

Personal Sketches

FRED J. AND EMMA CAHOON HEATH  
AND THEIR OFFSPRING

By Grant W. Heath (Nearly the Last of Them)

FREDERICK JOHN HEATH (1883-1948)

I lived with a positive example. If my father had faults, which I doubt, my mother never mentioned them. She did not countermand his instructions to any of us. On the contrary, she would make sure that orders were carried out. On occasion she might sympathize with us and even help us with our assignment, but she would never give the impression we did not have to do what we were told. Consequently, I obeyed my father, respected him and loved him, even though I was too timid to tell him so, at least in words.

It was my mother who loved and respected her husband and 'her. transferred those reassuring feelings to me. What a marvelous Legacy it has proved to be.

Frederick John Heath was neat, clean and pleasant to look at ,but he was not handsome, like his seven sons, or pretty, like his three daughters. He was as big around as he was high. That's really an exaggeration, but his considerable girth did make him appear somewhat shorter than his five-foot nine-inch frame. His stomach protruded far enough that he never wore a belt; he relied on suspenders if he wasn't wearing bib overalls. He struggled and grunted when he tied his shoelaces.

He was bald except for a fringe around the edges. In earlier years his hair was brown, although he was graying and older by the time I came along. His eyes were blue, clear and direct. I was accustomed to telling the truth, but I knew he could see right through me if I tried to lie.

He was good at getting to the point; his directness was upsetting to some people, but he saved a lot of time and guessing by not beating around the bush.

Now for his nose: it was big and he blew it in short bursts with real gusto. I would recognize the sound anywhere. I was thinking that if there are handkerchiefs and nose-blowing in the postmortal existence I will know immediately if Pop and I ended up in the same place. Gosh, I hope so.

Many people have observed that my nose is like Dad's. I haven't objected and haven't been inclined to have it shortened because as a newspaper reporter I found it handy. I didn't have so far to go to get into other people's business. I blow my nose differently, though, in long blasts instead of snorts.

My hairline resembles my father's also, although I have more fringe. I would have preferred lots of hair on top instead of my little tuft, but there again I'd rather be smart than have all the energy go into making hair. I've thought, objectively of

course, that a man can't have both hair and smarts.

My dad was well-rounded in another way. He was smart, not from lots of formal schooling because he got no further than the eighth grade. But he had a college education in reading people, scriptures and newspapers. Our home boasted a substantial library of classics, poetry, Mark Twain, reference books, and two newspapers plopped on our front porch each day. For years I thought newspapers were scripture. I guess I still do, but the impression is fading, finally. We always had lots of good things to read. And we had stimulating conversations...er...arguments around the dinner table, usually with brother Dick taking the opposite position.

My hands are much like my dad's, but Leon's were exact replicas. When Leon died, I peered into the casket, saw his hands folded over his chest and thought they were burying my Dad's hands again. There was a difference, though. My dad was ambidextrous. It was curious to see him pick up a saw or hammer with either hand and go to work. They were good, expressive, solid hands that knew work without being broken or callused. He kept his fingernails trimmed and clean. His handshake was firm.

Pop had a quick smile that seemed to turn out a bit pensive, even sad. He didn't show his teeth much. Maybe he was self-conscious over their being store-bought. I don't remember his laughing loudly, guffawing as some people do. But he enjoyed good humor and good stories. He used both in his Church talks and in his conversations. Pop gave the appearance of being a happy person, and much of that rubbed off on his family. I think all of us have been more glad than sad.

And he had a big heart. It's unfortunate that he didn't have lots of money. He would have shared wisely and widely. Speaking of big heart, as I remember his heart was enlarged because of excessive coughing.

To get relief from asthma attacks, he had some lifesaving powder in a square can which he would tap out onto the can lid. Then he'd light it off and inhale the thick, not unpleasant smoke. The fumes would relieve the wheezing almost immediately.

Pop was a true, blue, died in the wool, flag-waving Republican. When brother Harold joined the ranks of organized labor and became an active Democrat, black clouds hung heavily over the Heath household. Mom and Pop felt unworthy thereafter of having our house used for voter registration and voting.

"Just remember, son," Pop said to me on one occasion, "conditions are always better when the Republicans are in office." It's really the only time he tried to persuade me to be a Republican. I think that he thought I was intelligent enough on my own to follow in his well-reasoned footsteps. His trust was misplaced. I tried desperately to follow along, but I found myself a member of the Salt Lake Newspaper Guild and unable to get into bed, so to speak, with the Salt Lake Tribune management. So I tried to be an active Democrat even to the point of working to have Frank Moss elected senator. Then, after a while, I found that I could not swallow either party line. All this is neither

here nor there. Pop was true to his beliefs, and that in itself was consistent with his personality.

Possibly one of his experiences set his political feelings in concrete. During the depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration set up several agencies including the Works Progress Administration. Pop was hired by the WPA to oversee some type of outdoor make-work project. He bought steel-toed shoes, new bib overalls and marched off to oversee a work crew. He came home thoroughly disgusted. He put up with the job a few days, then quit in disgust. He said he could not in good conscience have anything to do with men who refused to work. I think he blamed President Roosevelt for all the waste. It wasn't until FDR declared war on Japan that he said anything nice about the man.

"The President was magnificent," Pop commented that Sunday morning.

Dad saw four of us off to war. Leon, Paul and I served in the Navy; Dick, the odd one, went into the Army. I didn't care much for the Army but didn't know exactly why until late in the war. Then when I was among many others gearing up for the invasion of Japan which was aborted by the atomic bomb, I received word that Pop was beaten and robbed by two or three soldiers who waylaid him as he was walking home from town. I wrote letters to the editors of the Salt Lake papers charging in bitter words that my enemies were not the Japanese but the cowardly soldiers at Ft. Douglas. I would have started the long swim home right then and there if my anger hadn't cooled. Incidentally, the soldiers broke my father's jaw and stole all his money (two or three dollars). They broke my flag-waving heart as what they did. I haven't cheered the Army football team since. This was probably my greatest frustration during the entire war. I know what helplessness is.

Pop was a good teacher. He taught mostly by example but he taught with word, too. We didn't have a woodshed and he wouldn't have used it for reprimanding as some fathers did. (I remember only one physical reprimand. It was when I was scrubbing the back porch floor and arguing with my mother through the open kitchen door. Pop slipped in through the back door, heard my backtalk and kicked me none too gently on the seat. I immediately got the point and recognized the error of my ways)

Speaking of woodshed, ours was a coalshed. Pop took me out to the tiny building behind the house and carefully explained that I should shovel the coal from the front, keeping it cleaned up so I wouldn't have to trip over misplaced lumps and dirty my clothing and shoes. It's a lesson I applied to many tasks as they came up. It's a lesson I'd like to hand down to my posterity. It applies to any job: keep your desk neat and handle a piece of paper only once; while washing or drying dishes, handle the nearest dish first; work through the pile without sorting them into smaller piles; spend more time doing instead of fixing to get started. But I know my offspring are smarter about these things than I was.

I have fond memories of my father. I remember times, when

we lived in Holladay, Pop would stand out by the barn talking to friend. The bunch of us would be playing hide-and-peek and take turns hiding behind Pop with our feet far apart so we would be "hidden." Christmases were grand occasions. We couldn't have been very poor because our stockings were full, the dining room table loaded with gifts, our stomachs satisfied, our hearts overflowing with good cheer but sad that other people didn't have the same blessings that we enjoyed. Thanksgivings were wonderful, always one of my favorite holidays. Fourth of July's meant piling into the old Buick and going into Big Cottonwood Canyon with cousins hanging out the doors and oozing through the seams.

Pop proudly carried in the groceries, churned the ice cream, led the way to church, reprimanded the older brothers (which they usually needed) and spoiled his three daughters. By the time I was aware of things, the rough edges of parenting had been rubbed off my dad, and the older brothers complained that we younger ones got away with too much. This likely was the case, except for me. I didn't do anything -- wrong, that is.

When we lived on West Temple, piles of wood needed sawing up for winter, weeds grew thick and fast, leaves fell by the bushels. Pop on many occasions timed us as we sawed and chopped. Our friends would gather like iron filings to a magnet, and later as the work was done, they would quietly disappear and then return with their swimming trunks rolled up under their arms. Then Pop would load us into his old Oldsmobile or Whippet or Dodge and take us to Municipal Plunge as a reward. He would go into the deep end of the pool and stand in water up to his nose while the bunch of us would mount the high dive, jump and paddle to him, one at a time of course. I remember well the reluctance of jumping, the coaxing, the assurances, confidence in Pop waiting below, the intense spine-tingling of jumping and the satisfaction at having the courage to drop into the unknown. I've wondered if dying won't be something like Municipal Plunge with my father waiting patiently. I wonder how he'll look in his new "swimming togs." If he's slim with a full head of hair, how will I recognize him? I doubt that I would love him more. I doubt that I could.

I was careful with money, had to be because there was so little of it. But one evening when I was earning twenty cents an hour car hopping at Royal Dairy, I invited Duanne Hansen and Pop to let me treat them to a malted milk at the dairy. he drove down, drank the malteds and I shelled out thirty cents. "Now, don't you wish you still had the money?" my dad asked. "No," I said slowly. "I'm glad I had it so I could treat." I have regretted that I didn't have enough presence of mind to say something like, "Not at all. You've treated me so many times, it's a privilege to do something for you." Or something like, "Not at all. Being with those I love and sharing my earnings with them is one of life's greatest pleasures." My second thoughts don't sound much better than my first thought, but I wish I had said something more profound.

About the only other money I shared with my father was when

I returned home from Navy duty. I had some money saved and insisted that he take \$1,000 to buy something nice for the home or for Mom. He was reluctant, knowing the needs I would have, but he finally gave in. I don't recall what he used the money for, but it doesn't matter. I had the satisfaction of trying to repay some of the cash sent to me while I was on a mission, not to mention everything else. It's strange that I remember so vividly his reluctance, yet I think I understand his feelings better now that I have children of my own.

I wonder how many suits Pop bought for himself. As far back as I can remember, he had only one suit at a time. It was bought carefully, fit well and wore for years. It did set terribly shiny in the seat before it gave way to something new.

Now for some more random thoughts. Pop was born in Salt Lake City in the Heath family log cabin on the southwest corner of West Temple and Sixth South. He then lived in a new home built by his father on Sixth South just north of the Grant School. He went through the eighth grade at the Grant School and had no further formal schooling even though he taught penmanship at some point in his career. From Sixth South the family moved to 970 South West Temple into a luxurious big home. It was when his father was doing well in real estate. He was baptized into the Church when he was about 18, became a deacon, teacher, priest, elder and seventy in quick succession before he was called to serve in the Southern States Mission. He talked of Ben E. Rich and served in the mission office, tried tracting without purse or script, wore a swallow-tailed coat until it mildewed on him.

After his return from his mission, he took a job in Sugar City, Idaho, as timekeeper for a new sugar factory. After a short time he married, bought the general store, loved his wife, fathered many children, coached the town baseball team, became a stalwart in Church and community. His asthma got the best of him, and the doctor ordered him to move to a drier climate. With sacrifice and considerable money still due him, he moved his family to Holladay, to the 11-acre farm which belongs in the dawn of my memory. From the farm we moved into a large red brick home at about 4600 South Highland Drive, also in Holladay.

We then moved into the Salt Lake home Pop's grandfather built in 1869, at 626 South West Temple. Then after many years and grown family, he and Mom moved to 1939 South 6th East. He was newly released from the High Council of Temple View Stake when he died. I think his reluctance to leave his council assignment might have been a voluntary decision to move on to something better.

Pop farmed and sold insurance when we lived in Holladay. He continued with insurance, tried the WPA job and then joined the Church Welfare Program full time. He took his meager but sufficient pay in commodities and cash.

Speaking of the Welfare program, Pop was senior member of the Pioneer Stake High Council when the Welfare Plan was started. I guess some of my brothers felt that the young stake president Harold B. Lee got all the credit and Pop got none. There may have

been some imprudent words spoken because President Lee was somewhat cool toward me when I became attached to the church payroll. He always asked about my mother's well-being but never mentioned the rest of the family.

At any rate, Pop was happy in his welfare work. He was work director and did his best to keep the many volunteers gainfully occupied. It was said that he was the only person in the world who could have assigned a prominent doctor, lawyer and businessman to clean pigpens and have them enjoy doing it.

Pop wore eight and half size shoes. (He had a pair for best and a pair for work.) His hat size was the same as mine, seven and a quarter. Shirt size was 17 if I remember correctly. He did have more than one shirt at a time. He liked red ties, and maybe that's where I got my preference. I doubt that he hated ties as much as I do, though. I don't see how he could.

Pop's voice was about half way between tenor and baritone, like mine. He didn't profess to be a singer but he could carry a tune nicely and would join in bravely in congregational singing, sometimes singing the bass part. His speaking voice was pleasant and he had good presence which came from much public speaking. He said that he didn't preach from the scriptures, that his talks were on practical religion. His talks were lively and interesting; people weren't bored.

It occurs to me that Pop listened well and spoke when he had something to say. He wrote a little poetry, was sentimental but not overly so. He had an objectionable habit or two, like smacking his lips when eating (which he obviously enjoyed) and telling me I was too close-mouthed. Overall, I'd like to be more like him, and I'm pleased that in the pre-mortal existence I had judgment enough to select Frederick John Heath as my father. I couldn't have done better.

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