

Chapter 13 - Meeting Frances

During the year, I had gone broke. The \$700 did not go far enough and although Mother sent me all she could of her housekeeping money, I needed more money. I began to tend the hospital switchboard. It turned out to be a bad idea as I was always too tired. At first, I substituted for a fellow student, Dewey Barnard, at the hospital switchboard evenings. Later I had my own job on the switchboard and worked from 1:00 a.m. until 7:00 a.m. They paid me one dollar. I received a meal at midnight and again at breakfast, the most important meal of the day. That money plus the food helped.

Dewey began to talk about a someone he was dating, a New England lass of English descent named Frances Bunting. She was a cute blonde, a dietitian in Philadelphia High School. She had no discernable bad habits, did not smoke and just a rare glass of wine. When Dewey had a date, I took his shift as well, which meant I worked from 7:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m.! He gave me the money he would have earned. I stopped doing this after one year, as my job at the Forrest Laundry had created sufficient finances. Frances' brother, Arthur, was a fellow medical student at the same college and chairman of the Junior Prom. One day he asked me, "Could you kindly take care of my sister Frances at the prom?"

"My pleasure," I reassured him.

Her date was Dewey. When she came up for the prom, she had a room in our boarding house. While she was ironing her party dress, the ironing board collapsed. I heard a scream and ran to help. That was how we met. I was quite taken with her. I guess the chemistry was established. I danced as many dances as I could with her.

Shortly after the prom, Dewey said to me, "I am breaking up with Frances. Her moral standards are too high for me. She likes you, why don't you date her?" So I did.

Each Wednesday afternoon, my half-day off, Frances and I ran up to the local movie. If we made it in time for the matinee prices, I had enough to buy a 10-cent dish of ice cream for each of us: chocolate with orange sherbet. Such romance! I fell in love with Frances and she with me.

Summertime came around. Frances had not trouble getting a job in a tearoom on the Ocean City boardwalk. We had it made. The trouble was, we worked from before dawn to well after dark and we were exhausted. Our schedule made dating almost impossible. So Sunday, we spent the day on the beach. Even then, I slept a lot of the time!

As a mighty senior, I wore the traditional doc's "whites" all the time, served in the hospital, treated sick people, and of course attended class. I had the honor of being elected to serve as president of a medical fraternity, Phi Sigma Gamma.

I was part of the fraternity swimming team. In one of our meets at the local Y.M.C.A., our team was in the lead in a four-man relay. At the last moment, our final swimmer faltered. We came in last but felt we could have easily won. Afterward, the last swimmer said, "The reason I hesitated was that I lost my trunks!" Image a medical student letting that bother him. We lost the gold.

During Christmas break of my senior year, I took Frances home to meet my family. It was a memorable time. Archie, my robust, fun-loving brother, met us at the train station in sub-zero weather, with a team of horses and a sleigh. We used real bear skins and buffalo hides for blankets. Arch, dressed like an Eskimo, in a bearskin cap, big fur jacket, etc., drove the horses. Mother tried to talk Archie into driving a car, thinking for sure that Frances would freeze to death in a sleigh. Nevertheless, Archie felt this would properly indoctrinate her as a "future member of the family." He took us to a cabin away back in the woods.

As he drove up he said, "This is Alan's home, you know!"

We got out and opened the door of the log cabin. A fire blazed in the fireplace. We all sat down and had sandwiches that Arch said was buffalo meat!

After about an hour of this, Arch began to laugh and laugh and laugh. He took us outside and there was his beautiful Chrysler sedan. We all climbed in and he drove us to my old home in the city of Fort William. This was a two floor brick home.

“Surprise, this is really Alan’s home.” said Arch.

The next day was Christmas, and we had a custom of visiting the family from house to house. When we visited Arch and Bea’s and their three beautiful daughters, Archie continued to indoctrinate Frances.

“Come join me in the back yard, Frances, I want to show you something,” Archie said as he picked up a double barreled 12-gauge shotgun and took Frances out to his backyard. With about 4 feet of snow on the ground, he put a five-gallon tin can on a pile of snow then handed Frances the shotgun. “Now, Frances, just imagine that tin can is a partridge. Aim for it and pull both triggers at the same time,” he said.

Frances did as she was told and was immediately thrown backwards into a snow drift. The roar of the gun was deafening on the quiet Christmas morning. Archie and Frances laughed until their sides ached. Doors were flung open and the neighbors saw Archie. “Oh, it’s only Arch up to his old tricks!”

It was a wonderful Christmas vacation. My family all fell in love with Frances and she with them. Things had progressed nicely. Arch said, “Don’t let that one get away. She’s special!”

My sister Helen said, “For an American girl, she’s pretty good!”

I answered, “I think I am a very lucky fellow and I agree with you. I’ll keep you informed of our progress!”

Back to school for the last semester, I became the editor of the college yearbook. This was a fascinating position. As editor, I took trips into the Philadelphia business district, interviewed printers, photographers and lithographers, etc. However, I always had difficulty getting a firm price on their work.

Finally I realized they were accustomed to kickbacks. My response was, “Hey, I am a square Canadian. Neither my subeditors nor I want any kickbacks. All of the money goes into the yearbook.” Our yearbook went to print and was quite impressive. It read and looked good, had a leather padded cover with all the extras we could afford.

Near the end of the term, there was an announcement on the loud speaker during a class. “Interviews will be conducted in the dean’s office starting at 1 P.M. Anyone applying for an internship should be on hand.”

Now to intern in one’s college hospital was special. You got to work with all the professors who had lectured to you for 4 years. You got to deliver babies, assist at surgery – it was a real plum!

In fear and trembling, I submitted my name and waited to be called for the interview. On entering the dean’s office – there were about a dozen professors – I was expecting some deep didactic questions about diagnosis and treatment. Instead, they began to quiz me about hunting and fishing in Canada!

It was a most relaxing interview and I suddenly realized that the choices had already been made. And true enough, I became an intern in our college hospital.

We had a few days off, so Frances and I drove her little Plymouth Coupe up to Lynn, Massachusetts to meet her folks, the Buntings. All went well. Her parents approved. We drove back to Philadelphia where she resumed her work as a dietitian in high school, and I began my intern year. I moved into the intern quarters on the top floor of the hospital. For the first time finances were no problem. I received a uniform, laundry services and \$10 a week spending money.

The internship year was great. I assisted in surgery, delivered babies, served on the floors, kept up patients’ charts and served in the Emergency Room. The ER was one of my favorite shifts. Most of the residential staff socialized Friday evenings and didn’t wake up early Saturday mornings. As a result, I booked any minor surgery for Saturday mornings and had the entire area to myself with no hindrances from the residents.

During the internship something was said that changed my whole life. I had assisted in surgery, and after it was finished, the operating room nurse said to me, “Everything went well, except one thing.”

“What was that?” I asked.

“You should have been doing it!”

That was it – an idea was born and I decided to become a surgeon.

I was broke, so I started to see a few patients in the clinic offices, which they did not allow. The authorities suspected I had a private practice. They were right. The girls at the hospital switchboard would call me when someone required a doctor. I would meet them in the Emergency Room after hours.

After Frances drove back from Lynn, she was stiff and sore. She asked if I could give her a manipulation, a special pain-relieving

technique of osteopathic physicians.

We went to the tiny clinic office. Just as I was treating her, the door was thrust open. Two clinic professors came in. They felt they had me. I introduced them to my fiancé, Frances Bunting. They were embarrassed and apologized.

Later that year, other authorities were suspicious of me. I received a very irate telephone call. "Is your name Alan James Snider?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"I am a United States immigration officer. You are here illegally and must leave the country immediately."

I asked, "What can I do? I am a medical intern here at the college."

"You must go to the police station and have your fingerprints checked. If you are not a felon, you must get a letter from a U.S. citizen saying that you will be supported for two years, if you cannot support yourself. You must go back to Canada and have them check your record. If you pass these mandates, we may let you back in the country. Still, you must have a legitimate visa."

I immediately telephoned Dr. E.G. Drew, chief of surgery at the college hospital. I told him I needed a letter verifying a promise of support for the next two years. He laughed. "Anyone who thinks you will need outside support is crazy. Of course, I will give you such a letter."

He asked me to meet him at the very exclusive Poor Richard's Club at noon in downtown Philadelphia. I arrived and he said, "We are having a Father & Son luncheon. Slip off your overcoat and join us." Underneath I was wearing the standard white coat of an intern and felt very conspicuous sitting in the elegant, low-ceiling banquet hall.

After lunch we went to Dr. Drew's office. I received the letter and returned to my hospital duties.

The United States police checked me and I was okay. I then crossed the border into Niagara Falls, Ontario, to be checked there. The Canadian police fingerprinted me and I checked out okay again. I obtained the necessary letters from a Canadian minister and was allowed back into the United States, where I resumed my medical internship and hospital duties.

Toward the end of the Intern year, those who desired a surgical residency were requested to meet in the dean's office and apply. By this time, Frances and I were engaged, and since she was already working in Boston, I applied for my surgical residency at the Massachusetts Osteopathic Hospital in Boston and was accepted as the first surgical resident in the hospital's thirty-five year history.

On the basis of Frances' position as a dietitian in Boston and my approval to be a four-year surgical resident at the hospital, we decided to become man and wife.

During the first year of my surgical residency in Boston, Frances and I got married. The wedding was held in the Buntings' beautiful St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Lynn, Massachusetts. Frances was a charming bride, and I, a newly graduated doctor!

Six of my classmates from medical school, all practicing physicians, drove up from Philadelphia in Dave Young's old Packard. They stayed in a hotel in Lynn and readied themselves for my wedding. My best man and ushers, hecklers all, told me they had written "I AM CAUGHT" across the soles of my shoes, so all could see when I knelt at the altar. I'm not sure if they really did or not. I am sure the old conservative hotel took a while to get back to normal after their visit. They carried on so, the manager had to caution them to be a little less noisy.

After our three-day honeymoon in Derry, New Hampshire, we settled into a tiny Boston apartment and pooled our income. Frances was now a dietitian in the River Country Day School in Brookline, Massachusetts. I was making a \$50 monthly salary as a surgical resident. We were busy but very happy. Life was good. Imagine eating food prepared by my wife, a dietitian, after the years of Pass Lake then student cooking.



