

Evelyn Bliss Reddin

Edwin F. Taylor

When I entered our family house shortly after the death of our mother Esther Bliss Taylor, my sister Ruth Taylor Deery (Oberlin College class of 1944) sat on our couch with a bereft expression.

"Evelyn is taking Grandmother's two pieces of furniture," Ruth said.

In the adjacent dining room, Evelyn Bliss Reddin (Oberlin College class of 1945) was busy moving the sideboard table, preparing for the arrival of professional craters and movers. "Esther said I could have two pieces of furniture." she remarked.

Next to the winged armchair on Ruth's right where father used to sit was the best piece, a beautiful round table with a latch underneath that elevated the round surface vertical, revealing a candle stand from long ago. As a child I was enchanted with its wood-grain finish and cunning machinery. Similar examples currently offered on Antiques Road Show don't touch it.

Ruth and I were constitutionally helpless against Evelyn's assault. Should this happen now, I would ask her to show me mother's written permission. If she could not produce it, a phone call to the local police: "Please come to 123 Forest Street. A relative is stealing our only pieces of family antique furniture."

My first name is that of my mother's brother, Edwin Meeteer Bliss. You may read about them both at eftaylor.com/thoughts. Find

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Uncle Edwin was the sweetest, most withdrawn person I have known. When he planned to visit us at 123 Forest Street in Oberlin, he wrote to his sister, my mother, "Esther, I can be friendly to your friends if necessary -- but not very." I listened quietly to the conversation between those two on our large back porch, absorbing what I could.

Edwin and his first wife Lillian did not want children and informed their daughter Evelyn of this fact. When Evelyn was ready for college, she took the train from Casper to Elyria or Cleveland Ohio, then the bus to Oberlin. I was sent down to meet her. I waited at the bus station next to the Apollo Theater. No Evelyn. A phone call from home revealed that the real bus station was across the street. I picked her up and fell instantly in love.

Evelyn was beautiful, animated, fascinating. Evidently our family provided free room and board at 123 Forest during Evelyn's college years. She entered spontaneously and light-heartedly into our global-reach dinner table conversation. After supper Evelyn and sister Ruth washed the dishes with chortling companionship. In Evelyn's company Ruth opened up. Every topic elicited un-suppressed laughter.

Daniel Reddin, another Oberlin student, saw Evelyn on her green balloon-tired bicycle and said to himself, "That's the girl I'm going to marry." I ushered at their wedding in Oberlin's Fairchild Chapel, receiving for this service a paratrooper's knife, whose 6-inch blade slid out of its handle with a flick of the wrist. Folded at its side, the "neck spike" opened up for stealthy disposal of a sentry.

Daniel served in the Quartermaster Corps in the European Theatre. When someone asked him, "Didn't you have to account for these things?" he replied, "Not at the front."

Daniel was one of four brothers in a prominent lawyer family in Bowling Green, Ohio, one hundred miles from Oberlin. Both parents were lawyers. All four brothers served in WWII; all came home physically unharmed. Lively conversation at Bowling Green meals introduced me to the world of sharp law practice -- unheard of in the Puritan-drenched conversations at our Oberlin table. Daniel's father described "curbstone consulting:" church acquaintances asking for legal advice about "simple" matters during informal after-church conversations. "Here's roughly what the law says. If you want more, see me downtown."

Young Daniel laughingly recalled filling out taxes for a local Bowling Green farmer, asking, "Will you give me half of what I save you in taxes?" then submitting an hourly bill for much less than this half.

When father died in a mountain-climbing accident, the Reddin firm in Bowling Green executed his will. Evelyn told us, "We would have charged you much less as a family member, but our law firm partner did not permit it." Father carried a lot of life insurance for his time. The total remaining inheritance was our house plus roughly \$28,000.

Was Evelyn Reddin's middle name really Bliss? I doubt it, given the fraught relation with her parents, but it makes an orienting title.

We never again saw Grandmother Bliss's sideboard table or round, turn-up candlestand. Many years later Ruth received an empty envelope from Evelyn, who later died of Alzheimers's Disease.