

(MARION) YVONNE RILEY ROTHERT  
Born July 26, 1919 - Davenport, Iowa

Early in 1921, we moved to Madison, Wis., where my father was a salesman for the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. (See separate sheets about Harold F. Riley and Marion Nielson Riley)

My parents were great story-tellers and readers, and I had learned to read before I started kindergarten at age 5. Kindergarten was a wonderful experience for me, partly, I'm sure, because I was one of only two students who could read, and the teacher thought that was quite an accomplishment, in those days before "Sesame Street," etc. I had exciting times with my maternal grandparents, Andrew and Mary Nielson, in Madison.

Just before I started first grade, we moved to Mason City, Iowa, where my father's parents lived. By this time our family had grown to three children, with the birth of my sister Lorraine in 1922 and my brother Harold Jr. in 1924. For a while, we lived with my grandparents, "Fred" and "Jenny" Riley. They were both good story-tellers, too.

I remember that while we lived with them, I had the measles, and I had to stay in bed in a darkened room. (Measles can be hard on the eyes.) My Grandma and Grandpa used to come in the room and tell me stories. Grandpa told tales of things that had happened in Northern Wisconsin (embellished, I'm sure, to make them more exciting). Grandma made up stories that always had a moral to them, usually about a girl just my age who was tempted to do (or DID do) something wrong, with dire consequences.

Members of my family always gave me books for Christmas and for my birthday. All my life I have loved reading -- and owning -- books.

My grandparents rented a room in their house to a schoolteacher who became my friend and taught me about numbers and arithmetic. By the time I started 1st grade we had moved to our own house, and I had learned to add columns of 3-figure numbers (such as 297 plus 948 plus 629, etc.) Because I knew this, and could read better than most of the 1st-graders, the teacher had me take small group of students who were having problems into a small room and help them with their numbers and with reading (phonics).

At the end of the year, the teacher recommended that I be promoted to the 3rd grade on condition that I learn how to multiply and divide. So my mother drilled me in the "times tables" and the "goes-intos," and I skipped 2nd grade.

I'll never forget going into that 3rd-grade room with all those kids who were so much bigger than I was. I was scared to death, and I guess that must have been when I decided that I'd have to make up for it by always being at the top of the class. Most of the time, I was.

I did make new friends, though, and some of them are still my friends today, after 68 years.

It was in 1st grade, too, that I did my first writing. I made a book by folding sheets of paper together and fastening them together with twisted pieces of crepe paper. I filled it with "poems." One of them, I recall, was about what good friends books are.

My first published writing was also a poem, that I wrote when I was 10 and in the 6th grade. At school we were supposed to write an essay about George Washington, but I wrote a poem about him before I wrote the essay. My father liked the poem and sent it in to the local newspaper (The Mason City Globe-Gazette), and they printed it!

My first pay for writing came when I entered a contest, sponsored by a bread company, and I won 2nd place with a limerick about how good bread was for sopping up gravy on your plate. My prize was 50 cents, almost a fortune for a 10-year-old in those days!

My uncle and aunt, Max and Margaret Riley, lived in Mason City, too. They had no children of their own; so they were almost like second parents to my sister, brother and me. Uncle Max was rather rotund, and he always



played Santa Claus at the children's Christmas parties given by the American Legion. He and my father were members because they were both veterans of World War I. We children had to pretend that we didn't know who he was, because, he told us, if we told his secret he would see to it that when the real Santa came to our house on Christmas, Uncle Max would tell him to leave lumps of coal in our stockings. We didn't tell!

Then came the Great Depression, and my father lost his job. Uncle Max was the city garbage commissioner, and Aunt Margaret worked in the county clerk's office, so they kept theirs. My grandfather was office manager for an auto repair business, but soon he had to take drastic pay cuts, because people couldn't afford to have their cars fixed after they lost their jobs. In those days, there was no "welfare" as we know it now, and most people would have been ashamed to accept "charity." So families helped each other as best they could. My parents had good friends who would help us when they had money; my parents helped them when THEY had money.

My father took any kind of work he could manage to get, including such short-term jobs as digging ditches. My mother became an expert at cooking with almost nothing and making the meals seem delicious to us children. She sometimes cooked noodles in beef broth, and that was our dinner. Or sometimes a farmer would come to the door selling sweet corn for 5 cents a dozen, and if she had a dime she would buy 24 ears. That would make dinner for our family of five, and we thought it was a real treat.

We kept having our phone disconnected, our electricity and gas (for cooking) and sometimes even our water shut off, and we had to move several times because of non-payment of rent. We children wore hand-me-downs sent to us by relatives in other parts of the country.

In 1932, for my 8th-grade graduation, I had my first NEW dress in years. It cost \$1.98 -- I don't know how it was paid for, but because I was at the top of my class and had to speak at graduation, someone thought I deserved a new dress. I can still see it in my mind -- it was green and white dotted Swiss with white lace. I was so thrilled!

I had already decided that I wanted to be a journalist when I grew up. I think at first I just liked the sound of the word, but when I learned that it meant writing for a newspaper, I was all for it.

In high school, still wearing hand-me-downs, I discovered Latin and French, which my mother had loved when she went to high school. For English classes, we had choice of plain English, oral English or English with journalism. I chose oral English because I was so shy that I knew it would help me to be able to speak in front of people, and through that I became interested in dramatics. I played the lead in the junior class play.

Through all this, though we had no money, my parents managed to give us a wonderful family life. We read aloud, played games, and went to things that were free, such as softball games in the park. My father made jigsaw puzzles for us by pasting pictures on cardboard and cutting them into very difficult puzzles that really kept us occupied!

My Grandpa Nielson, after the Depression began, had lost his photo studio in Madison, Wis., and Grandma Nielson had a stroke. They went to live with my mother's sister, my Aunt Christine, in Princeton, Ill, where her husband owned the weekly newspaper. (Visiting them had also whetted my interest in newspapering!) After Grandpa Nielson died, in 1932, my mother's sisters and brother banded together and offered to pay our rent and a certain amount of money each month if Grandma Nielson could come to live with us in Mason City. So we were able to keep a roof over our heads, have a phone again, and not have to worry about the utilities being shut off. And I learned how to help take care of an invalid.

I had always thought I would attend the University of Wisconsin, like my father, but in 1936, when I graduated from high school, that was out of the question. So I began my college years at Mason City Junior College,



where I continued my interest in speech, dramatics, writing and French, and was introduced to psychology. The first year I earned my tuition by tutoring (after school!) high school Latin students who were having problems. They hated it, because they had to stay after school for it, and I disliked it because they were so unpleasant. I think that is when I decided I could never be happy and successful as a teacher!

The second year, when the Latin-tutoring program was discontinued, I earned my tuition by working in the school library, which was also a valuable experience for me but convinced me that I didn't want a career as a librarian. When I graduated in 1938, I received a degree as Associate of Arts.

Then, through great good fortune, I was able to receive two scholarships, one because my father was a World War I veteran, and a student loan that enabled me to go on to the University of Iowa in Iowa City, and to begin working on my degree in journalism. (I had to give up on the University of Wisconsin, because I couldn't afford the out-of-state tuition.) I lived in a "cooperative" dormitory, where residents earned some of the cost by working for several hours each day, mostly in the kitchen.

Because a journalism major ordinarily took three years, I had to double up on some of the courses in order to make it in two years. So it was a busy time for me, though I managed to have some fun, too, though I was often embarrassed because my friends wanted me to have a "Coke" with them, and I didn't have the nickel that a small one cost at a soda fountain. I was active in a students' group at the Congregational Church and made friends there, too, because on Sunday nights, when dorms didn't serve dinner, we could cook our dinners with food furnished by the church. (You see, through all this time I was gradually learning to cook in one way or another!) My parents still couldn't afford to send me money, except for a dollar about once a month when they had it.

In 1940, I graduated with journalism as my major and with minors in English, French and psychology. Newspaper jobs were very hard to get that year, but I was fortunate to get one, back in Mason City, as assistant to the "society" editor part of the time and proofreader the rest. After World War II started, in 1941, I was moved to the news side of the paper as the first full-time woman reporter they had ever had. There was no question about equal pay -- I had that from the beginning, \$25 a week -- but there was a considerable amount of what today would be called "sexual harassment" because I was the only female in the newsroom. I learned to be tough and to win respect by doing a good job.

I joined the "Civil Air Patrol", which was part of the World War II at-home effort, and became information officer for the Mason City group. I also learned the International Morse Code and earned a radio/telephone operator's license.

In 1943, when I began to feel I should be doing more for the war effort, I obtained a Civil Service job as a civilian radio-operating instructor in the Army Air Corps (After the war, it became the Air Force). I was sent to St. Louis University, where the Air Corps had set up a school for instructors, where I seemed to have a natural aptitude for sending and receiving code and I became a high speed operator. I was assigned to the air base at Sioux Falls, S. Dak., where I taught GIs who were being trained as radio operators for bombers. (That's where I got the nickname "Mike," which I still have. When I was introduced as "Miss Riley," someone asked if that was Pat or Mike. I said, "Oh, Mike, I guess," and "Mike" it became.



In Sioux Falls, one of my students was Roland L. Rothert. At that time, he preferred to be known as "R.L." -- he received the nickname "Ron" much later, when he was working in Portland, Ore.

We were married on March 12, 1945, in the chapel at the Sioux Falls Air Base. I gave up my job. On our honeymoon, we went first to Chicago for a few days, and then to Tampa, Fla., to visit his family. He had graduated as a radio operator and was assigned to the Air Base at Shreveport., La., for further training. I lived in town, in a room with kitchen privileges we rented from a wonderful couple who were doing that as part of their contribution to the war effort. My husband had to live at the air base (Barksdale Field) part of the time, but he could also spend part of the time (and some of the nights) in town.

Meantime, my parents had moved to Vancouver, Wash., where the Depression ended for my father when he obtained a job at the Kaiser Shipyards. When "R.L." went overseas as the radio operator on a B-29 bomber crew, I moved to Vancouver to be with my parents and my sister, whose husband had also gone overseas.

"Rationing" had set in for civilians. We each had books of ration stamps, which entitled us to buy some of the items that were in demand for the military and consequently in short supply for the people at home (leather, which meant shoes, meat, butter, sugar). The amounts we could buy were extremely limited: for instance, one pair of shoes a year, a few pounds of meat a month, perhaps one pound of butter and a little sugar. When they were available, the lines were long. We had an introduction to recycling of such things as animal fats and some metals.

After "R.L." was discharged in 1945, he decided to try living in the Northwest. His first job was with the Post Office, delivering mail in the pouring rain of December. I had taken a job as receptionist for a Vancouver optometrist -- it offered me free glasses as well as a not-bad salary. Then "R.L." went to work for a wholesale appliance distributor in Portland (this is when he became "Ron"), but we continued to live in Vancouver. I quit working before our first child, Carol, was born.

In 1948 "Ron" was transferred to Eugene, Ore, where our second child, George, was born. We experienced our first earthquake shortly after Ron was transferred back to Portland, probably in 1950. Ron left the wholesale business and became manager of a retail appliance store. Later he became district sales manager for Allstate Insurance and eventually opened his own insurance agency.

Meanwhile, Mark, Anne, Paul and Jan were born, and in-between, I kept myself occupied by doing volunteer publicity for Women in Communications and for the Girl Scouts, among others.

At the time of our marriage, I had agreed to bring our children up as Catholics, and in 1958, after Paul was born, I became a convert to Catholicism.

In 1966, when Jan entered 1st grade and Ron suggested, "If you're going to spend so much time doing volunteer work, why don't you get a job that pays some money?" I took a job at The Oregonian, where I was well-known because of all the publicity work I had done. First I was a feature writer, then food-editor and feature writer, and then assistant editor of the Sunday magazine. I retired in 1989.

My success at work was good for me, but hard on Ron. We were divorced in 1983. I still live in the house we bought together in 1953.

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