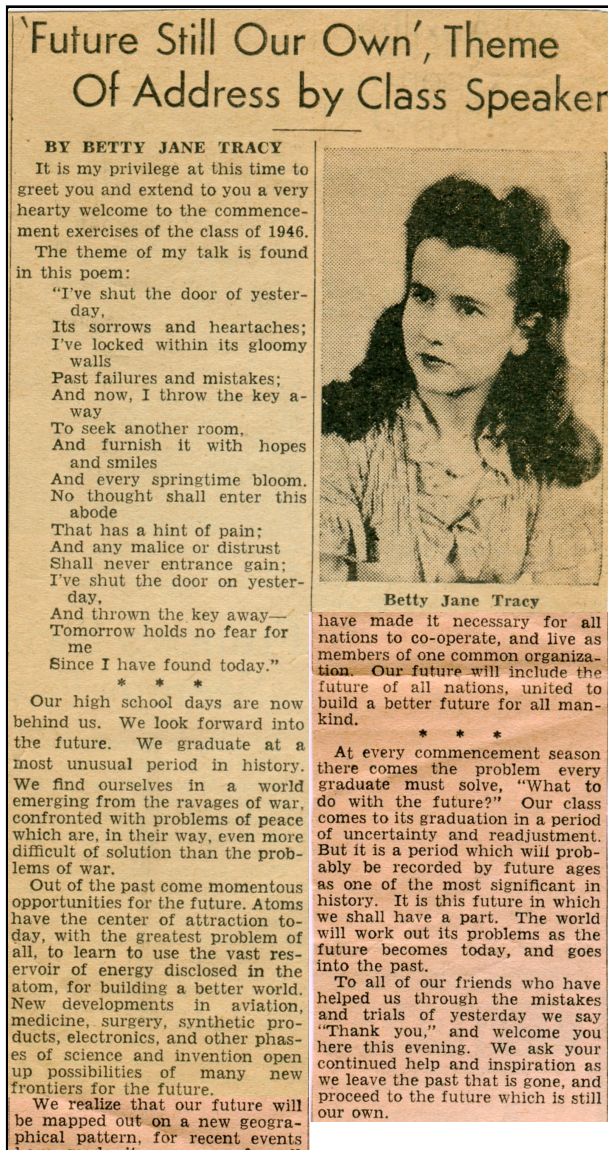


Figure 1.24. My mother's commencement speech as printed in the *Marshfield News-Herald*.

mercial scrapbook, she had to make do with pasting her magazine clippings in an old geography book.

Top of Her Class

My mother graduated from Marshfield Senior High School on 03 June 1946 at the top of her class of 155 (figure 1.23). Her last semester of high school, in the spring of 1946, was a busy one. In February she was one of three girls nominated for the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.) Good Citizenship Award. In March both she and Herb Kane were among the 25 students in their class elected to the National Honor Society. As usual, my mother had earned straight A's. In looking over her surviving class records, I note that she

took mostly courses in English, literature, history, civics, geography, and foreign languages (Latin, Spanish, and German). However, beyond a course in biology and one in algebra her junior year, there are no courses listed in either science or math.

In turn, the Marshfield chapter of the National Honor Society chose my mother and Herb to be the speakers at the class commencement ceremony on 03 June. Herb's speech was entitled "A New Era Dawns" and my mother's "The Future Still Our Own." Both speeches would be printed in full in the *Marshfield News-Herald* (figure 1.24). It is interesting to note that, in her talk, my mother made an oblique reference to the future role of atomic energy – a topic of considerable interest at the time as a result of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the previous August.

As graduation day approached, my mother's social calendar began to fill up. On 16 May the Senior Class Banquet was held at the Marshfield National Guard Armory, followed by final exams for seniors on 28 and 29 May. The next day, on 30 May, there was a Senior Class Picnic at Wildwood Park, and on 02 June a Sunday Baccalaureate Church Service in the Purdy Auditorium.

Several personal lists relating to her school activities have also survived. One summarizes my mother's expenses for her final semester of high school, which appear almost ridiculous by today's standards:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| <i>Graduation Gown</i> | \$1.50 |
| <i>Yearbook</i> | \$4.00 |
| <i>Graduation Announcements</i> | \$2.88 |
| <i>Calling Cards</i> | \$1.50 |
| <i>Class Photos</i> | \$19.00 |
| <i>Spanish Textbook</i> | \$1.00 |
| <i>First Aid Booklet</i> | \$0.15 |
| <i>Home Nursing Booklet</i> | \$0.60 |
| <i>Banquet Ticket</i> | \$1.00 |

Yet a second list, made by my obviously proud grandmother, summarizes her daughter's activities and awards:

My Mother

- * President of the Spanish Club
- * *Vice President of the Latin Club*
- * *Secretary of the Senior Class*
- * *Member of the Debate Club*
- * *Member of the Library Club*
- * *Member of G.A.A. (Girls Athletic Association)*
- * *Voted “Best Girl Student”*
- * *Voted “Girl Most Likely to Succeed”*
- * *Twice recipient of the Gold M Pin*
- * *Recipient of the A. Herff-Jones Scholastic Award*
- * *Elected to the National Honor Society*
- * *Her picture appears 13 times in the yearbook and once in the newspaper.*
- * *Received 65 calling cards and sent out 24 announcements*
- * *Today she got word that there is a scholarship award for her that she can use at any state teacher’s college or at the university.*

The situation was perhaps best summarized by a comment written by a fellow student inside my mother’s copy of the 1946 yearbook:

Loads and lots of luck to the girl with a million brain cells and a million friends !!

The final item in my grandmother’s list – the scholarship – merits a few additional details. My mother was informed of this via post-cards, one dated 04 June asking her to meet with the school principal in order to discuss available scholarships, and one dated 21 June which read:

This certifies that Betty Jane Tracy was graduated with the class of 1946 from the Marshfield Senior High School with an average of A, and is eligible for a scholarship grant having ranked 1 in scholarship.

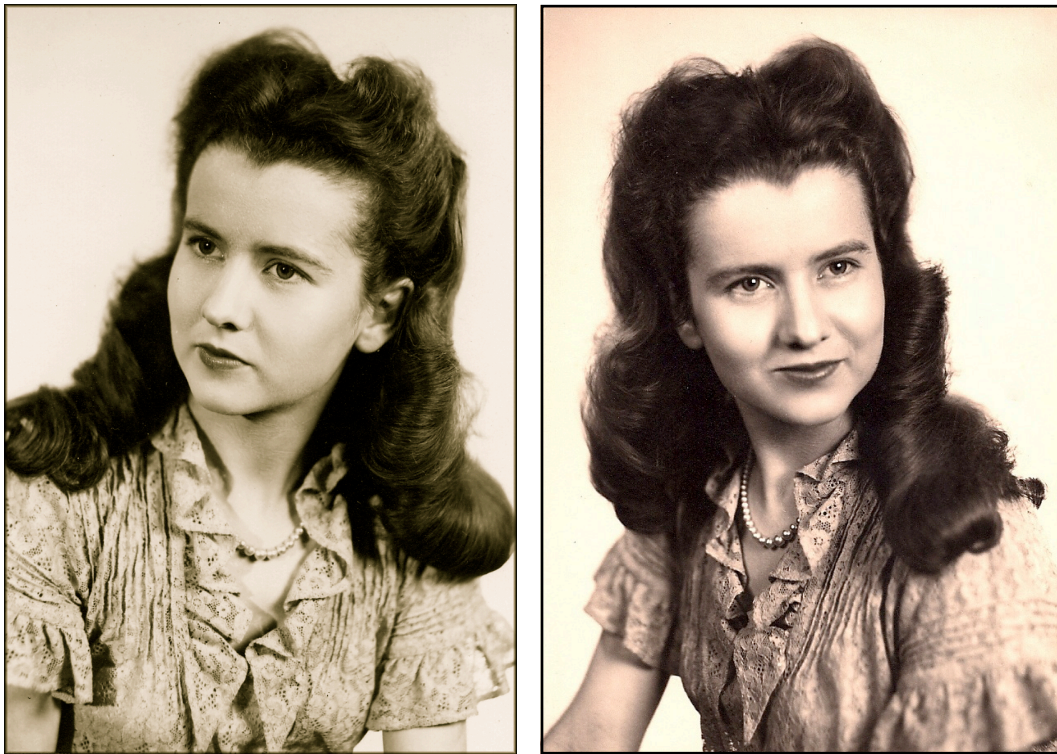


Figure 1.25. Spring 1946, at age 18. Two versions of my mother's high school graduation photo.

Yet a third card arrived on 21 July informing her that, because of overcrowding on the Madison campus due to the influx of returning veterans, the University of Wisconsin Extension would, for the first time, be offering the entire freshman year of university in Marshfield itself starting on 23 September 1946. This option should have appealed to my mother, as there is no doubt that she would have felt extreme anxiety at the thought of having to leave home in order to attend college and of having to deal with the financial costs of living on her own. But, in the end, all of this was moot. Though in later years, when talking of her time in high school, she would always mention the scholarship offer, she never made use of it, since by graduation, as we will see in the next chapter, she had already made other plans.