Dating Dorothy

Allen Colburn introduced me to the young woman who became my wife. Allen was chairman of Chemical Engineering, the liveliest, most imaginative, highest paid (as a result of an outside salary subsidy), and most widely renowned member of the Delaware faculty. By the fall of 1944 he had assembled a professional staff and a small group of graduate students to work on research projects he secured from private business and government agencies.

I was then an instructor in history, rejected by the draft because of my history of bleeding problems (diagnosed as thrombocytopaenic purpura). In **1943**, when Jack McDowell, the alumni secretary, entered the navy, I agreed to take on his work, part-time, in addition to my responsibilities to the history department. I would, for the time being, give up research on my doctoral dissertation.

My part-time duties consisted of keeping in touch with alumni (but not alumnae), conducting an annual fund campaign (which volunteers from the alumni body would direct), and producing four issues a year of The University News, the alumni magazine.

Allen Colburn, ever alert to publicize his department and the work it was doing, asked me to write an article on this subject, promising to buy offprints that he could circulate privately. It was in the course of preparing this article that I met Dorothy and Katheryne Levis.

Allen had established the custom of breaking off work in mid-afternoon to serve tea in his laboratory. His graduate students and professional staff would prepare the refreshments and the event became so well known on campus that other people sometimes dropped in. Allen invited me one day to talk with him about the story I was writing. He bosted to me of his latest distinguished scholarly acquisition, a refugee chemist named Kurt Wohl. "Call him a chemical engineer," Allen requested. Then he added, "And I want you to meet two young women, twins, who have just joined us from North Carolina."

Later, he sent me, with other possible illustrations for my article, a snapshot of the two girls that I used in the magazine. I remembered the event clearly; they did not.

Dating Dorothy

But I soon heard more, much more, of the Levis twins. In **1944-1945** by great good luck I shared an office in Hullihen Hall (University Hall it was called then) with Dick McCormick. Dick and I had been acquainted since September **1940**, when we met in the office of Professor Roy F. Nichols in Bennet Hall of the University of Pennsylvania. We were both to be employed that year as graduate teaching assistants in an American History course taught by Nichols and Professor Arthur C. Bining.

After I left Pennsylvania in the winter of **1942** to become a history instructor at the University of Delaware, Dick continued there for one more term before leaving for a job writing military history for the Quartermaster's Corps of the Army. (Like me he had been rejected by a draft board on medical grounds, though I never knew precisely why.)

When Professor James Barkley, already over-age, retired at Delaware in **1944**, Roy Nichols recommended Dick as his replacement. I was surprised to hear that Dick, with whom I had kept up an acquaintance since leaving Penn, was coming to Delaware, and all the more so to have him as my office mate.

I commuted to Newark from my parents' home in Wilmington, as I had always done in the past whether to Newark or Philadelphia. Dick, however, took a small faculty apartment (a large bedroom and a shared bath) in Brown Hall, and before long he was telling me stories of the Levis twins, who ate at the same table. Though they were working in chemistry under Professor Elizabeth Dyer, they and their projects were under the general supervision of Allen Colburn, who had raised the money for them – from the Armstrong Cork Company (of Lancaster) and from Gustav Landt, an industrialist with a factory near Philadelphia, who was, in a sense, bribed by Colburn by being invited to give a graduate course.

The twins' preparation seemed somewhat weak when they were thrown into courses like thermodynamics with chemical engineers, who had a more technological background. Dick told me how some of the men were, a bit condescendingly, offering to help the sisters until the results came back from their first tests, on which the twins did better than the men.

Dick was amused, also impressed. More and more frequently I heard from him about the twins, but I was still surprised when he proposed that I come down to Newark on a Sunday evening to play bridge with them. I knew Dick at Penn as an enthusiastic

poker player but I had never known him to show any interest in bridge. I had once or twice played poker with Dick and other friends in Philadelphia, but I didn't care for the game, possibly because I didn't like to gamble, even for small amounts. On the other hand, I liked bridge, especially duplicate bridge, and had played frequently during my last two years in college and during the following three years while I taught at Newark High School.

So I accepted Dick's invitation and took the bus to Newark one Sunday night in December to play bridge with the Levis twins in his apartment. We cut cards for partners, and as a result I played with Dorothy and Dick with Katheryne. Despite my greater experience, they beat us. (Dick may not have played much bridge, but he has good card sense.) So when we played again, a week or two later, Dorothy and I had to play together to get revenge, which we did.

At about this time Dick and I decided to invite the twins to a play at the Playhouse, a theatre in the Du Pont Building in Wilmington. (Possibly it was The Watch on the Rhine, with Montgomery Clift, but my memory of it is weak.) Dick brought the twins to Wilmington on a B & O train, and I met them in the Brandywine Room, a cocktail lounge adjoining the theatre.

I remember that they drank sherry and talked a lot, frequently interrupting each other in a way that we found charming, though we were accustomed on past double dates to do most of the talking ourselves. As proper young women of that day, they wore hats. Dorothy's was light colored, straw-like, with a band and a half veil. I liked it.

The occasions for our get-togethers became increasingly frequent in the new year. I can remember only isolated instances, not in proper sequence. Once, for instance, Dorothy came to see me in my office in the alumni building. She entered it through a door we never used, from a porch, pushing aside a settee that blocked it in my office.

On a memorable Friday Dick and I accompanied the twins to Philadelphia, where they had the excuse (in taking off from their lab work) of visiting some laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania. In the afternoon we took them to the matinee concert of the Philadelphia Orchestra in the Academy of Music. We couldn't get four seats together, and so had to settle for two pairs of seats. It is noteworthy that we had not yet separated definitely into two couples (except at bridge), for I sat by Dorothy for half of the concert

and by Katheryne for the other half, switching at intermission. I think the orchestra played a tone poem by Richard Strauss and that possibly William Smith conducted.

After the Concert, we asked the twins, "Would you like to go to the Bellevue-Stratford bar (which was nearby) and talk for a while before we take a train home, or would you like to see something of old Philadelphia – Independence Hall, Christ Church, Elfreth's Alley, Benjamin Franklin's grave?"

"Oh," they answered, with no hesitation, "we'd like to see something of old Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin's grave, Independence Hall, and so forth."

We were surprised, and pleased. The girls we'd taken out before, however intelligent, would have been glad to relax in a bar after the concert. Did the twins set us up, knowing we'd enjoy being guides? I still don't know. They were – and are – remarkably energetic and they are inquisitive tourists, wanting to see what is to be seen.

On these evenings, as we left the twins at their dormitory (Warner Hall), Dick and I ever more frequently said to each other, "Remarkable girls!"

Dick saw them more often than I did – at three meals a day. But on a few occasions I was alone with the twins – without Dick. Once I remember being with them in the women's faculty club in the basement of Warner Hall. I was playing on the piano, playing tunes from my well-loved Gilbert and Sullivan operas, when the lights went out. The resourceful twins found candles and stood at either end of the piano keyboard, so I could continue playing – and probably singing very low. Most friends, I thought to myself, would have welcomed an excuse to get me away from the piano.

I remember another evening when they were in Wilmington, spending the nightat the YWCA on King Street before taking a train to some industrial installation in New Jersey. I recall taking them to a Chinese restaurant on Shipley Street before leaving them at the door of the Y.

One evening I stayed in Newark late in order to watch a women's basketball game between faculty and undergraduates. The twins played on the faculty team, and several of us formed a rooting section for them. Jaime Carvajal, a Columbian from Cali, who was here to study technical developments, wrote cheers for us in Spanish. After the game we took the twins to the Deer Park Hotel, where they later clamed to have drunk beer for the first time.

Dating Dorothy

Late in March the twins invited Dick and me to their parents' home in Baltimore. After we accepted we discovered we would be in Baltimore on Maryland Day – which seemed an auspicious occasion for historians like us. I was surprised and flattered when Dorothy asked me whether I would like to have calf's liver for breakfast.

She had learned about my peculiar dietary requirements. My mother tried everything that was suggested as a possible cure or treatment for my bleeding disease. It was said that calf's liver or beef liver would build up the blood; therefore, I was forced to eat it six days a week. (I had Sundays off.)

I hated liver from the first, and I never learned to like it any better by being required to eat it. Dr. Lewis Flinn backed my mother up in her insistence on this diet, but I think he was catching at straws and unwilling to discourage her hopes of doing some good – as by the raw eggs in orange juice (just the yolks) that she had my father bring me every morning when I first awoke.

I assured Dorothy I could get along very well for one weekend without liver, but that I appreciated her thoughtfulness. And indeed I did.

Our Baltimore weekend was near the end of March. In previous weeks we had frequently had the pleasure of hearing records of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, courtesy of Col. Daniel Moore Bates. Bates was a retired industrialist (he owned a textile factory at Yardley, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania) who was angry at the government for insisting he was too old for a place in the armed forces. A romantic and an enthusiast, he offered his services to President Hullihen at a dollar a year to teach a required mathematics course to the young army trainees who had been sent to the University of Delaware. In the winter of **1944-1945** he closed his house at Centerville, Delaware, and moved into a small faculty apartment across from Dick McCormick in Brown Hall on campus, while his wife went off to spend the cold months in a warmer climate.

Hearing of our enthusiasm for Gilbert and Sullivan, Col. Bates, who owned some complete recordings, brought a set now and then to campus and invited friends, including Dick and me – and, through us, the Levis twins – to hear them.

The critical part that Gilbert and Sullivan recordings played in my life did not, however, come from one of Col. Bates' musical evenings. It was, instead, the dean of the

Women's College, Marjorie Stuart Golder, who provided the opportunity for the most crucial decision of our lives.

Hearing of our enthusiasm for Gilbert and Sullivan, Dean Golder invited the four of us to her house on the evening of April 12 to hear some of her records. By this time the pairing of Dick and me with the twins had become established. It had begun when we cut cards for partners at bridge, and gradually this arrangement had been extended – at least to the point that when we walked with the girls I usually walked with Dorothy and Dick with Katheryne.

Thus, when we left Dean Golder's house at the corner of Park Place and South College Avenue on the evening of April 12 Dorothy and I started out together up the campus. I intended to get the bus to Wilmington on Main Street, but Dorothy had some reason for not stopping off at her room in Warner Hall but continuing on to Brown Laboratory, where she worked. She could enter through the rear basement door that led to the quarters of the Chemical Engineering Department. Perhaps she had an experiment underway that she wanted to check on; I don't know. I suppose Dick had walked Katheryne to Warner Hall and left her there, going on to his apartment.

Despite my great admiration for Dorothy and enjoyment of her company, I had been conscious through these hectic months of the almost nine years' difference in our ages. This consciousness was steadily growing fainter, however. Still, as we lingered no the steps descending to the chemical engineering labs I had no intention of proposing marriage. But I did.

If my boldness surprised me, Dorothy's immediate unhesitating response surprised me even more.

What is not surprising is that when I got to Main Street I found that the last bus to Wilmington had already departed. What to do? My first thought was the Deer Park Hotel, but when I asked for a room there it was too late; they were full. Then I remembered that my department chairman and good friend, Henry Clay Reed, customarily worked late into the night, so I walked up Quality Hill (the section of Main Street west of the Deer Park and the B & O tracks) to his home. A light in the front window, which was his library and office, showed that he was still up.

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The Reeds rented the first floor in a three-story building. Arthur Dunlap, professor of English, and his wife and daughter had the second floor, and the two families shared the third floor. I was welcome to sleep there, Clay Reed said, but first he invited me to take a chair in his study and began to tell me of the series of published New Jersey Archives he had recently received and was examining. His wife, Marion, emerged in a bathrobe from their bedroom just beyond the study. She looked closely and perceptively at this midnight visitor and interrupted her husband. "Clay," she said, "I don't think John is much interested in the New Jersey Archives just now."

How true that was! I explained and in due course was led off to bed. In the morning I had an early class, so Marion gave me breakfast quickly and I was off. After class, when I entered the office Dick and I shared, he was sitting there and looked at me questioningly. On my desk was my hat, which I had forgotten and left at the Reeds' house. What was troubling Dick was that he had seen Clay come into the office and leave my hat while I was in class. How did Reed get it, Dick was wondering, inasmuch as he had seen me leave Dean Golder's and, he thought, set out for my home in Wilmington the night before. Clay had left the hat without saying a word.

When I told my mother that evening or the next morning that I was going to get married, she said, "Which one?" She had heard a lot about the twins but not about either one in particular.

Things had indeed moved rapidly. I met the girls (I'm still speaking of the two of them together) in the fall, went out with them in December, and was engaged in April. The speed made my head spin.

My father had courted my mother for seven years (he would have used the term "went with her" rather than "courted her") before they were married. I believe he was held up by the fact that he was providing a home for his father and sister, but they were also delayed – this was after his father's death – by my mother's insistence that he first save enough money to buy a house (as they did in **1912** with the help of a mortgage from Uncle Harry, who built the house). I didn't expect to wait seven years to marry, but I did see two impediments to any fast action. First, I had no money except for some war bonds I was accumulating by a deduction from my pay check. I was making **$3600** a year, a satisfactory income then, but **$1200** of it was temporary , deriving from my part time job

as an alumni secretary, a job I wanted to resign as soon as possible. Since the war in Europe was nearly over, it seemed probable that the war in the Pacific would soon be winding down and that the absent alumni secretary would be returning from the armed service to his desk. I wanted to get back to work on my Ph.D., which was a matter I had put aside while filling two jobs.

And this was the second impediment to an early marriage. I had a dissertation to write to complete my graduate work. I needed the doctoral degree to solidify my position at the University of Delaware. I had passed the comprehensive examinations in January **1942** and had begun research on my dissertation after beginning to teach at Delaware the next month. But this all had to be set aside in **1943** when I agreed to fill in at the alumni office. I was eager to get back to this unfinished work soon.

I might have had a third concern about my health. When I was about eleven I was diagnosed as suffering from purpura. My nose bled frequently, and sometimes petichiae (tiny spots from subcutaneous leaks of blood from capillaries) showed up, especially on my lower legs. Bruises, which were, of course, hemorrhages, appeared at the least knock of my body, and sometimes they appeared without explanation.

In my senior year at high school I suffered a serious internal hemorrhage, probably from overexertion during a senior trip to Washington (where I climbed to the Capitol dome). I was rushed to the hospital, given three blood transfusions (directly from donors, the first being my mother), and kept in bed and then restricted to the house for much of the summer.

I had occasional scares two or three times while in college and was given additional transfusions, more in hope of stimulating the body's production of platelets than to replace lost blood. The last attack (petichiae, bruises, nose bleeds) occurred during my first term in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania and forced me to stay home for two months.

Purpura was not painful and not hereditary. The problem rested on an insufficient supply of platelets (thrombocytes), particles which assisted in the coagulation of blood. The effect, the bleeding, was somewhat like that suffered by hemophiliacs, but hemophilia was hereditary and, as I understand it, involved platelets that were

physiologically defective. Removal of the spleen, which destroyed platelets, seemed to offer a cure, but a drastic one that was never suggested to me.

My doctor, Lewis Flinn, had told me that if I lived into my thirties, my disease would cease to be a problem – for unknown reasons. And this is what happened. I was married at thirty-one, and though petichiae once showed up – in the first year of my marriage – the bruises and bleeding did not occur. At last I could give up the special diet and weekly injections I had been getting for years.

Dorothy and I visited Dr. Flinn before our marriage to inquire whether there was any medical reason why we should not marry, but he saw none. As to my lack of money, that did not bother Dorothy. I had a steady job and she worked part-time for several years (after completing her **M.A.** in **1946**). Though strapped, we made enough to get along.

In the months of May and June I felt myself torpedoing, very happily, into an early marriage. The days that passed are a blur in my mind. Weekday mornings Dorothy and I met at the De Luxe, a restaurant on Main street, before beginning our work. We did many things, now forgotten, with Katheryne and Dick. Of course, we visited parents in Wilmington and Baltimore. Betty Dyer and Quaesita Drake, chemistry professors, had a shower for us in Newark, and Rita Krapf, mother of my friend Earl, who through his father was a distant cousin, had another shower in Wilmington. I recall a very happy party in Ardentown at the Tessmanns' (Mrs. Katharine Tessmann was my mother's sister); a surviving photograph shows the crowd of guests holding a mock wedding, with Theodore Bacher dressed as a bride.

When the crucial afternoon came on July **7**, **1945**, I recall that as I stood at the front of Grace Methodist Church, in Roland Park, Baltimore, I thought to myself how comforting it was to know that Dorothy Levis was the person who was about to walk up the aisle and join me. Her presence gave me confidence then, and ever after.

John A. Munroe
Spring of 1996