

Chapter One

Three Days in September 1937

Late August, 1937

Herb Lentz writes an entry into his ship's log, at the front of one of his photo albums of his Navy adventures.

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.

It was almost as an afterthought, that Herb plans to travel from San Pedro up to Halcyon to visit his brother just before shipping out for the Philippines and China for two and one-half years.

His brother Bernard, at 34 was much older than Herb, and he had been living in Halcyon for about six years now. It was a small village nestled in a somewhat remote agricultural region of central California, located just a couple of miles from the expansive, fine-sand beaches. The main reason Bernard had moved there was to join the Temple of the People,¹ which was the center of life within this cooperative community.

Saturday, September 4

Herb relaxes at the Long Beach YMCA, reading his mail. He got a letter that morning from his brother Bernard, inviting him up to Halcyon, just a day's journey north. Herb realizes that if he goes to visit Bernard, he would also get to see again "That sweet looking girl who I just saw for a few short minutes once"² (*September 4, 1938*). Only a half hour later Herb is hitchhiking up the coast. (*September 25, 1937*)

After Herb finally arrives in Halcyon late Saturday afternoon, Bernard convinces him to join them for dinner at the Dower's home, which was only a half mile west of Halcyon, in the town of Oceano. Louise Stenquist prepared meals for Pearl Dower and her husband Dr. William Dower whose health had been declining for a number of years now. Dr. Dower was the current head of the Temple organization.

Herb stayed for dinner, during which Pearl had said (revealed) a lot about Louise that caused her to feel embarrassed (*Louise June 30, 1938*). "If you hadn't come to supper that night, I would have been disappointed. I wanted to see you" (*Louise October 6, 1938*). Herb wrote about that night "It was as if you were someone I'd seen all my life" (*Herb November 5, 1938*).

¹ An organization dedicated to promoting the "Golden Rule" and brotherhood among humanity, through a fusion of science, religion and art. The Temple, an intentional community, has been the subject of several books.

² During a visit to his brother December 31, 1936.

Sunday, September 5

The next day was a busy day for Herb, being escorted around town with his brother, meeting people who were friends of Bernard's. Herb wrote that when he was in Halcyon, he noticed how many people held Louise in high regard. "In fact they had me in awe of you" (May 22, 1938).

During the day Herb, Bernard and Louise went over to the Mallory's home to play a game of monopoly. Pat and Cethyl Mallory were a generous and socially active young couple, having moved into Halcyon about the same time that Bernard arrived, and for the same reasons. They lived in a small cottage on Halcyon Road, just south of the Halcyon Store. Herb commented about how Bernard played the game "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 plan to take Louise that evening to see a movie in Oceano. Herb feels proud that he "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). In one letter he confessed that he didn't want to appear bold, and that what he really wanted was 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" (Herb, September 5, 1938).

Louise reminisced that Fred, her stepfather, gave them all a ride home from the show. Herb sat in the back with her (Louise, April 9, 1938). Herb's account of that was "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" (June 4, 1938).

Monday, September 6

Herb wrote his version of the story "One year ago today," a story of their last night together (September 6, 1938).

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.

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 Flamore³ 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.

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 jig-saw 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.

Herb and Bernard join Louise, Fred and her mother Ebba for dinner at the Dower's that evening. While Herb is upstairs visiting with Pearl, Bernard, and Dr. Dower, Louise is in the kitchen when she hears on the radio the song "The First Time I Saw You." As the song plays Herb is walking back down the stairs, and that is the moment Louise realizes that she was falling in love with him. (*Louise September 2, 1938*).

After dinner Herb helps Louise with the dishes, while they hum a few songs together; one of them is "On A Moonlight Bay." They are waiting for Bernard to finish talking with Dr. Dower, then Herb says goodbye to Dr. Dower. (*Herb September 6, 1938*).

Louise had earlier suggested that they take a walk after dinner, "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" (*Louise January 22, 1938*).

Herb's account of the evening continues. (*September 6, 1938*).

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

³ Flamore was a child of Dr. Dower's previous marriage; she was born with physical and mental disabilities. She was two years younger than Louise, and Louise was frequently called upon to care for her.

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.

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).

Herb reminisced about their last night together and how she sang a song to him: "The First Time I Saw You."⁴ He wrote "I'll never forget our theme song" (June 12, 1938); "the song you sang for me" (December 26, 1937).

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! (September 6, 1938).

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).

⁴ This song originated from the 1937 film "The Toast of New York." Gracie Fields sings a nice version of it. Lyrics are at the end of this chapter

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. (September 6, 1938).

That night Herb gives her is 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. (September 6, 1938).

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. (September 6, 1938).

"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." (June 7, 1938)

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. (September 6, 1938).

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! (September 6, 1938).

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. (September 6, 1938).

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).

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. (February 19, 1938).

Tuesday, September 7

Just before Herb leaves at 4:30 in the morning, he writes a note for Louise.

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 has breakfast early. He can hardly eat; he is so elated. Duncan, one of Bernard's friends, offered to give him a ride part way down to Los Angeles. After Duncan drops him off near Oxnard, Herb then gets a ride all the way into Hollywood. A year later (June 7, 1938) 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"

Herb gets to the YMCA in Long Beach by 1:00 p.m., and he writes another letter to Louise.

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.

(Tuesday, September 7)

After Herb's visit to Halcyon, he reflects upon his decision a month ago to sign up for duty in the far east. Back onboard his ship, while in San Francisco, Herb writes that he was such a young kid, he let the glamour and excitement of traveling to China appeal to him; (September 14, 1937) and that going to China was an opportunity to see things one would never get to see normally. (September 16, 1937).

The First Time I Saw You

By Gracie Fields

The first time I saw you
I knew at a glance
I was meant to be yours, yours alone

When I look in your eyes
I am thrilled to the skies
And I feel like a queen (king) on a throne

The first time I saw you
I knew at a glance
I was meant to be yours, yours alone

My heart was fancy free
One love meant nothing to me
Until one grand and glorious night
You chanced to come my way
You turned that night into day
It must have been love at first sight

The first time I saw you
I knew at a glance
I was meant, meant to be yours, yours alone

As I stood before you
My heart seemed to dance
And I prayed you would call, call me your own

The first time I saw you
I knew at a glance
I was meant to be yours, yours alone