

YOUTHFUL MISADVENTURES

As I inferred earlier, I was no angel as an adolescent. I did have a juvenile delinquent record of note. I was a notorious, three-time loser before reaching age 11. The first offense: No bicycle license. The second: Thumbing for a ride. The third, and most noteworthy: Hitching a car in the snow. (We dragged and squatted behind, holding onto the back bumper). This last and final crime occurred on a dark, cold and snowy night. Dicky Paul and a few delinquent buddies were hitching cars at the top of Browning Ave. and 13th East. Browning is very steep below 13th. Wow! What a ride that was. We were three abreast, holding on for dear life. My buddies all bailed half way down the steep descent. I held on until the road leveled out and the car turned to the right. Then I let go and skidded half a block right into the side of a parked police car. The officers just opened the back door and waived me to enter. Not once did an officer of the law ever read me my Miranda rights.

I spent a few miserable hours at the City Jail. It wasn't pleasant. Finally, my dad came to bail me out. It took a while. When they reviewed my wrap sheet, I think he and the officers had a little chuckle, because my dad did not flash me his steely, blue-eyed stare on this occasion. I got worst treatment from him for getting into our 5 year, emergency supply of winter wheat (we made wheat gum). He could tell that I had been under extreme stress and felt that the worst punishment had already been meted out. He tenderly wiped a tear from my eye.

As I left the jail and passed by the booking desk, the attendant offered me two tickets to the "Junior Delinquent Ball." I accepted them graciously. I was thinking at the time about what kind of girl would ever accompany a boy to a "Juvenile Delinquent Ball?"

For years after, I was among the "usual suspects" whenever there were any complaints in the neighborhood. On one occasion, the police came to our door looking for me. Luckily, I was at home and my mom vouched that I had been there all night. Later, I learned that my older brother and his rowdy buddies were tormenting a neighbor up the street with water balloons and they floated my name (Dicky) as an alias to deflect their identities during the attack. I was being framed, but mom would have none of it.

One leisure summer afternoon, my neighbor, Mrs. Duncan, a matronly wife of a "Linconesque" attorney, hat and all, noticed some smoke drifting upwards behind her garage and she checked it out. She found me, Hal Thomas, and Larry Sheya smoking ground-up leaves in our hand-carved, horse chestnut pipes. She paid no attention to the other boys, but took me by the ear to mom. It pained me to see my mother's great disappointment in her erstwhile, three-time loser, but penitent son. She put me in the bathtub to soak and then thoroughly washed my mouth out with Pear Soap. I hardly ever smoked or drank, even near beer, after that.

Repentant as I was, I still had a socially destructive quirk. I had my heroes and one of them was a basketball player named Duff Hanks. (He later became a General Authority of the LDS Church). I wanted to be like Duff. In fact, I adopted his name and if any of the school kids didn't observe my new name, I punched them in the solar plexus. It wasn't long

before I was universally, but begrudgingly, known as Duff. However, there was one holdout: Mary Jane Rice, who secretly loved me and perpetually pestered me to death. She was always trying to get my attention. She continued to call me Dicky without my permission. This was an annoying loose end. Mary Jane was not an ordinary schoolgirl. She was a tomboy on steroids and backed down to no 5th grade boy.

Inevitably, Mary Jane and I were on a collision path. Could there be a better stage for this than after Primary Class in the Edgehill Ward parking lot? After a few insulting exchanges, she came at me with a swift kick. I moved deftly out of the way and she went up in the air and came down on her little head. Unconscious, she slumped there on the ground until the ambulance came. At first, I was pretty proud of myself for making such an instinctive defensive move. But then fear gripped my chest and I was in no mood to celebrate my victory.

I quietly slipped away from the crowd and found myself in the ward gymnasium. There, a man that I had not known personally but about whom I had heard so much came over to chat with me. He was Paul J. Hansen (Dr. Paul J. Hansen) who was my older brother's coach and mentor. He had set up a marvelous program for kids in the Edgehill Gym. Paul had just returned from Europe and the armed services. He was a Major in the army. For years I thought he was an MD. Actually, he had his doctor's degree in Psychology. That little chat was a turning point in my career path. I went from erstwhile three-time loser and woman beater to being a legitimate "gym-rat." How I loved that gym, basketball and Paul Hansen.

As for Mary Jane Rice, I can never thank her enough for causing the chain of events that brought about my redemption. I hardly ever fought a girl after that. It's a good thing, because Adriana Van Oostendorp was the next in line in the neighborhood inter-gender conflict. Her father, Pete, was the trainer for the heavyweight contender Rex Layne, who eventually knocked out Jersey Joe Walcott before falling to Rocky Marciano, the World Champ. Adriana would never have come at me kicking. She had a devastating right hand. She had very few friends, male or female. People just kind of stayed away, such was their respect for that right hand.

Let's get back to Mary Jane. Mary Jane's mother was colluding with mine. Mom sent flowers to the hospital for Mary Jane in my name and now they were conspiring for me to go to visit Mary Jane in the hospital and apologize for, alas, my awesome footwork. This was all too, too much for me. Finally, my better self committed to the idea and Mary Jane got all of the attention she had sought for so long. I had not faced a more difficult task in my young life. But then, I had finally found someone whom I might consider taking to the Juvenile Delinquent Ball. Fortunately, she was still recovering from a concussion at the time.