

Allie's Stories



Merion, PA

All of these people weren't the same age, but to me I guess anyone over the age of 50 was getting up there, and anyone 60 with gray hair and a little bit overweight, pretty inactive and things like that, why I thought they were awfully old people. Now these were people that I just met in my family as a youngster. I had been born in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1934, because my father was working there as a salesman for Consolidation Coal Company. Then a couple years later he had to move to the Washington suburbs because he took a governmental job with the Consumer's Counsel, which was designed to do something for the Federal government, and we moved to I guess it was in the Virginia/Maryland area. Then after a few years Consolidation Coal wooed him back to their offices in Philadelphia and made him sales manager. So probably before I was six years old we had lived in Reading, Pennsylvania, Chevy Chase, and back into Merion, Pennsylvania. When I was living in Merion, Pennsylvania, I was probably 5-6 years old, and I started school there. My teacher's name was Miss Lyons. When I learned her name before I met her I just figured she'd walk on four legs and have a big, hairy mane and be a very ferocious looking woman. When I went to school the first day and I met her, she really didn't have a hairy mane, but she had a very wrinkly face that looked like something off the Wizard of Oz, and I thought I'd been half right anyhow.

My sister, Tensie, who is four years older than I, was always a pretty girl, and it seemed like there were always boys following her home from school. There was one guy that came over to the house a lot when we lived in Merion and he hung around a lot and was always trying to be with Tensie. I got a little bit tired and maybe jealous of this guy moving on the Eichelberger household, so one day when I came out of the house and found this guy (Tom Davis was his name), he was lying in a hammock which was tied between two trees in our side yard. I went in the house and got a straight pin and came out and snuck underneath the hammock and stuck it up under his behind, and he YELLED and jumped in the air and chased me into the house. Of course, when I ran into the house he did not follow me in. I think it made it difficult for Tom Davis to come visit Tensie anymore. I don't know that she regretted that I drove him off, but years later Tom Davis went to the University of Pennsylvania and was a star football player at Penn, captain of the team, and we chuckled about what might have been if Allie had not

been so cruel to Tom Davis when he came to visit Aunt Tensie.

I had a friend in Merion. Now Merion is a suburb in Philadelphia, I didn't tell you that, but it's near Philadelphia. It was a nice community. It would be like Oakwood or Sharonville or something like that. I went to first and second grades there. One of my best friends was a Quaker boy, and his name was Tommy Linton. And Tommy Linton was the same age as I, about the same height, and he was fun to play with because he was mischievous and a daredevil, and he would do things that otherwise I probably wouldn't do but would be interested in learning about. I liked Tommy a lot. One of the tragedies was Tommy's mother and father were the first people I ever knew in my life who got divorced. I didn't know what that meant, but I knew that Mr. Linton moved out of the house one time. I asked about it and Tommy said his parents were being divorced. I said, "What's that mean?", and he said he didn't know. So when I came home I asked my mother, and she explained it to me. But that was a pretty hard concept, that people who would get married maybe would get unmarried sometime later on, even after they had children.

Anyhow, Tommy and I lived on the same block, but between our house was a great big school yard. I lived at 500 Baird Road, and he lived on Narberth Avenue. There was like a block apart, and in between was an elementary school where we went to school, and then this huge yard or schoolyard/playground that you'd call it today. Well, Tommy would come over and play a lot at my house. I think my mother got pretty patient at giving Tommy a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and glass of milk along with me at lunch time. One day my mother went to visit a neighbor down the street who was ill, and the two of us (Tommy and I) were playing alone in the side yard. We were pitching ball, and the ball rolled out of the yard and down the sidewalk, over the curb, around the corner, down the blacktop street, and it dropped into one of those sewer gratings. Well, we went hunting for it and found it, but it was down there, out of reach of a hand, sticking down through the sewer grating. I think I suggested that we wait until we got some help. I know that Tommy wasn't ready to wait, and he wanted to push his body down through that sewer grating, so he went ahead and he squeezed and he squeezed, and

he got his head, arm, and shoulder down through the sewer grating and could reach the ball. When he picked it up, he tried to back his body through the sewer grate, and it wouldn't come, and he was wedged in there. He began to cry, and he said, "Go for help! Go for help!" I said, "OK, I'll be right back." I went and got my mother. She came and she stood over the sewer grating and she couldn't pull Tommy out of this trap he was in. He was stuck in this thing! And so she went in and called the local police department.

The local police department came by and a policeman had some oil and he put it on his shoulder and tried to squeeze and get Tommy Linton out of this sewer grate. He couldn't get him out. They called the fire company. The fire company came, and eventually they removed the sewer grate with Tommy stuck in it, stood the sewer grate on its edge up on the grass yard, and were eventually able to work him free by getting him in some other position than upside down on the edge of the road. Meanwhile, Tommy's mother wasn't home, and his daddy wasn't home, and my mother pretty much bore the brunt of all this pressure and excitement. There were times I think my mother got weary of the type of situations that Tommy and I got involved in, but she had always been patient with us and let us have our way.

Interestingly, in about 1982, I was working at United States Steel Corporation and sponsoring a workshop in Pittsburgh when I got an enrollment form from a sales manager at U.S. Steel in Detroit named Tom Linton. I picked up the phone and I called this Tom Linton and I said, "Could it be that you are the same Tom Linton that lived in Merion, Pennsylvania, back in 1941 and 1942?", and he said, "Yes, how do you know?" I said, "My name is Allie Eichelberger." Well, he had a big laugh over that. When Tom came to Pittsburgh, we were by then 48 years old, and he came to Pittsburgh on business. He had I had dinner together and we had a lot of laughs talking about the difficulties and the fun we had as children growing up.

As happens in many families, there are not only good times, but there are bad times. While I was growing up in Merion with my father, mother, and my older sister Tensie and my older brother Chippy, my father became very, very ill. He was taken to the hospital and diagnosed as having an incurable disease and permitted to come home and remain at home as long as possible because my mother, being a nurse, could care for him. I was seven years old at the time and I didn't understand much about nursing care and problems and health. All I knew is that my

dad spent just about all of his time up in the bedroom and we had to be very quiet around the house and respect the fact that my mother spent a lot of time caring for dad. He was ill for about two months before he died, and that was in March of 1942.