

3-15-99

A Family Story

Since I have been writing my memoirs, I've become interested in just exactly what I remember, trying to separate family legend from real, entirely personal memory. There is one family tale that I know to belong to me only because I heard it so often. It was always told as an example of a funny story with no particular person designated as the goat.

The event must have occurred soon after we moved from Shreveport, Louisiana, to 3308 Princeton Avenue in Highland Park, a suburb of Dallas. I remember some of the things that happened while we lived there, but not this particular one. My little sister Martha was probably around six months old at the time, and if so, I was two years old. I would imagine that, what with an infant to care for and a house to get in order after a move, Mother and Daddy found that entertainment for a toddler was not always easy to come by. At any rate, the story goes that I was greatly attracted to Mother's diamond engagement ring, and someone (Mother? Daddy?) gave it to me to keep me occupied, I suppose with the idea that I would stay more or less in one place inside the house until I tired of the novel toy. The diamond was a large one, two or three carats - a significant part of Mother's jewels.

When Mother retrieved her ring, the beautiful diamond, the ring's primary attraction for me, was missing. Had I played only in the house?



I can imagine the uproar which immediately resulted. Undoubtedly, I could not have been very informative about where I had been with the ring or when the diamond had dropped out. Mother and Daddy searched the house with great care but without success. In desperation Daddy decided to search the back yard where he had built a sand box for me. He went over the entire grassed area. Then, with a small kitchen sieve he carefully sifted all the sand in the box until finally he abandoned the fruitless search. Then, of course, they had the awful thought: had I swallowed it, giving them the necessity of another more tedious search?

The next day, Mother hand washed the clothes Martha and I had worn that day, a daily chore. When she was wringing my blue checked gingham pinafore, she felt something hard in the pocket. Yes! The diamond was resting safely in the little pocket. A jeweler reset the diamond, and I am sure I never again had the privilege of playing with the ring. I do remember that I continued to admire the ring and the story of my role in its loss was told again and again. Somehow, I never felt guilty about the incident, but I've certainly never forgotten the oft-told saga of its loss and recovery. The lovely ring was a victim of our struggle to live during the depth of the Great Depression. After that loss, I don't believe I ever heard "my" story again. But the lesson was not lost on me. After we had children, we never gave my engagement ring to George or Roland to play with when they were two years old. Or even later.