Part One

Beginnings

As I look back on my life, I can see how lucky I was to be born to two very loving people. That's the biggest aspect of my childhood that I remember. I felt a great deal of love and support from my parents.

My first memory is of being held by my father when I was only two or three years old. From that time forward, I felt nothing but devotion from both my parents, and my life was off to a wonderful start.

— P.H.J.

My Mother

My mother, Mignonette Esther Peterson, was the fourth of sixth children, three girls and three boys. Her family called her Minnie, but everyone else called her Pete. In her later years, her grandchildren called her Petie.

Mother was born in Proberta, California, to Dena Christianson and Peter John Peterson, and grew up on the family ranch near Redding. Life on the ranch was very simple. The whole family was kept very busy with the usual chores, even the littlest children.

Once, when her parents had gone to shop in town and left the older kids in charge, Mother was kicked in the head by a horse and was knocked unconscious. Her brothers Emil and Ernest dragged her into the horse trough and dunked her in the water to revive her. The doctor in town was too far away to help, so when Grandma came home, she sewed together the cut over Mom's eye with needle and thread she had boiled!

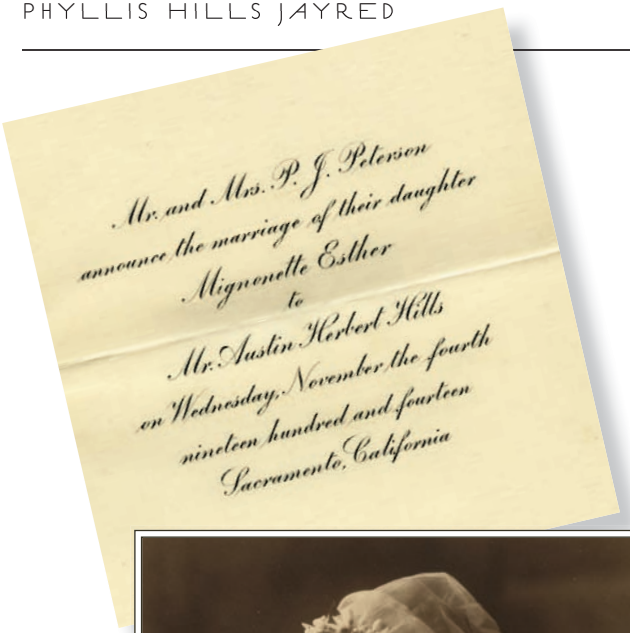
I'm not sure I could do that, and I'm very grateful that I never had to try. But you couldn't tell there was a scar; I saw it, and Grandma did a perfect job.

Mother was little, and very zippy and cute. In fact, my youngest daughter, Merilee, is so much like her that she makes me laugh. Mother had a good sense of humor and loved to dance. She was a live wire.

Before she married Dad, Mother was a surgical nurse at Fabiola Hospital in Oakland. She took care of Dad's first wife, Mary Haskell Hills, and came home with her from the hospital. Then she started dating my half-brother, Gray Hills.

Dad and and his first wife also had a daughter, Eveline, from whom Dad became estranged. Their firstborn son, Austin Noyes Hills, died in the early 1880s. When he was not quite two years old, the family carriage hit a rock and Austin fell

Mother as a nurse and earlier



Mother on her wedding day

out –– a huge tragedy for Dad and his wife.

When the first Mrs. Hills died a year or so into her convalescence, Mother suddenly started going out with my father. I never could get any more details about that from anybody; whenever they were asked about their courtship, Mother and Dad just smiled and laughed. They were married in Sacramento on November 4, 1914.

Dad was 69 when I was born, so people often thought he was my grandfather. Mother was much younger than Dad and was very sensitive about that; her husband was older than her own father. She made a practice of telling everyone that she was much older than she really was to make their age difference seem less shocking. Dad was born in 1851 and I'm sure he was at least 35 years older than Mother, maybe even more. It's been hard for me to ever figure it out. I don't know the year my mother was born, but I'm guessing it was in the early 1890s.

Their relationship, though, was so loving. I just always remember how close they were. As a child, it didn't seem to me that anything was different about them until I went over to play with my friend Martha Dexter and her father answered the door.

Mother and Dad

He looked so young to me, close to my half-brother Gray's age, and I thought he was Martha's brother!

Mother's parents were Scandinavian. Her father, Peter John Peterson, was from Lovik, Norway, and her mother, Dena

Phyllis with younger sister Merilyn and older sister BG in their play clothes at the Peterson farm

Christianson Peterson, was born to Danish parents in Owatonna, Minnesota, in 1871.

Our family used to sometimes drive up for the weekend and visit my grandparents, who by then had moved to Woodland, California. Those visits were fun. Grandma always cooked fried chicken and gravy, which we thought was so delicious. They had all the animals — lots of cats, dogs, chickens, pigs, and lambs. The little baby piglets were so much fun. And we got to ride horses, which we loved.

They still had an outhouse; can you believe it? Later, my father had a bathroom built for them.

My grandmother was darling, very sweet, and I just loved my grandfather. Grandpa had a thick accent and always had a story to tell us about life in Norway. We'd get him to speak Norwegian, and we'd get such a kick out of hearing a different language.

We all loved to hear him tell about the whales that his village captured in 1865, when he was a boy of 12. His village of Lovik, in the Lofoten Islands off the west coast of Norway, was small, only about 25 families. All the men made their living by fishing.

One night, Grandpa's father, Engebrecht Peterson, saw a huge school of whales coming into their bay. He alerted the men in the village, and they all filled their boats with large stones and very quietly made their way out to the ocean side of the whales.

When the whales tried to leave the bay for the open ocean, the men dropped stones in their paths, and the whales turned back toward the beach. The men did this until the tide went out and the whales were trapped in the bay — 218 of them!

Grandpa Peterson and Phyllis

At that point, they were easily killed (their blubber would be rendered into oil for light and heat). Our favorite part was when Grandpa told us how the water was pure red from the blood of all those whales. Why do kids like blood and gore so much!?

(cont. on p. 10)

Peter John Peterson

Dena Marie Christianson Peterson

Mother's Family

The Petersons

For a review of my heritage on my mother's side, I am fortunate to have a small booklet titled A Modern Viking Saga, *published by my aunt, Pearl Peterson Morse, in 1971. Pearl lovingly documented the history of the Peterson family, starting with my grandparents' Scandinavian roots and bringing the story up to the early 1900s on the family's California ranch. The following pages are taken from that history.*

— P.H.J.

My mother, Dena Marie Christianson, was born in Owatonna, Steel County, Minnesota on August 19, 1871. Her father was a flour miller, but unfortunately, his business in Owatonna failed. He lost his mortgage on his mill and decided to move to Artichoke Lake, Minn. Mother was at this time, I believe, eight years old.

Theirs was a proud family, claiming even an aristocratic ancestry. Can you imagine how hard it was for such a family to make such a trip, carting all their belongings in wagons and driving their cattle along with them? Dena Marie had to walk, and even some of the oldsters in this caravan had to go on foot.

In one of the wagons of this train was Elsie Christian, my mother's grandmother, who had come over from Denmark. (Many years later, Mother remembered that her grandmother was "the most perfect person" she had ever known.) Somewhere in the train was Mary Christianson, the eighth and last child of Elsie Christian, and the mother of Dena Marie. Also in the company were Althea and Carrie, my mother's sisters. It must have been an arduous trek.

When this family of strangers arrived in the vicinity of Engebrecht Peterson's family, now living in his log cabin, you can imagine how my dear mother and all members of her family were in need of good, kind friends. This they truly found in the Peterson family — and much more. By this time, the Peterson family had been converted from the Lutheran belief to the Seventh-day Adventist faith and had been observing the seventh-day Sabbath for several years. Perhaps this new-found

faith enabled them to welcome the new family with more open arms.

Eventually, the Christianson family, too, adopted the Seventh-day Adventist faith, giving up the Lutheran belief as the Petersons had done before them.

About 1884, when Dad was in his thirties, he took Dena Marie Christianson as his wife. She was somewhat younger than he, by — I believe — about nineteen years. I have always felt there was a balanced contrast to their personalities. Mother was a warm, outgoing kind of person — a mother who always felt that children should have fun — while Dad was more serious and reserved.

Soon, a son was born to this newly-wed couple and they named him Emil.

It seems that Emil and guns just did not mix. When he was three, he somehow managed to shoot a gun from Dad's workshop into the house, narrowly missing Mother, Grandmother, and Great-Grandmother. Then, when he was eleven, while out hunting ducks, the kick-back of his rifle broke his nose — but, all the same, he bagged two ducks. Somewhat later, while hammering a shell into a gun, the gunpowder exploded into his face.

Front row from l., Pearl, Peter (holding Grace), Pete (Phyllis's mother) and Ernest. Back row: Dena Marie and Emil

Mother nursed him through these accidents — as she did for all of her children. She had an excellent medical education — two books which she always consulted in times of emergency in our family: Dr. Chase's and Dr. Kellog's. They were the equivalent of Dr. Spock's books today.

I was the next child to be born to Peter John and Dena Marie, but before I came, our family migrated to California. Some years before this, my mother's brother, James, had left his native Denmark for California. He wrote countless letters to Mother and Dad, praising the countryside and urging them to join him. His descriptions of California made the place so attractive that Peter John and Dena Marie decided to pack up and join the great move to the West. Grandfather Engebrecht, perhaps because of his age, chose to remain in Minnesota with his second wife and his children, Ole and Caroline.

Once in California, the Petersons settled on a 160-acre ranch in the Sacramento Valley, seven miles south of Red Bluff in Tehama County. Peter John built a house on a hill that overlooked a winding creek.

Following me came Minnie and then Ernest, but the next child, unfortunately, did not survive childhood. I am speaking now of Esther, my beautiful little sister — as pretty as a doll — who passed on when only sixteen months old.

You can imagine how heartbroken — how almost bitter — Mother was at the loss of her darling child, but God was gracious to her and to us all. He sent another baby girl and Mother's heart was so full of gratitude she named the child Grace in praise of God's graciousness to us all.

Last to arrive was Lionel Earl, whom we always called "Bill."

Peter John sired seven children, but with the loss of little Esther, we always thought of ourselves, while we were growing up, as a family of six children.

How I love to go back in memory to those early carefree days on the ranch! They were surely the happiest days of my life. I remember a happy home, filled with love, respect for our parents, and obedience to God. At every meal we ate, God was remembered with a grace. Then, in the mornings, we would read together verses (or sometimes whole chapters) from the Bible. Daily, we would pray together as a family.

Our father provided for us very well. Across the creek at the ranch was some low land which he rented. On this land, he raised a fine grade of wheat which, when ground up, was perfectly delicious in bread or morning mush. Dad also raised cattle for sale. Then, too, I recall what a fine hunter Dad was.

I also remember how skillful Mother was in managing the home. There was always nourishing food on the table, and she was the one who sewed all our clothes — even the suits for the boys. My mind goes back to a time when she stayed up all night finishing a dress for me that I would wear at a picnic the following day. What young mother today could do as much? Mother herself raised all the vegetables we needed and there were always plenty of flowers around the house.

All of us children had chores to do, but there was fun too. I remember, when I was very young, how delighted I was to watch our turkeys feeding in the fields. I remember picnics, when we took a lunch and then roasted potatoes in a fire pit until their skins were black, while inside all was soft and fluffy and white.

Ours was not a wealthy household, but we never went to bed hungry. God was good to us. We never had too much, but we always had enough. The turkeys, geese, ducks, chickens, and cows always kept us supplied with meat, eggs, and milk. Though we had to live frugally, I can still recall how generous Dad was, donating money for Adventist missions around the world (sometimes against Mother's wishes for economy) and even giving money to the Pitcairn Islanders for their first ship.

For several years, we older children went to a country school three miles from home, riding the way in a buggy led by a good, gentle horse. Sometimes we would race other children in their buggies along the way. On one of these occasions, I recall how Minnie's lunch box fell out of the buggy onto the muddy road during one of the races. That was too bad, of course, but we won the race.

These were, indeed, happy times, but changes came to alter this pattern — changes that were not entirely for the good. By the time I reached the sixth grade, Mother and Dad decided to provide Emil,

Ernest, Minnie and me a better — and more Christian — education. In Red Bluff was a small Adventist church, so, in order that we might receive regular instruction at this church, he bought a small house near it. I can appreciate the sacrifice that Mother and Dad made, because they kept the ranch too, and this meant a good deal of traveling back and forth.

Mother, I know, loved her days in town. She welcomed the change after the strenuous life she had led on the ranch. As I have said, Mother was a good-natured, fun-loving woman, who enjoyed meeting new people and making new friends. Town life gave her social opportunities that were simply unknown at the ranch. She blossomed in the city and, to many of our new friends there, she seemed so young and radiant that they would mistake her for our elder sister. But this is not too far from the truth. In many ways, Mother was like a sister to us. She always understood the young, because she was so young herself.

Unfortunately, I feel this change was not so good for us children. In town, we met many more worldly boys and girls than we had known on the ranch. Also, Minnie and I missed the younger children who had been left at the old homestead. We wished we could have stayed at the ranch,

Phyllis's grandmother, Dena Marie Peterson, and her daughters (from l.), Pete, Grace, and Pearl, early 1900s

Phyllis's great-grandmother, Mary Christianson Spangler (front row left), with her daughter, Dena Peterson, and grandaughters Pete (behind her) and Pearl

Peter John Peterson

Dena Marie Christianson Peterson

but we tried to make the best of it.

After Minnie and I finished grammar and high school, we set out in our late teens to make our own way. We entered nurses' training and graduated from the Fabiola Hospital in Oakland, California, where, after our labors, we received the title of Registered Nurse.

Eventually, Minnie and I married wonderful Christian men of faiths other than the one we professed.

Sisters: Grace and Pete Peterson

(cont. from p.3)

Many decades later, when my second husband, Mac, and I were on a cruise ship that visited Norway, we got talking to the captain about my grandfather having grown up in Lovik. He was very interested, and excitedly urged us to get off the ship and fly there, and he'd pick us up at the next port. We were thrilled, and decided to do just that.

After a flight in a tiny plane, we arrived at a very small town. We checked into a hotel and chatted with the clerk about how we had come from California and were planning to rent a car and drive to Lovik, where my grandfather had lived. We noticed another employee, an old man who didn't speak English, sitting behind the desk. He quietly disappeared and we went to our room.

Then came a knock on the door, and here was the old man. He had several pages in his hand that he handed to me. They were written by my Aunt Pearl — an excerpt from her little book *A Modern Viking Saga*, in which she recounted Grandpa's story of the legendary whale catch of 1865. It was so amazing and such fun. Here we were in the remote Lofoten Islands, for Pete's sake!

The next day, we found the place Grandpa was born. There was a foundation of the house, and that was all. Three men were standing nearby, only one of whom spoke English. He was able to communicate that he had known my grandfather's family, which was thrilling for me to hear.

My niece Sherry has since traveled to Lovik with some Norwegian friends of hers. They started talking to the local people, and a man showed up who was a grandson of Grandpa's brother. Sherry said he looked so much like Uncle Ernest, Mother's brother, that it was uncanny.

They also saw the wall of whale bones made from the skeletons of the gigantic whale catch. Aunt Pearl had some of the bones in her possession when I was a little girl.

Aunt Grace (above) and Mother (right) with BG and Phyllis at Coronado Beach near San Diego

Mother's older sister, Pearl, and one of her cousins, Evelyn, were nurses. Pearl came to Oakland and went to the Fabiola Training School for Nurses, so when Mother finished high school, she came down and became a nurse, too — a surgical nurse. She was very young.

Mother was very close to Pearl and their other sister, Grace. Grace lived right up the street from us in Piedmont. Her husband, Bob Atkinson, owned the Atkinson Mills, a lumber company, and had fought in France during World War I.

Oh, I had such a crush on Uncle Bob! *[laughs]* I thought he was wonderful. He was so handsome, and he was just darling to us. When I started college at Cal, I actually lived with them for a while, because by then Mother lived in the East.

Aunt Pearl lived in Oakland for a while, and then she and her first husband, Jack Nelson, moved to Los Angeles. Jack was a good friend of my father's. I'm sure he was much younger than Dad, but they played a lot of cribbage and were great friends.

Neither Pearl nor Grace had children. Both of them had babies that died in childbirth. It was tragic for both of them, terrible. I think that's

Bob and Grace Atkinson

Uncle Bob and Phyllis

Pete and A.H. Hills, Phyllis's parents

Pearl and Jack Nelson

From l., Bill, Grace, Ernest, Pete, Pearl, Emil and their mother, Dena

probably why they were so big in our lives. They were always over at our house, always doting on us, and we loved them dearly.

In fact, Grace, who lived so close to us, would wake us up in the middle of the night and bring us fried egg sandwiches. We loved that! Adults were always reluctant about waking kids, but it meant so much. Oh, I'd be so excited. *[laughs]*

Mother's three brothers were farmers. Two of them died tragically in middle age. A train hit the oldest one, Emil, and the youngest one, Bill, committed suicide.

Emil had six kids, and I remember that when we went up to visit them, his eight year-old daughter was feeding the whole family. She was cooking the dinner. Emil's wife was sort of out of it.

Bill, the baby of the family, actually lived with us for a while when we were young, before he got married. He was a neat guy. He always liked to be with us. I don't know why he became so unhappy that he killed himself, but I do know that his wife had died. They had one son, David.

Ernest was the middle son. He and his wife were always darling to us, and they lived close to Grandma and Grandpa, so we'd see him and his family when we visited. They had four kids, Lawrence, Janet, Johnny, and Tommy.

My Father

Dad's full name was Austin Herbert Hills, but everybody called him A.H. He was 69 when I was born and he died when he was 82, in 1933.

I don't know much about my father's background, because he was older; I never knew his parents, of course. He and his brother R.W. were the only members of the family I ever knew. Dad and R.W. were good friends as well as siblings. Together, they started Hills Brothers Coffee.

They had another brother, Ernest, who died of alcoholism when he was about 40.

Joseph Hills, the first Hills to come from Kent, England, came to Malden, Massachusetts, in 1638. There's a monument in his honor in Malden, which is now a suburb of Boston. He was the patriarch of the family in New England.

Dad's father, Austin Hills, was born in 1823 in Union, Maine. He married Harriet Heald and they raised their young family in Rockland, Maine. Dad told us that it was so cold there, the road froze and he was able to ice-skate to school on the road!

One of the most amazing stories about my father is that when he was a little boy, he shook the hand of President Abraham Lincoln. Can you believe it?

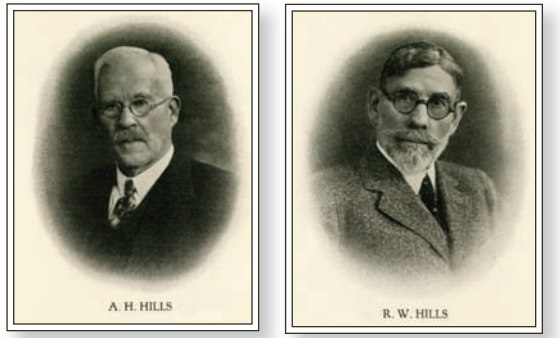
Dad didn't leave Maine until he came to California, so in my mind, I've figured out that he must have shaken Lincoln's hand during Lincoln's second presidential campaign. I know Lincoln's campaign train went up into New England, and he would have stood in the back of a train on a little observation deck and shaken people's hands and talked from there. That is purely in my imagination, but it's the only possibility I can think of. Dad must have been 8 or 9, maybe even 10. You know how kids would gather around an exciting event like that.

Abraham Lincoln made a tremendous impression on that young boy. Dad mentioned the experience many times in the twelve years I spent with him. He was always bringing up Lincoln, and felt very strongly about the injustice of slavery. He was very, very impressed with President Lincoln.

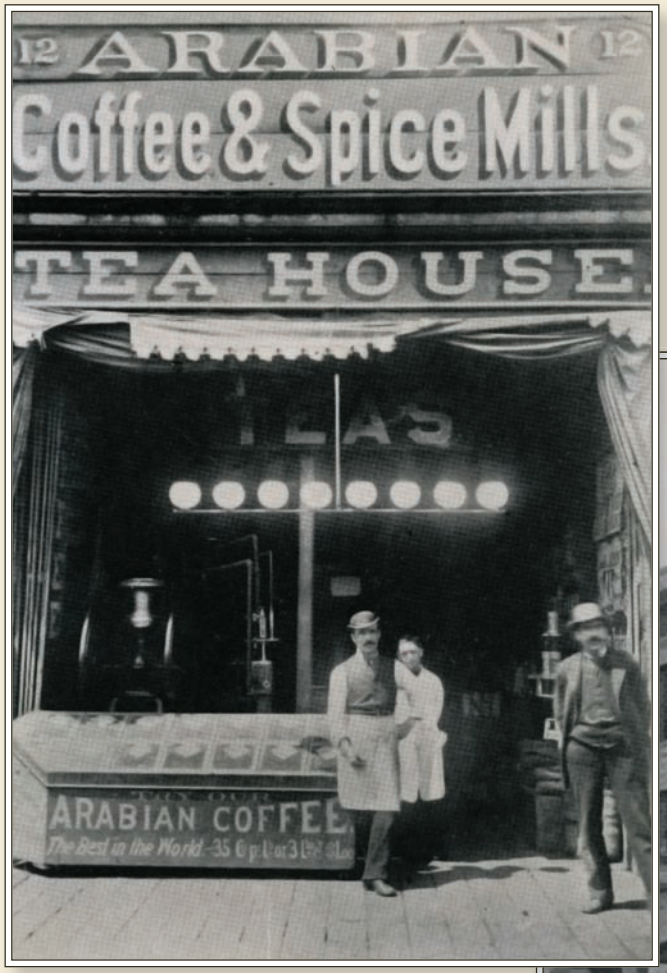
(cont. on p. 28)

Joseph Hills (1602-1688) and Rose Clark Hills

Dad's parents
Austin Herbert Hills, Sr. and Harriet Heald Hills



Dad (left) and his brother, R.W. Hills



First Hills Bros. retail shop at 12 Fourth Street, San Francisco, 1882

The Hills Bros. warehouse at Sacramento & Sansome Streets, 1917

In 1948, to commemorate its 25 years as the advertising firm for Hills Bros., N.W. Ayer & Son of Philadelphia wrote a history of Hills Bros. and gave slim leatherbound copies to just three people, the firm's executives. The following pages, including the romantic historical poem "Prelude," are from that history. My copy was inherited from my half-brother, H.G. (Gray) Hills.

The following account of "men of sound ideas and good character" starts with a description of my grandfather, Austin Hills, and his pioneering spirit. He passed the spirit onto his sons: my father, A.H. Hills, and his brother, R.W., who co-founded the family business, Hills Bros. Coffee, in the late 1800s. This enthusiastic account, written just after WWII, is a captivating slice of American history and a tribute to the American dream.

— P.H.J.

The Hills of San Francisco

A brief history of an epic enterprise

In the Beginning

The man with whom our story begins, Austin Hills, was born a few decades after the nation was born. He lived during a period when the nation was beginning to acquire the strength of its maturity. When he came to San Francisco in 1862 he was thirty-nine years old, and the American dream was still very new.

How new may be gleaned from the fact that it was only ninety years before his arrival that the first white man had sailed into San Francisco Bay. And it was less than sixty years before that Jefferson sent a message to Congress suggesting that $2500 be appropriated for exploration west of the Mississippi. The result was the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804, authorized to "extend the external commerce of the United States."

When Austin Hills arrived in San Francisco, only a dozen years had passed since President Fillmore signed the Act of Congress that admitted California into the Union as a state. Seven more years were to pass before a golden spike at Promontory, Utah, joined together the two tracks that gave the nation its first transcontinental railroad.

The railroad gave substance to the American dream. From then on the growth of the nation was rapid and spectacular.

Many of the pioneers in California with families in the East greeted it with joy, for it meant they could send for their wives and children without subjecting them to the severe hardships of travel which they themselves had experienced. Austin Hills, whose family was in Rockland, Maine, was one of these.

San Francisco made great strides in the decade that followed Austin Hills' arrival. By 1873, when he brought his family to California, the rawness of its Gold Rush days was almost gone. No one could complain any longer, as general W. T. Sherman did in 1850, that he dreaded riding horseback along Montgomery Street for fear of being thrown and drowned in the mud — or that Kearny Street was impass-

able, "not even jackassable." The city still had a rather untidy aspect, but the signs of improvement and growth were in evidence everywhere.

The summit of Nob Hill had become a dazzling spectacle of ornate Victorian palaces; on all sides files of wooden houses were rising. Scattered throughout the city were substantial buildings, impressive proofs of its booming commerce and industry, including such enterprises as breweries and malt houses, sash and blind mills, rolling mills, flour mills, boot and shoe factories, coffee and spice processors (which later developed into one of the city's leading industries), box factories, soap works, packing plants.

There were also churches and schools in surprising number. And down at the waterfront, where Austin Hills was engaged in the business of building ships, a giant project was under way for reclaiming the mudflats and shallows of Yerba Buena Cove, and the docks were crowded with freight and passenger ships from distant countries.

Examining the city at this stage of its growth, Austin Hills must have felt justified in thinking that this was the right place for him and his family.

The Cornerstone

Austin Hills was joined by his family on June 3, 1873. Their move from Rockland, Maine, to San Francisco marked a significant milestone in the history of the Hills family. The Hills had lived in New England ever since 1638, when Joseph Hills, who established the American branch of the family, arrived in Malden, Mass., from Kent, England. Now once more, after seven generations, members of the Hills family were faced with the prospect of establishing a home in a brave new world.

Austin Hills' eldest son, Austin Herbert, was then twenty-two years old. Reuben Wilmarth Hills was seventeen years old.

Their arrival was almost concurrent with an outstanding date in San Francisco history. The day before, on June 2, 1873, ground was broken in the city for the world's first cable street railway. It was a dramatic triumph over nature: at last, a means of transportation was found for surmounting hills that were too steep for horses.

For several years after their arrival, the two young Hills brothers worked in various capacities. After having acquired a little capital and a great deal of valuable business experience, they pooled their resources. On June 1, 1878, almost five years to the day after they first set eyes on San Francisco, they formed a partnership known as Hills Bros. and became dealers in coffees, teas, spices and dairy products. Thanks to the vision and industry the two brothers brought to their business, this little establishment in a public market stall eventually became the cornerstone of the present great business of Hills Bros. Coffee, Inc.

In 1882 the two brothers opened another retail shop at 12 Fourth Street for the expansion of their coffee, tea and spice business. Above this store they placed a large sign which read: "Arabian Coffee and Spice Mills." Why coffee? What prompted the young brothers to emphasize this item?

The most obvious answer is that they realized there was a strong demand for coffee in San Francisco, which would continue to grow as the population increased. But cold business logic is only one aspect of the answer. The fact that their mother enjoyed a good cup of coffee may have influenced their interest in fine coffee. Or it may have been evoked by the colorful spectacle of ships from every land crowding the famous Embarcadero.

The 50th anniversary of Austin and Harriet Hills, July 6, 1900. A.H. Hills stands at the far end of the table, in front of the door; his brothers R.W. (looking away) and Ernest are to his right. His first wife, Mary Haskell Hills, is at far right; their daughter, Eveline, stands behind her. Gray Hills sits at bottom right.

What is a good cup of coffee? We believe it is a great deal more than something hot to drink. It is courage in the morning. Refreshment at noon. Congeniality with friends along the afternoon's way. And restoration when the day has ended. It cheers the gloomy, wakes the sleepy, and soothes the tired. It is drink for the body, food for the spirit, too.

— Hills Bros. ad

Prelude

It happened then:
As Maine went,
so went the others.
All the way
from Maine to California,
from the moody Atlantic
to the so-called Pacific
they went;
Across plain, mountain, desert, water,
Despite pain, redskins, sickness, danger,
they went,
Lured by a giant rainbow that
straddled the nation from east to west
with a potful of hope
at the end of it.

Some sought adventure,
Some easy money,
Some went for the climate
and some for the ride.
By wagon, foot, ship and rail
they went,
Praying and groping and planning,
their minds soaked with the words
of those who had got there first.
Some of the words sang,
others commanded:
("Go West, young man. Go. Go West.")
All were hot with hope,
pregnant with promise.

"Where are you from?"
"What do you know?"
"When did you leave?"
"Where will you go?"

Those were the days
when the Old Gray Mare
was what she used to be;
When tall tales were so tall you had to climb
a ladder to hear the tail end of one;
When they claimed that a herd of California cattle
got lost in the hollow of a giant redwood tree;
When Paul Bunyan was straightening out rivers,
and Johnny Appleseed was planting
seedless oranges.
Those were the days of Bret Harte, Mark Twain,
Jack London and Ambrose Bierce;
When Twain's Jumping Frog played leapfrog all
over the nation,
and Tom Sawyer was having the time of his life.
Yes, those were the days . . . .

Wrote General Vallejo to President Lincoln:
"The Yankees are a wonderful people, wonderful.
Wherever they go
they make improvements.
If they were to emigrate in large numbers
to Hell itself,
they would somehow manage to change the climate."
"Some day," marveled another Mexican general,
"some day, these Americans will build ladders
to touch the sky,
and once in the heavens they will change
the whole face of the universe
and even the color of the stars."

Westward, the youth from the East
pushed forward,
leaving their past behind them.
Even when the gold was all dug and gone,
Even when the dream of getting rich quick
had faded into thin air,
the Yanks kept coming,
holding their hopes before them.

In the early sixties,
in the state of Maine,
in a sea town called Rockland
(noted for lobster and limestone)
a man heard the call of the West
and thought of a city named San Francisco,
a city by a Golden Gate

with a scant American past,
but, oh, what a future!
and ever so many hills —
at least three times more than you could find
in such a fancy city as Rome, Italy,
And, gee, what a climate!
and, gosh, what a harbor!

They say this man was tall and strong,
a good man to be the head of a good family.
They say he wore his Sunday blacks proudly —
A careful man, but daring too.
A man of granite with a smile
that was both a promise and a guaranty.
His name was the plural of hill,
Austin Hills, to be exact, son of Reuben;
and husband of Harriet,
a gentle woman
with a penchant for good coffee,
and what's more:
eager young sons, growing up
and rarin' to go.

Seven years before the Dream
of joining the nation by rail came true,
in eighteen hundred and sixty-two
Austin Hills took his life in hand,
and journeyed to San Francisco
to get the lay of the land.

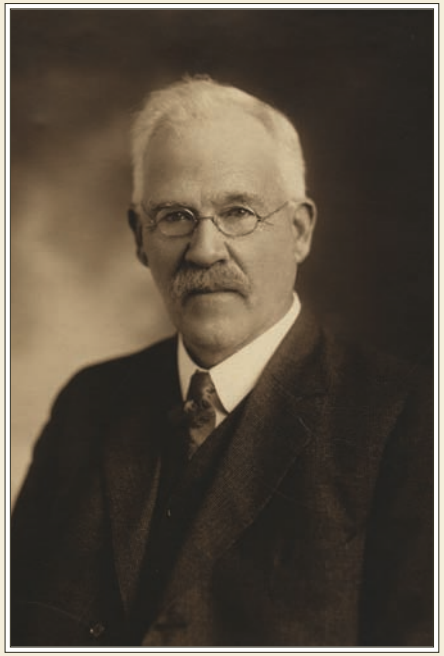
Later, when the Dream was real,
after a golden spike hit hard
on the head made history,
came Harriet Hills with her sons,
now grown up and ready to live.

"What is the time?"
"Who do you know?"
"When does it get there?"
"When do you go?"

All the way
from Maine to California
they came,
across three thousand miles
of a giant rainbow
with a potful of hope
at the end of it.

They were part of the vanguard:
the immigrants, the pioneers, the dreamers
of the forties, the fifties, the sixties
and the seventies.
They were the spirit of America,
the builders of tomorrow.
They planted the seeds
that became beautiful harvests.
They laid the foundations
for pillars of strength.
They are the reasons why a nation
of and for and by the people
could flourish.

They were Americans
in the best sense of the word:
free and enterprising and genuine,
with a dynamo of faith
for a soul.



A.H. Hills

But perhaps the best explanation is that the Hills brothers were inspired by the natural love of the hardy Westerner for fine coffee. To the pioneer working his way westward, coffee was an essential part of his equipment. Pioneers of the forties "planning to travel from the Midwest to the Pacific Coast" were advised to take a stock of supplies that included "fifty pounds of sugar and thirty pounds of coffee." To men like A. H. and R. W. Hills, steeped in the romance of the early West, there must have been something appealing and distinctly American in the picture of the traditional pioneer bending over an open fire, frying bacon and brewing coffee.

Inside the Cup

By 1882, when the Arabian Coffee and Spice Mills opened its doors, the population of San Francisco had jumped to more than 234,000. Although the city was still "an unkempt metropolis whose nocturnal thoroughfares were murky with gaslight," it was progressing rapidly on most fronts, especially with its industries and maritime trade.

A San Francisco newspaper in 1882 carried a front-page story expressing enthusiasm over the "latest improved hydraulic elevator" in the Phelan Building. The same newspaper carried an advertisement featuring Nicoll, the Tailor, "the Largest and Finest Store in the city! Lighted by Electricity!" In the same year the Bohemian Club, already famous for the charming hospitality it extended to visiting literary, art and musical celebrities, observed the tenth anniversary of its founding at its quarters on Pine Street. The Palace, "the world's grandest hotel," which one San Franciscan described as being "at least four times too large for its period and place," had achieved an international reputation for its luxurious appointments.

In this atmosphere of increasing comfort and relaxation, the coffee business established by the Hills brothers took root and blossomed. By 1884 Hills Bros. had outgrown its Fourth Street store and moved to a larger establishment at Sacramento and Sansome Streets. Two years later retail selling was discontinued; from then on Hills Bros. Coffee was sold exclusively through retail grocers.

In retrospect, it is clear that those formative years in the eighties were among the most significant in the history of Hills Bros. It was during this period that the two founders built the solid foundation on which the present business stands. In the years that have intervened there have been numerous improvements in tech-

niques; the superstructure above the foundation has assumed titanic proportions. But the original foundation remains unchanged; the same standards developed in the eighties have been observed faithfully ever since.

With the wonderful thoroughness that was to characterize all operations of the firm, the two brothers, early in their career, made a detailed study of their product. Their zeal in providing their customers with quality coffee that was consistently good led them to establish a new precedent in the coffee trade: instead of selecting their coffee on the basis of appearance, as was generally done by wholesale dealers, they would test the coffee they purchased and judge it by its taste "in the cup."

Their insistence on applying the "cup test" to all the coffees purchased proved to be one of the chief reasons why Hills Bros. achieved such wide fame for the consistently fine grade of its product. As a young man, R. W. Hills used to make periodic trips to New York, taking with him cups, spoons, scales — all the paraphernalia necessary for testing coffee "in the cup." (Such equipment was seldom available there then.)

Today everyone in the coffee business "cup-tests" — more or less — but Hills Bros.' own early development of this technique probably had a greater underlying effect on its business than any other single feature that occurred before or since.

In less than a decade the fame of the coffees sold by Hills Bros. had begun to spread all through California. By 1894 business had increased to such an extent that the firm was compelled to move for the third time, into still larger quarters. The new address was the Hansford block, part of a gore-corner running through from Market Street to California Street, just below Davis Street.

The emergence of the Arab as the trademark of Hills Bros. Coffee had its origin in the fact that the firm's leading brand of coffee at that time was known as "Arabian Roast." For a number of years the two brothers had attempted to secure a trademark that would properly represent their product, something that would suggest its fine quality and also, perhaps, serve as a reminder of the ancient world where the practice of drinking coffee had its legendary beginning. Many ideas were considered but none seemed to fill the bill. Finally, in the early nineties an artist by the name of Briggs unexpectedly came into the Hills Bros. office one day with a sketch he had drawn of a bearded Arab in turban and gown.

The figure met with the instant approval of both A. H. and R. W. Hills. It first served to identify "Arabian Roast," which afterwards became known as Hills Bros. "Highest Grade" and later by its present name, Hills Bros. "Red Can Brand."

The Turning Point

In 1900 the most significant advance in the coffee field came from Hills Bros. The search for an improved method of packing butter into tins so that it could be kept in perfect condition when sent to distant points led A. H. Hills to Chicago, where the Norton brothers had been experimenting with the process of vacuum packing food products in cans. So impressed was he with their success that he lost no time in ordering the necessary machinery and acquiring exclusive rights for the Pacific Coast.

When the machinery was set up in San Francisco and the first cans of butter were packed, the Hills brothers realized that the vacuum can offered

even greater possibilities for coffee than it did for butter. Steps were immediately taken to adapt the machinery to the vacuum packing of coffee. By July, 1900, Hills Bros. was distributing the first coffee ever to be packed in vacuum.

Thanks to vacuum packing, Hills Bros. early acquired the advantage of being able to send its product to any part of the world. Vacuum packing literally started Hills Bros. across the map.

The Hills brothers could not have picked a more favorable time for launching their program. In 1900 the two men were in the prime of their lives: A. H. Hills was then 49 years old, R. W. Hills 44 years of age. Both were old enough to have the strength of their convictions; young enough to have the courage to guide their business into newer and greener fields. Slowly but surely, the "slow trickle" they had started in 1878 was broadening into a mighty river. From the very beginning of their partnership, the business abilities and the sound imagination of A. H. and R. W. Hills had made an ideal combination. Both men were endowed with qualities that inspired devotion and confidence, not only among their employees but also among those with whom they did business.

How solidly their business was established is evidenced by the fact that the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, which ruined a number of budding companies, had little or no effect on the progress of Hills Bros. The Hansford Block on Market Street, where the Hills Bros. plant had been located for twelve years, was entirely wiped out. Undefeated by the catastrophe, Hills Bros. rose out of the ashes like the proverbial Phoenix. For a few months the firm operated in a barn on the Tubbs Estate in Oakland. On returning to San Francisco it occupied a building at Howard and Hawthorne Streets. Two years later there was another move into a larger plant at 175 Fremont Street but, with the increasing volume of business, this plant soon proved too small. The building next door was annexed and, later, two other adjoining buildings all became part of the Hills Bros. establishment.

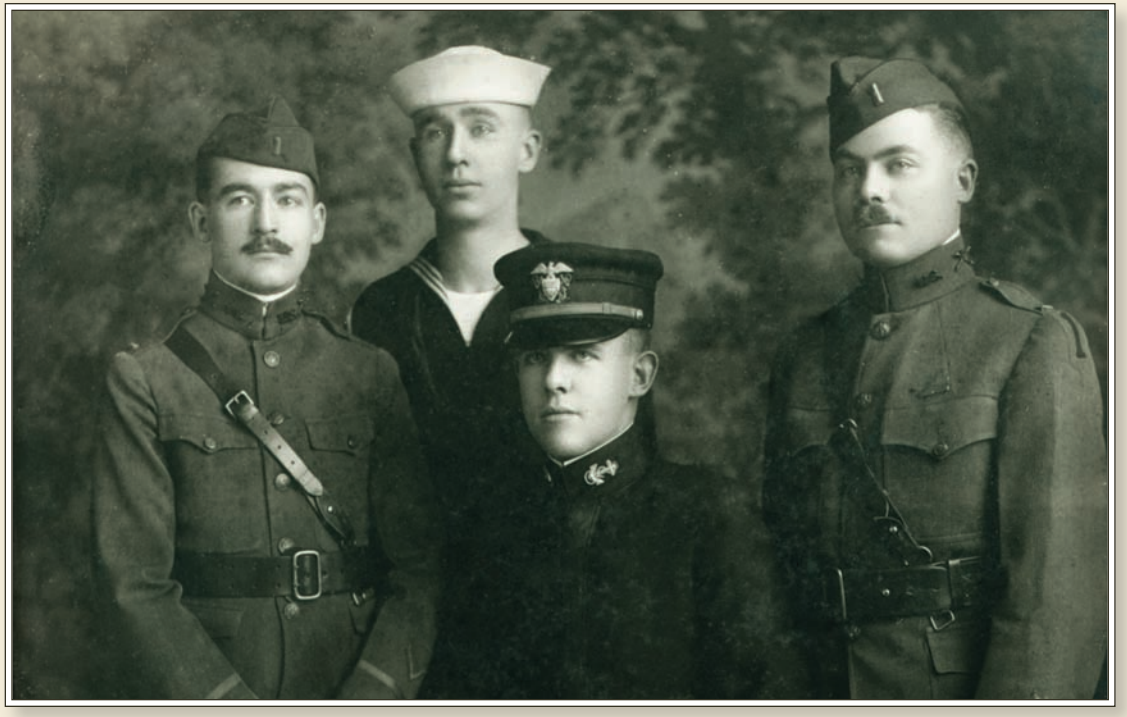
About 1914 the Hills Bros. organization began undergoing significant changes. The partnership was incorporated, and the sons of A. H. and R. W. Hills were entering the business and acquiring their knowledge of coffee "from the bottom up." By the early twenties, the four younger Hills were assuming important responsibilities in the firm. Reuben W. Hills, the eldest son of R. W. Hills, was interesting

himself in the coffee department of the business. Edward E. Hills, second son of R. W. Hills, was familiarizing himself with the financial end of it. H. G. (Gray) Hills, only son of A. H. Hills, was active in the advertising and sales departments. Leslie W. Hills, youngest of R. W. Hills' sons, was mastering the engineering-production end of the business. Hills Bros. was beginning to show the development that was to bring the firm greatness.

After several years of experimentation, the company perfected "Controlled Roasting," which was first put into actual use in 1923. By this exacting method, green coffee is introduced into the roaster in small, evenly measured lots and is propelled through the roasting cylinders in what might be described as "small compartments," thus roasting the coffee little at a time — continuously. . . .

The "Controlled Roasting" process proved to be another milestone in the growth of Hills Bros. It provided the assurance that coffee could be uniformly roasted day after day. Moreover, more coffee per roasting unit could be produced per hour than by any other known method.

Within a period of two decades Hills Bros. "Red Can Brand" Coffee had achieved the reputation of being the highest grade coffee available in the generalmarket and a "best-seller" almost everywhere it was distributed.



Sons of A.H. and R.W. Hills in World War I (from l.), Reuben, Leslie, Gray and Edward Hills

On January 8, 1924, Hills Bros. informed N. W. Ayer & Son that it had secured a large piece of property bordering on San Francisco's famous Embarcadero, and was about to erect a new coffee-roasting plant which it believed would be the largest plant in the United States devoted exclusively to the roasting of coffee. Ground for the new plant was broken on August 12, 1924, and the building was completed late in 1925. On January 11, 1926, Hills Bros. moved into its new home at No. 2 Harrison Street.

Armed with large production facilities, successful merchandising tactics and skillful advertising techniques, Hills Bros. was now well equipped to push its

drive for new markets in all directions.

By 1928 branch offices of Hills Bros. were established in eleven large cities, and strong positions had been established in territories as far east as Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Past and Present

The two founders of Hills Bros. died within a very short time of each other, Austin Herbert on March 1, 1933; Reuben Wilmarth on November 27, 1934. Always together in thought and spirit, the two brothers had lived to see the small retail store they started grow into one of the largest producers of roasted coffee in the United States. They died knowing that their epic enterprise was in the capable hands of men who would remain faithful to the principles of integrity and quality which they had so consistently practiced during their lifetimes. In terms of American business they will undoubtedly be remembered as giants; but those who had the privilege of knowing them will probably think of them primarily as men of good will, "with a dynamo of faith for a soul."

Following the deaths of their fathers, the four Hills sons assumed additional responsibilities of management. Edward E. Hills became president of the company. Reuben W. Hills, Jr., H. G. Hills and Leslie W. Hills continued as vice-presidents, which all three had been for a varying number of years.

By 1939 its expansion program had proved so successful that Hills Bros., which the year before had changed its name to Hills Bros. Coffee, Inc., decided to build a plant in the East that would enable it to keep up with the increasing volume of business accruing from new markets it had opened. The site selected was Edgewater, New Jersey. This plant, completed in 1941, became a modern companion to the San Francisco one in size and capacity.

Shortly after the opening of the new plant came World War II with all its restrictions on coffee imports and containers. Hills Bros. Coffee, Inc., was soon faced with a choice of policies: either lowering its standards and packing all the coffee the war-swollen markets would take, or maintaining its high standards and producing as much coffee as possible. The latter course was adopted, with grati-

Ground-breaking for the new plant at 2 Harrison St., on the Embarcadero, August 12, 1924.
From l., A.H., Gray, Leslie, Ed, Reuben Jr., and R.W. Hills

Remember, you buy coffee by the pound but you drink it by the cup. It's the number of strong, full-flavored cups you can get from a pound that determines the value.

— Hills Bros. ad

All-at-once is not a good way to soft-cook 1,000 eggs. Neither is roasting huge quantities of coffee at a time the sure way — that's why Hills Bros. roasts a few pounds at a time by a continuous process.

— Hills Bros. ad, 1929

The French writer Voltaire used to drink enormous amounts of coffee throughout his life. Somebody advised him to give it up, saying coffee was a slow poison. Voltaire replied, "It must be a slow poison, for I have been drinking it for 65 years and I am not dead yet."

fying results. In spite of its handicaps, Hills Bros. business grew during the war years.

When tin was unavailable and glass was in short supply, Hills Bros. was compelled to use paper cartons for a short period. During this time its advertising was designed to explain that although the packing method had temporarily changed, the quality of the coffee was still the same.

By 1947 most of the major wartime problems had disappeared and Hills Bros. was once more in a good position to produce quality coffee in large quantities, packed in its famous vacuum can.

The company has reason to be proud of its personnel, which it considers to be the most experienced in the coffee business.

The sons of A. H. and R. W. Hills have directed the destinies of the firm since 1934. There are only three of them now, since Reuben W. Hills, Jr., died in 1940.

Following the example set by their fathers, Herbert, Jr., son of H. G. Hills, and Reuben III, son of the late Reuben, Jr., are gradually acquiring a knowledge of the business, learning to become future leaders of the firm. With this infusion of new talent, Hills Bros. Coffee, Inc., as a future with unlimited possibilities.

Today the company is consolidating its position in the markets it has won and preparing for the future. Already Hills Bros. Coffee is known and used in approximately two-thirds of the nation's geographical area. The fathers of the company found their "potful of hope" at the western end of their rainbow; their sons and grandsons are projecting their dream towards the eastern end of the same rainbow, the birthplace of Austin Hill. By continuing to employ the same qualities of leadership they have shown in the past, there is nothing to stop them in their march forward.

Hills Bros. Coffee, Inc., has enjoyed a past of seventy exciting and proud years. Its future is even more promising. The American dream is still as alive and wonderful as it was in the days of our pioneers. There are still many opportunities for men of vision fired with the ambition to improve their lot and that of their fellow-men.

While it is true that grave problems harass our nation today, they will not discourage Americans with healthy minds. The obstacles can be overcome, as always. The river of progress, endlessly running its course for the benefit of mankind, can be made deeper and broader.

In 1976, after 98 years of family ownership, Hills Bros. Coffee was sold to a large Brazilian corporation. In 1983, it was bought back by a group of San Francisco investors. In 1984, Nestlé Holdings, Inc., an American subsidiary of the Swiss food company, purchased Hills Bros. and kept its name.

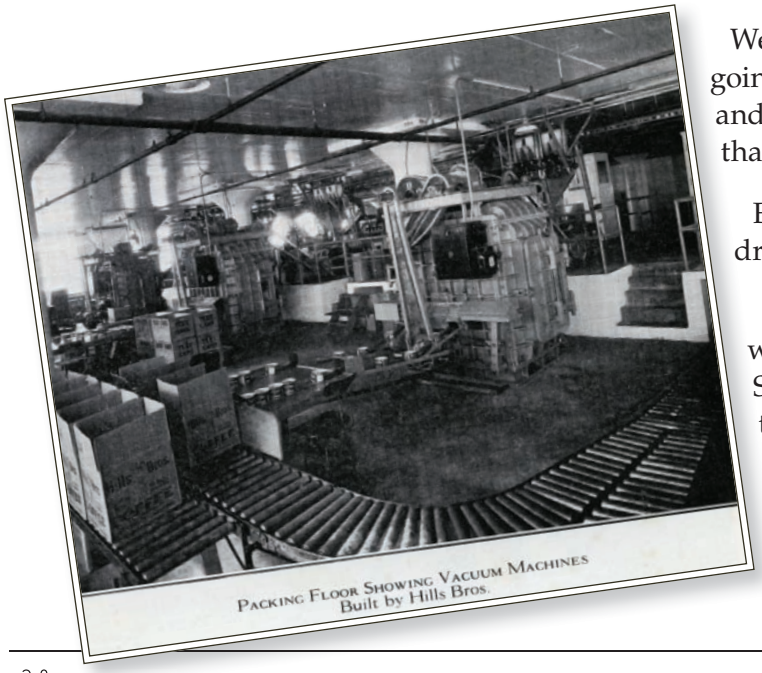
Hills Bros. building, 2 Harrison St., c. 1928

(cont. from p. 13)

On Saturdays, Dad and I would go over to San Francisco on the ferry. He liked to work in his office at the Hills Bros. factory at 2 Harrison Street for half a day, and I loved accompanying him on the ferry. It was great fun.

Everything from roasting the beans to vacuum-packing the coffee in cans was done at the factory. A separate floor housed the administrative offices. My father and R.W. shared a huge office with back-to-back desks.

While Dad was working, a man in the coffee warehouse watched over me. There was a slide that went down two or three stories, on which enormous bags of green coffee beans that weighed 50 or 100 pounds traveled when they arrived. This nice man would hold back all the huge coffee bags — they were as tall as I was — and he'd let me slide down that marvelous slide. I had *more fun* going there!



Packing Floor Showing Vacuum Machines Built by Hills Bros.

There were also big boxes that held a dozen cans of vacuum-packed coffee. He'd put me in one of the empty boxes and send me in the box along traveling rollers. I would move through the factory floor on these rollers, almost like being on a conveyor belt.

Well, when Dad got wind of what was going on, he thought maybe I'd get hurt and he put a stop to it. I was *sick* about that!

Even on the slide, I always wore a dress. Girls didn't wear pants, ever.

Uncle R.W. was always nice to us, but we didn't see a lot of him. He lived in San Francisco. I remember writing letters to him in the summer when we were at Tahoe, and he would send us boxes of candy.

Dad & Mother with Minnie and R.W. Hills

I think we visited Uncle R.W.'s house in the City, but I don't remember much about that. We did have a family reunion in Los Gatos one year, though. They lined

Gray Hills

all of us kids up in a row in a stair step pattern, from oldest to youngest.

R.W.'s sons and my father's son, Gray (Herbert Gray Hills), were all grown men and had their own families. R.W.'s sons were my first cousins as well as Gray's, but they were Gray's contemporaries and all of them had children my age.

I was an aunt to Gray's three children, Janice, Mignon, and Herb, when I was born. *[laughs]* It's really very complicated. My sisters and I played with our nieces so much that it was easier to call them our cousins.

Dad was a vigorous man for his age, and one of his great passions was fly-fishing. He made his own fishing reels for the rods, so he worked on lathes and other equipment downstairs in his workshop. He loved that, and he loved the fishing.

He went up to the McCloud River in Northern California every spring to the Bollibokka Fishing Club, which he started with some other men and which is still in existence. He and his group bought nine miles of the McCloud River, a spectacular stretch right above the Shasta Dam. The club is run by Gray's side of the family now, and it has wonderful fishing — big rainbow and brown trout.

Dad also belonged to another fishing club, the Fly Casting Club of San Francisco. In 1995, Don Dorward and his wife, Nancy, invited me out to the club, which is outside of Truckee. The last time I was there, I was nine years old. After Dad's death, a woman could not inherit a membership, so we never returned.

It was such fun looking in the old guest registers from 1928-1931 and finding the signatures of Dad, Mom, my sisters BG and Merilyn, my aunts Grace and Pearl, my uncles Jack and Bill, and Dad's close friend Clark Burnham, as well as many other names I recognized. There was a picture of Dad on a wall with other members. The visit brought back what a special place it was and still is.

Adults, from l., Eddie, Florence (his wife), Ethel (wife of Leslie), Mother (leaning over), Everard (wife of Reuben), Marie (Gray's wife), Gray, Janice, BG, Dad. Children, from l., Mary Lee, Harriett, Herbie, Billy, Mignon, Merilyn, Phyllis

Dad's other hobby was growing orchids, which he enjoyed giving away to all the friends who came over to our house. He had a huge orchid greenhouse with at least 1,500 plants and a full-time gardener. He was one of the first growers in this part of the country. I have a greenhouse

of my own at my house in Lafayette, and I still have a lot of his orchids.

When I started dating and boys came to take me out, they'd bring me an orchid, and I would think, "Oh, *God*." I'd have

Dad holding a bouquet of his beloved orchids

to pretend to be excited, because orchids were considered very exotic then, but I would have much rather had a gardenia. *[laughs]* At our house, orchids were always around.

I remember Dad reading, always reading. He had a wonderful library and he always had a book in his hand. He loved Zane Grey, who wrote Westerns and fishing stories and outdoor adventures. He was very interested in Winston Churchill long before anybody else around here knew much of Churchill, long before World War II.

Dad was too old to fight in World War I, but he told me he had knit socks for the soldiers. They all knit socks for the boys in the trenches.

Daddy taught me to read before I was four years old. He would bring me books and read to me, and it wasn't long before I could make out all the words and read them back to him. I remember sounding out newspaper headlines. I also learned to play cribbage so that I could play with him.

I *adored* my father, simply adored him. In all the pictures, I'm hanging all over him. At Christmas with all of the family, I'm hanging over him. At Tahoe, I'm hanging over him. It must have driven him crazy.

I think I was probably very shy as a little girl. I'm not sure. I just remember that whenever Dad was around, I was okay. I worshipped the ground that he walked on.

He wore a lovely gold locket on a chain. It had a beautiful diamond in the middle and his initials on the back. I don't know whether Mother gave it to him or what. He wore it on his watch chain, and I cut my teeth on it.

When he died, Mother had the locket put on a chain for me and gave it to me for my thirteenth birthday. Dad had a darling picture of Mother in it, and I added a picture of him. I wore it all the time.

I was absolutely heartbroken when it was stolen from us in a burglary many years later. I just loved that locket. Ah, that awful burglary.

From l., Mignon, Herbie, BG (back row), Phyllis, Dad holding Mary Lee Hills, Janice (back row), Merilyn, Harriett Hills and Reuben Hills III (Billy). Mary Lee and Harriett are Leslie's daughters; Billy was Reuben, Jr.'s son