

3-19-96

Dwight and Mary

Dwight Brock has just left after a delightful visit of two nights with us while he attended meetings of the ENAR (Eastern North American Region) of the Biometrics Society here in Richmond. We were disappointed that he was not able to bring Mary with him, but she was busy with staging a high school production of *Guys and Dolls* as well as doing her regular work with a CPA in the busy pre-April 15th period. We had a great time bringing each other up to date about our respective lives.

We go back a long time. Actually, Paul can probably date his first contact with Dwight to one of the many years during the sixties when he was recruiting graduate candidates for the Statistics program at SMU. My first actual memory of Mary may be an unusual one for the beginning of a friendship, but, I guess, the incident represented some of the off-beat paths in our relationship.

I have a foggy recollection of a Statistics party one balmy summer evening around a swimming pool. Paul was making the rounds of faculty, students, and spouses. He spent a long time with an attractive couple, and I became aware of a very relaxed and uninhibited exchange of puns and stories among the three. The two turned out to be Mary and Dwight Brock. I was impressed by their open, outgoing, friendly personalities, particularly their willingness to be personal friends without letting the student-professor relationship bother us in the least. There was an unexpected lull when Mary teasingly called Paul a name - observed with some shock by a number of the students present, including the hilarious laughter led by Paul.

Not long afterward, the Brocks invited us to their apartment for dinner. They charbroiled steaks on their balcony - my first taste of Mary's expert cooking skills and of Dwight's equally expert hosting skills. Mary taught advanced placement English classes at Thomas Jefferson High School in Richardson, a suburb of Dallas; Dwight was a full-time graduate student as well as a soloist in the choir of the Church of the Incarnation, an Episcopal church across the street from the high school Paul had attended many years before. The cooking, the English classes, Statistics, and music fostered a solid base for our long friendship. Interested as we were in Dwight's voice, we had to wait a while before hearing him sing.

When I had a chance one August to attend the American Statistical Association meetings in New York City with Paul, we felt fortunate that Dwight and Mary agreed to stay with George and Roland, then fifteen and twelve. The boys didn't require much "sitting" skills, as far as we knew, but we had a seven-year-old miniature dachshund, Snoopy, who demanded and got a good deal of attention, plus a daily walk. The boys had a wonderful ten days enjoying the fun of being with the Brocks, as well as the keen pleasure of Mary's different meals. George had band practice every morning at seven o'clock before the August sun became too brutal, a quality he was particularly aware of, having slid down a deep gravel pit on his back with a motorcycle on top of him just the week before we left.

(After the indignity of having to undergo a tetanus shot, he still had the torture of having to wear a shirt on his raw back and arms while he played his clarinet.) The visit was a huge success with the boys and, apparently, with the Brocks, if we can judge by their talk about their adventures of parenting two adolescents and a temperamental dachshund.

Their favorite story of the week was about Snoopy's afternoon outing. Snoopy loved to walk outside but resented not being able to carry the air conditioning of the house along with him. He usually succumbed rather quickly to the hot sidewalk. When he had walked as much as he cared to, sometimes as short a distance as a hundred yards, he rolled over onto his back with his stubby legs sticking straight up. No amount of persuasion could get him off his back and walking again. He weighed fourteen heavy, hot pounds that then had to be carried back home, where he quickly resumed his usual zest for living. Last summer as we prepared to walk with the Brocks near their home in Rockville, Maryland, Dwight assured me that he would *not* carry me back home.



We had other happy memories with the Brocks, especially one evening when we first heard them both sing as they recreated all the songs from *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* for us after having seen it on Broadway. That was just the beginning of many years of sharing music with them.



After Dwight completed his Ph.D. degree, at a time when graduate statisticians were eagerly courted by universities, industry, and the government, he took a position with the National Center on Health Statistics, and later became Chief of Biometrics with the National Institute on Aging (one of the National Institutes of Health) in Washington, D.C.

A few years later, Paul and I moved to Richmond for Paul to become Dean of Arts and Sciences at VCU. We exchanged numerous visits with the Brocks in Rockville, Maryland. Soon they added Shelley to their family, and, several years later, David arrived, too. Our boys were grown and we welcomed the Brock children as our surrogate grandchildren. Over the years we have admiringly watched them play soccer, football, and basketball, as well as play in piano recitals and sing in school musicals. We have heard the Brocks progress in their musical lives in their church choir and seen Dwight become a popular baritone soloist with the Paul Hill Chorale and other D.C. choral organizations. Shelley has graduated from Wake Forest University and is a Masters candidate in Biostatistics at Chapel Hill, and David is a freshman at Virginia Tech.

Dwight, Mary, and Paul have pooled their musical talents to entertain Statisticians at national and regional meetings, as well as singing together in their church choir and in cabaret shows in Maryland. For example, after Mary had put special words to popular songs to celebrate a friend's anniversary, she and Paul began putting statistical words to Broadway show songs, as in "Is your mean too low or too high?" with the answer sung as "Barely high," a takeoff on "Bali Hai." Mary still calls Paul unattractive names, except that now there is no doubt to anyone that it is with considerable affection.



Dwight Brock, Mary Brock, and Paul Minton add their voices in statistical merriment.