



Anne  
with an e.

Front cover: Anne Merklng at UCLA, circa 1944

Write to Be

43 Vista Linda Rd.

Ranchos de Taos, NM 87557

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Dedicated to a once-in-a-lifetime woman,  
Anne B. Merkling

1926 - 2022

# Anne

with an e.



a collection of stories



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the town and grew the crops. Brigham said to some, like he did to my grandparents, "I would like you to go to Arizona and build a church." They had to leave their homes and get in covered wagons pulled by horses, no oxen, through the Colorado River and into Arizona and start a city in what is now Saint Johns, Arizona. That's still a very vibrant Mormon community. My parents eventually went back to Brigham City, but we visited there. The houses they built there are still there. It is a drive-in town, but now has its own temple.

When Dick joined the church, we only had eight temples, now there are 150 or so. Interesting stories and interesting heritages. It's important for our family to study it.

### *One Bicycle*

The Great Depression 1930's

When we were ten years old, 1937, our country was in the midst of the Great Depression which I didn't pay much attention to. I was happy about my life.

Our great emancipation was when Brent and I got a two-wheeled bicycle for Christmas and, being in the heart of the Depression, we got one bicycle. We were to have his day and my day. It was all marked on the calendar: Brent's Day, Anne's Day. That's when we could ride the bicycle. The joy of riding the bicycle with the wind blowing in my hair, it was absolutely the most wonderful thing I could imagine. It was an elegant bike, it had fenders and a horn with one of the first blue tires ever made. It cost \$40 which was an immense amount of money in those days so that's why we shared that bicycle. We got it for Christmas and that day it snowed. The first snow of the season. We couldn't take our bicycle out on the street until the snow went away and it was two or three months before the snow was melted and the ground was hard before we could ride it. So we had it sitting up in our bedroom on a stand and both of us rode that bicycle every day waiting for the weather to get better. It was a big deal in our life.

My father had lost his business which was an auto repair shop because farmers and everyone in town needed their car repaired but couldn't pay him. He would repair cars, trucks, and tractors for farmers, but no one had cash. They would give him a sack of potatoes, a side of beef, or some pork chops. He had no cash to pay the shop, so we eventually had to leave Brigham City. Everyone, at that time, was going to California because there were more jobs open for men. I was very, very sad about leaving my grandmother.

*Los Angeles, California 1936. Age 10.*

Dad smoked cigars, which is one reason he didn't go to church in Brigham City. When he started going to church, he had to give up his cigars. One day, he was working up on the roof and the smell of tobacco came from the other side. There was a man up there smoking and he said, "Oh my gosh, I can smell a cigar. How would a member of the church be in the building smoking a cigar?!" It turned out to be a man who was just happy to see that kind of thing going on in the neighborhood. Dad thought that was really funny, we laughed about it. We all enjoyed going to church together there. Brent and I were ten years old. I was ten and he was nine. We had our Mormon friends at school where we went. It was a good way to make us feel like we knew people in California.

My father knew someone down there that could employ him at an agency. Leaving my grandmother was very hard for me, but we were excited about going to California because we thought the movie stars were walking up and down the streets, orange trees would be lining the sidewalks, we expected to see Tom Mix and all the other stars every place we went. That was not at all how it was.

We moved onto Edward Street, and we pulled up in front of this big building and I thought, oh my goodness this is big! It was flat and two times as tall. We managed to get into the building where me and Brent shared a bedroom, which made us get into arguments. Having a community was helpful. It was a very friendly neighborhood. There were kids on both sides of the street. There was a little boy that had seizures and another little boy who was Jewish. We had never heard the term "Jewish". He lived alone with his mother and she was building the biggest house in the neighborhood. She was having an argument with her builder the day they moved us into our building. She was just cleaning the house on him. She could be heard all up and down the block, and so that's when I began to associate what Jewish was. The noisy people.

She never let us go into her house. She kept the drapes closed all the time so the sun didn't go in. Her little boy loved to be at our house. Loved to be across the street, where there was a wonderful neighbor lady that took everybody in. Now I think back on how touching it was that he couldn't wait to get out of his home and go across the street.

*The Los Angeles flood of 1938 was one of the largest floods in the history of Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside Counties in southern California.*

We had probably one of the biggest floods they had in the neighborhood. It was big enough that all the streets ran like a river, just on the roads. It didn't get up on the lawns or the houses. We thought this is a wonderful place, maybe we can take a boat to school! That was the last big storm in all the 20 years I lived there but we thought California was living up to its promise after all.





We had to walk to school and had a pretty long walk because we lived on the dividing line so our friends in the neighborhood on the north side of the street went to one school and we went to the other one on the other side of the street, which was a little weird. We had a principal there who was very... well, she would have rather been a dictator.

Every morning, we had to go out and line up and ring a bell. We had to all line up in our rows to pledge allegiance to the flag while she stood up on the school steps like the general, who is in charge. She would call the name of our class and we had to file out of the building. She had everything organized and drilled into us. That kind of scared me to begin with. I had always known everybody in the school and been one of the leaders in the class. When I walked in nobody would talk to me. I would just sit there so alone, it was scary. I was in the 6th grade and my brother in the 4th.

The next year, we went into Louis Pasteur Junior High School. The school was just opening. We were the first classes to go there and again I had to walk on the edge of the dividing line to go to school. Me and my friend would walk to get there, later with our bikes. They were teaching us home economics, shop for the boys, and sewing for the girls. Brand new machines and everything. It was really a wonderful school. We were divided into homerooms.

In my first period class, there was a boy who I thought was cute. Your grandfather. He was on a different schedule, but that was the first time I met Dick. I was in seventh grade and he was in my homeroom. He was elected boys Vice President in the ninth grade, when you had Student Body Officers. I certainly admired him from afar, but we didn't, well he claims it was love at first sight. Whatever. We didn't date each other, of course, we were there six, seven, eight and by nine a lot of kids were pairing up "going steady" ...what a stupid thing to say.

We got through Junior High together and he was one of the popular boys. He had a girlfriend. I had a boyfriend. I knew I wasn't in love with my boyfriend. We had a group of us that would go to movies together, three girls and three boys.

Then we went to high school together.

### *Drafting Aircrafts and Ice Skating*

Alexander Hamilton High School, 1941. Age 15.

The aunts all stayed in Brigham City so we would go and visit with them. Eventually, Pearl Harbor happened when I was in ninth grade. A lot had changed at that point. We had to make some sacrifices. My dad belonged to the bomb squad with his duties. They trained all the men with hats and identifications. When we

had blackouts, we had to turn off every bit of light so it was black at night so nothing could locate the city to bomb us. So one night, the sirens went off and they called an alert. It turned out they had spotted some submarines off the coast so they informed us that we might be hit from the submarines. I said, "Daddy, Daddy! There is an alert, you have to get to your station!" and he said, "Do you hear any bombs falling?" and we said, "Well no, not yet," and he said, "Well, wake me up if you hear any bombs. I am on the bomb squad." As kids, we were excited about all the blackouts and the sirens.

Dick and I went to Alexander Hamilton High School. It was an excellent school with excellent teachers. We had a math class together or something. Dick had started working for the drafting teacher. This smart drafting teacher decided he could work for Douglas Aircraft Company and have his A students make the corrections on his blueprints as the company was rebuilding his airplanes. Dick and two other boys started the company with him. When Dick had to leave, after about a year, I took drafting. I was one of Mr. Gillenswan's A students and so he hired me and two other girls. We were all working in one big room and the girls were so attracted to the boys or the boys to the girls, I should say. He separated us and put three girls in one room and the boys in the other. I was working there when Dick had to go back to Indiana.

When I was in the ninth grade, it was 1941 and Pearl Harbor happened and then everything began changing. As soon as a boy turned 18, they were subject to the draft, and they had to go down and be registered. Dick's mother decided she didn't want Dick to be drafted and go into the infantry so she decided to move their family back to Indiana where her mother had died, and her father was living alone on the farm and Dick would become a farm worker. For the first part of the draft they weren't drafting farmers. We were in the 10th grade when he moved away. He was so unhappy there, he didn't get along with his grandpa at all, so his mother let him come back which was really surprising because she was overprotective you know. She let him come back to California and move in with one of her friends, who was divorcing with one son.

So he came back and walked into Mr. Gillenswan's shop and we were building in a big room on Wilshire Blvd. in Beverly Hills. When Dick heard there were girls there, he just thought that was the worst thing in the world. They certainly weren't capable of doing that type of work.

Mr. Gillenswan always had his eye out for women, and he married a girl quite a bit younger than he was. They divorced after he married her. He needed a secretary, so he hired Phyllis Darling. She was one of those tiny, petite bombshells in the high school so he hired her as his secretary and Phyllis would sit at the desk and answer the phone, write letters. She would keep a dictionary right by her and whenever she would do something she would flip through the dictionary. She was very decorative, but not much of a secretary. So Mr. Gillenswan hired my mother. She

took over the role and kept Phyllis still working there. We liked her. My mom knew Phyllis was a good window dressing. She wasn't hired for her secretarial abilities. She was cute, interestingly enough. Usually, girls like that you aren't crazy about, but Phyllis had a cute personality and didn't take herself very seriously. So we liked her, fortunately. It was funny.

When Dick saw me, we got reacquainted, and one of the girls came in and said, "Who is the new guy who just came back from Indiana? He looks really interesting." I said, "Well, that's Richard Merklings and I have a date with him tonight." She said, "You have?!" Like how I had gotten away with him so quickly.

What I always thought was that I had a date with Richard Merklings that lasted 74 years. He came in to say hi to me and asked me if I would like to go ice skating, and I said, "Sure!" There's this interesting guy and I could happily say, yes. I have a date with him. That was fun.

We fell in love pretty much. We were very happy with each other. He was very cute. I hate to use the word, cute. Good-looking. That's a better word. He has his widow's peak, his brown eyes, and his smile, you know. So I was happy to have a date with him. We both loved ice skating so after we had gone a few times he showed up with a present for me. He got me racing skates which have a 15-inch blade on them. It's 9 inches on a regular hockey skate or finger skate. He bought these racing skates, a pair for me, so that we could skate together. Usually, the same length of blade you could go at the same speed. I had finger skates with little points on the end. Unfortunately, I took off my skates and left them with things on the bench and when we got back somebody had stolen them. At that point I didn't have finger skates, I had racing skates.

We both loved to skate and then we'd play badminton. We played on an indoor court with another couple who was married. We, of course, were not married, but were younger than they were so we had gone along. They were working and had enough money to rent the hall. We used to love to play badminton. Similar to volleyball or tennis, there's a net and you hit the birdie with the racket and keep going over the net to gain some points. It's really fun if there's not much wind.

In high school we lived in a fourplex, two apartments down and two apartments above and the garages were in the back. There was a court, so we painted a badminton court and everyone from the neighborhood came and played. It was a neighborhood gathering place and a fun thing to do.

## *Boyfriends Called to War*

Dick Called to Active Duty. Nov. 1943

We graduated in the summer of 1944 and the war was over in 1945, but he turned 18 extra early and he was gone for most of our senior year. We wrote lots of letters and called on the telephone. Once in a while he would get a leave and would have to hitchhike sometimes or take the railcar to come home from city to city. He used to call me and when he got wherever he had gotten off the trolley, or when he would get about three or four blocks from me, he would tell me he was there. It would be about six in the morning or something like that, and I would get dressed and run out and we would meet each other halfway. That was a really sweet time. So glad to see each other. He would come up and visit with me and go over and check in with his parents and act like he just arrived, so they didn't feel like he didn't go there first. It was a very romantic time.

Dick had some stories about Indiana that were interesting. Just before he turned 18, he went to enlist in the Army. Dick enrolled early, they told him when he enlisted that he could finish high school, but that was a promise made by the recruiter. So he turned 18 in November of his senior year in high school and the day he turned 18, here is your bus ticket, you are in the army now. He left in about September or October, his senior year, no it was his birthday, the 4th of November. I didn't get to go to prom or anything because my boyfriend was gone.

There were a bunch of us, about six girls, and we all went to the movie together. In those days, girls couldn't go alone, you had to go with an escort. We had been dating since 10th grade. None of us liked that our boyfriends had to go to war. Some girls would go with family, friends, or a cousin who would take them to the prom. But there were about four of us who had our boyfriends called to war, and the four of us went to a movie on prom night. That made us feel a little lonely. We didn't know when they were coming back. Whenever the war was over.

My mother got a secretarial job in downtown LA, down on Main Street. She had to ride the bus and the streetcar to get there. It used to be a wonderful street in downtown, it was a block below Broadway and Main Street which became "the pits." It was where the winos hung out and people begging for food, what-have-you. So, of course, Dad always worried about Mother going down there. There were beggars on the street and the proprietors of the stores told them they couldn't come in.

One time, an obviously inebriated man walked in and asked mother for money and the boss came out and said, "You can't panhandle in here," and he pulled up all his dignity and said to the man, "I wasn't even going to speak to you! Miss?" My mother laughed.

Later on, we had a good friend who was a teacher in a Beverly Hills school. She was working as a secretary. So Mother got the job and was in one of the richer places in town.

Women were highly debated. She should be out working, but needs to take care of the children. Mother had gone to secretarial school and with all these skills, typing and shorthand made her very employable, not many boys were trained as secretaries. You could be a teacher, nurse, or a secretary. That's what women aspired to. Nothing but the lower end of the pay skill for sure.

Money was always in short supply, so my mom always had a job. Dad worked at the garage there and did most of the body work. They had him doing a lot of the cars because he was such an artist. The only time that I realized things were getting out of hand, Mother announced to Brent and I that they had only made \$18 that week and our rent was \$40 for the month, and we didn't know if the next week would bring in enough money. They just told us we all had to be careful. We would just pick out the things that were not the expensive ones, and that we would be ok. Brent and I felt like we weren't rich, but it didn't worry us, we just knew that Mother and Dad would manage, some way, which they did.

### *How Can we Help You Kids Make a Go of It?* UCLA, 1944

I was going to be a nurse when I started college. I took chemistry and biology and worked in the labs with cadavers and all body parts and did all of the very tough classes for pre-nursing.

When we were thrown into college, all the teachers were rising in their professorship and had to teach so many classes a year, and so we got one of those. He was writing a very advanced book. He came in there with a fancy attitude, "You won't believe what they're thinking we have to teach you!" It was like saying you wouldn't believe you have to learn your ABC's. He would bounce through his lectures with  $H_2O$ , like a simple equation, and we would then get a test that was nine digits long. So, consequently, most of the girls that were in there for pre-nursing would fail and then they would all go down to Santa Monica to a junior college and take a reasonable chemistry class. I got a B in that class. I was never so proud of any score in my life. I didn't care that it wasn't an A, a B was first class.

The Air Force sent Dick to college, a long semester or two in Montana where he studied aeronautics and mathematics and all the things that would prepare him to be in the Air Force. He absolutely loved Bozeman, he always thought that he would go back and finish school there, but it didn't work out that way. He liked

Today was a lovely day. This is how Anne started every diary entry while she was growing up. Her stories are a true reflection of the joy and wonder she felt for her life.

A tree climber and avid adventurer, she lived through the Great Depression, a time when women could only aspire to be secretaries, and violent racial undertones of World War II were spreading throughout the nation.

Anne served as the General's wife to high-school sweetheart, Richard E. Merkling "Dick", a three star general of the United States Air Force, who she was in love with for 76 years.

A true pioneer, she started a preschool on Nellis Air Force base and was one of the first trained workers in Mesa, Arizona to open a Church of Latter Day Saints temple.

Anne was an exquisite seamstress, artist, teacher, and dedicated mother to four often raising them with military aids while Dick trained and fought in World War II, the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War.

Living among the cherry blossoms in Japan to the cobblestone streets of Belgium with other high-ranking wives, she embodied the example of a true American, friend and neighbor. Through endless and often abrupt moves across the world, she never questioned her dedication to Dick, the Church, and serving their country.

These are a collection of her stories, as she told them.