Leave The Dishes In The Sink

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Published by Utah State University Press

Thorne, Alison.
Leave The Dishes In The Sink.
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5 Conformity and Creativity

Some Views on Conformity

My shadow manuscript of the 1940s criticized conformity to perfect housekeeping standards and blind acceptance of advice. This was an uphill endeavor in the 1950s, which was a decade of considerable conformity. I looked again at Elizabeth Hoyt’s approach. She began in the 1920s, as did my parents, by criticizing “keeping up with the Joneses,” but she also wrote that emulation is important in introducing and diffusing interests. In the 1950s the rapid spread of air conditioning and of television were examples of technological emulation.

Hoyt wrote that technology increases our opportunities for the good life but also increases our dangers, liabilities, and temptations. A trade association representing national advertisers arranged to check textbooks. When unfavorable comments on advertising occurred, the publishers were requested to get the authors to withdraw their statements. Publishers protested to presidents of colleges about faculty members even moderately critical of advertising practices.

Hoyt deplored the extent of government expenditure for technological research on instruments of human destruction, observing that we have hardly grasped the possibilities of our bombs and the still more terrible possibilities of the organized spread of the bacteria which bring death. She wrote of new fears that subversives were behind every lamp post, every hearth, and at every council table, so people must take no chances. It was considered better to destroy others who were innocent rather than risk everyone being destroyed. Hoyt’s was not the only voice raised against this false reasoning. In 1955 the historian Henry Steel Commager wrote in an article published in Utah:

A free society is a society where men and women are not afraid to speak their minds; to go to the church of their choice, or the assembly or meeting of their choice; to join such organizations as they fancy; to make their own friends and associates; to insist on their rights, even against officials . . .

We must abandon the indignity of teachers’ loyalty oaths and legislative investigations to discover subversives . . . A free society
does not humiliate its citizens . . . It does not intimidate them or permit officials, clothed with temporary authority, to humiliate them—not even if they are members of Congressional committees!¹

Neither Hoyt nor Commager named Joseph McCarthy and the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities, but serious readers could read between the lines.

As Hoyt analyzed conformity on national and international levels, she saw its impact on individual lives. Earlier she had developed the idea that a standard of living has three elements: the physiological, conventional, and personal. The personal requires individuality and courage, and a person of independent judgment tends to choose the individual and personal rather than the merely conventional.³

Oddly enough, some corporations were urging their own ideas of proper behavior onto executives’ wives. William H. Whyte wrote two articles for *Fortune* and quoted an executive who said, “We control a man’s environment in business and we lose it entirely when he crosses the threshold of his home . . . Management therefore, has a challenge and an obligation to deliberately plan and create a favorable, constructive attitude on the part of the wife that will liberate her husband’s total energies for the job.” The wife was cautioned not to drive a car better than her husband’s superiors and not to be outstanding in personal ways. Intellectual pretensions should be avoided like the plague. When callers were expected, she should put *Harpers* and *Atlantic Monthly* under other magazines.⁴

Toward the end of the decade I became a member of the Logan Board of Education and was given a subscription to the *American School Board Journal*. Imagine my consternation when I read an article by a husband-wife team telling the wives of board members and the wives of superintendents how to behave. I promptly wrote a reply, called “Go Easy on Advice to Wives!” noting that the authors would not have told the husband of a board member how to behave.⁵ Certainly Wynne would not put up with such nonsense.

Women and the Agricultural Experiment Station

In the 1950s I still faced the problem that, in Utah, women should conform to the ideal of staying at home and staying out of the labor force. And there was still the problem that the college did not want both husband and wife on its faculty.
A year after our return from Tennessee, Wynne became director of the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station and found some unanalyzed housing research done by home economists. Dean Ethelyn O. Greaves had died of cancer and the person who did the actual research had left the staff because of illness. Wynne conferred with the acting dean, Una Vermillion, and they asked me to analyze and write up the data, with help from Frances Taylor on the home economics staff. Frances and I became co-authors of two bulletins published in 1956, one on kitchen arrangements, and the other on use of kitchen shelf space by farm homes in the western region. Of course I could not be paid for my work, thanks to the anti-nepotism ruling, and for a time there was even debate over whether my name could appear on the bulletins, even though I was the principal writer. My name did appear.6

Women authors of Utah Agricultural Experiment Station bulletins were few and far between, although historically there was an auspicious beginning when Leah D. Widtsoe, wife of President John A. Widtsoe, spoke to the First International Congress of Farm Women, held in Colorado Springs in October 1911. Her paper, “Labor Saving Devices in the Farm Home,” became Circular No. 6 of the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station and Extension Service. During the next eighteen years there were no women authors, until Almeda Perry Brown published four bulletins between 1929 and 1936 on the food habits of farm families and of school children in relation to physical wellbeing.7 When Brown neared retirement in 1945, she was made a full professor and acting dean of home economics.

The woman to make the greatest mark on Experiment Station research in the 1940s and 1950s was Carmen Fredrickson of the sociology faculty, who taught and did research. She assisted Joseph A. Geddes, head of the department, with rural community studies. The anti-nepotism ruling did not apply to Fredrickson because her husband was not on the faculty. The fact that she had no children also fortified her position. Fredrickson was a remarkable person, active in community affairs, and especially in AAUW in which she held state and national offices. In 1950–51 she created a course called “Women Today,” which she taught until her retirement. Both men and women took the course, which had this catalogue description: “The progress of women in American society from colonial days to the present. Some attention given to women’s struggle for status in industry, politics, education, sex, religion, and the arts. Roles and contributions of outstanding women reviewed.”
The content of Frederickson’s course was remarkably similar to the content of the first women’s studies course introduced into the USU curriculum in 1972. Without anyone realizing it, Fredrickson had begun women’s studies at USU twenty years early. I knew at the time that some of her materials came from AAUW and from the Status of Women Committee of the American Council on Education.

In 1954 Geddes and Fredrickson published a bulletin on libraries as social institutions. Utah was the only state without a state library system, and many rural children had never seen a bookmobile. That same year the Sociology Department published research on the impact of urbanization on Davis county, including a section on the role of women, written by Frederickson. She next undertook a study of the impact of women leaders of Davis county on a changing order, published as an Agricultural Station bulletin in 1959. I regard this as a feminist document, making visible the experiences of the hundred women she interviewed. Because so few women were on commissions, boards, and in school principalships, Frederickson observed that women were not yet in full partnership with men. She was dismayed that no woman was on the Davis County School Board, no woman was a secondary school principal, and only one principal in the twenty-one elementary schools was a woman. Yet nationally at that time, in urban areas, about half of all elementary school principals were women.

Fredrickson recognized the increasing employment of women and wrote that more mothers in the labor force raised important public policy problems involving maternity leave, job security, and the use of public funds for child care—all vital questions today. By 1960 Fredrickson was researching the effects of the employment of mothers on the problems and problem-solving of families of northern Utah. She concluded that delinquency does not result from mothers being in the labor force. “The roots of delinquency are complicated and too numerous to be associated with a single cause.”

My Efforts to Help Others

My summers were filled with 4-H work, as leader of a club for Barrie and friends, and later for Sandra and Avril. I wrote an article for the National 4-H News about the high domestic standards upon which 4-H insisted and observed that sometimes conformity to standards of perfection does not make good sense. I wrote that during the summer of 4-H activity when Barrie set the table, we had a tablecloth, flowers in the center of the
table, and plate, knife, fork, and spoon all in proper position. When school began in the fall, I fell into the old habit of bare table, no flowers, and tossed the silverware pell-mell onto the table. Our table was a wooden one. Formica would come later. In subsequent issues of the National 4-H News readers responded, referring to my article as “Silverware Pell-Mell.” An interesting debate ensued, which I lost, according to the number of letters opposing my position.

After writing up the housing research, I was at loose ends. Our college became Utah State University in 1957, and I was still ineligible for a faculty position. My mother’s cousin, Pauline Udall Smith of Mesa, Arizona, asked me to help her write a book about our common ancestor, Captain Jefferson Hunt of the Mormon Battalion. When the Mormons left Nauvoo in early 1846 and started west, the Mexican War had begun. By the time they reached the Missouri River, President Polk had a proposition ready for Brigham Young—that five hundred Mormon volunteers should march against Santa Fe and across southern California with General Kearny’s Army of the West. Although Young disliked losing this many able-bodied men, he realized it meant free food and transportation, and their pay would be sent back to the main body of Saints who desperately needed cash to buy supplies.

Jefferson Hunt was elected captain of Company A, consisting of a fifth of the men. The Battalion began its march in July 1846, went to Fort Leavenworth, and then on to Santa Fe. The Mormons never caught up with Kearny, did not actually fight any battles, suffered from illness and lack of water crossing the desert, laid out the first wagon road along the southern route, and finally arrived in San Diego in late January 1847.

Hunt led a colorful life. The next year he guided a party of forty-niners across the desert to southern California. Against his advice, some of them left the party to strike out on their own, looking for Walker Pass and giving Death Valley its name. Hunt served in the legislatures of California and Utah, founded Huntsville, and in his later years ranched and freighted in southern Idaho. A good family man, he had two plural wives and numerous progeny. He died in 1879.

Pauline composed the book out of family stories and other people’s journals. Jefferson Hunt, himself, never kept a journal; when asked why not, he had replied, “Hell, I’m so busy making history, I don’t have time to write it!” Although he did not write his history, his great-granddaughter Pauline did, with firm hand and pen and ink on long sheets of lined yellow paper, which she mailed to me from Mesa. I typed, edited, sometimes rewrote, and mailed back. Two thousand
copies of the completed book were published and immediately sold, mostly to descendants.10 Pauline’s son-in-law, historian George Ellsworth of the USU faculty, said to me, “You know, Alison, this is not really history.” I replied, “I know it. A lot of it is family stories, but it’s important to get them into print.” He agreed.

While I was wrestling with Pauline’s manuscript, Kip was a high school student. When he was seventeen years old, he entered the Science Talent Search. I wrote about his project:

The Science Talent search was on. Our high school senior chose four-dimensional geometry as a project. He cut coat hangers into short strips and hung the corners together with modeling clay. The device which he created was large, angular, and occupied all the top of his desk. This meant his books moved to the floor. Scraps of paper with penciled mathematics lay scattered everywhere in the room. His clothes hung on the floor; his bed was perpetually unmade. Any real tidying-up was impossible for work was in progress, let the chips fall where they may. Just as he completed his paper two days before the deadline, he rushed downstairs, gave it to me and said, ‘Type this for me, will you Mom?’ and hurried out the door to join his friends on an overnight hike. Well, I typed it. He can type—all our children can type—but I make the fewest mistakes. There were seven pages. I understood the first two; his father understood the first four; I still wonder if the judges understood all seven. Anyway it won a placing.11

On the strength of this honor and doing well on the National Merit Scholarship exam, Kip received scholarships that would provide much of the funding of his undergraduate years at the California Institute of Technology, which he entered in the fall of 1958. He lived at home that summer and worked at Thiokol, where solid propellant rocket engines were being developed out in the desert beyond Brigham City. On June 24 I wrote to Wynne, who was out of the country, “. . . I don’t understand much about his job, and he hesitates to write much, but yesterday when he was calculating the speed or something of the two different fuels, with different speeds, he discovered that they should be reversed in position, so he told the boss; a big test is coming up on Saturday, and the boss said ‘Are you sure?’ And he said, ‘I’m quite sure.’ So they switched the positions. Fifteen hundred employed at Thiokol now . . . “12

That first fall when Kip left for Caltech, I sent along thirteen cotton shirts, mostly short sleeved, many of them left over from his final year at Logan High. In my years at Iowa State I had watched men students mail
their laundry home in cardboard suitcases for their mothers to do up and mail back. Did Kip mail home his laundry? No indeed. Did he wash his own shirts? No indeed. He discovered that the wrinkles hung out in the Pasadena climate, so he wore them over and over again, assuming that no wrinkles meant no dirt, a naive view for a budding physicist. The thirteen shirts accompanied him to Logan for Christmas and I washed them up in short order, giving stern instructions to get them washed regularly in Pasadena, instructions which I’m sure he disregarded.

Wynne’s Trip to Iraq and the USSR

In the spring of 1958 Wynne had a phone call from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), asking if he would be interested in going to the Soviet Union as part of a team to look at soil and water. This would be one of the earliest United States’ scientific teams allowed into the country, a country which we regarded as full of government enforced conformity. Wynne already had an invitation from the Iraqi government to look at their country’s soil and water. As things worked out, he went to Iraq first, with the understanding that the USDA would inform where and when he would meet their team to enter Russia. Luckily for him, Burnell and Leora West were living in Baghdad and invited him to stay with them. Burnell was working for the United Nations as head of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) mission in Iraq. Wynne had known the Wests at the AC when they were students together in the early 1930s.

Mail between the United States and Iraq was erratic, but enough of Wynne’s letters came through so that we learned of heat, dust, poverty, isolation of women, and most of all, his evaluation of bureaucracy. He also described the historical and legendary places he saw. He visited the northern and southern parts of the country and went to Kuwait. Eager to learn the history of irrigation, he flew by helicopter over the faint edges of the ancient Nahrwan canal, 420 feet wide. The helicopter had a plexiglass front and no doors, because being closed in would have made it too hot. It was like flying through the air on a jiggling chair fifty to five hundred feet above the ground.¹³

In mid-June, the USDA notified me that the Russian trip was delayed a week. I sent word to Wynne by airmail, and the USDA sent a telegram from Beltsville to the United States embassy in Baghdad. Leora West happened to hear an embassy secretary say there was a telegram for Dr. Thorne about the trip to Russia, whereupon Wynne
went to the embassy to inquire. He was told the telegram was classified and he couldn’t have it. After much arguing he was allowed to look at it, but not take possession. The telegram said the team would leave Brussels for Moscow at noon on July 17. The team had his tickets and special passport.

In the remaining days of June, Wynne worked on the final report for the Iraqi government which included plans for a general soil fertility investigation. He wrote that the King’s palace, whose magnificence he described, would be finished in November. On June 27 Wynne wrote that a new hotel had just opened, with bell hops in Arabian Nights costumes. Sixty people from Switzerland would run it for the first year. Wynne took the Wests and the J. B. Smiths to a farewell dinner there, just before he left Baghdad. Little did he, the Wests and Smiths, or the United States and British embassies realize that in a matter of days a revolution would topple the king’s government, and two Americans staying at that very hotel would disappear. Together with Wynne’s letters, I have a two-page appraisal of the revolution, written by Leora West, telling of the new government’s plans for land reform and hoping they would materialize. Competent professional people continued on in their positions. And indeed, as we learned a few months later, the new government honored earlier commitments, including Wynne’s pay for consulting.

Wynne met the soil-water team at the Brussels airport. They were C. E. Kellog, L. B. Nelson, Hub Allaway, Marline Cline of Cornell, Bill Donovan, and Joe Bulek (Foreign Agricultural Service, former agricultural attache in Moscow). Bulek was the only one who spoke Russian. They flew on a Russian jet to Moscow. Wynne had never been on a jet before. The luggage and freight were not tied down and slid violently up and down the aisle.

Wynne had a fascinating six weeks in the USSR. The Russian people were agog at seeing Americans, especially in the rural areas. Hospitality was warm, the food generous. Wynne sent airmail letters which I typed, sending a copy to close relatives and placing a copy at his office for everyone there to read. Interest was great. As I wrote Wynne, “Some think you are crazy to go to Russia and will never get out, and can’t see why I am so calm about it.”

After his return, Wynne loaned the typed letters to a Federal Bureau of Investigations agent who came from Salt Lake City to ask for them, saying it was one of the ways the United States government could find out what was going on in Russia. Wynne told me there was no reason
to withhold this information, and that the agent was an earnest young man who wanted to do well in his FBI career.

The Russians Come to Dinner

Wynne had not been home long when we got word that a Russian team of irrigation engineers would be traveling across the United States, with Logan as their westernmost stop. Wynne at once said we must have them to our house to dinner so they could see an American home. While in Russia, the United States team had not been inside a scientist’s home. Although one scientist did invite them, he retracted the invitation and took them to a restaurant instead. Wynne wondered whether it was for fear of government retaliation, or because the Russian scientist felt that his home was far below American standards and wanted to prevent mutual embarrassment.

In the process of planning dinner for the Russians, I went downtown to Wilkinson’s to buy a new pickle dish. When I said to the clerk, “I need this dish because a team of Russian scientists is coming to dinner,” a complete silence fell across the store, and the other clerks and customers turned to stare at me. Americans were still paranoid about communists, because Senator Joseph McCarthy and his ilk had done their work well. When Wynne met the Russian scientific team at the Salt Lake City airport, and the Ukranian member dashed across the field to throw his arms around him, the first familiar face he had seen across the continent, one of the bystanders muttered “Communist!” at Wynne.

Later the Russian team said the most friendly place they visited was Logan. There had been hostility at all their other stops. They were not allowed to go on to California to see Disneyland, but by the time they reached Logan they were tired and glad to stop their journey westward. Originally there was a plan to take them to see Glen Canyon dam, still under construction, but knowing the anti-communist sentiment of construction workers, it was feared someone might take a pot shot at them, so that part of their tour was cancelled.

These men were no longer young. They had survived two world wars, with periods of near starvation. There were five of them: Aleksanor N. Askochensky, Sukhan Babaev, Ivan I. Budarin, Stephen M. Perekhrest, and Nuritdin Aliev. The United States government had sent along two interpreters, one a refugee from Russia. I noticed that when they sat in the back seat of our car, the refugee, on the outside edge, would turn rather sideways so his shoulder did not touch the Russian
next to him. I am convinced he was a bona fide refugee. The other interpreter, we were told, was a retired United States Army officer.

When they arrived at our house for dinner, I had the table set. Other guests were Dean F. Peterson, dean of engineering at USU, and his wife Bess. Also present were Barrie and our three younger children. It was a summer weekend and Kip had driven to Yellowstone to visit his girl friend, which was just as well. We would not speak of Thiokol, Hill Field, or other installations. When they traveled in Russia, the United States team wore blindfolds as their car neared military installations.

Wynne came dashing into the kitchen with a bottle of vodka that our Russian guests had brought, and he thrust it into the freezer compartment of the refrigerator to chill. “The bottle will break!” I protested. “No it won’t. It’s 50 percent alcohol.” And he dashed out to escort our guests around our vegetable garden (not in very good shape because Wynne had been out of the country most of the summer, and I am no gardener.) They saw our garage and asked if Wynne drove his own car. And they saw the new kittens.

Well, I had already poured fruit juice into our company glasses. When Wynne asked me where the little glasses were to put the vodka into, I said, “Oh, the kids broke those years ago.” So we put the vodka, for adults only, into ordinary drinking glasses. Long toasts by the Russians and by Wynne had to ride on the inch or so of vodka in each.

The Russians came to dinner at our house, and they had lunch President Daryl Chase’s. They are shown here with the president, Alice, and son Peter. Photo from The Story of a House: The President’s Home by Alice Chase.
glass. Now I knew that with this first toast it was absolutely necessary to drink the liquor down in one fell swoop. What I did not know was how strong vodka is. One sip and I was scalded all the way down my gullet. Etiquette or no etiquette, I hastily set down my glass.

The sharp-eyed young children, watching the guests, told me later that the retired United States Army officer did not drink his vodka. He poured it into his fruit juice and then never drank the juice during the meal. I noticed he didn’t drink the juice, and assumed he was allergic to it. Not until two months later did we learn that he was with the Central Intelligence Agency, and being on duty, did not drink. When he found out, Wynne was outraged, feeling our own government had violated our integrity as citizens.

We did have a pleasant time visiting. The Russians were delighted with the two ceramic Russian dolls on the table, which Wynne had brought home with him. Three inches high, their wide dresses would swing from side to side when pushed with a finger. You could almost sense homesickness as the Russian visitors touched the dolls. They gave the youngsters small pins; one said “The 10,000th student of Turkmanian University.” The man from Uzbekistan gave us square, embroidered caps. In return, the youngsters gave them sea shells from their collection.

In the living room afterwards, I showed the retired army officer a book of Russian rhymes for children that Wynne had brought home, and asked him to translate one of them. He did it half-heartedly because he was very busy listening to everything that was going on in the room. At one point the Ukranian began to speak German with Wynne, off in a corner, but the army officer stopped them, saying, “We speak only Russian or English.” He himself, obviously, did not speak German.

The next day, USU President Daryl Chase and his wife Alice had the Russians to their home, and in the evening some of the faculty held a picnic up the canyon for them. We all sat around a bonfire in the dark night, and four of the Russians sang songs. They had beautiful voices. The songs were all about rivers and were tragic. The Russians teased Wynne about his inability to sing, which he took in good humor, pleased they were friends enough so they dared tease him.

On their last day the head of the group, Askochensky, quietly shared pictures of his family with Wynne and me, an unusual thing for a Russian to do. And he presented a book to Wynne to give to Kip, saying, “I also have a son studying physics, and I hope some day they will meet under peaceful circumstances.”
Inquiry into Creativity

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, I continued to give talks to PTAs and women’s groups, under the title of “Leave the Dishes in the Sink.” Instead of dwelling on the shortcomings of perfect housekeeping, I shifted to the idea of creativity, as portrayed by Frank Barron in the September 1958 issue of the *Scientific American*. Barron and colleagues at the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California, Berkeley, studied the characteristics of highly creative painters, writers, physicians, economists, and other professionals and found that highly creative people can stand more ambiguity and chaos than other people, because they find such chaos challenging and believe they can put their own kind of order onto it when they are ready.\(^{16}\)

At our house we dwelt so often amidst physical chaos that I decided one reason we could stand the mess was being so engrossed in particular projects, let the chips fall where they may, that we were unaware of the chaos around us. Could it be, I wondered, that too perfect a house prevents the flowering of creativity? Not that Barron suggested this, but I would.

I spoke of the array of materials (I called it “stuff”) with which children do creative things. I told about explaining carbon paper to our three young ones when we lived in Tennessee. I put the carbon on top of a piece of white paper and marked it with a pencil. We lifted the carbon and saw the mark. Then it occurred to us that one doesn’t need a pencil, so I pressed with my thumbnail. When we lifted the carbon, there was a crescent mark. Sandra, five years old, ran from the room and came back with her hairbrush. She made several swirls on top of the carbon, and when we lifted it up, we found dozens of beautiful curved lines.

I called this an act of creativity because it was an unexpected combination of things. Carbon paper and a hairbrush usually do not end up together. Her idea was original; it was a surprise. The result was beautiful, and this made it worthwhile. But beauty is not the only kind of source of worth; there is also the delight of a child. It is wise to praise a child who creates something, but the real worth remains the child’s own sense of pleasure.

Speaking to a roomful of mothers in Ogden, I asked for examples of something creative they had seen a child do. One told of an episode that happened in the home next door. The mother had given her little girl a pretty pink nylon umbrella. One day when she came home she found her daughter under the dining room table making doll dresses
out of the pink material. “If it had been my child,” said the woman
telling the story, “I would have spanked her for cutting up the
umbrella. But my neighbor was wiser. She realized her daughter
wanted to make doll clothes, and there were no pretty scraps in the
house. So she went out and bought remnants and turned the child
loose with them.”

It was pleasant to experience the frequent humor that emerged in
my audiences. At the Ladies’ Literary Club of Hyde Park when we dis-
cussed how to get children to work, one mother made the sage obser-
vation, “When trying to get work out of your girls, if you have one girl,
you have one girl. If you have two girls, you have half a girl. If you
have three girls, you have no girl at all.”

In 1959 a group of parents asked Wynne and me to join them in
exploring matters related to giftedness. An informal group at first, it
subsequently incorporated as the Northern Utah Association for the
Gifted. Ray Nelson of the Logan Herald-Journal wrote of our members:
“They have no objection to the status given athletic superiority, which
everyone does enjoy having and watching, and the status given the
superior money maker, another superiority we all appreciate. But they
deplore the tendency to call efforts to cultivate superiority of talent or
intellect, snobbish . . . They are not, they maintain, malcontents out to
reorganize a whole system.” Among the activities begun for children
and youth were a summer creative dance program, and a class in
German that went through the year, sponsored by Sigma Xi and the
College of Education.

Through this group I became acquainted with The Gifted Child
Quarterly, which published an article of mine, later reprinted in a book
Mine was the only article written by a housewife; it was awkward being
a writer without professional affiliation. Here are some excerpts:

Neither Perfect Housekeeping nor House Beautiful dominates our
home. We live in a university town in a high, square, old-fash-
ioned house. The upstairs bathroom contains an immense closet
with wide shelves for quilts and blankets, but we don’t keep our
extra bedding there. Instead we keep stacks of National Geographic,
all the art work and notebooks which our five children have
lugged home from school and wanted saved, lots of maps, and a
stack of very large envelopes containing pictures and clippings
about American history, English history, Renaissance art, religion,
plants, animals, etc. . . .
By way of further inventory let us consider the kitchen cupboards. The glassed-in shelves intended for lovely china and glassware are filled instead with games, puzzles, stamp collections, two decorated cans which contain embroidery floss and half-completed dishtowels, two sets of knitting in progress—I think they are to be bedroom slippers. My silverware box does not contain silverware; it has been subdivided for a sea shell collection which has overflowed into Christmas card boxes. There are tennis and badminton rackets and three cameras.

Scattered in various other places are scratch paper, type paper, pencils, crayons, scissors, water colors in small jars, three kinds of glue, chalk, compass, rulers, three kinds of tape, balls of string, and ink. At this very moment two children are at the kitchen table writing with a pheasant feather and ink, just to see how it might have felt to be a scribe in colonial days.

As for books, we have them on stars, birds, trees, flowers, shells, history, and the usual childhood classics. Our history books include one of our local valley, telling of ancient Lake Bonneville, which once covered the entire valley floor and reached into the canyons of our mountains. The two older children brought home their geology texts from Cal Tech and Stanford, and the local geology professor gave us an excellent source book written for elementary and secondary schools. Our nearby canyons are Paleozoic, and we find such books valuable.

We also own, as a traveling companion, the WPA guidebook for our state. We studied about the fallen ghost town of Silver Reef as we walked over its rocks and picked up rusty square nails and bits of bottles turned violet by the desert sun. Nails and glass now lie in the drawer of my dressing table after several excursions to school to be “shared.”

We take the *Scientific American*. Its advertising has magnificent pictures of rockets, satellites and other matters dear to the heart of the young devotee of space. Its articles need translation for the small fry but often the puzzle pages are entrancing. We did the Chinese tangrams and wrestled with the Japanese art of paper folding.¹⁹

One consequence of my article was that Ann Isaacs, editor of *The Gifted Child Quarterly*, invited me to write the “Parents’ Page,” which I did, without pay, from autumn 1964 to summer 1968. These were brief articles with examples of encouraging learning and creativity in children, and questioning some attitudes of our society.
Over the years I accumulated a lot of information about creativity. I particularly liked Carl Rogers’s observation that the potentially creative person has three qualities, which I illustrated with my own examples:

First is openness to experience, meaning one can see in the usual categories, but also sees much more. At the New York World’s Fair I was standing in the Indian Pavilion, looking at a jeweled rug lying on the floor of the exhibit case, so exquisite a rug that it took my breath away. Flower stems were of small entwined pearls. Flower centers were amethyst, topaz, and beryl. A little girl stood beside me as entranced as I was. Turning to her mother she said in wonder, “Will it fly?” Her eyes reflected the enchantment of stories of flying carpets. She saw more than what was in the showcase. “Don’t be silly!” said her mother sharply, and hauled her off to the next exhibit.

Second is the ability to toy with elements and concepts, to play spontaneously with ideas, colors, shapes, relationships. This is the ability to connect things that most people would not consider connect-able, such as Sandra’s combining a hair brush with carbon paper. I also remembered when Avril found dry bean pods in the garden, shelled out the multi-colored beans, and strung them to make a necklace.

Third is an internal locus of evaluation. The value of what is created is decided by the person, not by praise or criticism of others. This is independence. Frank Barron’s article, using Solomon Asch’s research and published in the 1958 Scientific American, concluded that highly creative people, besides being able to stand chaos, were also independent. I also made good use of Asch in my talks, holding up a sheet of paper showing lines of unequal length, as he had done in a now-famous experiment with a class, in which some members were told ahead of time to lie about the unequal lines and say they were the same length. Three-fourths of the “innocent victims” said the lines were equal in length, and only one-fourth said they were different, preferring to believe their own senses rather than conforming to the answer given by the majority.

In the 1950s psychologists and the schools emphasized social adjustment, which to me was another word for conformity. It did not give scope to the human desire to be alone for periods of time, or to the capacity to stand up against society when one feels society is wrong. At one point I went dashing up to the campus to ask the department of child development and parent education how I could rear my children to be independent, to stand on their own two feet, and to defend their ideas of what is right. I was told there was nothing they could give me.
on such things, but they did have a lot of good information on social adjustment. This I declined.

Then I discovered that Jacob Getzels and Philip Jackson had dealt with this problem. These two researchers at the training school of the University of Chicago tested students from sixth grade through high school on intelligence, creativity, social adjustment, and moral character. There were plenty of tests for intelligence and social adjustment, but they had to invent tests for creativity and for moral character. Getzels and Jackson wrote that current educational literature gave greater welcome to the adjusted student than to the one with character, and this should be a matter of serious concern. “The question here, as with the highly creative and the highly intelligent students, is not which is better but how can we provide for both.” I especially appreciated their description of a home that produced a highly creative adolescent:

The father is a well-known biologist. The mother edited a small newspaper until the birth of her first child . . . The most striking characteristic of the apartment is the litter of books and magazines. Books by the hundreds are seen in the living room and in the hall, and they are veritably jammed into several of the other rooms.

Mrs. Black is a large handsome woman quite at ease with herself and the world, even in a house-dress split at the seams.23

Wynne also wrote about creativity; I have carbon copies of three of his papers. In “Education for Research” he wrote, “In order for the gifted child to get enough course load in our average high school to challenge his abilities, he must have the courage of a gladiator and the hide of a rhinoceros plus the vigorous support of an irate parent.”

Wynne’s three papers dealt primarily with scientific research, and his favorite quotation was from Pareto: “Give me a good fruitful error any time, full of seeds, bursting with its own convictions. You can keep your sterile truth for yourself.” Quoting from Whyte’s Organization Man, Wynne went on to say, “The emphasis placed in our schools and industrial research laboratories on the social adjustment of the individual and on cooperative projects tend to crowd out the lonely genius of the past. After all, thinking is a lonely art and we must not eliminate the brilliant mind from research in our present stress on collective activity.”24

We both liked to use famous examples of creative inspiration brought together by Brewster Ghiselin in his book The Creative Process. There was Kekule who saw the benzene molecule as a ring because he dreamed of a snake that swallowed its tail. Poincare was just stepping
into an omnibus when he realized the nature of Fuschian functions. Coleridge wrote Kubla Khan from a dream. Mozart could hear the parts of a new composition not successively, but all at once.  

Ghiselin was a poet on the faculty of the University of Utah. We met him when he came to Logan to speak to Thoughtless Thinkers. I saw him again when he spoke at Calvin Taylor’s “Workshop on Creativity” at the University of Utah in June 1963. Ghiselin never felt that research on creativity would hamper his poetry writing. Indeed, he was helping Taylor and his researchers set up tests to try to identify possible scientific talent in young people. A wide spectrum of people spoke at Taylor’s workshop, including Virginia Tanner who created the early courses on children’s dance at the University of Utah. Frank Barron came from California and told about his institute’s research on personality. I told him how much I had used his September 1958 article in the *Scientific American*. For three days I attended the workshop, sleeping in a dorm at night. I was the only individual there in capacity of wife and mother. Everyone else had a salaried profession: teaching, business, art, and engineering.

Avril had her fourteenth birthday while I was at the workshop, and I wished her happy birthday over the phone. Truth is stranger than fiction, because years later Avril took her Ph.D. at Berkeley, doing her research on personality, at the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research. Still later, she joined the psychology faculty at the University of California, Santa Cruz, replacing Barron after he retired.

With ideas I got at the workshop and from my wide range of reading, and at invitation of Norma Compton of our faculty, I wrote a paper, “Homemaking and the Idea of Creativity,” and presented it at a conference of college teachers of clothing, textiles, and related arts. I quoted the anthropologist Dorothy Lee, who, in an analysis of home economics manuals, found more emphasis on getting along with others than on the inner experience. I went back to Carl Rogers’s idea of an internal locus of evaluation, and I gave Roy Heath’s description of Reasonable Adventurers (1964) as people who are curious and critical, capable of close friendships and independent value judgments, and tolerant of ambiguity because of their stable self image. They evince a breath of interest even in the commonplace, and they have a sense of humor.

I assumed that women as well as men could be Reasonable Adventurers, although the fact that Heath’s study was of Princeton students, all male, made me uneasy. Years later it dawned on me that the Reasonable Adventurer did no volunteer community work, and caregiving certainly was not part of his description. However, the Reasonable
Adventurer never captured public attention anyway. Flower children and hippies did. On Mother’s Day I received a homemade card of heavy purple construction paper with this hand-written verse:

Our Mom ain’t got no bells or beads  
A ‘jangling on her neck and knees  
And doesn’t go to yoga class  
And don’t dance nude upon the grass.  
We dig her.  
She’s a nonconformist!  
Hippy Momma’s Day!

Love, Sandra, Avril, Lance