

7. ROBERT NORMAN KEYFITZ, OTTAWA, 1947-

Robert was born more quickly than Barbara. Beatrice's pains started at 12 o'clock midnight on January 20, 1947 and at 4:20 a.m. Rob showed up. He was lovable from the very start; had the kind of personality that people just take to. After a childhood that paralleled Barbara's he went on to a more varied and colorful career than most young people, even in these turbulent times. When I was on the faculty of the University of Chicago he enjoyed the privilege of attending, starting with the famous Laboratory School, an experimental secondary institution. He was in the last year of high school, and in that year he acted in Shaw's Pygmalion. I remember as clearly as yesterday his manly appearance on the stage as he acted the part of Alfred Doolittle.

Rob then went on to the University of Chicago proper, taking courses in economics, political science, philosophy and other fields from some great teachers--economist Jacob Viner, philosopher Richard McKeon, anthropologist Robert Redfield--but after his first year he wrote few exams and ended with 13 incompletes. So no degree.

But though he was not a great academic success at the University of Chicago, he was active and very successful on another front. A surprising and yet in the end joyful feature of Barbara's first wedding was the news from Dorothea Kline, one of the guests, with whom Robert had been intimate, that she was pregnant, and a few months later Benjamin Anderson was born. He was essentially brought up single-handed by Dottie, at the same time as she pursued her studies. We recognized her as our beloved daughter-in-law from the beginning, and admired her heroic work in bringing up Ben while she stubbornly drove towards a professional career. She looks soft, a pushover, but she concentrates on what is important and achieves it however long it takes.

Ben is now well into his career. He is with a substantial accounting firm in Texas, head of the Trusts Department, and working very hard. He had a long term companion, Laurel, and they were married in 2003. Of all our relatives, none is more persevering in seeking out good causes to support. I recall when he went down to Mexico to encourage the trade union movement in that country.

Robert had just enough certification to be accepted into the first year at the University of Waterloo. Not as famous as the U. of Chicago, but right for Robert in imposing the supervision and monitoring that he needed. With his B.A. in economics, he went on to McGill for an M.A. and there did well enough to be awarded a fellowship of the Canadian Government for study at the London School of Economics. After five years of study and coaxing by his supervisor he completed a doctoral dissertation and was awarded the Ph.D. By this time he was the most educated person I know.

Given all that, it was disappointing both to him and to us that he could find no suitable employment on his return to Canada. He went out to British Columbia and there worked at planting trees. He got in with some hippies, but soon found them and their way of life disgusting. Then for a while he was lost to us--we had no phone number, no address, all very disturbing for a pair of loving parents.

Then, about the middle of 1972 he came to the surface. There is such a dramatic, I should say an epic, quality in his reappearance that you should know it in detail. I was lecturing in Santiago de Chile, and out of the picture, so his reappearance was experienced by Beatrice alone. Here is her story.

The return of Robert

It all happened within the last few days we were to spend in Berkeley.

We had bought a house at 73 Edgemoor Road in Belmont MA--I had seen it once on our trip to Cambridge to look over and be looked over by Harvard; we made the owners an offer by mail which they had accepted. All I could remember of it was that it was old and unrenovated but in good condition, had a nice corner lot with some trees and a hedge, and in the light of some awful houses we had looked at in Cambridge could almost be described as attractive. As usually seemed to happen whenever we were moving from one place to another far away, Nathan was somewhere else, I think this time in Santiago, Chile, if that's the long skinny country on the west coast of South America.

In any case, I was alone in 510 The Alameda, busy packing. I had no idea where Robert might be at that time. The bitter 60s were still in swing, though the tide of Rebellious Youth was no longer at the full. We had managed to maintain as much contact with Robert as was possible--we knew he was discouraged, humiliated perhaps, by his lack of material success, the breakdown of his union with Dottie, and the general dilapidation of the Youth Movement. In any case, the last address we had from him was in Vancouver BC where he had a job planting trees, and the last news was that now that the rains had started (did they ever stop in British Columbia?) the job was coming to an end. What worried me was that once I departed from 510 The Alameda all contact with Robert would be broken.

So I called Western Union and had a friendly chat with an employee who assured me that there was no problem to sending a reply-paid telegram to Rob's last address and that they would let me know if they couldn't send it.

The instant I hung up the phone it rang again. I picked it up sadly, and heard Robert's voice, the familiar "Hi, Muh."

Where was he? My brain still reels when I think of it. He was in Berkeley. Not knowing where we were, he had spent his last quarter on a phone call. How did he get there? Nothing to it. Deciding to leave Vancouver, he had picked up a ride with a friendly but tired truck driver who, strictly against the rules and perhaps against the law as well, faced with a night-long drive to Los Angeles, had decided to give a lift to any reasonably honest-looking citizen who knew how to drive a truck. The only condition he made was that his passenger, once he demonstrated that he could take over, should let him sleep.

So here was Robert, sitting on a park bench at the bottom of University Street.

Before hastening to his rescue, I took the time to call Western Union to cancel my telegram. The friendly operator, we were practically old pals by now, was much amused. "We try to give service," he said, "but it's not usually this fast."

Two days later, having seen all the furnishings of 510 The Alameda packed into a van with loving care and reassurances that turned out not to have all that much validity (but that's another story) Rob and I started out for the East.

Then in Toronto he had various jobs that did not seem to carry him very far, until the Canadian Government offered him a post in the foreign aid effort it was providing to Kenya. There he had an exciting four years, and most important of all, there he married, a marriage that has provided the previously missing stability to his life.