

Playmates

When we arrived at Jerry's front door after school, we were greeted by the frantic barking of the Hunts' wirehaired terriers, Hermie and Sassie. They pawed the Venetian blinds in the window near the entrance, then they pounced on us as we walked in. Jerry got busy looking for whatever damage they might have done during their long, boring day alone; he'd discover a gnawed slipper, a shredded cigarette package, or—Hermie's specialty—a long ribbon of toilet paper extending from the bathroom several yards down the hall .

I loved these afternoons in an empty house, with the freedom and space they provided. At my house, by mid-afternoon, my whole family would usually be there: Mother, Daddy, Granny, and my sister, Judy. It was also a treat to explore adult spaces in a strange house, examining the bric-a-brac, exploring Jerry's parents' rooms, admiring the new Early American furniture in the living room and den (we'd never had suites at home).

We'd soon settle in Jerry's room, though, with its blond desk, bench, and double bed (items I still use). Jerry had quite a few records, and we'd listen to Ibert, Bartok, Ravel, and Rachmaninoff on his monaural Webcor with its simulated leather case. I had only just begun collecting records, but it was already apparent to us both that our musical tastes were different. As a pianist, Jerry was interested in music for the keyboard. He was also fascinated by orchestral tone color. I was listening to symphonies, to Wagner, and, still, to musicals. We'd play things for one another, but it was really more a matter of taking turns using the record player.

Bach was the exception. One afternoon Jerry played a couple of keyboard concertos, performed on the harpsichord by Helma Eisner on a disc he had checked out from the downtown library. I was entranced, hypnotized almost by the music Colette described as a "divine sewing machine" and at the same time energized by the propulsion. I couldn't get enough of it, and still can't (although like any potent substance, it should be taken in moderation if it's to have the maximum effect). For my fifteenth birthday Jerry gave me Wanda Landowska's *The Art of the Harpsichord*, inscribing it "Best wishes to my closest friend—Jerry E. Hunt".

Our love for music, even as it occasionally diverged, was probably what inspired us to create The Society

for Fine Arts and Sciences and its "organ," *Lachesis* (named for the Fate who measures out the thread of life—but mostly for the look and sound of the word). Much of our time during those afternoons after school and late into the evenings on many Fridays and Saturdays we spent working on that publication. Jerry would write long articles on music and religion, I'd contribute movie reviews and a kind of gossip column about movie stars, and our friend Carol would write articles about astronomy. (A fourth member of the Society and would-be contributor to *Lachesis*, Elsie, soon dropped out of our group, having discovered horses and horseback riding.)

We enrolled as many of our relatives as we could as subscribers to *Lachesis*, and I am proud to say we delivered on the promise we made to them. There was almost a year's worth of magazines sent out before we lost momentum and found other interests. I've managed to keep a few issues all these years, and it's sweetly embarrassing to read our pretentious prose.

Squabbles among ourselves about power in the Society frequently emerge in the magazine as various administrative titles are jockeyed about from issue to issue. But what I recall most warmly are the hundreds of happy hours we spent typing our articles on Jerry's Remington Rand portable with its specially inked ribbon that produced a master we could duplicate for 75 copies or more by using the tray of gelatin called a Hectograph. I handled all the Society's correspondence at my own house on my own Remington Rand, bought, I suspect, to have one like Jerry's. I still have a box half-full of the stationery we had printed.

Some afternoons Jerry had to practice. He was studying with Dr. Paul van Katwijk, and later with Silvio Scionti, and performing regularly on recitals. I hated to be around when Jerry practiced because he really worked, becoming totally absorbed in the music and the problems it presented to the performer, absolutely indifferent to anyone who might be nearby. And he was extremely hard on himself when he played the wrong notes, banging out the correct ones over and over with a relentlessness that frightened me (and that continued to do so through the years, a few times even driving me and our dog from our two-story house on Swiss Avenue). I often think of his mother and wonder how she stood it, coming in tired from work and a crosstown drive. Jerry probably finished most of his practicing before his father got home later.

I liked to make music too. After a few years studying the accordion, I switched to the violin during junior

high. By the time I met Jerry, I was able to play, or play at, a little simple chamber music. On two or three occasions, Jerry, Carol, and I tried to read through one of C.P.E. Bach's trios. Jerry would also accompany Carol and me as we blithely raced through the violin parts of J.S. Bach's double concerto. We knew we were outclassed by his musicianship; it was obvious to us both that his role in these sessions was to be patient—and he mostly succeeded. I do recall a couple of times, though, when he stubbornly continued reading for a minute or two after Carol or I or both of us had floundered among the intricate scale passages and had finally stopped playing.

We began going downtown on Saturdays quite regularly. We'd ride the bus from our East Dallas neighborhood the 45 minutes or so it took to get there. The library was our first stop; we'd return the books and records we'd checked out earlier, then we'd start on our adventures in the city. Cokesbury's Bookstore was conveniently located just across from the library. They carried the entire Modern Library, and they often had books on sale (I bought a little pocketbook of foreign words and phrases there that I still use). It was an elegant store with fine wood paneling throughout, and no place I knew of had more atlases and globes.

We'd cross the street to Titche's, to visit their book and record store on the mezzanine. There was a bakery and a very cosmopolitan luncheon café on that level as well, and sometimes we'd sit down at one of the booths served by a separated walkway for waitresses and order a sandwich and the raspberry ice we both loved. It was fun filling out our own guest checks with the golf pencils provided for the purpose.

Then we'd head down the street several blocks to visit Whittle's, the music store that also sold records and instruments. I'd stay on the ground floor looking through the records (and playing some in the listening booths), and Jerry would usually head down the stairs to the sheet music department in the basement and to the piano Whittle's made available there for trying out music. We sometimes dared to ride the freight elevator up to the piano department where Jerry would audition pianos—depending on the mood the salesman was in and how busy they were.

If we hadn't eaten at Titche's, we'd now eat at the Blue Front German restaurant across from Whittle's. It had a bar-like atmosphere that intrigued me, although we were too young to have lager with our Polish sausage sandwiches and hot German potato salad. There was a German lady waiting tables there whose accent

appealed to us. I suppose Jerry and I enjoyed the contrast between that European atmosphere and the less exotic ambiance of Wyatt's Cafeteria and Youngblood's Fried Chicken out in our own neighborhood. Over the years we continued to seek out unusual places to eat downtown, including Crowder's Brass Rail with its decorative steins on display behind the bar, and the Mayflower Coffee Shop with its baked beans served in individual cassoulets and the kitschy elf on the back wall quoting the rhyme about keeping your eye on the donut and not on the hole as you ramble on through life.

When my fascination with Montgomery Clift began to possess me, we added another stop along our route: Harper's Bookstore. This was a tiny hole-in-the-wall that sold used books and magazines. Mrs. Harper was a huge woman who never left the easy chair in the front of the store; after her death, the tall and thin Mr. Harper kept the store open a few years, boasting a nationally famous collection of postcards. Finding things there always meant searching through shifting piles of magazines, then sorting them in order to make a selection. I'd be working with issues of *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen*, and Jerry would be riffling through electronics magazines looking for circuit diagrams that he could use to build sound-making devices for electronic music. He also bought the odd occult book when he ran across something intriguing. Sometimes we'd walk back uptown to the library, checking out more books or playing records in the listening rooms there (or using the desk headphones), filling our green canvas library bags with items for the days and weeks to come. Or we'd stay downtown, waiting there for the bus home, gazing up Commerce Street at the lights of the hotels and restaurants that had just come on.

Fifteen years later we were living in that two-story house on Swiss, replicating our version of middle-class suburban life, teaching at a prep school and a college, furnishing rooms, and entertaining friends, but we had largely stopped sharing our explorations and discoveries with one another. Circumstances certainly affected our behavior, but we too were at fault for relaxing our vigilance and for allowing ourselves gradually to stop playing together, having adventures. In due course I'll get into all that, but what strikes me now is that our early years were some of our best, and that the better times we were later able to create were good because they were so much like those in the beginning.