

CHAPTER 1

STORIES OF FAMILY,
LESSONS OF LOVE



Whenever I hear that someone is a “self-made” man or woman, I smile. None of us is truly self-made. We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, and we all have reason to be grateful for the help we have received along the way.

In my own life, I have many reasons to be grateful. I remember a Girl Scout message from an earlier day, “Honor the past. Cherish the future.” Both are equally important. If we do not honor the past, we may well end up thinking everything begins and ends with us. Such self-centeredness leads to swollen egos—and pride, which, as we all know, goeth before the fall.

Lessons of Love and Family

In my lifetime, with all the remarkable guides, family, and friends who made it all possible, there is one person who has had the greatest influence on my life and my work—my grandmother Sadie Pringle Wicks. This surprises people, for some of the greatest thought leaders in many fields have

shared my journey in generous and highly visible ways. Yet from the time I could walk and talk and say, “Mama Wicks,” she had the greatest impact on me—personally, with my family, and professionally. She was small, gentle, loving, and quiet. She was always there for me. Her wisdom, her depth, and her love began to shape me from my earliest years. When I would walk in the room, I was the only person there. When she talked to me, I still remember, she would look into my eyes intently. For that moment she made me feel like the most important person in the world.

When I was a small child, she used to tell me family stories about our ancestors. For example, when Lincoln called for volunteers, the seven Pringle brothers, one of whom was Mama Wicks’s father and my great-grandfather, set out with their father on the Pennsylvania Railroad train from Summerhill to Johnstown, nine miles away. First, the father walked with them to a photography studio, where he had each son photographed. Then they walked over to the post office, where they volunteered, and then the seven sons left for Pittsburgh to be inducted. The youngest was nineteen, the eldest twenty-seven. Six of these men were married, and left their wives and children and farms because their country called. It never occurred to them that three could go and four could stay at home and take care of their farms and their small lumber mill that made barrel staves way back in the mountains. All seven brothers volunteered. They were called to do what they did. At the end of the war, six brothers came home. The nineteen-year-old, the baby of the family, was fatally injured in the Battle of the Wilderness. One soldier brother was given leave to bring Martin’s body home. As a

little girl, I would go with Mama Wicks to the Pringle Hill cemetery, our family burial ground, and we would pause at each weathered marble headstone as she told me stories about the seven Pringle brothers. With these visits and the stories, my grandmother showed me how to honor the past and the leaders in my family.

I experienced another example of my grandmother's influence not long after I was married and World War II began. My husband John volunteered for the Navy and was sent to Pensacola for training as a Naval Combat Air Crew photographer. It seemed a strange assignment for a young newspaper editor and writer, but off he went, saying good-bye to our eighteen-month-old Johnny and me.

I was determined to join him with the baby in Pensacola, but my mother, other family, and friends were horrified. Mother even suggested my leaving the baby with her and going alone. They had an extensive list of objections and excuses. It was a long train ride to Pensacola, he could be sent out as we arrived, and on and on. When in doubt, my practice was to ask Mama Wicks. She was the mother of nine children, with seven surviving, and had lived a long life with an adoring husband (so adoring that he wrote a long, passionate poem to her on their fiftieth wedding anniversary).

She listened to my story, put her arms around me, and said quietly, "Your place is with your husband and with the baby." I went back home and said, "Mama Wicks says my place is with my husband." No one could contradict Mama Wicks.

So, by Pennsylvania Railroad, from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, to Pensacola, Florida, with my eighteen-month-old baby, John, and his crib so he would feel at home, I traveled to be with big John. Later, after this trip, we took an even longer train ride from Pensacola to San Diego Naval Air Base to be with John. Those few years in naval towns, with very little money, were some of the best years of our lives. I took little Johnny to the beach while his father was flying; I'd say prayers and sometimes smile while thinking that a guy who had never even shot a BB gun was in a clear bubble under the plane with a camera and a big gun. John was told, "You shoot your way in, and shoot pictures on the way out. And as you are leaning out to shoot pictures, if you drop the camera, just follow it." Navy training humor.

The war ended as John was finally to be deployed. Johnny and I came home to Johnstown by train in time for Christmas. The eighteen-month-old baby was now four years old. John didn't get discharged until February, and came home to find the Christmas tree still up, losing needles, yet with lights, ornaments, and gifts under the tree to welcome our sailor home.

Mama Wicks died before our tour of duty was over. Her simple statement, "Your place is with your husband," taught me lessons about the power of love and about families belonging together. What a different life it would have been if I had heeded the timid ones who told me it was too dangerous to take the baby thousands of miles by train. Later, when I was called to give advice in many difficult situations, I learned to

consider the issue and simply state from the heart my best advice, and it is always about them, not you. My grandmother taught me this.

The second-greatest influence on my life was Mama Wicks's daughter Carrie—my beloved Aunt Carrie who had a greater influence on my work and who I am today than my own mother.

Here in its entirety is the letter she sent to me on my birthday in 1985, which shows that the admiration was mutual.

Easton, PA

Dearest Frances:

The enclosed photograph of you, Mom and Pop will tell you how long you and I have been "Travel Companions". [The photograph was of my grandparents with me as a six- or seven-year-old.] This was the last time you came with anyone. From that time on you came alone, or, with me when I had been visiting in South Fork.

I have such happy memories of those days. When you were four or five years old, I asked your opinions of so many things, such as, which dress I should wear to a party etc., and that has gone on through the years; of course you came to me for counsel. Well all in all, we have been good "Buddies." Do you remember the time you came to Easton from New York in a blizzard after you had attended a National Board Meeting? You had to come in a bus via Reading, Pa.

You always went the second mile for Mike and me.

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I knew, from the time you were five years old (in kindergarten) that you were destined to do great things and that Prophecy has come true. I do love you and hope all your wishes will be granted.

*“He who would do wonderful things very often
must travel alone.”*

Henry Van Dyke

A happy, happy Birthday and dearest love to you.

Carrie

October 28, 1985

My husband appreciated Aunt Carrie almost as much as I did, and we loved including her in our travels. We smiled together during a trip to Paris when, in her late eighties, she sprinted up the long stairs to the top of the Basilica of the Sacre-Coeur, even though an electric lift was available. While in the United Kingdom, we also noticed that no one was more absorbed, more appreciative of the King’s Library in the British Museum than Carrie.

Carrie’s father was born in Tywardreath, a tiny village in Cornwall, England, a village of farmers, fishermen, and tin miners, who heard long ago the message of John Wesley and built a little Methodist chapel outside the village walls in the late 1700s. The great landowners would not permit “the dissidents” to build the chapel within the village walls at that time.

However, by 1823, this sturdy little band had grown so strong and so determined that they persuaded a farmer in the village to let them build their Methodist chapel on his land within the village walls. He agreed on one condition: on one

side of the church wall, there had to be a lean-to for his cows. So for years, there were no windows on one side of the church.

Church history records that in 1823, three farmers were ordained as lay preachers, and every Sunday after service, these sturdy lay preachers who were farmers and tin miners walked to nearby villages to preach the Word. Our ancestor, Thomas Henry Wicks, was one of those three. So Carrie and I would go to Cornwall every year; sit in the 1823 Wicks pew; and think about our courageous, “dissident” ancestors; and I would hope that their genes, their blood still flowed in my generation, and I would say to myself, “I’m the sixth generation of dissidents to sit in this pew, and I’m not going to change.” You can find great strength in honoring the past even as you cherish the future. Carrie helped teach me this.

Carrie was regent of a Daughters of the American Revolution chapter and helped save and restore historic eighteenth-century buildings in Easton, Pennsylvania, where I now have a home. I think she added to my love of history, of family heritage, and of the men and women who sustained the democracy in every war from the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War to the War of 1812, and to my appreciation for the seven Pringle brothers who fought in the Civil War. All the men in our family served in World War II. My father and my son served in the U.S. Army and loved it. My son is now on oxygen twenty-four hours a day, has a faltering heart, and is confined to his bed, but says proudly, “I was a soldier, I am a soldier, I will always be a soldier.” He writes his own books and feels as I do about family and country. When I call every evening and ask how he is, “Mom, I’m doing great” is his answer, and we talk about

his writing and his new granddaughter, Isabella Frances Hesselbein, the joy of his life. Service is a value that runs strong in my family.

My son and Carrie were very close from the time he was a baby. She bought him his first cowboy boots when he was six, and I often hear her voice when he is talking with me about the U.S. Army, for she was a great Army historian.

Carrie died at ninety-six, still the bright, charming, impeccably groomed, tastefully dressed, perfect companion I will always remember. At every wonderful event in my career she was there, in New York, in Washington, wherever, adding a special and loving dimension to the moment. I carry her in my heart always.

My Father

Long ago, my father, who was traveling, wrote a letter with three sections: a short story about a bunny and a robin for my brother, John, who was two years old; a long poem filled with birds, animals, and children for my sister, Trudy, who was four years old; and a loving message to me, his eight-year-old: “Be good, be kind, be considerate of the feelings of others, and know your daddy loves you dearly.”

At eight, I probably wanted some robins and bunnies of my own, yet as I was the one who read my father’s loving messages to Trudy and John, over and over, I guess they became mine as well, and I tried to be what he wanted me to be. It’s possible that so long ago, I learned that we take care of others. Later, this surely became part of my leadership approach, my commitment, and my belief that to serve is to live.

My father, Burgess Harmon Richards, was my hero for many reasons. He spent many years in the Army, serving on many fronts, from the Philippines and Panama to here in the United States, and he loved his Army years. On my wall are photographs of this sturdy, handsome guy in his football uniform as a fullback on the Willoughby, Ohio, high school championship football team, and on the U.S. Army and Pennsylvania State Police football teams.

He left the Army to become one of the first state police officers in Pennsylvania, which had established the first state police force in the country because of the violence in its coal towns, where ethnic groups were battling with one another. (Miners came from all over the world to work in the Pennsylvania coal mines.) General Norman Schwarzkopf's father was the man charged with forming this first state police force, at the request of the president of the United States. The call went out, and two thousand men applied, many of them U.S. Army cavalrymen. Two hundred were chosen, and my father was one of them. According to State of Pennsylvania archives, he was "an officer of great character and courage." These mounted policemen wore black uniforms and tall black caps, and rode big, dark horses. The miners from Eastern Europe dubbed them "the Black Hussars," for they reminded them of the czar's Hussars, who wore similar uniforms. (There is a book, *The Black Hussars*, that records the story of this historic force.) I have photographs of my father mounted on "Old High," his wonderful horse, in a parade. The battling miners were not afraid of guns, but when two Pennsylvania State Policemen galloped into the fray on those big animals, they disbursed.

My father was a great storyteller. His stories live with me today and still guide me. Best of all, he made our family history come alive. One story was especially poignant: in 1803, William Richards and Mary Adams were traveling in an oxcart from Connecticut to the Western Reserve of Connecticut (later to become Ohio), when their little girl was bitten by a rattlesnake and died. These early settlers endured hardships and made sacrifices that would inspire later generations of our family.

My father also told me about the certificate, now framed and hanging on my wall in Easton, that says, “William Richards, 1853, \$150 contribution to the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute” (later to become Hiram College). He was one of the founders and then a trustee of the Institute. I think about this giving man, William Richards, a farmer, dedicated to education. In 1853, \$150 was a huge amount of money. “How much better is wisdom than gold” he would inscribe in his books.

Generations later, my father’s father, the Reverend Orphanus Quincy Adams Richards, graduated from Hiram College, Ohio, at nineteen, and married Serena Harmon (a freshman, fifteen), later the valedictorian of her class at Willoughby College (now Lake Erie College). When my grandfather was ordained a minister in the Disciples of Christ Church, the young couple was called to go to frontier towns in Wisconsin, to build Christian churches and congregations. Once a church was established in one town, they would go on to another. His sermons, which we treasure, are soaring, masterful, and poignant.

I never knew the Reverend Orphanus Quincy Adams Richards, but he remains alive for me because of my father's stories. He told me that when his father, the minister, heard that the miners in the Klondike gold rush were not hearing the Word of God, he took a leave of absence from his Pennsylvania church, bought big boots and "heavy gold rush clothing," took his eldest son, and went off to the Klondike to preach in tents and in ice fields, wherever the gold miners were. He observed that world.

When he came back, his lectures on Alaska were famous. A flyer for a January 24, 1899, lecture in Cleveland is headlined, "Lecture by Rev. O. A. Richards of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, A Gold-Seeker's Experiences in Alaska." The flyer provides the subjects to be covered: "The Copper River Indians, Ocean voyage, sledding Trip into the Interior, Scaling an Ice Mountain 5,000 feet high, Boat-building, Shooting the Klutena Rapids, Prospecting for Gold with a Pack Train Through the Wilderness. Admission, 25 cents; Children, 15 cents. Family Tickets, \$1.00." What an adventure!

My father was a fine writer. He wrote stories and even a book, which was lost along the way. He helped us appreciate the power of language as well as history. One day, when I was in grade school, I began calling him "Father," probably because I read a book in which the title impressed me. When I continued the "Father," one day he hugged me and said, "I think 'Daddy' will do." I got the loving message. "Daddy" it was.

A powerful sense of history, of family, and of service and obligation were all part of what Orphanus and Burgess left to their children, grandchildren, and now a new generation

eager for the stories of their lives and the lessons they teach. And now it is time for my story—the stories of my life I am endeavoring to share.

It was wonderful that both my father and my mother's mother, Mama Wicks, were such impassioned storytellers and that they spent endless hours telling stories to a little girl who would ask for more, for stories to be repeated so that she could then tell them to her little boy, John, years later.

My Aunt Frances, my father's sister, told me stories particularly about our Adams ancestors. She had John Adams's own toddy bowl on her breakfront in her dining room in Philadelphia. I loved her stories about John and Abigail Adams. Only recently did I learn that John Adams was the only founding father who did not own a slave. That part of our family history comes alive once more as I read recent books on Adams and view the HBO series *John Adams* on DVD.

My niece Frances Chadwick Eckman, my sister's daughter and a great amateur genealogist, and I now keep alive the family stories my father passed along: Anyone for the French and Indian War? Or how about William Pringle, Private No. 19, Continental Militia, Pennsylvania? He came from Scotland to fight in our Revolutionary War. Or our great-great-grandmother's recipe for soap? And how does a young mother tell her husband on a Civil War battlefield that their eighteen-month-old little girl has died of diphtheria "and there are no men left to dig the grave. Two little boys eleven years old from nearby farms dug the grave and their mothers laid out her little body." Family Civil War letters keep alive

the stories of the courage and the sacrifice of Mary and Philip Pringle and all the men and women who have gone before us—who lived and sacrificed so that we could live our lives as we do today.

These are the stories we heard as children from my beloved grandmother; father; Aunt Carrie; and Harry and Ida, John's parents, whose people lived through the Johnstown Flood of 1889—and these are the stories of their lives I share—lessons learned along the way to be applied in our lives.

Because of my father's age—he was forty when I was born—my grandfather could have been my great-grandfather, and although I missed knowing him as a person, his amazing, colorful life, the way he wrote, and this personal window on an earlier generation were great gifts passed down by my father and his stories. So we three children loved, absorbed, and lived lives shaped by the stories our father told us. I cherish those stories, and they are as vivid and alive as they were long ago. My love and respect for the military, the Army, police officers—all those who lay their lives on the line every day for all of us—began with my father, the time he took to tell his children the stories of his young life and all the ways he served his country. Stories of family and life told by a loved one have amazing impact.

With what my father taught us, my brother and sister and I stayed close as we grew up, got married, and ended up living in three parts of the world—John in California and Oregon, I in Pennsylvania and New York, and Trudy with her Navy husband, Captain Walter D. Chadwick, all over

the world, wherever submarines dock. Somehow we stayed closer than most families, to this day. Trudy and John have left us, but are very much alive in my life and work.

Although I lost my father at seventeen, he stays with me. His example of writing and storytelling, his sense of history and our heritage, and his love of family and service walk around with me. I think of him every day and am grateful to a soldier, “an officer of great character and courage,” who adored his children; understood the power of love, language, and example; and tried to prepare Trudy, John, and me for a life well lived, a life of service. Today, when I am working with cadets at West Point and with U.S. Army Chiefs of Staff, my father is smiling.

My Husband

I married into a Johnstown, Pennsylvania, newspaper family. Harry Hesselbein, my husband’s father, was managing editor of the *Tribune* for many years and active in the community. Harry Hesselbein, “Bastion of integrity,” is what he was called in an essay in the *Johnstown Tribune* on its 150th birthday. Harry and Ida Davis Hesselbein were the finest people I have ever known. Both were from early Johnstown families, both families surviving the 1889 flood. I was so fortunate to become their daughter, and I think of them every day.

When John graduated from the University of Pittsburgh as a journalism major, he went to work as the night city editor of the *Johnstown Democrat*. When we were first married, I thought that his was the most romantic career in the world.

After the war, we came back home to Johnstown, where John set up his own business—the Hesselbein Studios. There John made award-winning documentaries and was named a Robert Flaherty Fellow, one of the first six in the United States. (Robert Flaherty was the father of the American documentary.) John also initiated an early local television program, *Adventuring in the Arts*.

Our studio did all kinds of photography: high school senior portraits, belching steel mills at night, weddings—whatever the customer wanted, we tried to provide. John was the artist, and our young teenager, Johnny, assisted in the darkroom. I did something I called “helping John.” In a small family-owned business, everyone helps. So I helped with the documentary films John made, with all kinds of photography—not the artistic shooting, but the preparation of the final product—marketing, listening to the customer, meeting their needs, and so on. I worked on *Adventuring in the Arts*. When a customer wanted her dog’s photograph to look like a painting, John handed me some oil paints, and the customer soon had an oil painting of her dog. I loved my life with those two John Hesselbeins, never wanted to leave Johnstown and never expected to.

Little did I know that everything I learned by doing, by “helping John,” would provide me with indispensable skills, tools, and a background I would need in the future I had never envisioned, one I never thought I wanted when it came. Communications was our business, and communications became a basis for my work years later. Providence plays an important part in the story of my life. There is a plan, was a plan, from the beginning. I just was unaware that

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everything I did was preparing me for the life I would live, the contribution I would try to make in the years ahead. I never wanted to leave Pennsylvania or my hometown. Little did I know that Providence was at work, or that a whole new world of opportunity, of service, and of fulfillment was waiting.