EXCERPTS

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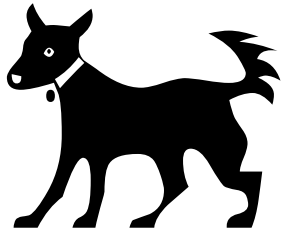
How Love Invents Us

a personal history



Roger Ladd Memmott

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COVER ART
Roger & Trixie
Photo by Donna & Hal Fisher, Christmas 1946

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For
(Who Else?)

My Children
•
My Grandchildren
•
Their Children
•
ad infinitum

~ Vital Statistics ~
Roger Ladd Memmott

Born: June 21, 1944
Father: Orion Perry Memmott (b. 10/20/1910, d. 4/21/1990)
Mother: Nelda Petersen (b. 9/1/1913, d. 12/19/2005)
Elder Brother: Orion Douglas (b. 9/9/1939)
Younger Brother: Jan Corwin (b. 11/21/1950)
Married: July 28, 1966 – Los Angeles Temple
Sharon Sally Benton (b. 3/29/1947)
Children:
Christian Ladd (b. 11/24/1969)
Aaron Thomas (b. 10/19/1974)
Divorced: November 10, 1987
Re-Married: July 1, 1989 – Salt Lake Temple (time only)
Marrianne Wood Miller (b. 8/29/1960)
Height: 6′3″
Weight: 145 – 165 lbs.
Eyes: Blue
Hair: Blond
Favorite Color: Green
Favorite Food: Crab, Popsicles
Interests: Loving deeply my wife; playing with my kids and my dogs; teaching and writing; playing the guitar, banjo, dulcimer, and autoharp
Odd Character Trait: Partly dog

LDS Gospel Ordinations
(Born in the Covenant)

Named and Blessed: September 3, 1944 by Orion P. Memmott (Elder)
Baptized: May 17, 1953 by Carlyle Fuller Gronning (Elder)
Confirmed: May 17, 1953 by Orion Perry Memmott (Elder)
Deacon: June 25, 1956 by Orion Perry Memmott (Elder)
Teacher: June 22, 1958 by Charles Nelson Terry (Bishop)
Priest: June 26, 1960 by Charles Nelson Terry (Bishop)
Elder: September 13, 1964 by Joseph C. Smith (Stake President)
High Priest: April 17, 1977 by Joseph W. Banks (Stake President)

In saying my work fails I flatter myself that I have imagined what it should have been.

— *James Richardson,* Poet

Note to the Reader

THOMAS WOLFE ONCE SAID: "Fiction is not fact. Fiction is fact selected and understood; fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose." That statement presupposes that the events of one's life (facts) are without rationale, that the experiences of life are largely meaningless until we determine some causal relationship between this event and that, until we make inferences about those events that allow us to *explain*, inferences that allow us not only to "select" but to "understand," inferences that allow us to impose the necessary fiction on "fact" in order to glean some sense of meaning, in order to answer the question of *"Why?"* In other words, not only is fiction more meaningful than fact, it is also our means to validate fact. It is our means to get at the truth.

This book, much of it written narratively or dramatically (that is, in the form of fiction), is a litany of fact. The memories I record are charged with purpose, selected and painstakingly arranged. It is for you to determine whether the purpose with which those memories are charged is adequate, whether my recording of fact is meaningful—and how meaningful, then, my life.

Although you may be able to arrive at some semblance of truth regarding my life, you will never know who I am. The prophet Joseph Smith once said, "No man knows my history." That is a truism of the first order and applies to us all. When I write about others, whether about my children, my wives, or a friend, I write only what I *perceive* about them, who I *perceive* them to be, not who they are. No one can write who we are, and words cannot reveal the innermost thoughts in our hearts, neither our demons nor joys.

Glancing back over this narrative it is easy to imagine that it could have been written only by one who: 1) has no shame, 2) has the heart of a child, or 3) is incapable of telling a lie. To produce this history I have summoned honesty and called on courage. You who desire to remember me, why should I have you remember other than truth?

I AM TWO FEET TALL.

It is night and stars are splashed against the sky like unfallen rain. When you are small, the vanishing rains can sweep the overhanging night with a frenzy of stars, the stars themselves like a handful of rain flecked on the sky. It is in the absence of rain that you smell it, the air without weight and so clear it is like earth in your breath: the earth you have come to. Above, the watery, misshapen moon hangs like an ambivalent eye. You can see it, among the stars in the glistening street and tread on those worlds above, watch how they burst up and then ripple away. They are nothing but water, these stars and the moon, whether in the street or the sky.

"Oh, Rogie," I hear Mama's voice, "now your shoes are all wet!" Daddy tugs on my arms and flies me over a puddle or two. Buddy is giggling, leaping the puddle I sloshed. When we come beneath the light our shadows go squat and waver as we walk, now thrown against the high stadium wall. The man at the turnstile says, "Hey, Cotton Top," and spins us through, though I easily duck beneath the horizontal bar before it clicks around. I turn back and shoot him twice, click, click. He grins and slaps a hand to his heart, returns fire with the barrel of a finger.

The evening air is filled with the scent of my mother and yet something of rain. I feel my hand in the hand of my father, and then I am lifted and plopped next to Buddy who is dangling his legs over the

retaining wall. I think my memory is skewed here. Although, I see us awaiting the spectacle: Mom, Dad, my brother Douglas (Buddy), and myself sitting on a retaining wall, six or eight feet above the ground, it is in all likelihood the bench of a bleachers.

When the clowns come out, I shoot each one. "Click, click, click." It is my little blue pistol, with a yellow hammer and red trigger. The yellow-red cylinder spins as I click. The colors are magnificent, like those you would find in any kindergarten room, primary blue, yellow, and red. Roy Rogers has nothing on me. Sometimes when I click, the clown actually falls, rolling about in the mud. It is a sad sight, watching clowns die. But then they get up, and I can breathe once again.

They set a house afire and rescue the lady. She is flailing from a window two stories up. The clowns are scrambling up the ladder and spraying each other while the house burns. This, Doug thinks, was the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Circus, in Salt Lake City, up near the University of Utah football stadium, on the east shelf of Foothill Drive. But I remember only the clowns and the blazing house—the elephants marching about, swinging their trunks. I remember only the precious gun I dropped in the mud and how time plants its feet, dallies for a moment, and then rushes on.

"Daddy," I cried, but he wouldn't. It was soggy down there, at the foot of the retaining wall (or beneath the bleachers). "Daddy," I cried, but he had on his best shoes and a clean shirt. "Mama!" But she only shook her head and shushed a finger to her lips. And beneath me the yellow hammer winked up from the mud.

"Peejunwagner," Buddy teased. "Stop crying like a baby and breathe. Look! The lady's about to get stomped!"

And it was true, how life gets in the way of itself: the lady in fishnet and sequins lay on her back on a red mat on the ground as the elephant's fore-hoof came within an inch of her nose. The ringmaster barked orders for the elephant to lower its hoof. "Stay, stay," he directed, hunched over the handle of his whip as he used it to point. Then he shouted, "Up, up!" and the elephant raised its leg. It sat back on its haunches, pawing the air with its fore-hooves and trumpeted while the lady leapt to her feet, swept her arms wide, and bowed low.

All around us people were shouting and clapping, and beneath me my little gun shone. Buddy pointed to the center ring where the

unburning house continued to burn. At the foot of the ladder the blue-haired clown is tried to wiggle out from under the fat lady—and I laughed as I cried.

My head hurt with laughing through tears and I was trying to think. I was trying to think how to get my gun out of the mud below. I was trying to think how I dropped it in the first place. I was trying to think what the rest of my life would be without it. I was trying to think whether I had done something wrong. I was trying to think what it meant to be good. I was trying to think how to make it all right. And what, I wondered, was my little gun trying to think?

I remember nothing more but the trauma inside, my sense of a horrible loss. That and the smell of ozone and dung. And my family as close as the evening damp.

Such is the memory that begins my life: family, rain, heartache, and clowns.

One earlier incident that I don't remember, but that mother tells about me, was the time I ran away from home, age 1½. Buddy found me a block away, sitting on the curb in front of the corner grocery store. A flock of children waited impatiently while I delved out pieces of "n-d-y" from the bag I'd stolen inside. These were my philanthropic days. I was the god of small things. When Mom arrived, she asked the grocer if he hadn't seen me go in and out of the store. He said, "It was the strangest thing. I was standing behind the counter, and I saw the door open and close, but no one came in. After a minute, I saw it open and close again, but no one went out. I thought the place was haunted or I was losing my mind." From his perch behind the counter, he couldn't see me waddle in and out, the neighborhood culprit, child of dastardly deeds. I had such a sweet tooth that Mom kept the candy hidden and spelled in code when she or Buddy wanted a piece: "n-d-y."

But I broke the code. All I had to do was thump my head on the coffee table and yowl at the top of my lungs. Mom came rushing with a lemon drop or maybe a caramel or two. "I don't know what to do," she told the doctor one time, "I'm afraid he'll bash out his brains." The doctor

leaned back in his chair and chuckled, she said. He summoned all the wisdom he could. "When it hurts bad enough," he counseled my Mom, "he'll quit."

And I did.

When I asked Grandpa Petersen for an ooty-driver, he said, "Oh, Nelda, what can it hurt?" Against my sweet mother's better judgment, Grandpa gave me a screwdriver just right for my size. I've always wondered if it occurred to either one of them that I might poke out my eye. But I went about my business while they visited in peace. When we got home, Grandpa called Mom. "What in the hell has that kid done to my house? Every doorknob I touch falls off in my hand. And the furnace won't work."

Mom looked at me. She sighed and clicked her tongue against her teeth. "Your Grandpa's an ooty-ball," she said and hung up.

Sometimes, during the years from 1951 to 1953, Dad would wake us up at four o'clock in the morning, and we would stand at the kitchen window to watch the detonation of an atomic bomb. These were the experimental years, and the bombs were detonated on schedule in the Nevada desert about 150+ miles south of Milford. Dad worked the Iron Mountain and Las Vegas runs during those and later years and ultimately became a victim of fallout, as did many others in the southern part of the state. This was our government at work—experimenting with new ways to kill people and finding success in the process. In my little book of poetry *Riding the Absolute*, I published this poem about my father, which was also published in the literary magazine *New Millennium Writings*:

GROUND ZERO
—1951, U.P.R.R.

The cause of this disease is unknown,
but (pick one) genetics, certain viruses,
& exposure to radiation may play a role.

You thundered in from Vegas
riding a hotshot, clouds of glory
in your eyes. Throttle back,
my papa, swing
down from the
cab. How those glistening rails
called to you, the switchfrogs,
the yellow wonder of it, the croak.

...and we stood at the
kitchen window, $E=MC^2$,
parents & brothers
watching flashes of dawn
at 4:00 AM,
lingering bursts
of artificial suns, unaware how
history seeps into the bones,
how legacy thins the blood.

At supper mother mentioned
something about mushrooms
but clouds were all the same
to me.
Early morning holocausts
against the window pane, my
darling father's shrouded life
reflected in unimaginable eyes.

Dad had a little of Errol Flynn in his look; he had black curly hair and combed it straight back. He was the most gregarious person I've ever known. He loved people. He was interested in people. He loved to find out about people. Many individuals of a sociable, communicative nature

spend more time talking about themselves than listening to others, but Dad always listened. I'm sure he thought subconsciously that everyone and everything was more interesting than he, and that was precisely the trait that made him more interesting than anyone or anything else. He loved both ornamental and vegetable gardens; he loved anything that grew: hollyhocks and daffodils; irises, and lilacs; rhubarb and squash; apples and currents were among his favorites. Some of the lilac bushes in our yard grew as high as the eaves of the house. In the spring, the scent of lilac suffused the air from one end of town to the other. Who would know that lilacs were a member of the olive family…other than my father and some horticultural scholar? When I was a child Dad showed me how to pinch a leaf from its branch, fold it down the spine of its stem, and make it buzz with my lips. He loved brickwork, stonework, rockwork and labored as a mason whenever he could, finally building one of the city's most elaborate brick walls to boundary our yard

I slept with my female cousins—Diane, Margo and Delene—until I was fifteen. I had baths with Delene until I was eight. It was like sleeping or bathing with your sister, I guess, but not in any incestuous way. Our parents apparently thought we were absent of sex. They'd throw out a pallet on the floor and say, "Let's see now, so and so can take the bed in the front bedroom and so and so can sleep in the bed in the basement, and Roger and Margo (or Roger and Delene or Diane) can sleep right here on the floor. We'll just make them a bed." But sometimes Margo slept in my bed at home, and I remember the three of us, Margo, Donald, and me, sleeping together in Donald's room in the Hinckley house. After about twelve when we slept in the same bed, we tried not to touch. But when we were seven or eight it was a whole different thing. We sometimes slept in each others arms. These were the cousins I loved; they were balm to my soul. One night, at Delene's, she slept in the bottom bunk in her room and I in the top. I was probably seven and she about six. After saying our prayers, she climbed up to the top and crawled in. I felt so childish and strangely adult. We talked for a while and then hugged. We hugged and then kissed. I kissed her all through the night

and then slept. In the middle of the night I woke up and kissed her some more. We hugged and we kissed and I remember how my heart thumped. I felt my love for that girl sink in my bones. In the morning I woke up and looked at the child I had kissed through the night. She had ringlets and her hair was affray, and all I could think was, "WHAT HAVE I DONE?"

Certainly, given the parents I had been given there was not only hope, but steeped in my bones, happiness beyond the possibility of hope. How could I love anything in the universe, my childish mind wondered, more than my Mother and Dad? "But, Rogie," I remember mother telling my one time, as Dad swept the new Studebaker around the Minersville curve, "you have to love Father in Heaven the mostest of all." That was a concept at the time I couldn't quite grasp.

O, how I love my parents! When I think of the love and nurturing they gave me, for the examples they set, I wonder now how I could have ever done wrong. Even so young, I recall wishing to be a similar light in the darkness to children of mine! As a boy, I was not free of temptation, but each time some demon arose with a beckoning smile, the image of my parents rose up in majesty, like a monument, and threatened most demons away. I had no inclination to bring displeasure upon them, and I knew there was nothing in their lives that would warrant me in taking a course that would not be acceptable to them, and thus to my Heavenly Father. O, the guilt that I felt when I failed their trust!

Here's a poem representative of my feelings for my mother. It was published in *Riding the Absolute*:

THE TEACHER
—for Nelda

For the life of me
I can't recall one child
who had to polish apples with you—
maybe Dad on occasion.

Yours was a first class room
where more than numbers counted
& even the shy & discontent
heard the sun in your voice.

Consider the white shingled home
your children couldn't do without,
you and Dad had imbued it so. Yours
was devotion of a kind lost to the world.

Yours was valiance of a nearly perfect nature.
It must have come all the way from Denmark
down through your father's magic hands. It
must have been in your mother's English prayers.

You are more than important to generations.
You are that moment in history when truth
and the wonder of knowledge illuminate
an unaltered hieroglyph standing among the rubble.

If they held me against my will to complete
an image, I would call your eyes gentle,
your voice soft singing. I would say you were
the bright bead of this poem, a promise of pearls.

I always thought my mother was prettier than the actress Virginia Mayo, who she resembled somewhat. My mother had a prettier mouth and more fetching eyes than either Virginia Mayo or Rita Hayworth.

When I turned twelve, I went on a number of Priesthood or youth outings. I was never much of a scout, but I did go on the overnighters and learn how to tie knots. I preferred the Priesthood outings to the jamborees, such as going to Saint George to do baptisms for the dead.

Sometimes, the entire mutual would go. We'd make a kind of round trip, from Milford through Cedar and down to St. George. On the way home, we'd circle to the west and go up through Enterprise stopping along the Santa Clara River to swim in the hot springs at Veyo, a big outdoor pool. From the font to the pool seems now kind of weird. Larry Lofthouse or Cullen Goodwin, Priests, would talk about this girl or that. They would razz us deacons with the mysteries of love. It was odd, this coming of age, to be on the Lord's errand with hormones abuzz.

Once we went to the State Fair in Salt Lake City. We brought our sleeping bags and slept overnight in the recreation hall of a chapel in American Fork and went to Church the next day. At the State Fair, Hubert Smith won the ring toss and picked a switchblade as his prize. When you pressed a button on the side of the handle the blade sprung out. I won the ring toss right after him and picked a switchblade as well.

We walked from this booth to that, got a cotton candy, and checked out the bulls. Deep in my heart, I knew something was wrong. It nagged me as we inspected the hogs. Hubert took out his knife, pressed the button, and flashed it around. I thought of the stainless steel horse with a chain for a bridle that I could have picked for my prize. Bobby said, "Let me see the knife that you won." But I told them, "I'm taking it back." They tried to talk me out of it, but I knew what was right. On a priesthood trip you don't pick a switchblade when you win. That's worse than a loss.

I was a little embarrassed when I asked the man at the booth if I could exchange the knife for the horse. He didn't seem to understand and I had to ask him again. "You'd rather have this horse than that knife?" I nodded I would. He shrugged and took the knife and gave me the horse.

Of course, I didn't want the horse, but on that trip I wanted the horse more than the knife. This is how the Spirit whispers soft in your ear. This is how you come to know little rights from small wrongs. Even embarrassed, you know there is strength in the decision you've made. And you feel that strength in your boyish sinews and loins. Go ahead and laugh, you dare with a look to your friends. They might snicker a bit, but they couldn't laugh if they tried. They have a conscience as well, in spite of how they might choose.

That night, after we were settled in at the recreation hall of the chapel, we got permission to go for a walk. We slouched beneath the streetlights, just me, Hubert, and Bob, like a triad of toughs. We stood on this corner and that—watched a girl walk by. We went in a store and got us a drink. On the way back, we encountered two kids. They were about our age, bullies and ready to fight. "Up from Milford?" you say. "Spending the night in a church?" The threats sort of built.

When Hubert took out his knife simply for show, the big kid said, "Hey…ready to rumble are we?" and rummaged for his. He produced a pocket knife with a blade twice the size of the blade Hubert had switched.

Hubert put the knife in his pocket and started to run. Before I could run, the skinny kid had me in a Full Nelson with his knee in my back. Hubert stopped and came back. Bob said, "We didn't mean anything. Let him go."

The big kid put the knife to my throat. He made a lame joke I've long since forgot. I wasn't scared, maybe a little perhaps. I think we all prayed. Whether they'd done something horrendous, who knows? But in some strange and curious way, after a minute or two we were all friends. The transition I remember was odd. The skinny kid let me go and the big one folded up the blade of his knife. We stood around for a while like pals talking about sports.

You can't imagine how glad I was to have chosen the horse.

My father—Orion—was aptly named after the constellation; for he was the hunter of hunters, but I, as "Roger," was only a spear bearer, the hunter's aid. Let me tell you the difference between the hunter and the hunter's aid. We were hunting up in Wild Horse, the mountains northeast of town—Jan, Dad, and I—when I shot a three-point in the hindquarters. It was a cool October morning, the day after Dad's birthday. A thin light lay in the ravine and sponged at the shade. I was about mid-ridge, shooting 50 or 60 yards down hill. Through the scope I watched the little buck go down and slip around on its haunches. It could brace itself up on its front legs but the hind legs were useless. I

watched through the scope as it dragged itself down the slope and into the trees. "I broke its back," I yelled to Pop.

He hollered from higher up on the ridge, "Can you see it?"

I shouted and heard the clap of my echo deep in the canyon, "Not for the mahogany. It's still alive."

I heard him shout back and waited for the echo to clear. "Well, go down there and hit it," he said.

I shuffled down the side of the mountain, through a forest of cedars, slipping on shale. I could feel the blood pump in my ears. When I came out of the trees, I saw the little buck, his back jammed up against the trunk of a mahogany tree. He was laboring for breath and twisting his head. When he saw me, he tried to get up, wheezed, and fell back against the trunk.

High on the ridge, I could see the intermittent orange of Dad and Jan making their way down. They appeared on the side of the hill for a moment and then were lost in the trees. Dad yelled again for me to hit the damn thing.

I laid the 30.06 on the ground, took my canteen from its case on my belt and unscrewed the lid. Instead of taking a drink, I re-screwed the lid tight and put the canteen back in its case. I cast around for something to use, picked up a branch for a club. Each time I tried to smack it, the deer fended me off with its antlers. I couldn't get a clean whack at its head. I heard Dad, now, coming down through the cedars. I hefted a pretty big rock, tried to hit it with that, felt the blood pump thick in my throat. I picked up the rock and heaved it again. The point of one of its antlers broke off. The little deer struggled and wheezed. Both of us wheezed.

I found a bigger rock and was ready to heave that when Dad and Jan broke through the trees. Jan was about nine and carrying Dad's gun. The look on his face was as bewildered as mine.

"What the hell are you doing?" Dad asked.

"You said to hit it," I said.

"Hit it?" he said. "Hit it? I meant shoot the damn thing."

It hadn't occurred to me to shoot the damn thing. I picked my rifle up from the ground and chambered a round. At about ten or fifteen feet, I found the little buck's head in the scope, and with Dad and Jan standing there, blew the side of its face against the trunk of the tree. I

remember hearing a last breath that expired, unknowing whether it was the deer's or my own.

This was not a pleasant experience for either the deer or me. I always loved tromping the mountains with my brothers and Dad, but in spite of the many deer I killed over the years, I was always out of sorts with the hunt. No, not the hunt, but the kill. Of course, it was easier if you were 300 yards away, as many of our shots were, and if Dad was there to clean it. We shot a lot of deer at that distance, sighting them across the Sagebrush Flat on top of Honey Boy. Sitting on a rock in the top of Cherry Creek Canyon, I once made a shot that was about 300 yards. The deer was a four-point, on a dead run through the mahogany and oak in the bottom of the canyon, and I shot it right in the top of its head between the antlers. A single glimpse in the scope and one shot. I stayed on the rock while Dad went down to find it. No one was sure I'd killed it until Dad stumbled on it in the thick of those trees. Killing a deer like that was akin to a fighter pilot dropping a bomb on the enemy below. But the Wild Horse experience smacked of the horrors of hand to hand combat. It wasn't long after that I grew out of my desire to hunt. I would simply rather carry the spear.

Perhaps it was the dog in me that allowed me to identify with porkypines, rabbits, and deer—and to worry about the part I played in their deaths. I would not have been a vicious dog. Perhaps I'd have been friendly with cats.

I remember watching a man slaughter pigs at the stockyards. I was probably about five, maybe six. Doug and I would go down there with Dad. We would lean against the fence of the sty and watch the pigs slop. Finally, Doug would say, "How about that one, Dad? He's a big hog." Dad would pay for the pig and the man would slaughter it and hack it up for the fridge.

Uncle Nord and Dad slaughtered a pig at Grandpa Perry's one time. It was a "hog"; they called it a "hog." To me it was a pig, but not a "Practical" pig—it was the other one that made its house out of straw.

They drove the pig from its sty and up on a ramp where Uncle Nord got its head in a noose. I had to hold the bucket under its throat while Dad stuck it. It squealed, of course. Uncle Nord strained at the noose and

I watched its life drain away. Finally, it slumped on the ramp, all its blood gone.

They shot a cow once in that corral ("kill a beef" was the term). It was a big red Hereford with a patch of white on its head. Grandpa levered a round into his 300 Savage and shot it behind the ear. It was less painful than killing a pig—less painful for me.

Although a side of beef, together with a brisket of pork, will keep you alive until spring.

Such are the sorrows you see, the woes that you do, the ambivalent wonders that grow in your heart as a child. Necessary "evils," I guess, in this veil of tears.

In the spring of my junior year, I saw angels dance on the head of a pin. I fictionalized the incident in *Sweet Sally Ann*. But the following is fact. After a high school basketball game the previous year, Ronnie Turner and I got in an argument on the sidewalk in front of the Hong Kong Café. There were two or three of us who'd just finished the game and gone downtown for something to eat. Who knows what the argument was. We got out of the car to go in the restaurant, and he took a swing at me, kind of a glancing blow. Beneath the streetlamp, our shadows wavered and danced. I slapped him, which was worse than a punch. His eyes went wide, and I slapped him again. Next time he swung, he lost his balance and fell to his knees. I hit him on top of his head and that was the end of it—at the time I thought so, at least.

The following year, he buffed out, got sassy and rude whenever we met. I could never figure out what he envied in me. One day it rained and Coach decided to keep us in during practice and let us all box, each match a single round according to weight. Somehow, Turner and Memmott fell on the same card. "I'll bloody your nose," he said, shaking a glove in my face before the bell rang. It's true; he addled my brain but didn't let blood, and without blood what's a boxing match worth?

When the weather dried up, we started to sprint and run the high hurdles, pole vault, and pass the baton. The day I remember got honeyed and low; lightning sparked to the east. I started toward the broad-jump

pit, barefoot, shoes in my hand, when an angel flew by. If you've ever had an angel overseeing your life, you know what I mean. The ministrations of such are out of this world. It's not something you see with your eyes but something you know in your heart—know not in your head but your heart. Watching the disappearance of something I hardly believed I had seen, I felt the same infinite passion of expectation when, right at that moment, a javelin came out of the lowering sky and glanced off the back of my neck.

"Duck!" someone yelled, and I remember the glint of the spear.

I had my track shoes in one hand, crossing the field to broad jump (long jump, I think it's now called). I could feel the grass up through my toes and cool on the soles of my feet. I could see Gary at the far end of the field in a dip and a whirl, the flung discus planing the air, the cords in his neck. Lightning sparked and then sparked again, sparked the rod atop the gymnasium and rattled like chains. Lightning shivered the goal post at the end of the field, cracked, and arced the bleachers behind. Turner, who should have been throwing the shot, picked up the javelin and flung it for kicks, wanted to see how close he could come.

"Duck!" came the voice, and time got suddenly slow. I turned and wrenched back my head with my hand. Whether I saw it or not is a point of debate, but I think I know what I saw, the aluminum shaft coming down. And I heard it as well, hissing and bright in my ear. I fell to my knees and pulled my head down.

The javelin struck the top of my shoulder and glanced off the back of my neck. Had I not fallen to my knees, it would have gone through my chest. Had I not pulled my head down with my hand as I fell to my knees, it would have gone through my neck. But I fell to my knees and yanked my head down, felt it strike and slide by.

The wound in my shoulder sprayed a bright arterial blood. Each throb of my heart sprayed the blood more. I have never seen such terror in the usually unmoved eyes of our Coach.

Racing me to the doctor's office downtown, he kept hollering, "Keep that gauze pressed hard to the wound!" I tried to look in the rearview mirror to see and sprayed blood all over his car.

It took five stitches to close the wound in my neck, leaving a scar like a welt about the size of my thumb.

Dr. Symonds numbed and needled my flesh and tugged the gut through. "I always knew," he remarked, "you'd get the point one of these days." When I came out of Dr. Symonds office, my shoulder patched up, the sky was bright blue. A number of kids across the street at the service station whistled and waved. Turner, among them, just laughed.

No one could remember who told me to "Duck!"

Another incident at school that got me to the doctor's office was when I spilled sulfuric acid on the back of my hand. Mr. Hughes, the chemistry teacher, cried, "Wait! Wait! Don't run water on it. I'll get a bottle of ammonia." He hurried to the closet while I stood by my sink holding that hand by the wrist. I watched the flesh blister and peel. When he came out of the closet, he unstoppered the bottle and poured a generous portion of ammonia into a rag. He dabbed at the pain. Every student in class gathered around my table to watch my hand blister and steam.

He told Doug Killiam to get me down to the doctor's "right now."

When we got to the doctor's office, Dr. Symonds looked at my hand and inquired, "You were in the chemistry lab?" I nodded I was. "And don't you have sinks?" I nodded we did. "And you didn't wash it off as quick as you could?"

When I told him about Mr. Hughes and the ammonia, he just rolled his eyes.

How I Learned the Truth about Santa Claus
(Which Led to Myriad Other Miscellaneous Truths too Apparent to Dismiss and too Numerous to Discuss)

When recently I told someone I was on Santa's "Do Not Visit List," they were curious enough to ask: "How did you learn the TRUTH about Santa Claus?" And so I told them the truth about how I learned the truth from my darling angelic Mother, a purveyor of truth, and the truth about which I am now telling you:

I was in the third grade and some fourth grade moron tried to tinker with my head. So after I got home from school I asked my Mother, and she said, "Don't be silly. That kid's just a moron. Of course there's a Santa." But it nagged me, and I thought, "But what if he isn't a moron…I mean, just on the slightest off chance…I mean, *WHAT IF?"* So I went back to my angelic mother who hadn't a wicked bone in her body, and I said, "Yeah, but WHAT IF?" And she said, "Honey, the world is full of morons. Don't be silly. Just wait until Christmas."

But impatient boy that I was (am), I was too stupid not to leave it alone, and there was, of course, that slight off chance…just the possibility, you know, that the little imbecile in the fourth grade was just this side of moronic? So I went back to my darling Mother who could not, even under the most dire of circumstances, be driven to distraction—except, of course, by her middle child, wicked boy that he was (is). "WHAT IF?" he said. "WHAT IF? WHAT IF? WHAT IF?" Until finally she said, "You're giving me a headache...and I guess you're old enough to know."

Oh, you can't imagine what trauma that caused—me, on the verge of becoming a moron, like that. And that's how I learned the truth about Santa. Otherwise, if I were a moron, how could I be on his "Do Not Visit" list? If you think about it, the truth is hard to come by sometimes. But if you think hard enough without thinking too hard it's apparent that only the morons don't know the truth.

Using forceps the obstetrician left a mark upon the infant's brow, in detail the whisper of a plot, starlike, a momentary stay, the best of everything life might give, a purpling cluster of sonny's blues or death in the woods—sorrow for a midget, perhaps, an effigy of war. There is this little known fact: We were before we are, nebulous as the pattern of our lives, immutable Seraphim given our blood, plants rough as the moon…

College of Arts and Sciences
Department of English
248 McMicken Hall

UNIVERSITY OF Cincinnati

Cincinnati, Ohio 45221
Phone 513.475.5924

September 24, 1973

Office of the Dean of Students
c/o Linda De Feo
Educational Placement Center
University of California
Irvine, California 92697

Dear Mrs. De Feo:

Mr. Roger Memmott joined the faculty of the Department of English at the University of Cincinnati in the Fall of 1970. I am pleased to recommend him to any College or University wishing to appoint an attractive and imaginative faculty member in literature and creative writing.

For the past three years Mr. Memmott has taught classes in Freshman English, Sophomore American Literature and Creative Writing (Fiction). He has been a popular teacher from the beginning, particularly in Creative Writing—the area for which we first hired him. Last year his enrollment in the writing course doubled, and this year we have had to establish three sections to deal with another 50% increase in student demand.

I have seen several student evaluations of Mr. Memmott's classes and they are consistently superior. I have also visited his classes and know first-hand that he makes an unusually good impression as a teacher.

Mr. Memmott has a keen sense of order and planning, good presence in the classroom and a voice that carries easily and comfortably. He knows how to ask good questions, and how to keep students alert and conscious of a rational development in what they are studying. He is, in brief, an unusually good teacher with a potential for becoming genuinely exceptional.

Mr. Memmott joined our faculty with the understanding that his appointment would be terminal after three or four years and that his service with us would provide him with something like an apprenticeship. He has done a good deal of writing during the past three years; he received a Taft Foundation Summer Grant to work on his manuscript of a novel in the summer of 1972; and he shows every sign of becoming a fairly well-published writer before he leaves Cincinnati. Mr. Memmott is a personable and thoughtful young man who should be encouraged to remain in the academic world. If someone were considering him for a position I would be pleased to comment further or answer any questions by telephone (513-475-5494, collect).

Sincerely,

John P. McCall

John P. McCall, Head
Department of English

College of Arts and Sciences
Department of English
248 McMicken Hall

UNIVERSITY OF Cincinnati

Cincinnati, Ohio 45221
Phone 513.475.5924

December 3, 1979

To: Nancy Harvey, Head
Department of English

From: Watson Branch, Coordinator
Freshman English Program

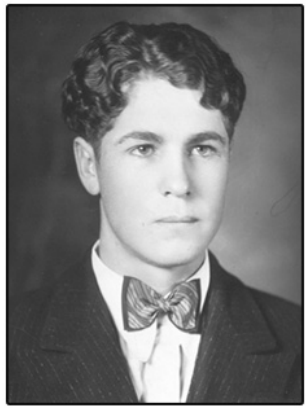
Re: Visit to Professor Roger Memmott's Freshman English class

My visit to Roger Memmott's Freshman English class and my conversations with him have shown me that he is an intelligent and imaginative teacher. His mature manner of quiet authority sets the tone for his class. This tone is tempered by occasional humorous dialogues between teacher and students, dialogues that are always relevant to the subject matter. The students respond willingly and accurately to questions Prof. Memmott poses regarding the material being covered. They have a good sense of both the substance and the method of the assigned readings (formal essays in the class I visited). Prof. Memmott also makes good use of handouts to focus on special problems of composition.

It is a measure of the students' interest in Prof. Memmott's class that they wanted to continue the discussion even after the bell rang to end the hour-and-fifteen-minute class. I am sorry to be losing him as a teacher in our Freshman English Program, and I hope he will take up the profession again at his new home on the East Coast. Students today need teachers like Prof. Memmott.

Watson Branch

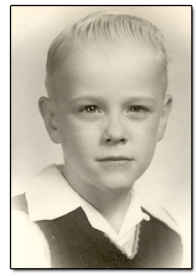
Photos



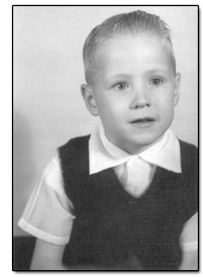
My Father – Orion (1936)

My Mother – Nelda (1936)

Douglas (1952)



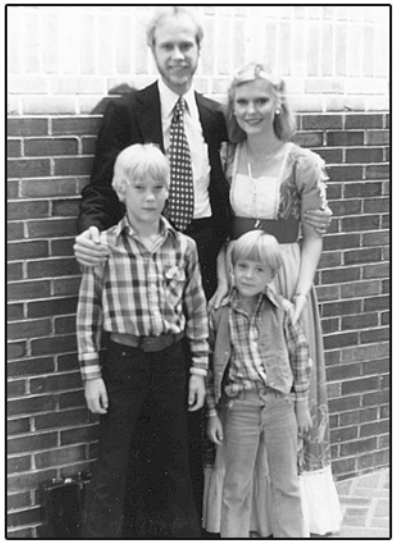
Roger (1954)



Jan (1955)

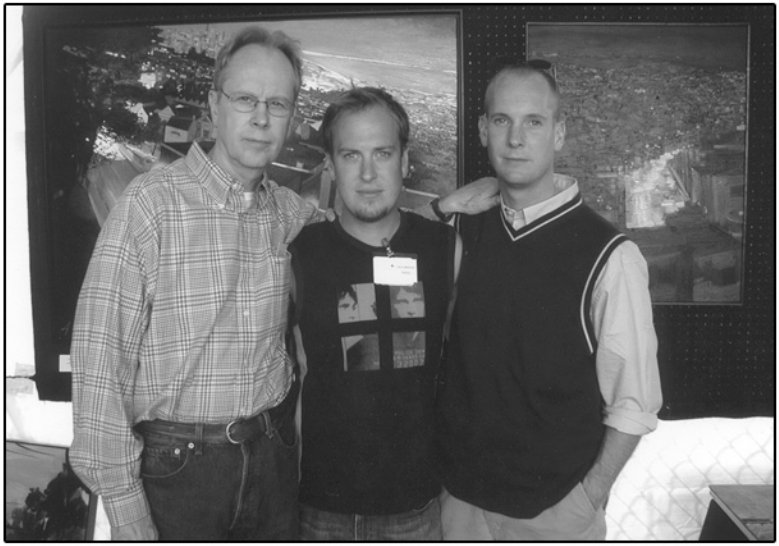
Shari (1975)

Marrianne (1983)

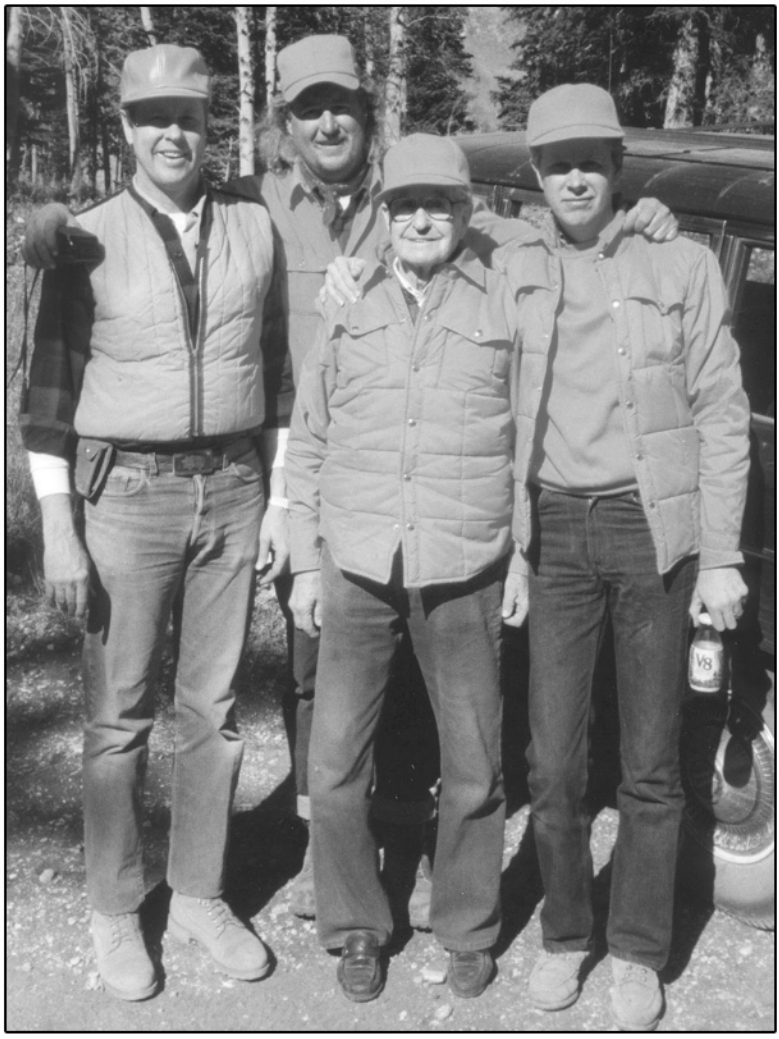


Roger, Shari, Christian, Aaron
(New Canaan, CT - 1980)

Christian, Marrianne, Roger, Aaron
(Salt Lake City, UT - 1989)



Roger - Aaron - Christian
(Aaron's Booth at the Sausalito Arts Festival, 2003)



Doug – Jan – Dad – Roger
"The Last Hunt"
(Manti Ferron Reservoir, 1989)

Orion & Nelda (My Mother and Father) – 50th Wedding Anniversary, 1986