

Chapter Ten

Three Days in September

How We Got Here – A “Bird’s Eye View”

The Temple of The People in Halcyon, California is the link between our mother’s and our father’s lives. Louise came to Halcyon because her mother sought out The Temple. Herb came to Halcyon because his brother, Bernard, sought out The Temple.

Almost as an afterthought, Herb traveled from Long Beach up to Halcyon to visit Bernard, just before shipping out for the Philippines and China for two and a half years. That’s when he fell in love with Louise.

After their brief encounter, Louise and Herb each believed that the other was a perfect match for their own life. Each of them was destined to fill the spaces in the other’s life that were empty. Their bond and mutual dedication would give meaning and a sense of purpose to their lives. They were, when they fell in love, on the cusp of adulthood.

The preceding chapters describe events and experiences in their lives that may have led them to make such a long-term commitment to each other one autumn night in Halcyon. In the following passages we hear directly from each of them about this.

Herb’s log entry in late August 1937, while still in San Pedro:

Hot dog, I made the China draft. Now for a week’s leave before I catch the transport USS Henderson in San Pedro. ... Guess I’ll go up to Halcyon on leave.

What an incredible decision Herb made, just before he was going overseas. A decision to go visit his brother that would change his life forever.

What follows is how those three days in September progressed.

Saturday, September 4

Herb was at the Long Beach YMCA, reading his mail. He got a letter that morning from Bernard, inviting him up to Halcyon. Herb realized that if he went to visit Bernard, he would get to see Louise again. "That sweet looking girl who I just saw for a few short minutes once [on December 31, 1936]" (*September 4, 1938*). Only a half hour later he was hitch-hiking up the coast (*September 25, 1937*).

After he finally arrived in Halcyon on the night of Sept 4, he almost did not go over to meet her. Bernard convinced him to go meet Louise.

Gee I almost didn't go over to Dower's on my first night there which would have meant I'd seen that much less of you. But Rosa called Bernard up to tell him I wasn't coming over and he asked to speak to me - so the result was I came over. I can hardly understand his persuasive powers over me. But then I was probably thinking of a certain blonde angel when I acquiesced to his wishes (December 4, 1937).

Herb wrote about that night he went over to Pearl's to see her again. "It was as if you were someone I'd seen all my life. Just part of the mystery surrounding our whole romance" (*November 5, 1938*).

In two letters Louise referred to the night he had dinner with them. Pearl had said (revealed) a lot about her that caused her to feel embarrassed (*June 30, 1938*).

"If you hadn't come to supper that night, I would have been disappointed. I wanted you to see me when I wasn't in bed, and where I could be myself. Besides, I wanted to see you anyway" (October 6, 1938).

Sunday, September 5

Herb wrote that when he was in Halcyon, he noticed how many people held her in high regard. "In fact they had me in awe of you" (*May 22, 1938*).

One of the things they did together was play Monopoly at Pat Mallory's house. Bernard played also. Herb commented about Bernard "He'd be too polite to strike a hard bargain with an opponent so he lost everything in no time" (*August 27, 1938*).

Herb and Bernard had dinner that night at Ella's. "She really was nice to us and we had a nice dinner there, with Ed too" (*September 6, 1938*).

They had planned to go see a movie in Oceano with Louise. Herb wrote "I sure felt proud that I was taking such a swell girl to a movie" (June 4, 1938).

I was glad when evening rolled around so that I could see more of a certain dear girl. It was nice being so close to you, at the show sweetheart; and you can bet that I'd have loved to hold your hand; but gee, I just didn't dare; I didn't know how you'd take it (September 5, 1938).

Louise had teased Herb for not holding her hand. He wrote that he didn't because he didn't want to appear bold – when in fact, he confessed, he wanted to put his arm around her (November 14, 1937).

I was sorry when the show was over, sorrier yet when I had to say good night to you that night. Because I was rapidly beginning to find a distinct happiness in your company. Little did I dream of what the following night was to bring! (September 5, 1938).

Louise reminisced that Fred gave them all a ride home (Bernard, Herb, Louise). Herb sat in the back with her (April 9, 1938).

Sure, I sat in back with you on purpose, and next to you on purpose. In fact you were like a magnet to me and I was irresistibly drawn close to you. I guess that was some of the first effects of the love that was starting to burn within us (June 4, 1938).

Monday, September 6

Herb wrote his version of the story "One year ago today," a story of their last night together before he went overseas (September 6, 1938). His telling of this story, from that one letter, is below in italics. References from other letters appear in regular font.

Morning

I woke up, to begin with, that morning, never dreaming that it was to be the most eventful day in my life; aside from the fact that it was to be my last day with all my friends in Halcyon. Bernard and I had a late breakfast in the Administration building.

And then Bernard said that he had to go over to Dower's and that I could go visiting [in town] during the afternoon; and come over to Dower's for supper. But for a definite reason I wanted to go over with him right away;

and I did. The reason: I knew that I would see that more of a certain sweet somebody.

In the Kitchen

Sure enough. I was tickled that you were there already. Then we talked in the kitchen, and I said it would be nice if you liked to write letters and could drop me a line out in China once in a while. And I helped you grind some meat. And we washed the machine, or rather you did; and the parts I dried and put away you had a heck of a time finding.

And then you showed me some small pictures of yourself and I asked you if I couldn't have one. I was happy that you did let me have one. Later on I was to treasure it greatly.

Then Pearl asked you if it wasn't time to take Flamore for a ride before supper, so we went out to the car; because naturally I was interested in going along. But I didn't go to sit next to you because Flamore wanted that seat; so I had to sit in back.

Walk on the Beach

Then we drove down to Oceano, and the beach; and got out for a walk. I got sand in my shoes too, pushing on that car that was stuck. Gee, it was nice walking along on the beach, talking to you. but all the time my heart was feeling leaden because I knew that after supper, I'd say goodnight to you and that would be all.

I didn't dare tell you how much I loved you there; I didn't see how that jigsaw puzzle could ever be fit together; then! The waves didn't help me much either; they just reminded me of what lay before me. We talked, about the Navy, about Halcyon; you asked me if I drank much (uh-huh); and I asked you how you liked living in Halcyon with so few young companions. Then we retraced our steps, and much to my regret, we were soon on our way back to Dower's.

Again I was in the back seat hoping you wouldn't run into a tree trying to drive, and turn around to talk to me at the same time. Oh; but one thing you had to say fairly thrilled me thru and thru. Would I like to go for a walk with you after we went home after supper? Would I?

Maybe that started me thinking, put a lump in my throat, and an ache in my heart. I guess the candy wasn't wholly to blame for our not having much

of an appetite; wasn't it darling? I kept thinking of how pleasant a walk with you would be. I told Bernard and expected some comment from him; but he surprised me by not being surprised.

Louise was much more straightforward. In a letter she explained "So I suggested that walk, hoping you'd at least kiss me before you went." "I was wishing there was some way we could say goodbye without a whole lot of people around" (January 22, 1938).

Dinner at the Dower's

Herb came to dinner with them [the Whitney's] at the Dower's. Louise wrote that she heard on the radio "The First Time I Saw You" while he was upstairs visiting with Pearl, Bernard, and Dr. Dower. "That," she emphasized, is when I fell in love with you," as he came back downstairs to join her (September 2, 1938).

Then 'we' did the dishes and gee it was nice to be close to you helping you a little. We hummed a few songs, "On A Moonlight Bay," was one of them. Then we waited for Bernard to get finished talking with Dr. Dower; and I said goodbye to Dr.

After Dinner

Then we got in the car and dropped Bernard off, and drove up to your house. You were going in the house to get a coat, and we were going to leave a note for your mother; but we decided to go over to the temple instead. You showed me Vickie [her cat] and had him jump through your arms. And you were surprised when he did it for me too.

You looked so sweet standing under a certain light; I felt like grabbing you and kissing you then and there, but oh, on second thought it seemed shocking to me. I figured boy you'd get mad and slap my face; and probably not go out with me. No, I'd never have done that; it was just a passing idea, because you were so kissable looking.

The Walk to the Bridge

So we went out, and it was dark and I couldn't see, so you took my hand and showed me the way. When we got on the road you started to let go, but I kept holding your hand; and you didn't seem to mind. That seemed a wonderful privilege to me at the time; and it was. So we walked over to the temple and caught Fred and your mother just as they came out.

So you told them we were going for a walk, and I asked if it would be all right; and I said I'd take good care of you. So back to the road we went, and arm in arm we happily started walking down the highway. But I was still puzzled darling and didn't expect what was coming. I didn't dare dream that you loved me. And I knew you weren't a bad girl perhaps looking for a good time. I thought at first, that perhaps you had something to confide in me, or just wanted to walk and talk with me since we were to part for a long time so shortly.

Oh honey when we started out, I was in love with you, head over heels; but I wouldn't have told you for the world. Oh it was eating my heart out; the circumstances and all that. No, I couldn't ask that much of a girl; besides I was conceited to think that she might even love me. Love; tomorrow; goodbye; China; 2 and ½ years; o-o-oh; it couldn't be true; could fate be so ironic I kept telling myself.

In a separate letter Herb referred to "that one night" when he fell "madly in love" with her. She encouraged him to talk – he talked a lot – she gave him confidence and courage (*September 17, 1937*).

Their Song

Herb reminisced about their last night together and how she sang a song to him: "***The First Time I Saw You***." He wrote "I'll never forget our theme song" (*June 12, 1938*); "the song you sang for me" (*December 26, 1937*).

A Kiss and a Promise

But your one word lead to another. I was breathlessly hoping something might be true. Did I believe in love at first sight; did I think two people could wait for each other so long? Was she trying to say; did she mean; oh Lord and she does care. That stopped us both in our tracks! Then that first wonderful kiss that was to forever bind two hearts and souls together. Sweet lips endeared me to them for eternity!

Louise wrote that when he kissed her, it made her feel "all shivery inside" (*June 30, 1938*).

Herb later wrote "I really should have made you give me at least one more kiss ... but that might have gone on all night. We had to stop some time" (*December 16, 1937*).

In another letter Herb wrote that when she told him that night that she loved him he was shocked. He wrote he wanted to hear that, "but hardly dared to hope for such a wonderful miracle" (November 14, 1937).

Then more walking, and planning, and talking, and love! Gee but we were both in a daze then. We had to find a place to sit down and talk it over. And gee, we ended up in a dirt pile! We were so happy and yet so sad."

"You said now you know how wives and sweethearts felt when their loves left for war. To be engaged had me spellbound at first. No formality, no ring; but we had one that had to suffice.

The Ring he gave her that night was his high school graduation ring.

That ring and I had been inseparable because I had vowed no girl would wear it until we were really in love. But you and I were in love, so you wore it. Time really flew then."

We were in each other's arms but short seconds when it was time for us to start back. Then we were wondering who to tell about us. It still seemed fantastic to me; being engaged; somehow I seemed to think that Bernard would regard it as scandalous; and I didn't for anything want to cause him any embarrassment in Halcyon.

Sharing the Good News

And so we sat on the bench in front of the store while you were convincing me that I should go and tell Bernard at least; if not your mother and Fred. I was wondering what we could tell him, I guess I was stalling; so you half dragged me over to the Guest House. And there with my knees almost shaking we went up the stairs and knocked at his door. He was in bed but we barged right in and started spluttering and stuttering; half wondering, but proud and defiant come what might.

In a separate letter (June 7, 1938) Herb wrote

"I'll never forget how reticent I was to go up to Bernard's room with you that night to tell him about us. ... You see I couldn't think of Bernard accepting calmly what we'd done. Or anyone else. I thought that they mightn't even think the whole matter an innocent one and if there is one thing in the world I wouldn't have done in Halcyon, it is to have jeopardized Bernard's good reputation and standing in Halcyon. Little did I know that was the last thing that I

should have worried about. And Bernard's happiness about our engagement was enough to floor me."

In another letter Herb acknowledged she would have known Bernard better than he, at that point in time, because he had not seen him at all from 1926 to 1936. (November 6, 1938)

But when I saw a look of happiness come over him and after he congratulated us and told us he was glad; what a relieving let down it was. Yep, with my sweetheart in my arms; we told him how happy, how proud, and sure of ourselves we were.

Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow

But then it was getting late so we went out and walked up to your house. Since everyone was asleep or out, we decided not to tell them. It was brave of you to want to tell them alone.

And then it was that one last kiss – then goodbye! That was hard; sad; cruel; but inevitable. As I walked back down to the Guest House I fairly held my head trying to figure it all out and how it could all have happened to me, so quickly!

Back at the Guest House

Then Bernard and I talked for a couple of hours. He told me how wonderful he thought it was; and had dreamed of such a possibility occurring; but hadn't even dared to mention the thought to anyone.

I don't know when I ever got to sleep; if I did. I was thinking, tossing; wondering; dreaming; hoping; and praying all at once. I thought of you in your house, in your bed, probably doing what I was doing; I knew you needed me and I needed you but we were already parted; to stay parted for many months.

The Question of Sex

Herb reminisced "I'll always love you for the clear thinking that you did that night, and it was the only thing that saved us" (April 8, 1938).

In a separate letter, writing about sexual relations between couples, he referred to their last night together. "How easily we might have satisfied our emotions to the limit." "However it was nice to know that we possessed the sense and will power not to do what most lovers would have done." "And for that, I couldn't help but love and respect you all the more" (April 14, 1938).

Afterthoughts

Louise wrote how, every time she goes by the bridge over the Arroyo Grande creek, she thinks of him and how happy they were that night (July 15, 1938).

In a letter five months later, Herb revealed his innermost feelings about the meaning of their special night back in September (February 19, 1938).

"Darling you know I love you for all that you said and suggested that Monday. It had to be the way it was. I couldn't ask a girl to wait for me before I was sure that she loved me, in those circumstances. I knew how much I loved you then; but I couldn't open my mouth until I knew for sure that you felt that way."

"I was afraid that if I told you how much I loved you first; if you didn't like me much you would have thought that it was just another line that a typical sailor was handing out. Oh, how I waited and hoped for things to occur as they did. I knew emotions that night darling, that I never sensed before."

Tuesday, September 7

Below is the complete text of Herb's note for Louise as he was departing at 4:30 in the morning on September 7, 1937.

Darling,

How did you feel this morning? Isn't it wonderful! How I hate to leave you, and yet you have made me the happiest guy in the whole Navy and two years will seem like nothing, won't it. I can hardly imagine such a wonderful thing happening to me; you are a dream come true indeed. Your faith in me

is something I can hardly realize, yet I have the same faith in you and never in thought, word, or action will I ever let you down.

It's all like a dream, isn't it? Only this is one dream that doesn't just fade away and it is going to have a perfect ending too.

I haven't only a minute now so I can't write the pages I'd like to, Louise dearest. You will be cheerful and brave I know, also my brother is for us too; in fact who won't be when they hear about it. Always think of the happy things to come and don't ever worry or be unhappy on account of me.

I hope it wasn't too sudden for your mother and father. I'm sure they'll understand. I would have preferred telling them with you but it didn't work out that way, did it honey.

My sincerest best wishes and love to your mother and Fred. Words can hardly convey my feelings to the dearest girl in the whole world. Goodbye darling, all my love, today and forever,

Always, Your Herb xxx

That morning Herb had breakfast at Lottie's early. He could hardly eat; he was so elated. Duncan gave him a ride part way down to L.A., then he got a ride all the way into Hollywood. A year later he wrote about telling Duncan the good news.

Then on the way down the highway after a long period of silence, I said to Duncan 'It sure does feel good to be engaged.'

And he said 'Oh are you, really. I suppose to some girl out here in Cal.'

'Oh yes' I said. 'In fact to some girl right here in Halcyon.'

'No' he exclaimed. 'Who is she.'

And then when I said Louise, he was really flabbergasted, and the proud grin that spread all over my face was really something you should have seen. And so that is how our secret didn't remain untold" (June 7, 1938).

Herb was at the YMCA in Long Beach by 1:00 p.m., and he wrote another letter to Louise. Below are two excerpts.

Gee honey, I'm in such a daze I never noticed the miles and hours going by. Except that I knew that each mile was another one away from you. Oh, everyone in Halcyon is so swell, I couldn't imagine such a happy viewpoint as they seem to take of our engagement.

I can hardly write now; my hand is almost shaking. Why? Because it doesn't seem possibly to me that a girl as sweet and nice as you, would promise to be mine, would wait so long for me, and would make life seem so wonderful for me.

Reflections on Love

Louise wrote "Bob was trying to tell me last night that I was in love with an ideal." "He told me to ask you if you aren't in love with an ideal ... !?" (July 6, 1938). Bob had wanted to have a talk with Herb when he returned, before they got married.

Herb wrote a response to Bob's question about them being in love with an "ideal." He considered Louise to be his "ideal woman" – so, yes (August 14, 1938). He reminisced about his fateful decision to apply for the tour of duty in China "But before I did leave America's shores I at last did find my sweetheart. It seemed so ironic at the time" (November 11, 1938).

While on liberty one day in Tsingtao, China Herb walked along the seashore. He "sat down on a rock, where I wanted to be all alone with you; at least my memories of you ... and all that transpired two years ago last night" (September 7, 1939). He wrote:

The waves washing in not far below where I was seemed to be bringing messages of reassurance from you. They also told what my heart was saying, "I love you," "I love you." You'd be surprised ... how distinctly they said that as they came swirling in to dash against the rocks.

Segue to Part Two: A World Apart

Each of them wrote almost daily, from September 8, 1937 through late 1939. They strived to answer each other's letters, faithfully, paragraph by paragraph. Because of the time it took for a letter to cross the Pacific Ocean (about a month), usually it would be two months before either of them would get an answer to a question posed in a letter. In a few cases one of them could afford to pay the extra postage for an airmail stamp, which would bring the letter across the ocean much quicker.

These letters had been carefully packaged and stored for all these years. While Herb's letters continued right up to the time they were reunited in March, 1940, Louise's letters seemed to end abruptly in September, 1939. In her last letter she wrote that it would be awhile before she would write again due to an infection in her hands.

In one letter he wrote an interesting paragraph about how he was so thankful that they met. "It behooves me to lead the kind of life a thankful man should lead." He went on to suggest a "code of living" for the two of them: "being good; thankful for the happiness that comes our way; and cheerful and optimistic about the misfortunes that may temporarily be ours" (May 20, 1939).

One of Herb's letters contains a glimpse into his values and what he wanted in life; this passage, in particular, helps explain differences that would emerge between them, based upon their previous, lived experiences.

"I envy no one their desires to make a million, or go to South America, or have a wild time by themselves, or be a bigshot; or anything at all. You are and always will be my everything honey! Now all I want out of life is peace, comfort, and security for my family to be; and I'm willing to work hard for that" (September 5, 1938).

In one of his early letters there is a good example of Herb's thinking about how/why they would wait so long for each other. Basically, that their dreams/wishes for the future sustain their endurance.

Besides living in terms of the present; which one should do, and make each day a happy day that counts for something; still it is nice to think of the future now. That is really what sustains us, I'm sure (December 29, 1937).

After a year and a half of experience with the Asiatic Fleet, Herb wrote about what a good influence Louise had been on his life.

Honey, I really don't know what I'd ever do without you. I couldn't live, that I know. And do you know if I hadn't met you before coming out here, I probably wouldn't even be sending any money home. I'd be leading one fast, wicked life out here to the tune of wine, women, and song; and I know what the result of that would be; so, you see sweetheart how much you really have done for me already. There's just no saying how thankful I am that you came along; how wonderful it is that you fell in love with me. You saved me in other words Louise (February 22, 1939).

Part Two of our story will draw almost exclusively from what they wrote in their letters, to portray their lives during the two and a half years of waiting. What did Herb do out there with the Navy? What places did he visit? What did he do when the ship was in port? What about Louise's life in Halcyon ... what activities kept her busy? What was her health like? Who were her friends and what did they do? Where did she live in Halcyon? What events challenged their faithfulness?

Importantly, what do we learn about our mother and father through these letters that explains the behavior that we observed and lived through as children? What do we learn that sheds light on how their relationship ultimately unfolded?

In telling this story we have the benefit of hundreds of letters that fill in many details of Louise's life in Halcyon, and that contain many vivid descriptions of Herb's adventures in the Philippines, China and in what is now Indonesia.

Part Two explores what each of them did during those two and one-half years, as they desperately clung to the promise of a wonderful marriage, sometime in the future. How they maintained their long-distance relationship, while confessing to each other their weaknesses and addressing a few "slip-ups" along the way, make an interesting story.

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