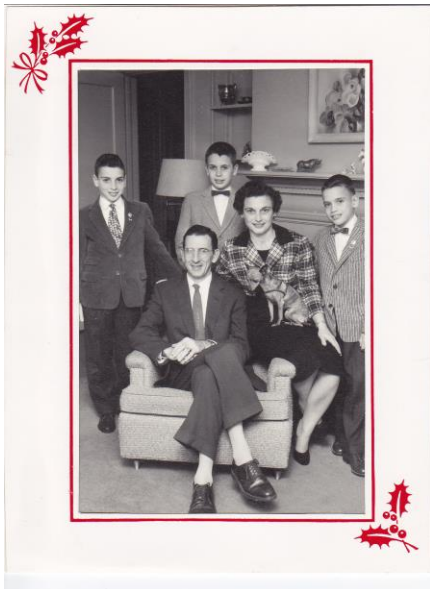


5-4-99

Henny Caldwell

In 1948, we moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for Paul to begin graduate work on a PhD in Statistics. We both had been promised teaching jobs, he as a T.A. (Teaching Assistant) and I as a full time Instructor in English. We rented by mail an unfurnished pre-fabricated house on Purefoy Road, out a bit from town. We easily found Purefoy Road, an unpaved country road which boasted four houses, two on each side of the street. Two of the houses were almost prototypical small farmhouses, side by side. Of the other two, directly across the street, one was obviously our pre-fab and the other was a log cabin. Paul called at the log house and met F. W. Brawley in a typical mess - he had just accidentally hit himself in the forehead with the claw part of a hammer and was bleeding profusely. He was, nevertheless, cordial and suggested that our key might be with the Caldwelles directly across from us. The Caldwelles, indeed, had the key, and we immediately began getting acquainted with a couple who were to become our best friends, then and now. George was working on his PhD in Mathematics, and Henny was a stay-at-home mom with their two-year-old Chuck, a sturdy, adorable two-year-old, and another child on the way. They were from Asheville in the western part of North Carolina.



We moved our possessions into the house, which still looked unfurnished even after we unloaded the contents of our car – some kitchen utensils, bath and bed linens, books, and records with a player. The brother of Paul's Mathematics Department chairman at SMU soon appeared with an offer to lend us several pieces of furniture - a mattress and two small tables with two straight chairs. We accepted and set up housekeeping with those articles. We went into town to meet our respective chairmen. I was welcomed into the English Department and invited to a faculty meeting that very night. Paul received his assignment as a teaching assistant in the Mathematics Department and met the secretary of the Statistics Department.

The Math Department's TAs consisted of a large number of graduate students, all of them fun-loving individuals. The Caldwells had many parties in their essentially unfurnished living room, which was also a wonderful playroom for Chuck, who could sit in corner of the room and roll his ball across the floor and the ball would immediately return it to him because of the floor's decided slant. Mike and Nell Eubanks next door, with three children, were from Mississippi. Mike was writing a dissertation on Senator Bilbo, a controversial political figure whom he admired greatly. The Brawleys, in the log cabin next to us, were natives of the area; he was an upholsterer who loved Beethoven and had one wall lined with shelves of Beethoven records and would listen to no other composers. He had rebuilt the inside of the log house with wallboard, electrical outlets, and plumbing, and was always sawing and hammering and listening to Beethoven. His wife Ruth had her hands full keeping two small children fed and clothed, all the time trying, on Fridays, to get F.W.'s pay check before he spent most of it on records.

Eventually, Paul and I bought a bed spring for our mattress and collected apple crates from the local grocery stores to use for cupboards and cabinets for everything - kitchen utensils, linens, clothes, books, and all. Our unfurnished living room, like the Caldwells', proved to be a splendid party room. Even the springy floor, consisting of six four by eight plywood sections made an excellent dance floor. Paul had his table and books in the back bedroom; I used the kitchen table for grading papers and preparing for my next classes.

All of us were serious students and teachers during the week but had solutions for alleviating our stress by partying in a modest way on the weekend. Since I was a full-time member of the English Department, Paul and I may have had a bit better income than the others, but mostly we all shared what we had. Henny baked a beautiful, delicious angel food cake every other week. Because I was able to take her to the store once a week (the Caldwells had no car), I began to learn a great deal from her about how she made do on their standard GI bill allowance of thirty dollars a month.

Henny had a grocery list that she had worked out in order to feed her family for the week. Every other week she bought a pound of coffee, and the opposite weeks she bought a carton of cigarettes for George. Once she tried to stretch her coffee supply by using half used grounds and half new coffee. It didn't work, so she was somewhat less generous in asking every visitor to have a cup. But I was especially intrigued with her angel food cakes. I had tried one once, a dismal failure. She first told me that she collected the egg whites for the cake by taking a teaspoon of the whites from each of their daily breakfast eggs. In two weeks, she had accumulated enough for the cake. She let me watch her prepare and bake one of her famous cakes. I was able to observe the exact consistency of the beaten egg whites; I learned how to fold the dry ingredients into the fluffy white without deflating them. I already knew that a cake pan reserved for angel food was necessary - no oil ever to prepare the pan. The rest was easy, and for more than fifty years I've had no problem with angel cake. I can't make Mother's "fail proof" devil's food cake, but that failure is no fault of my not having observed Mother preparing. Moreover, I've just learned that my sister, an almost flawless cook, can't succeed with Mother's cake, either.

I learned other secrets of economy from Henny, but some of them no longer work. She always looked for the very back cans on the shelves, for they frequently had been marked at a lower price than the front cans. That, of course, no longer works since the computerized cash register decides the price of each grocery item now.

Henny's and George's family grew during our association in North Carolina. Jack joined Chuck as our favorite children, and then Paul was born and named for Paul Minton. Two years later, we had our first child, named George, thus completing the cycle of naming our children for each other. Henny always claimed that our George was really her fourth son.

It was two-year-old Chuck who gave me the nickname that has followed me to this day. He couldn't say "Mary Frances," with "Mosse" the closest he could come. The nickname caught on immediately in Chapel Hill and continues today among many of our friends. Two of our grandchildren call me "Mosse" at my suggestion, since they had so many grandparents (eight for a time) that they got confused. The only problem with Mosse was that we didn't know how to spell it. We began with M A S S I E, but that sometimes became "Massie" or "Mossie," names I didn't fancy at all. We hoped that Chuck, who had bestowed the name, would spell it when I got old enough, but he was too cagey to attempt it. A couple of years ago, Dwight Brock came up with the ideal solution while he was out running one day. He suggested that "MOSSE" rhymes with "POSSE." Problem solved.

George Caldwell died a few years ago after coming in from jogging. Chuck, Paul's godchild, Jack, my godchild, and Paul, Paul's namesake are all married, with children, and in Chuck's case, grandchildren. Henny moved to Asheville after George's death. But the memories we have of the pleasures they have given us over the years are still fresh and wonderful.