

2-16-93

An Early Date

In order to tell this story, I must spend some time with apparent irrelevancies. Please bear with me.

First, let me tell you about my twin sister and brother, Ruth and Roland. I was twelve years old when twins made an unexpected entrance into our lives. Even the doctor said he was surprised. Actually, two five-pounds-plus babies shouldn't have been that much of a surprise. At least Mother, who had borne three six-to-seven babies, realized later that she was experiencing something extraordinary.

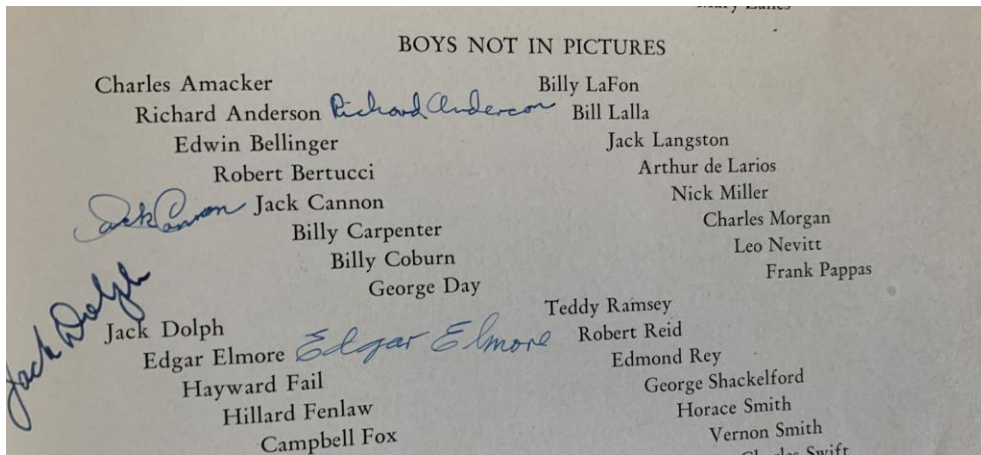


They were born on Tuesday, November 6, 1932, the day Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president for the first time, and they were sixteen years old before the United States had another elected president. They were delightful little babies. My brother, sister, and I adored them. I know I considered them my special charges and I suspect that Willett and Martha did too, although being younger than I they may not have felt quite so possessive. Of course, I realize now that Ruth and Roland were the ideal children for a twelve-year-old to have. Most of the tedium of child-rearing belonged to my parents, but I shared and enjoyed a great deal of their care and most of the fun. With that in mind, you'll understand that, while I could get exasperated with them, they usually were able to do just about anything they chose, including, once, painting my white dressing table with my first, highly prized lipstick. There wasn't much lipstick left when they finished, and I had the dubious joy of cleaning up the mess. I forgave them that and many other times. But more of their cooperative mischief was to come.

Next, I need to explain that as a teenager (a term that I don't remember being part of my vocabulary until many years later) I had a happy, uninvolved social life with a varying group of girls and boys who generally had mutual plans on the weekends and often enjoyed a certain amount of pleasurable activity during the week. Several times, for instance, on pleasant spring or fall afternoons six or eight of us would decide to walk the four miles home from school instead of taking the protracted streetcar, then bus, then streetcar route we usually followed. On weekends we went to movies together, using the streetcar as transportation, or we met at one home or another for games, dancing, or just talking, even once for a really messy taffy-pull at my home. Because of these

relationships there was not much early dating among the members of the group. We knew and were known by the parents of all the members of the group.

One more bit of information is needed before I can get on with my story: our house on Morningside, like most of the houses of people I knew, had no formal entry. A guest would enter directly into one end of a comfortable living room, where frequently the whole family was gathered for the evening. Generally, then, all members of the family, from youngest children to parents, were acquainted with the caller. An interesting exception to this situation occurred for one of my early dates. I was not particularly enthusiastic about my date, Edgar Elmore, but I had accepted his invitation to go to a movie and was looking forward to the evening. Our date was for early in the evening, and my family was still sitting around the dinner table, talking. Mother and Daddy knew Edgar, so there was no need for either of them to make a special effort to greet him. I was dressed for my date when the doorbell rang. I invited him in and went back to tell the folks I was leaving. Ruth and Roland, then three, were the sole members of the family who didn't know Edgar, and I failed to notice that they were no longer at the family dinner table. As I re-entered the living room, I heard a minor commotion behind the sofa at one end of the room. Two small heads appeared above the back of the sofa as they assessed Edgar and passed judgment on their sister's date. With a shrill accompaniment of childish giggles, they declared: "Look at his EARS! They're so small!"



H.S. Yearbook: is Edgar not pictured because he was embarrassed by his ears?

Indeed they were, but he didn't want to hear about it, and neither did I. It was a social situation that this inexperienced fifteen-year-old didn't know how to handle. I simply looked balefully at the twins and hustled him out the door. I tried to explain to him, an only child, about the hazards of having younger siblings. The evening was somewhat strained, but he did ask me for other dates and eventually he became a fan of his early tormentors. His ears remained small, but the subject was never again mentioned. After that, I always checked behind the sofa when I had a date with anyone the twins didn't know, never feeling entirely secure in the efficacy of the spirited lecture I had given them the next day.