I DIDN'T WANT TO BE A BOTHER

The Incredible Story of Proctor Ritchie

by Robert Pearson

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Proctor Ritchie, dressed to go out for the evening, displays his habitual good humor and zest for life – though at this point in the '70s he had been paralyzed from the neck down for a quarter of a century.

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In celebration of Rainbows' 50th Birthday

Proctor Ritchie was my uncle and the most incredible man I've experienced in my life. This book is his story, but there many more stories that could have been told about this amazing man. For instance, Rainbows United.

Rainbows is a not-for-profit serving children with special needs and their families, started by Linda Weir Enegren in 1972. When it first started, it provided therapies to a few children and struggled financially from time to time. Proctor believed in the mission and in Linda. He would step up, give her money to bridge a financial gap, buy her a new water heater when she had no hot water, and generally provide support to keep the lights on…….letting Linda do what she did best, help the children she served. Now Rainbows has grown to serve thousands of children with special needs and their families.

Proctor never sought the limelight, never wanted accolades, never wanted "credit" for what he did for people. A quiet man with a fabulous sense of humor, he was our patriarch to both the Ritchie family and the Ritchie businesses. While quietly helping many, many people he remained humble, kind, loyal. He just "didn't want to be a bother"…….

Hale Ritchie (nephew)
2022

Introduction

I first met Proc Ritchie at the University of Kansas, where we were fraternity brothers in the Pi Deuteron chapter of Phi Gamma Delta, "Fijis" for short. The year was 1936, as the country was beginning to emerge from the Great Depression. I was a junior, having attended Kansas City (Missouri) Junior College my first two years; Proc was a sophomore from Wichita, Kansas.

Our backgrounds could hardly have been more different. I was the only child of caring, loving parents. As Dad struggled to provide for us, we lived modestly but comfortable in the Country Club District of Kansas City. Proctor came from a prominent Wichita family, the third generation to operate a large road construction business. He was the oldest male among four siblings. While our little family moved 18 times in my first 13 years of life, Proctor's stayed put in one fine home in Wichita.

Nevertheless, as fellow students and Fiji brothers, we were all equal, judged on our own merits. I was already pursuing a writing career, making my way through school by ghost-writing themes and theses for other students, editing the college yearbook, the "Jayhawker," and selling a magazine article to national magazines – *Scriber's and Reader's Digest* – while still an undergraduate. Proctor, handsome, athletic (a star swimmer), congenial and popular, was a solid, directed person even at that young age. His natural leadership qualities were recognized by his becoming president of the fraternity house in his junior year – a position customarily reserved for seniors.

Looking back today, Proc says, "I was really a terrible president. Didn't do anything constructive." Don't you believe him! When he took over, Pi Deuteron's scholastic standing was so poor, he was called before the Dean of Men. But with Proc's planning and leadership their record improved dramatically. These were recession years, and although the Phi Gam house was chock full, many brothers found it difficult to pay their house bills. Proc refused to ask any men to leave, but by working with them he was able to keep them paying what they could, and the chapter prospered.

After our respective graduations, I set out immediately for New York City to make my mark as a writer, Proctor went back to Wichita, shortly to enter the family business. So we lost touch for several decades. In the class notes in the Kansas University alumni magazine, I read that Proc had married a former airline stewardess, and I was wed to Betsy Dodge, a K.U. Kappa Kappa Gamma who was a friend of the Ritchie family. As the years went by, each of us had three children.

One year, probably in the '60s, Betsy and I went back to K.U. for a homecoming football game. As we milled around in the post-game crowd, some said, "Look, Proc Ritchie is over there. You know he contracted polio at least ten years ago, and it left him completely paralyzed from the neck down. A tragic case! But he's rigged up a way to come to the football games anyway." With that, we moved toward a small group crowded around a small bus, where Proctor, strapped flat on a gurney, was holding court. When I greeted him, he responded with smiles and warm enthusiasm.

I was the one who was uncomfortable. He was the first quadriplegic I had ever been around. I didn't know whether to reach out and touch him or not. I stammered over what to say. I was embarrassed for him, but he didn't seem embarrassed at all. I admired the guts displayed by this man. But I quickly reverted to my own self-centered concerns, to have fun at a homecoming party with family and friends in Kansas City and fly back to my job in New York and our home in Greenwich, Connecticut.

So we went our separate ways.

In September 1993, Betsy and I scheduled a trip to Kansas City, Salina, Kansas (Betsy's home town), and Wichita, to see several friends who lived there. As the Wichita plans jelled, it was decided we would all spend a night with Proctor and Bette Ritchie, as their home had the most room, and some six couples of our friends would gather for a dinner party there.

As soon as we had dropped our bags in the Ritchie's sumptuous guest room, we went downstairs to check in with Proc. He was in a converted sun room at one end of the first floor, lying on his gurney with the back tilted up. The necessary operating mechanisms, a respirator, and a bedside table of medicines were the only clues to his condition.

Although one of a team of helpers is always present or within quick calling distance 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Proc is amazingly self-sufficient. By turning his head to one side or the other and by blowing through a metal "straw" near his lips, he can actuate various electric switches. Thus he is able to change the angle of his bed in all four directions; turn on and off the room lights, the television set, or the books-on-tape player; draw or open the window drapes; answer the phone or make calls himself (through a microphone right by his lips); or communicate by intercom with his wife or his helper.

That evening, he participated as co-host of the hugely successful dinner party, propped up on a more portable gurney at one side of the living room. He greeted each guest warmly and cordially, and entered easily into the hubbub of conversations. During cocktails he enjoyed his scotch held by a helper at his side. Dinner for such a large group was buffet, of course, so he dined as conveniently as most of us. Throughout the whole affair, he told stories, contributed funny remarks, laughed and enjoyed himself.

Returning home to Connecticut, Betsy and I discussed what an inspiration the whole experience had been. That Proctor was alive at all was a miracle. His ability to overcome the most severe handicap imaginable and lead a successful, apparently happy life was incredible. It changed our own attitudes. Disappointments seemed much prettier, and stumbling blocks were not nearly as daunting when viewed against our friend Proc's existence.

We couldn't help telling others about Proc, among them the editor or *Heartland USA,* a general interest men's magazine with more than a million circulation. He said, "Write him up. Give me a story about this man and I'll run it by our editorial board." So I did, and he did, and it was

published in early 1194 under the title, "I didn't want to be a problem…" – a direct quote from Proc.

Research for the article required another, longer visit to Proc and Bette's lovely home in Wichita and the gathering of a lot more information. The editorial policy at *Heartland* held the article to 1,800 words, the barest tip of the iceberg, barest introduction to my friend's remarkable life.

Hence, this little book.

Chapter I

GREAT-GRANDFATHER COL. JOHN RITCHIE

What is now the state of Kansas was Indian Territory prior to 1861. It was being settled slowly by two groups of pioneers emigrating from different sources. Those from the Midwest –Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio—were seeking more economic opportunity as the population of these states swelled with emigrants from farther East. The second group consisted of families sent out by abolitionist societies in New England, especially Massachusetts, to ensure that Kansas would come into the Union as a free state.

Missouri, meanwhile, had been settled largely by people from Kentucky, Tennessee and other southern states, who were vehemently in favor of owning slaves and determined that Kansas would come into the Union on the pro-slavery side. The result was bloody warfare waged across the Missouri-Kansas border during the years leading up to the larger national conflict of the Civil War.

Proctor Ritchie's great-grandfather, John Ritchie, was one of the Midwest emigrants, who moved from Indiana to the Kansas Territory in 1855 with his wife, Mary Jane (Shelledy), their four-year-old son, Hale, and baby Mary. They settled beside the Kansas River in the town of Topeka, founded only four months before by nine previous pioneers. John Ritchie purchase 160 acres, which remained his home as long as he lived, though he was to be involved in many other real estate transactions. He farmed the land, which also contained large outcroppings of limestone.

Colonel John Ritchie (as he was usually called) was a remarkable character, one of the best known of the early pioneers. The editor of the *Leavenworth Times,* writing about delegates to the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention in 1859, described his thus: "Mr. Ritchie is a man of medium size, with light hair and eyes, head narrow, long and high, with a frank face and cordial manner, rather rough in his appearance, free and easy, with an unshakable good humor. Everybody knows him, and, in spite of his peculiar views, everybody respects him…."

The editor went on to explain Ritchie's "peculiar" views: "He is an ultra- abolitionist, woman's rights man, teetotaler, and general advocate for reform, looking eagerly and earnestly for

the ultimate redemption of mankind from all oppressions, abuses and vices of whatever kind….We like John Ritchie."

Actually, Ritchie always avoided labeling himself as an abolitionist, insisting he had come to Kansas to find a better life, not to abolish slavery, as had the parties sent out from New England. Nevertheless, hardly had he arrived in Topeka when he became a part of the Underground Railroad. Later, after his death in 1887, an obituary noted that "no less than $100,000 worth of runaways slaves (an immense sum for its day) had passed to safety through this place."

Harboring fugitive slaves was a dangerous business at that time, as the Federal government zealously defended the rights of slave-owners. One morning in 1856, when John Ritchie was suspected of helping a runaway slave, 40 U.S. soldiers knocked on his door at 4:00 A.M. and demanded admittance. He parleyed with them until daybreak before permitting them to search his house. The fugitive they were seeking had indeed been there the day before, but had been sent on his way toward Holton, Kansas, during the night. Ritchie had delayed the search to give the slave more of a head start.

On another similar occasion in November 1857, a squad of soldiers, headed by Deputy Marshal Butcher, and infamous slave-catcher, knocked on Ritchie's door in the dead of night. As they had no search warrant or other writ of authority, Ritchie denied them entrance. As they were about to break open the door with an axe, they were stopped by hearing the click of rifles being cocked. They left, returning with a larger force and a writ. Upon searching the house, no runaway slaves were to be found.

In 1859, the notorious John Broun of Osawatomie, Kansas, was engaged to assisting slaves to escape. He stayed occasionally with the Ritchies in Topeka. (Brown's historic incident at harper's Ferry came later that year.)

From his arrival in Topeka in April 1855, John Ritchie plunged into the border warfare. Only the month before, as the Territory was attempting to elect a legislature, border ruffians from Missouri had ridden over and surrounded the polling places to prevent the free-staters from voting. The resulting legislature declared severe punishment for anyone speaking or writing against slave-holding. The free-staters immediately rebelled, meeting in Topeka to form their own constitution. The battle lines were drawn, and it became unsafe for free-staters to travel the roads. A Topeka Militia was formed with Ritchie serving as Third Lieutenant. In December, the free-state forces numbering 1,500, including the Topeka Militia, faced a similar size Missouri border army bent on sacking Lawrence—both sides heavily armed and with cannon. Although the Territorial Governor (a pro-slavery sympathizer) succeeded in defusing this confrontation, the following may the Missouri pro-slavers returned and did sack Lawrence this time, leaving terrible destruction behind. They then virtually blockaded the Kansas border towns, including Topeka, from receiving free-state emigrants or any supplies, including food.

In reprisal, the Kansas military organization, with the Ritchie second in command of one regiment, raided a number of the pro-slavery towns, capturing food and other goods of every kind,

for the relief of their blockaded towns. After several such skirmishes, the governor sent a detachment of the U.S. Army—including cavalry, infantry. And several cannon—to Topeka to arrest the insurrectionists including John Ritchie. They took 101 prisoners in all, returning them to Lecompton (the Territorial capital) to be imprisoned, on September 18, 1856. In November, Ritchie and several others escaped from the jail through a hole cut in the wall, Ritchie fleeing on to his parents' home in Franklin, Indiana, remaining the better part of a year. Meanwhile, in March 1857, Governor Geary pardoned all the prisoners, including the escapees (declaring they had had enough punishment).

Political turmoil in the Kansas Territory continued, with John Ritchie in the midst of it, until July 1859, when Kansas' permanent constitution was formed at a Constitutional Convention in Wyandotte. John Ritchie was the delegate from Shawnee County. Ritchie introduced a resolution to prohibit the manufacture or sale of liquor in the new state. The matter was discussed and dropped. (Interestingly, 21 years later, in 18/80, a prohibition amendment was passed, with Ritchie's support, and remained the law until 1948.) In October 1859 the Kansas voters adopted the Wyandotte Constitution.

Its subsequent progress through Congress was a rocky one, held up by pro-slavery opposition led by Senator Green from Missouri. Ironically, it was the secession of seven southern states from the Union that tipped the scale in Congress and permitted the vote to pass admitting Kansas as the 34th state in the Union.

During that time, despite Governor Geary's pardon of the Lecompton prisoners and declaration of amnesty, the pro-slavery contingent in the U.S. Government sent U.S. Marshals to bring the men to trial. To a man, they refused to surrender to these Marshals. John Ritchie had by now returned from Indiana to Topeka, resuming his active role in community and political affairs. On the evening of April 20, 1860, U.S. Deputy Marshal Leonard Arms appeared at Ritchie's house to arrest him. Meeting him outside the door, Ritchie told him he would not go, and walked inside. Arms followed him, pistol in hand, only to find that Ritchie had also retrieved a pistol which was pointed at him. The two men, each ready to fired, exchanged heated arguments. Reaching a standoff, Arms turned to leave, presumable for reinforcements, and both men lowered their weapons. A moment later, however, the Marshal tuned back and said, "By God, you have to go!" and advanced on Ritchie. Ritchie then warned, "Stand back or I'll shoot you." Arms advanced another pace and Ritchie fired. The pistol ball entered Arms' neck and fell dead.

Col. Ritchie surrendered himself immediately to Justice Joseph C. Miller for trail. The trial was held the next day, with General James H. Lane, the leader of the free-state forces (and Kansas' first U.S. Senator), coming over from Lawrence to assist Ritchie's Topeka counsel. A high degree of excitement ran through the town as the trial went on all day and into the night. Finally, the judge ruled that John Ritchie had committed a "homicide justifiable in the sight of God and man." The crowd that had gathered outside reacted with joy and lit bonfires in celebration.

The authorities made no further attempts against the Lecompton prisoners.

Over the years, John Ritchie was busy quarrying the limestone on his property, using it not only for his home and homes of others, but, in the summer of 1858, for a new Congregational church building. The Congregationalists, who had started many of the most distinguished colleges in the East, were now motivated to form a college in Kansas. Representatives of eight churches (Ritchie was one of them) met in April 1857 in Topeka to move ahead and secure a site.

Ritchie already had in mind a 160-acre stretch of high ground overlooking a wooded area. The land belonged to a man named George Davis, who had been unwilling to sell, but now had caught Gold Rush fever and wanted to head West. He informed Ritchie he was willing to sell the land for cash. John, with the help of a friend, Harvey Rice, worked out a complicated deal to raise the money from eastern banks, pledging his own property as collateral for the loan. And in 1860, Ritchie and Rice proudly deeded the land over to the college, which was to become today's Washburn University. Because of the Civil Was, actual construction did not begin until 1865—using stone quarried from Ritchie's farm. John Ritchie continued to support the college throughout his life, and in 1867, the entering class included Hale Ritchie, John's son.

With the advent of the Civil War, Kansas was, of course, on the Union side. The Kansas Volunteers (officially, the Fifth Kansas Cavalry) were organized in July 1861 at Fort Leavenworth. John Ritchie enlisted as a private, but because of his experience in guerrilla warfare, was forthwith made Captain of Company A. Within weeks, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and was under fire in the first engagement of the war in the West. A Confederate Army of 10,000, under the command of General Sterling Price, was marching north from Arkansas through Missouri. The Fifth Kansas marched out to meet the far left wing of Price's forces at Dry Wood Creek, ten miles east of Fort Scott. When the enemy was sighted, the Kansans dismounted, took cover in the tall prairie grass and surprised the Confederates with a rain of deadly shots. They also hauled up a small cannon, a relic of the Mexican War. Its first shot luckily landed in an enemy battery. The scattered Confederate soldiers were so frightened they retreated in near panic, not realizing the entire Kansas force numbered less than 380.

The war was waged back and forth between the same two forces for the next four years, with fierce fighting and many casualties. Heavy fighting took place late in the war at Big Blue Creek, just south of Kansas City, followed by the Battle of Westport. John Ritchie served throughout as a Colonel. In May 1865, he was ordered to Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, as its commander with the rank of Brigadier General. He was mustered out there May 31, 1865.

Back home in Topeka, Ritchie took up the battle for women's suffrage, which was placed on the ballot by the Kansas Legislature in 1867. To promote its passage, the most prominent women suffrage pioneers, Susan B. Anthony and Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, came to Topeka to speak to a public meeting. Presiding at the assemblage and introducing the speakers was none other than Col. Ritchie. But he (and they) were 'way ahead of their time, for the issue lost by a wide margin that year, and women's vote did not come to Kansas until 1912. During the interim, a Woman's Suffrage Association was organized in Topeka, which me in the Ritchie home.

John Ritchie's original 160 acres had grown impressively through his enterprise and shrewd investing. The 1875 state census revealed that he had 560 acres fenced—much of it divided into city lots of 75 to 100 foot frontage. Although he sold the majority of these, he also donated several lots to people wanted to establish businesses that he thought would benefit the community. In the late 1860s, his concern focused on the homeless freed slaves, to whom he gave away homesites, providing they would improve the property—a practice which drew considerable criticism. This disturbed Ritchie not a whit. He explained that he had borne arms in their cause, and he planned to help them now. His generosity has not been forgotten. To this day, there are many black residents of Topeka who can trace their homes to great-grandfathers who received their land from Ritchie.

For several years after 1885, the "city upon his farm" (as one newspaper called it) became the separate, incorporated town of South Topeka, despite repeated unsuccessful efforts by the city of Topeka to annex it.

Colonel Ritchie breathed his last on the morning of August 31, 1887. [The Shawnee County Historical Society has published a book entitled *John Ritchie, Portrait of an Uncommon Man,* Bulletin No. 68 – 1991 if there is interest in reading more.]

Chapter II

GRANDFATHER JOHN AND FATHER HALE RITCHIE

Thirteen children were born to Col. John and Mary Jane Ritchie between 1839 and 1859. Such was infant mortality in those days, from scarlet fever, smallpox and other illnesses, that only two offspring survived: Hale, born in Indiana in 1851 and brought to Kansas as a youngster; and John, born July 29, 1856, about three months after the move to Topeka. Proctor Ritchie has clear and precious memories of his grandfather John, before the latter died in 1926.

As America spread westward and new towns sprang up, one of the first perquisites of permanence and progress was paved. And the favored paving material was bricks. Hence, soon after the turn of the century, young John R. Ritchie, known to his friends as "Cap," had built a large brickyard in Topeka on the land given to him by his father and was laying brick streets throughout Kansas, and, indeed much of the rest of the country, as far west as Idaho and as far south as Lake Charles, Louisiana. He went to Wichita many times, but always came home to Topeka.

When John's sons, Clarence (born 1878) and Hale (born 1887) were old enough, they traveled and worked with him. The company name was changed to "Ritchie and Sons" and remained so until John's retirement in 1916. His sons continued to operate the business, deciding eventually to move it to Wichita. Clarence, however, preferred Topeka and moved back, becoming a contractor in association with new partners. Hale, choosing to remain in Wichita, moved his family there in 1917 and changed the name to "Ritchie Construction Company."

Proctor and his siblings were at the family vacation lodge at Bay Lake, Minnesota, in July 1926 when word came that their grandfather John was dying, back in Topeka. They remember that their father. Hale, with their uncle Clarence, drove through the night to get to his side. John was survived by his wife, Josephine (Whitlow), a tall, slim lady who died in 1937.

Hale Thompson Ritchie, Proc's father, had graduated from Topeka High School in 1906. He attended Washburn College for two years, playing on both the basketball and baseball teams, but left college when he join his father's construction business. In 1910, at age 23, he married the beautiful Edith Davis, also from Topeka.

Hale and his road-building company prospered in Wichita. The firm worked primarily in asphalt, which had become the area's most widely used road surfacing. Hale became Chairman of the Board of Derby Oil Company and served also on the boards of the Fourth National Bank, Yellow Cab Company and North American Finance Company.

Hale and Edith Ritchie had five children: Sally, born 1911; June, 1913; Proctor, 1917; Dan, 1918; and Dave, 1926. As the three sons graduated from schools, Hale brought them into the business, the name of which was again changed, this time to "H.T. Ritchie and Sons."

Sally has left a touching description of her parents:

"Dad was a quiet, un assuming, sweet man. Everyone loved him. Mother was always the one to mete out the discipline.

"Dad loved to gamble at bridge, backgammon or what have you, and would make a bet on anything: how far you could cast a fishing fly, on a football game, a statement you made, etc…. Dad loved golf but had to quit years before his death, after he had viral pneumonia down in Florida which enlarged his heart I know how hard this must have been on Daddy. He was very generous, always remember his nieces and nephews, his sister, every year, and joined Mom in her gifts to various relatives in their time of need.

"He turned his business over to his sons even before the youngest was of age, and did not draw anything from the business from then on. He gave us children stock, etc. for years before he died , and deeded over the Bay Lake property (the summer place in Minnesota) to the five of us children before he died.

"The place on Bay Lake has given more happiness to more people over the years, and is truly a memorial to Mother and Dad. It may be more of a memorial to Mom, as she was the one who did all the work. Dad wasn't handy with tools and favored hiring someone to do the work. Mom was a worker, and she quit playing golf but seemed to be constantly in the wash house, washing, ironing and helping wherever help was needed. Even when we teen-agers helped with the dishes, she would go to the kitchen to make sure we did it right. Believe it or not, one summer she was hostess to 192 people!

"Mother and Dad started with an old farm house on the lake which they had bought in 1936, after vacationing in that area. They remodeled it and built two guest cabins and a maid's cabin. Later they bought two more cabins up the road and kept them full every summer with family and friends.

"Mom was a beautiful woman, full of fun and energy. While we were young, she was always home when we came home from school. But after we had left the nest, she was active in the Needlepoint Guild and became national president on year. She also served on the board of the Kansas Children's Home and Service League. She solicited money and bought garments by the hundreds for the needy and wrote every donor a thank-you note.

"Mother loved to look up old friends and kept in touch with many all through the years.

"Mom and Dad used to go to all the Country Club dances when we were growing up. Dad was a wonderful dancer and much in demand, as was Mother. Dad was also an expert bridge player. They were a wonderful team and very proud of all their grandchildren. I think they are responsible for the close family we have today."

Proc concurs with his sister's appraisal. He was close to his father both in the family and in business, but he remembers his mother as the decision-maker and disciplinarian. His father, Hale, died in 1962; his mother Edith, in 1961. Their ashes were interred at the Bay Lake resort which had been such a source of joy for both of them.

Chapter III

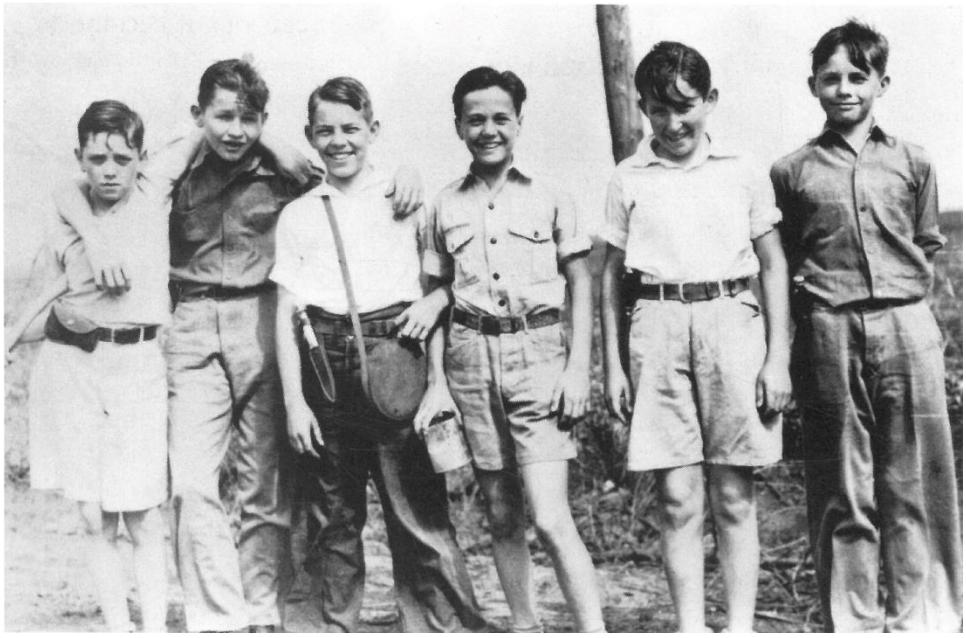
THE EARLY YEARS AND COLLEGE

Proc in 1922, at the age of five.

The third child born to Hale and Edith Ritchie in Wichita was Proctor, Jun 24, 1917. He had been preceded by an older sister Sally, born in 1911 and by sister June in 1913. And after him came two brothers: Dean in 1918 and Dave in 1926.

As a youngster, Proc was lively and mischievous. His best friend, Jack Spines, who lived only two doors away, was not only his constant boyhood companion but closest friend for life—80-plus years as this book is written! Proc remembers their playing in the sandbox together, frolicking on swings and turning poles, roller skating, playing shinney-the-can, and competing at marbles.

"Marbles was a big game in those days," smiles Proc, "and I was good at it." He also played with his younger brothers, especially when the family was a Bay Lake.



A band of teen-age buddies, l to r: Tod Parks, Proc, Micky Anderson, Lambert Reed, Phil Griffith, and Dean Ritchie.

The mischievousness emerged in the peashooter incident. Proc, Jack and Dean took their shoots into the second balcony of the Palace Theater, from which the vantage point they could annoy the audience below. Their fun lasted until the usher pounced on them and took away their peashooters. Shortly after this, the boys were old enough for B-B guns. Proc says they, too, were taken away within three months.

Proc attended College Hill School and then East High School in Wichita. College Hill didn't have a basketball team, but St. James Church did. The trouble was, Proc's mother wouldn't let him go to St. James for basketball. However, he and Jack hit on the idea of getting their parental permission to join the St. James Boys Choir, which was readily granted. Proc says proudly, "We did well enough to win second in our league."

Proctor became somewhat sickly in his early boyhood and was diagnosed with a kidney infection. When he was five years old, it was necessary to remove the infected kidney surgically, an operation performed by Dr. Cretchmeyer. The boy's mother was worried because he was so feisty. So the doctor made a deal: if the nurse testified that young Proc was giving her no trouble, he would

get a chocolate. "I loved those chocolate kisses—remember them?"—Proc recalls, "so I was a model patient."

During the three or four times that he was under an anesthetic at this time, Proc repeatedly dreamed the same dream: a vacant field plowed in wide rows, each a different color. Always the same dream—which, strangely enough, has continued throughout his long life.

The doctor told Hale and Edith that Proctor "might survive into midlife." "I sure have out lived him, anyway," comments 84-year-old Proc.

When Proc was released from the hospital, it was on the condition that he wear a kind of corset to protect his incisions. Proc, as might be expected, plunged immediately into his boyish sports on his return home, and off came the corset.

Proc's kidney operation prevented his playing high school football, so swimming became his sport of choice, along with other water sports up at Bay Lake during the family's annual visits there. "We swam miles every day and enjoyed water skis a lot," relates Proc. "When we were in our teens, we wanted a water ski jump. We made one out of an old dock and poles we cut ourselves. The water skis Pappy had showed up with were slick on the bottom. Dave tried several times and fell every time. I had the idea to start fast, which I did and stayed up on the second try. Afterward, Dave and I—one of us standing and the other squatting—went over together. The next year, Dad came up with water skies with runners which were a lot more stable. We used to trick guests by giving them the old skis!"

Proc also snow-skied at Winter Park, Colorado, easily accessible by car from Wichita. And at Bay Lake, he enjoyed playing golf with his father.

Like his father before him, Hale made sure his three sons were indoctrinated in the family business as soon as they were old enough. "When I was about eleven," recalls Proc, "I started as a water boy. Road building and paving hard, hot labor, so with a bucket of water and a dipper I would circulate among the workmen." He graduated to wiping the windshields of the trucks, and looked forward to operating the gas pumps. In his high school years, the company was paving Broadway in Wichita during the summers. He was put to work spreading crushed rock and shoveling materials into a bin for mixing—such back-breaking work that he and the other men worked four-hour shifts. "The older men loved to rag me," says Proc.

Proc with his mother, Edith Ritchie.

When he was a senior in high school, his sister Sally was already at the University of Kansas, and a member of the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority. Next door to the Kappa house was the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house, where, in 1935, Ed Tucker was president. He dated Sally, through whom he met the rest of the Ritchies. He was impressed with Proc; and Proc was impressed with Phi Gams, which he pledged when he entered K.U. that fall. His academic major was civil engineering. Now six feet tall, with brown hair and, some said, the features and the bearing of his great-grandfather Col. John Ritchie, Proc seemed to be a natural leader. He served as president of the Phi Gam chapter his junior year—an honor customarily reserved for seniors. "I was really a do-nothing president," he claims, with characteristic self-depreciation. "I didn't do anything special." Nevertheless, he is remembered as a leader who raised the scholastic standing of the house. Upon his graduation, he was a member of a number of honor societies including: Sachem, Owl Society, Sigma Tau, Tau Beta Pi, and Theta Tau (in engineering).

Freshman hazing was a part of the fraternity experience in those days. Although Proc was a non-drinker in college, the Fiji "freshman trainer," Lon Busick, somehow confused him with Carter Maule, who was definitely a drinker and got into trouble as a result. "I took a lot of Carter's paddle swats," he recalls wryly.

Proc dated a number of girls casually while at K.U., attending university dances, fraternity and sorority parties and movie dates in town. But his big romance in that period was reserved for a girl from his earlier teen years who he knew at the Bay Lake resort in Minnesota. Although he had a girl in Wichita, Proc had dated Peggy Scallon at Bay Lake. On his way to pick her up one evening, Peggy's younger and friskier sister, Mary, ambushed Proc and pulled him into the bushes. She prevailed on him to take her to the movies. And that was the beginning of a torrid love affair that went on for more than four years. (After 60 years, through a friend who had been on a cruise with

Mary (nee Scallon), Proc contacted her in California. "The embers of the fire were still warm," he says enigmatically.)

Proc's slightly younger brother Dean (born December 20, 1918, almost exactly one-and-one half years after Proc) was near enough in age to be included in the often mischievous boyhood activities of Proctor and Jack Spines. And he was to remain extraordinarily close to them for the rest of their long lives.

Dean also entered the University of Kansas a year after his older brother, graduating with a degree in petroleum engineering. He had followed Proc's footsteps in Phi Gamma Delta and in honorary engineering societies Tau Beta Phi and Sigma Tau, as well as the senior men's honor society, Sachem. An avid golfer from an early age, Dean found time at K.U. to win the Kansas Amateur Golf Championship in 1939.

Chapter IV

1939 - 1952

When Proctor was graduated from the University of Kansas in 1939, with a B.S. degree in civil engineering, he joined the family business. His father, Hale, wanted to retire, so he divided up the ownership of the company. Proctor became a one-third partner, paying for his share of the stock out of his salary. Younger brother Dean received on-third, and the remaining third went to the (non-family) superintendent who had been father Hale's right-hand man. Dean, incidentally, remembers his father would go out on the job in those days, working on the line, getting *real* dirty. "If he found a man leaning on his shove," recalls Dean, "Dad fired him on the spot."

Proc likewise went out on the job. "Zeke Foster and I did everything," he recalls. "We would put in a full day operating an asphalt lay-down machine, and then would return to the office to do the payroll and the other paper work."

Hale Ritchie explains the business to his sons, in 1948. l to r: Proc, Dean, and Dave.

The construction business was just emerging from the recession that followed the Great Depression. The company headquarters consisted of one big room plus two private offices. It employed eight or ten people *total* and expanded as needed when they got a job, hiring hourly labor. Proc remembers that business picked up just before the war. Streets were needed for the housing developments that sprang up to house workers in the defense plants.

When the United States entered World War II in December, 1941, Proctor immediately tried to join the Army Air Corps. He owned a airplane, an Aeronica, and had some training in flying in college. But when he appeared at Air Corps offices in Oklahoma, he was rejected because he had only one kidney. Nevertheless, with the help of a civilian doctor who declared him fit for duty, he talked his way into the "War Training Service" program, leading to a job as a flight instructor, ferry pilot or pilot for the brass.

Joined by Preston Clark, an older friend from home, the two were sent to Tonkawa, Oklahoma, where they lived in a dorm set aside for them. During the day they went by bust or car to Ponca City for flying instruction. Evenings, they were back at Tonkawa for classroom work.

The friends also indulged in pranks. They feuded with the occupants of a neighboring room. The enemy struck the first blow by moving Ritchie and Clark's furniture out. The latter retaliated by locking their neighbors' doors. From a Sunday visit home, Proc brought back some cherry bombs, which they threw over their neighbor's transom in the night. In the stir that resulted, Proc posted a notice, "The Phantom Strikes Tonight," and bombed the head of the school! Miraculously, he escaped disciplinary action.

Proc was ordered to Wichita to learn acrobatics and practice cross-country flying over snow-covered ground that obscured landmarks. From there, he graduated to Houston, Texas, for training in navigation. He flew out of the Army air base in twin-engine aircraft. He was now fully qualified and slated for air transport. When the call came, it was back to Oklahoma, where the Colonel said, "We can't use you. We can't even give you a license because of your medical history." Proc is still indignant at the bureaucracy. "My missing kidney has never given me a bit of trouble to this day," he grumbles.

The year was 1942. Now four years out of college, Proc is in the family business.

It was during this era that Proc entered on an infinitely more important chapter of his personal life. It began with a phone call from Ned Spines, a close friend who ran the Spines Clothing Co. Spines said a beautiful airline stewardess had come to Wichita to show a line of women's clothing. And he asked if Proc would like to have a date with her that evening.

"I would sure love to," Proc answered, "but my brother Dean has been called up and is going off to the war. We're having a family party tonight to see him off."

Ned said, "That's a shame, but I understand. Maybe I can get Dewey Buckley instead."

"Well, I knew Buckley," Proc says today, "so real quick I said, 'Wait! I'll get away from the family party as early as I can, and I'll join you.' I had a devil of a time prying myself loose from the family, so I was very last meeting Vivian. To make a long story short, Dewey Buckley never got to see her until after we had married." The marriage took place December 18, 1942.

Vivian Carter was strikingly pretty, with brown hair and a good figure. A good dancer, she liked to party, but had a strong character which was later to be instrumental in saving Proctor's life. She was born Oct. 7, 1914, in Pocahontas, Arkansas, of John and Anne Carter. He father was 6'5" tall and her mother stood 4'11", and according to Vivian they were always on the verge of divorce—periods in which they would send Vivian to her grandparents' home. At Pocahontas high school she starred on the girls' basketball team.

Vivian went on to Arkansas University. There she contracted a serious infection and was hospitalized. As a consequence, she left the university and enrolled in Nursing School in Memphis, Tennessee. She lived with a friend's family in Memphis. On graduation, she applied to Chicago and Southern Airlines as a stewardess. Her job led her to many southern cities. And at one time she had

been engaged to a hotel man in New Orleans. However, he turned out to be gay, and she dropped him. Her presence in Wichita was in connection with a publicity scheme of the airline.

Armando, Proc's chief helper, adds, "She was a classy lady, always very nice to me. But she had a very strong character."

Vivian became pregnant a few months after their marriage and followed Proc to Houston during that part of his training. However, she suffered morning sickness and had to stay in bed, with their landlady taking care of her during the day. So she flew home to the Ritchie summer place in Bay Lake, Minnesota.

They had three children in fairly rapid order: Tom, in December 1943; John, in February 1945; and Anne, in March 1946.

Meanwhile, brother Dean had graduated from K.U. with distinction and enjoyed the summer that followed. But in September, 1939, the war in Europe began. Dean joined the Army Air Corps and eventually served overseas with the Eighth Air Force in England from 1943 until the end of the war.

He likes to tell of meeting family friend Jack Spines in England. They got involved in a poker game where Dean lost every cent he had. He borrowed $200 from Jack to get to his home base. Not long after, Jack came up for two days, which they spent playing cards day and night. Dean ended up paying back the $200 loan and lending Jack $200 to get back to his base.

Also while in England, Dean met and fell in love with Barbara Cowley, a bright, pretty, warm and vivacious girl whose Canadian father had come to England during the first World War and married an English girl. After the end of World War II, Barbara came to Canada to attend the University of Toronto, and married Dean instead. The following year, they began their family, consisting of three boys and three girls. Barbara contributed impressively to her adopted town, becoming active in Community Theater, Red Cross, the Braille Association (recording books), Meals-on-Wheels, and teaching Sunday school for many years.

At the same time, Dean's community activities outside the Ritchie Company included being on the board of Junior Achievement, the board of the Fourth National Bank of Wichita, and involvement at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Barbara once wrote of him, "Dean is an even-tempered, kind and considerate man who is universally respected in this town as his father was before him. He has an intuitive understanding of other people, and is noted for soothing troubled waters and seeing a way through difficulties."

A measure of Dean and Barbara's compassion and generosity is that, until relatively recently, their home always had an extra person or two living there: a woman and her child who did baby-sitting in exchange for living quarters; girls from Juvenile Court to escape dysfunctional homes; school friends of their children who were having difficulties at home; and boarding students who lived too far away from school. [Proctor and Dean's mother, Edith, died in 1961, leaving their father

Hale lonely. After Barbara's father had passed away, Mrs. Cowley began visiting Wichita from England for more extended times, during which she and Hale became great friends—and eventually she ran rand his house for him, a boon for both of them.]

After the end of the war, America entered an era of prosperity and expansion. Jobs were plentiful, and everyone wanted a home in the suburbs. The country was short of roads and streets. With Proctor in charge of construction and Dean in charge of materials (including presidency of a subsidiary cement company), the Ritchie Company was booming, and both brothers were active in community affairs, and enjoying their families. Then, in 1952, a polio epidemic struck Wichita. Overnight, the life of Proctor Ritchie, and indeed the life of the whole Ritchie family, was changed forever.

Chapter V

POLIO STRIKES

On August 28, 1952, Proctor was out working with a concrete crew because the foreman was sick. In the heat of the afternoon, he experienced a burning sensation on his skins over his entire body and a tremor in his hands. This was followed by a crushing headache. He drove home, where Vivian immediately called the doctor over her husband's protests. The doctor ordered him rushed immediately to the hospital. There, a spinal tap revealed that he had contracted polio. [Ironically, less than two years later, the discovery of the Salk vaccine virtually eliminated polio forever.]

The year 1952 lives as a black one in Kansas' polio history. In addition to Proctor Ritchie, 1,722 other Kansans came down with polio, the largest number of cases since records were started in 1916. Of these, 73 died, the highest number of fatalities in the state's history.

But Proc Ritchie lived. "How, we all wondered at the time," recalls brother Dave. "Then after we decided he would live, most of us figured he would never get out of that iron lung. But he fooled us all. Never once have I heard him complain or bewail what had happened to him."

Dean was at the ballpark when he learned of Proc's polio attack. He rushed first to the hospital and then to their mother and father who were, of course, devastated.

That night, the illness reached a critical stage. It was a night of terror for Proc. "I felt every muscle in my body, one by one, flutter briefly and then quit working. I couldn't breathe, because of the contraction of my chest, so the doctor put me in an iron lung." [The iron lung was a relatively recent device for artificial respiration, in which rhythmic alterations in air pressure in a chamber surrounding a patient's chest for air into and out of the lungs.]

The nature of the polio virus is that it attacks and paralyzes the motor muscles of the body, but does not affect the autonomic nervous system. All the involuntary organs and functions continue: the heart, the lungs, the digestive and elimination system, the sex organs, everything. The

polio victim continues to *feel* everything he or she could feel before. Thus, Proc's first night in the hospital was excruciatingly painful. But he can also feel a caress or a kiss. "I can feel my nose itching," says Proc, "but I can't scratch it."

Thus began four agonizing months in the Wichita hospital.

Doctors at that time knew almost nothing about poliomyelitis. The physicians in Wichita were simply overwhelmed with the victims of the epidemic there. For Proc, the days crept by as he lay imprisoned within the iron lung. The doctors would release him temporarily and try to get him to expand his lungs under his own power—but in vain. At one time, they had heard that immersions in water in what was called a "Hubbard tank" might induce breathing. So they removed Proc for what turned out to be two hour, and transported him over to the tank, a long way. Proc recalls, "I couldn't breathe at all! I tried desperately to call for help, but I couldn't make a sound without air. For some reason, there was no medical help present. Vivian was scared to death and hurriedly tried single-handedly to get me out and back to the iron lung. By this time I had turned *black* and nearly died."

In January, as Vivian was visiting the hospital, she overheard one nurse tell another, "We are just trying to keep Mr. Ritchie comfortable until he dies." But they reckoned not with Vivian, who was herself a trained nurse (as were all airline stewardesses in those early days). Vivian and brother Dean were instantly galvanized into action. They managed hurriedly to arrange for a DC-3 airplane to be made available by the Army Air Corp from its base in Wichita. A portable iron lung was obtained, along with a moving van. In it, Proctor was rushed from the hospital to the plane and landed aboard, with Dean pumping the air manually all the way. With Proc's mother, along with Vivian and Dean, they flew to Minneapolis, Minnesota, to the Sister Elizabeth Kenny Institute, which specialized in polio therapy.

Proc learned there were some 200 patients at the Institute. He was placed in a ward with six other polio victims. He remembers gratefully the draconian regime the nurses and attendants followed as they desperately attempted to restore some slight movement to his paralyzed muscles.

"They applied boiling hot cloths to my chest," he relates, "following which a therapist tried to grasp and pull the tight muscles. This was repeated over and over, and hot packs were even pinned to my body all night. And they made noticeable progress in enabling me to expand my lungs to breathe enough so that I required the iron lung only at night."

Most of the other patients were not stricken as severely as Ritchie. In the next bed was 21-year-old, 200-pound football player. Next to him was a 47-year-old man. In their cases, it was their limbs that were affected and they were eventually able to go home. Another ward-mate was a dentist from Minneapolis. "We would shout back and forth to each other from our iron lungs," says Proc. "Although he was completely paralyzed in the beginning, his legs started to come back. They exercised him until he finally could walk, although he never did recover use of his arms. He would come over and take me for a 'walk' by putting me in a wheelchair which he would bump along the corridor. He left eventually to become secretary of the dental association. With his arm supported by

slings, he could still type." The two men kept us their friendship, and Proc had him as a guest at Bay Lake.

The therapists at the Kenny Institute tried over and over to bend Ritchie's arms and legs by force with the hot pack technique. "They would encourage me by telling me to try to move a leg by my own force of will, with them 'helping' me." Proc explains, "They would say, 'See, you made it move that time,' but the fact was that they were actually doing it all."

Proc admits that at the Institute, he was nightmarishly miserable. "I couldn't sleep at all, not at all, and I was in constant pain with the hot compresses day and night. They gave us NO medications for either problem. They sent me to a sleep clinic where they left me out in the cold. I'm still hopping mad about it! They sent me to some kind of nerve clinic to see if my nerves were dead. They were! I thought a lot about going home."

By mid-summer, it was evident that no recovery had been achieved, nor was possible to achieve. Proctor Ritchie had come face to face with the realization that he would live in this condition for the rest of his life. It was a watershed moment. At the Institute, he had heard many other patients crying out, "Why me?" or "How can I possibly go on living this way? What will happen? Who is going to take care of me?" They complained incessantly or sank into sullen gloom.

When Proc took stock of his own situation, he said to himself, "We've had a real strong family—my parents, my brothers and sisters, my wonderful wife and children—and I knew my condition was going to be awfully hard on them and my friends, *if I let it be*. And I determined then and there that I didn't want to be a burden to my family.

"I'm lucky, you know. I have a wonderfully supportive family—brothers and sisters, and my children, and a loyal circle of friends. I've had the means to hire the help I need, and a shop at our company which could make some of the mechanical aids I've designed to make my life easier. Most of all, I had a business to go back to, a place to get out of the house and go down to every day. And I've done just that every day since.

"Having something to do makes all the difference."

Proc's family was already inescapably disrupted by the polio attack. To begin with, the children were quarantined for three months. Then, to enable Vivian to spend as much time as possible in Minnesota, the boys were sent to St. James Military School. Anne remained at home, cared for by Dean and his wife Barbara, with the help of a capable housekeeper.

Proc and Vivian with their three children, Anne, John, and Tom.

By September 1953, the Kenny Institute had succeeded in getting Proc out of the iron lung permanently, but his arms and legs refused to respond to treatment. Nevertheless, Proc was sent home with the help of a resident male therapist. He was able to accomplish only one thing, but it was important, Proc points out. "He limbered me up. I was stiff as a board; couldn't bend my neck or my knees nor bend at the hip. It was like going into the ring with a professional wrestler ten times a day, but he *did* break the stiffness in my joints. Two years after I got sick, I was able to raise my head off the bed by myself. That was *some* day!"

After about three months, however, they felt they no longer needed the Kenny therapist and hired, instead, help of their own. Thus Proc began his lifelong quest to live a "normal" life despite being confined to a gurney, a total paraplegic except that he could move his head.

Proctor and Vivian (seated) attend his parents's 50th wedding anniversary celebration.

Chapter VI

"…NOT TO BE A BOTHER…"

Soon after Proc's return home, Vivian announced that a country club dinner-dance was being held and they were going.

Proc demurred, "Oh no, I can't do that, Viv. Not in this condition. I'd be embarrassed to death, having to be fed like a baby."

But Vivian kept pushing him to go, and on the evening of the event, Proc was dressed in party clothes and wheeled to the country club. Of course, the other guests greeted him warmly, enthusiastically, lovingly. The experience was a resounding success.

"Those first weeks and months were hard, extremely hard," Proc confesses. "I just summoned the best spirit I could. Vivian, bless her heart, knew what had to be done. Without her, I couldn't have done it."

Proc has required help to be available 24 hours a day, every day, for 49 years (as this book is written). He has worked it out so a driver and primary aide tends to him five days a week. In addition, tow college boys each work the weekend days and split up the nighttime care during the week. "That means I always have strong outside help," explains Proc.

When he returned to Wichita from Sister Kenny's in September 1953, he brought with him Marty Whitcomb as his driver and primary aide. "Marty was good help," says Proc, "but didn't want to spend the rest of his life in Wichita." He left after about six or eight months and was replaced by Ralph Lofland in 1954. "Ralph was a good and faithful worker until 1961, when he moved back to Liberal," explains Proc. He died about 10 years later.

Over the next 16 years a succession of workers came for periods up to a few years before moving on to another job. Then, in April 1977, Armando Sanchez came to work for Proctor and has been there ever since. He was working as a janitor for the Ritchie Company when Proc spotted the character and personality that might make a good primary aide, chauffeur, valet, attendant, companion, and friend. Armando is married to a wonderful woman named Ann. The couple "do a

lot of fun things together," according to Proc. Armando is extremely loyal, willing, and cheerful, with a ready wit.

Specially equipped busses or vans such as this one enable Proc to be mobile. These photos were taken in Richardson, Texas, in 1975.

In addition, Proc developed electronic assistance. The Rusk Institute in New York had invented a technology primarily to enable paraplegics to manage their wheelchairs by blowing into a tube located near their mouth. The breath actuated electronic switches, in response to a code, which in turn operated electric motors to start or stop or steer the chair.

As Proc became familiar with this ingenious technology, he devised ways to adapt it to his own situation. Thus, through a rather complex switchboard suspended above his head, just by turning his head to the left and blowing or sucking the tube there, he can raise or lower the back of his cot, tilt it to either side, summon help in an emergency, answer phones calls or initiate them himself (speaking into a microphone near his face). He can turn the TV on or off, change channels and control the volume. He can turn the lights on or off, open or close the window curtains, and speak by intercom to his wife or attendant. Fourteen functions in all!

But he cannot scratch his head, or blow his nose, or wipe away a tear without help. His attendants must feed him his food and drink and medicines, brush his teeth, dress and undress him and bathe him in a large bathtub. "That's actually dangerous," he points out, "because if I started to slip under the water, there's no way I could stop myself." To move him about the house, a crane on casters, with a chain hoist, is used to lift him in body slings. A similar procedure is used to get him in and out of his van. To enable him to work more efficiently at his office, he devised a "standing board" to hold him upright with the help of three straps and an abdominal binder which he wears most of the time "to keep his guts up." He was able to read in this position and by holding a pencil

in his mouth, could even make crude sketches of inventions. He found, however, that he could tolerate standing for no more than 40 minutes at a time.

Over time, he turned out other inventions. As the Ritchie company moved into marketing bagged sand, Proc devised a "sack stacker" as a labor saver. Finding that conventional wheelchairs were too bulky to maneuver in a auditorium or movie theater, he designed a light folding wheelchair. He had always enjoyed duck hunting with his friends, but no, of course, he could not hold a shotgun. So he found a sturdy metal helmet, on which he mounted his shotgun. He could aim simply by keeping a line of sight on the target. He pulled the trigger with a lanyard in his teeth. A great idea, except that on his first shot, the recoil nearly broke his neck. He didn't abandon the devise, but settled for a lighter gun.

As chief operating officer of the Ritchie Company, he was aware that the schedule of a paving job was dependent on the delivery to the site of the basic materials (aggregate, sand, asphalt) by the company trucks. And the capacity of the trucks was limited by city ordinance to 15 tons. It occurred to Proctor the engineer that the capacity of each vehicle could be extended—by four-and a half tons, as it turned out—by attaching a heavy-duty trailer on behind, with its own set of four rubber-tired wheels. So he designed such an auxiliary vehicle, patented it, and had it manufactured. It is in widespread use today, not only by the Ritchie Company, but by other construction firms across the country. It is called "The Proc."

Chapter VII

"…THE LARGEST FREE RESORT IN MINNESOTA…"

When Proctor returned from the Sister Kenny hospital in 1953, one of his first concerns was whether he would be able to have a summer sojourn at the Ritchie family's resort in Minnesota. It was accomplished, as it had been and was to be every year. For Bay Lake, as the retreat was called (after the site where it was located) has always been special adjunct to the Ritchie's home base in Wichita.

Proc recalls going there the first time at age 10 or 11, when it was still the Rutgers' Resort. It was owned by Alex Rutger, who spoke with a German accent. The property consisted of their farmhouse, plus three individual guest cabins and a central dining room.

When the boys were junior high age, the family was still renting at the Rutger place, but their mother, Edith, was talking to the landlord about how the resort might be improved. And soon afterward, their father Hale bought the place "to have the whole family together." He made numerous changes and improvements in the farm house and the log cabins. The porch was glassed-in and the garage was converted into a nice cabin with a stone fireplace. Proc and Dean gathered the stones for the 80-year-old mason. "With all our strength and hammers, we couldn't break 'em," chuckles Proc, "but *he* could, with a gentle tap. I think there's a lesson in life there."

In those days, the boys spent the whole summer there, but by the time they reached their twenties, they had to take turns. Their parents were having *their* friends up. Today, each Ritchie family is allotted three weeks.

The trip from Wichita to Bay Lake required an overnight stay in a motel. At first, Proctor had a station wagon equipped with a hydraulic lift. Although he could be moved in and out relatively easily, they sometimes had to try several motels for accessibility to the bathroom. Once they reached their destination, the main house and the cabins were planned and built to accommodate Proc. He and Vivian shared an oversize bathroom with a large tub. Now, however, Proc has moved to his converted bus, where he has more privacy.

"I no longer go water-skiing," he says, "but I can still enjoy the people and the locale. I lie up on the porch, where I can see the beach—or I take the motor home wherever the people are. We take friends up, several couples, who stop by my gurney as they go back and forth. I can go out on a barge in the lake; a couple of men can do it for me. I eat meals with the guests, from my portable bed. And Armando and I do a lot of errands, to Deer Wood, the nearest town, five miles away, or Crosby, an old iron-mining town. I used to go to restaurants with the others, but that's no longer practical because I'm on this ventilator, so a few of the people keep me company in the motor home as we dine out."

Bay Lake continues to be a center for Ritchie family life and a way to keep up with friends. Proc enjoys the people and cherishes the tradition itself. He says, "It's the biggest free resort in Minnesota."

Proc, in his special bed in his bus, entertains grandchildren at a family gathering.

Chapter VIII

THE RITCHIE COMPANY

As related earlier, when Proc got out of college, he joined his father Hale's company—followed in time by his two younger brothers, Dean and Dave. Proc was the senior man. Dean went out first to their oil business, but soon returned to run a small firm they had purchased, the Allen Concrete Co., whose main assets were five trucks. It grew rapidly to embrace large sand plants, a bagged sand business, a bagged "Quickcrete" (dry sacked concrete) business, and other offshoots. [Today, Ritchie's sand business is over 2,000,000 tons per year.]

Dave, Proc's junior by nine years, joined the company after his military service. He started at the end of a shovel, but (mentored by Proc from his iron lung) he advanced rapidly. However, he saw the potential of played-out sand plants to become upscale residential developments. The pit from which the sand was removed could become a lovely lake, and with the additions of streets, utilities and landscaping, the transformation was completed. Thus Dave began a career of his own as a successful real estate developer.

Within months of Proc's return from the Kenny Institute, he began going to the office every day. After being bathed and dressed, he was lifted into a station wagon and transferred to a wheelchair at the other end. (Later, this procedure was superseded by a specially equipped bus with a chain hoist and every electronic aid, which was far more comfortable and efficient.) And so Proc went back to being the senior executive in the Ritchie Company.

To enable him to do this, he devised a "standing rack" which, with the help of three belts, supported him upright for limited periods of time. He made a hydraulically elevated table top. He invented a page turner to help him read books. He rigged an electronically operated phone and similar dictating machine. He could work only one- or two-hour shifts without resting—but he was working, guiding the company to unprecedented growth.

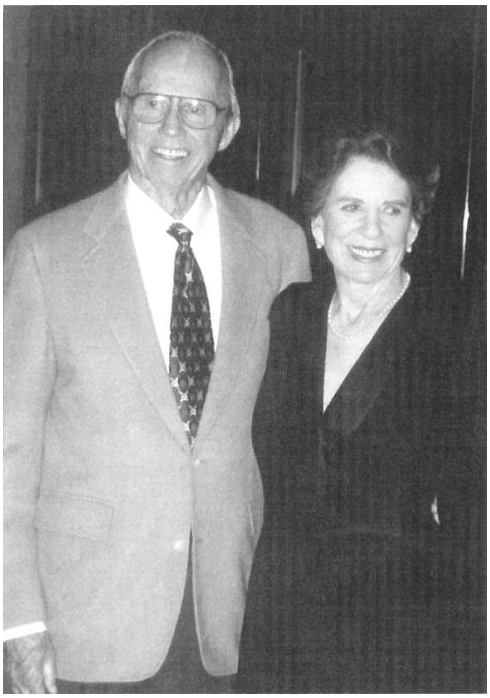
According to Dean and Dave, Proctor was the idea man. "He was always coming up with a new way to do something which was quicker and easier and saves us money. He was always designing in his mind a new piece of equipment either to help his own condition or his business.

Proc, as president of the Ritchie Company, went to the office every day. This photo, taken in the '60s, shows some of the mechanical aids used in his work and communication.

"It took him nine months to sell us on the idea of starting our own sand plant. And when we decided to go ahead, Proc listened to all the salesmen and the equipment manufacturers, decided which equipment would do the best job, and put the whole thing together."

The "materials" business was a major part of that growth. The company got into Quickcrete because they had large quantities of fine sand left over after the sand plants produced the coarser sand used for paving. It turned out the fine sand was used for sand blasting and other small-quantity uses. It needed only to be mixed with cement to become Quickcrete. So the company began supplying that in bags. Soon they needed a larger dryer, bagging equipment, a marketing organization and enlarged storage space. They franchised their distinctive product name to supply other parts of the country.

In the beginning, their largest competitor was Walter Keeler in the ready-mix concrete business. But as Ritchie grew, Keeler shrank, so in 1996, Ritchie bought them out. Similarly, in Western Kansas, the biggest asphalt contractor was Don Popejoy, with four plants. His company also has been bought by Ritchie, where Don is an executive. The materials division of the company has grown so big they now enjoy a new headquarters building of their own in Andover, a satellite town east of Wichita.



Dean Ritchie and his lovely wife Barbara. Dean has been the close, indispensable friend and companion to his brother Proc, as well as a top company executive, civic leader, and family man in his own right.

Brother Dean Ritchie was in charge of this end of the business from 1947 until 1976, when he retired and turned it over to his son, Hale. That same year, Proctor's son Tom was elected president of Ritchie Paving. Proctor Ritchie continued as president of the parent company until 1990, when he stepped down, replaced by his son Tom. "It was getting too hard," explain Proc. "I was on a respirator full time and my backside was sore." It was also the year he lost his beloved wife Vivian.

The Ritchie men after a meeting. On Proc's left, his son Tom. At his right, brother Dean with son Hale; then, brother Dave with son Jack. In the background, the Quickcrete plant.

When Proctor became head of the company in 1945, its annual sales were approximately $500,000; the annual sales today are roughly $60,000,000. Proc, Dean and Dave remain on the company board and take a keen interest in the business every day—Dean at the office and Proc in his special bus visiting every active Ritchie site.

Chapter IX

A FULL LIFE—FLAT OUT!

Accommodations and Assistance

Having determined he "didn't want to be a burden to his family," Proc's first priority was to arrange for help – help that would be at his side or instantly available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for the rest of his life. A therapist had accompanied him home from the Kenny Institute, but it was soon clear that he did not need that kind of help, and the therapist was released. After some foundering and false starts, Proc and Vivian arrived at the following arrangement:

The chief helper, the majordomo, chauffeur, care-giver, companion and friend is Armando Sanchez. [See chapter. 6] Armando serves from 8:00 A.M. until 6:00 P.M. weekdays. He is relieved by college students: one, on duty four nights and every other Saturday and Sunday; the other, three nights and the remaining days on weekends.

Similarly, the house, which had been quite sufficient for Proctor, Vivian and their three growing children, was simply not designed for the privacy and care that Proc's condition required. So they purchased the Leo Raugh home at 8 Douglas Ave. (where Proc still lives) and renovated it drastically to provide for his needs. A large, windowed sitting room was added at one end of the house, furnished tastefully with a couch, a table, comfortable chairs, a bookcase and TV set—in addition to Proc's bed surrounded by the equipment needed to keep him alive. Adjoining the sitting room is a large bathroom specifically for his use. An indoor crane on casters, equipped with chains and pulleys, enables an attendant to raise or lower him or move him as necessary. A similar system is employed inside his bus.

The rest of the large house remains as it was built, including four bedrooms and baths on the second floor. "Do you realize," asks Proc rather wistfully, "I have never been upstairs in this house?"

Proctor is ready to leave for work at 10:00 A.M. every day—bathed, shaved and dressed in a suit, starched shirt and tie. He is still better looking than most men in their eighties, with a ruddy complexion and sparkling eyes. After feeding him breakfast, Armando places him in his bus, and they drive to various Ritchie company offices, sand plants, and construction sites. At some locations, managers or foremen may visit him in the bus; and at all locations the employees wave and smile as they spot Proc's bus. "I like to stay close to my men," says Proc.

He usually lunches with brothers Dean or Dave, or with friends. Formerly, he would disembark to enter restaurants, but in recent years, it is easier for Armando to bring lunch into the bus. Proc makes a point of keeping his wallet in his pocket, but obviously Armando has access to it to pay for lunches and other purchases.

Proc returns home about 5:30. After dinner, he may visit with his wife or look at TV. He went to movie theaters in earlier days, going down front where the floor was more level. There, he would semi-recline in a special wheelchair; however, he says "my insides tended to slide down, and I tried to hitch up with the tiny strength remaining in my left buttock." The need for a respirator full-time finally made such mobility impractical. Fortunately, the arrival of VCR to show movies at home, plus the programmed TV movies solved the problem.

Many changes in Proctor's lifestyle have been due as much to advancing age as to his disability. Everyone's lifestyle changes as he or she grows older, and Proc is no exception. For example, he used to appear regularly at country club dinner dances and parties, but seldom does so now. But neither do other members in their eighties. He and his wife enjoy bridge, which Proc could do very well, with the help of someone to play the cards. But they play less frequently now.

Proc has been a fan of University of Kansas sports—especially football and basketball—and seldom missed a home game in the old days. He would be carried on his gurney or wheelchair to the top of the stadium near the press box. But he then devised and built a personal box that fitted on a forklift. He got permission to park the forklift behind the end zone with the box raised high, and he viewed the game from there.

Proctor's "box seat" for the University of Kansas football games from the end zone. Proc is on the right in the booth, with sister Sally Caldwell. Dean Ritchie is at the bottom of the ladder, Dave at the top, and sister June Greever waves from the doorway.

He enjoyed going on hunting weekends with friends, traveling in his bus. But the respirator makes it more difficult to do now.

However, the love of his family (especially brothers Dean and Dave) and his close relationship with other friends (especially childhood buddy Jack Spines) have never wavered. He still has a hot game of backgammon with them every Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Armando joins in. And Proc still looks forward to an annual vacation at the family resort at Bay Lake in Minnesota. "I may not swim or ski any more," he says, "but I lie on the porch and watch and chat with the friends and family as they pass."

Bad Things Happen, Too

The 47-plus years since contracting polio have not been without trauma, some life-threatening.

In 1968, about 15 years after the initial polio attack, Proc was at a business meeting in a Miami Beach, Florida, hotel. He was struck suddenly with terrible pain in his abdomen. Rather than entrust a local hotel physician with his unique situation, Proctor was flown to Wichita. Severe pain struck again, so he was rushed to a hospital where he was immediately operated on. The doctors found Proc's kidney was twice the size of that of a normal person. This pushed his liver against the gall bladder which was now swollen, causing the awful pain. After the situation was corrected, the pain ceased, all functions returned to normal, and it never bothered him again.

In the 1980s, Proc experienced his own "post-polio syndrome." During his stay at the Sister Kenny Institute, the therapists had—through draconian efforts—succeeded in manipulating his chest muscles sufficiently to allow his lungs to take shallow breaths. This freed Proctor from his iron lung, a great blessing. But now, 30 years later, he began to suffer terrible headaches, especially at night. It was discovered that they were due to lack of oxygen, because he was not breather deeply enough. Proc himself was aware of increased difficulty in breathing deeply enough. Proc himself was aware of increase difficulty in breathing, even when he was conscious. So the immediate solution was to add a ventilator in the night hours. The headaches abated.

As time went on, however, he experienced increasing difficulty in breathing. Eventually he had to have a tracheotomy through which he receives his life-giving air from a respirator. This, of course, put a limit on his activity, although it certainly never stopped him!

Perhaps the most dramatic accident occurred some years ago. Proc always enjoyed the fellowship of his friends, the closest being Jack Spines. One weekend he drove in a brand-new special bus, with a fairly new and inexperienced driver, to Spines' cabin, near Pratt, about 70 miles from home. A long electric cord was supposed to be hooked up to a local power source in the cabin. However, the attendant was unable to open the compartment containing the cord. So, in frustration, he and Proctor decided to run the bus generator all night, providing bus lights and, incidentally, powering Proc's respirator.

About 8:00 the following morning, Hale went out to the bus, where he found Proc and the driver still asleep. When breakfast was ready, perhaps a half hour later with no sign of Proc or the driver, jack and another man went out again to rouse the sleepy-heads. But they could not be awakened. They were in a coma from carbon monoxide poisoning. It was discovered later that the bus exhaust pipe discharged under the body of the bus rather than at the rear, so exhaust fumes had been seeping up between the outer shell and the passenger compartment all night!

Jack immediately called for an ambulance, which had to come from seven miles away. The patients were still unconscious on arrival at the hospital, where a helicopter was summoned to airlift the victims to Wichita. They were immediately placed in enclosed tanks with pure oxygen pumped in. Both men opened their eyes at about 4:00 P.M. Proctor was used to it, but the driver was scared to death, having no idea of where they were or how they got there.

Proc's wife Bette was out of town, but brother Dean was able to reach her. He met her at the airport and brought her to the hospital. After several days of mental tests, both men were released to come home with no permanent damage. Ironically, Proctor survived the ordeal better than his attendant. His respirator had come loose during the night, so he took only shallow breaths, whereas the attendant had breathed normally, thus absorbing more carbon monoxide. The latter sued the manufacturer of the bus and received substantial damages. Proctor simply had the design of the bus's exhaust system altered and went on with his remarkable life.

A final freakish accident occurred in 1999. The younger helpers often wheeled Proctor on his gurney from his room at home to the waiting bus in the morning, where they turned him over to Armando. On the morning in question, the helper was in a buoyant mood, acting a little like a cowboy. Rounding a corner of the house at an unsafe speed, the gurney tipped and spilled the passenger onto the floor. Proc fractured his pelvis and one leg—at 82 years old! His general good health and the immobility of the broken bones stood him in a good stead. After the necessary pins, etc., he healed remarkably swiftly and is today as good as ever.

Proctor still goes to the doctor for regular check-ups. Paradoxically, his confinement to a gurney has insulated him from many of the diseases, illnesses and deteriorating organs that beset other people. His doctor declares that, generally speaking, Proc is in better health than most men in their eighties.

Vivian and the Children

"Vivian saved my life, not just once but many times," declares Proctor unequivocally. But her constant care of her husband on top of mothering the rest of her family and running the household put an enormous strain on her. Her relationship with older son Tom and daughter Anne was happy and close, but she and middle son John just didn't get along. He was an abrasive, rebellious and negative element in the Ritchie household. [But since that time, John has become a successful real estate operator in West Wichita and has re-established relationships with his Dad and Uncle Dean.]

Armando affirms: "She cried on my shoulder many times. But she was a strong character, a very *strong* character." He paused and summed up his feelings with, "She was a classy lady. She was nice to me."

Their father's sudden illness and complete paralysis turned the Ritchie children's lives topsy-turvy. Tom was eight, John was seven and Anne was six, when the blow came. They have happy memories of the earlier days with Dad: of riding on his back, of swimming together at Bay Lake, of playing games when Dad got home from work. "He worked a lot," says Tom. "Dad taught me to ride a bicycle," Anne recalls. "He ran alongside with his hand on the rear fender, and then let go before I even knew it."

The day that their father fell ill was hard for the kids to understand. "They told us he was sick," remembers Tom, "but we weren't allowed even to go near him because he was *real* sick." The three Ritchie children were quarantined at home for three months in the hands mostly of a housekeeper.

Vivian went to the Sister Kenny Institute with Proc. The two boys were sent to St. James Military School in Minnesota. Anne remained in Wichita, where her Uncle Dean and Aunt Barbara took care of her. "Barbara picks up strays," says Annie. "I was one of them."

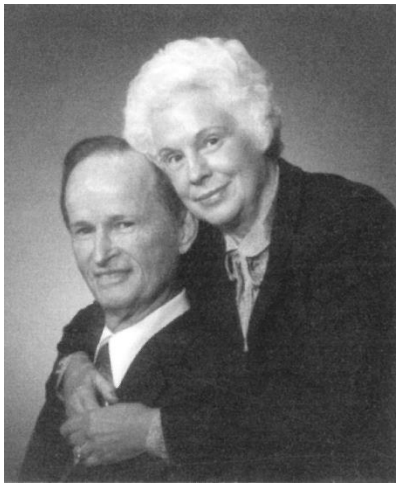
Tom and John were to remain at St. James Military School for four years—and hated it. Vivian sent lots of letters, but they felt abandoned. They didn't even get to go to Bay Lake; instead, they spent vacations with other students. "The students were a duke's mixture of cast-offs," in Tom's opinion, "kids from French families, kids from Jewish parents, kids with single fathers, and so on." As Tom grew into teen-age, he came back to Wichita in the summer and eventually attended eighth and ninth grades at East High School.

When Proc returned to Wichita from Sister Kenny's, to pick up his job at the Ritchie Company and pursue his other activities, Vivian was always there, making sure he ate as he should, and received whatever car he needed, and took part in the social life they had had before: dinner parties, bridge, county club parties and other gatherings with friends.

Sadly, however, this vital, energetic woman had a physical time-bomb in her body: a congenital heart disease. In her forties, she began to lose her usual pep and to experience chest pains. In 1986 she had a severe heart attack and was rushed to the hospital for a multiple-vessel bypass operation. When this bypass failed after two years, she was taken to Houston to be operated on by the noted Dr. Cooley. But his operation was no better than the first. She was never the same again: easily tired, listless, with less endurance; more or less bedridden with a nurse by her side. A year later, she had to have a third bypass operation, this time in Wichita. Although slightly improved, Vivian still had to stay home, in bed most of the time, with round-the-clock nurses.

Proc was able to visit her at least a couple of times a day until once when she was rushed to the hospital, screaming in terrible pain. The doctor said she would not last long at all. Proctor went to see her in the hospital. They talked together as long as she could, until she lapsed into unconsciousness. Proc waited and watched until he was asked to leave. The nurse reported later that after he had left, Vivian came to and said gently, "We had a wonderful talk." With that, she closed her eyes and died. The date was November 25, 1990. She and Proc had been married 45 years.

At Proc's request, Vivian's ashes were taken to Bay Lake and scattered in a flower garden there.



Proc and Vivian.

Vivian's death devastated Proc, of course. Abruptly, he was left alone in their large house—except for the unceasing love and care of his family and friends. Daughter Anne remained with him in the house for a month. She recalls, "Dad wanted *everything* of Vivian's *gone.* He wanted to make sure it was lovingly taken care of." Dave, Dean and Barbara were constantly at hand. Proc's friends rallied around without missing a beat.

Bette

Among the friends offering condolences was Bette Lewis, a divorcee for some 17 years, friend of Dean and Barbara's, who occasionally filled in for bridge games at Proc and Vivian's. Pretty, brown-haired and sparkling-eye, Bette had been married to Hiram Lewis, an attractive man but a plunger and risk-taker. While in this union, Bette became a heavy drinker. She and "Hi" were divorced in 1972, shortly after Bette had sought help for her drinking problem and became sober. She settled down to the life of a single woman in Wichita. She made the most of her women friends, who included Proc's sisters, Sally and June.

Bill Avery, an ex-governor of Kansas, was a friend of Proc and Vivian's, who dropped by occasionally to visit and have a game of bridge. Vivian sometimes called Bette Lewis to make a fourth. Later, Avery would personally request Bette for the game.

So after Vivian's death, Bette called on Proc (and Anne, who was still there) to offer condolences. After a warm chat which they kept on a light note, Bette said good-night, promising to be back again soon. The next day, her phone rang and it was Proc, saying he had enjoyed their talk and "how about coming over tonight." The relationship was soon on a daily basis—to the pleasure of other members of the family. On several occasions, Sally, Anne, Barbara, and others asked Bette if she would consider moving in to be a companion and hostess.

It was a felicitous arrangement: Proc needed a woman around the house, and Bette needed a man in her life again. After several months, they decided to get married. Says Proc: "Because the Ritchies are fairly well known in Wichita, as my condition is also; and considering Vivian's recent death, Bette and I realized that our marriage would set a lot of tongues a-wagging. So we eloped!"

The couple went in Proc's bus up to Newton to obtain the license. But they were recognized and the news was phoned back to Wichita, where the cat was out of the bag before the couple returned. Plans were made for a family gathering at home, with cocktails, refreshments and a wedding ceremony performed by Father John Flora of St. Steven's Episcopal church.

"The main problem," according to Bette, "is that I cannot cook. Jack Spines among others tried to teach me, but it was a disaster. It was finally agreed I might be able to boil water, but that was the extent of my ability in the kitchen. But we have been able to work around that."

At first, the Ritchie children were reluctant to accept their new step-mother so soon after the death of their real mother. Son Tom was particularly stand-offish and resentful. However, Proctor was choking one night before his night attendant had arrived. By the time Tom was summoned, Bette had inserted a tube down Proc's esophagus and was pumping out the obstruction. "He started to warm up to me after that," says Bette with a smile, "and all's well now."

Proc and Bette.

To this writer's mind, if what happened to Proctor Ritchie had happened to me, nothing would be easier or more natural than to give up. Let the rest of the world take care of me and the go on its way. But Proc's determination "not to be a burden to his family" has opened the gates to a far broader and richer life beyond that of the non-handicapped. It is a life that has benefitted countless others, through Proc's participation in community affairs and his generosity to worthy causes.

His success as head of the Ritchie Company from 1940 to 1971—during which period he increased the annual income of the first ten-fold—speaks for itself. And in his mid-eighties as this book is written, he still takes a daily, personal interest in every major decision and every project (somewhat to the annoyance of the second generation, Tom and Hale Jr., who now head the company). Proctor was also active in the whole construction industry in his area, attending the functions of the Kansas Contractors' Association and similar groups.

He was a warden of the St. James Episcopal church, chairing its capital fund drive. He has been an active and supportive alumnus of Kansas University, including making a special contribution to K.U.'s Engineering School to help train students for work in Spanish-speaking countries. He was president of the Wichita Phi Gamma Delta Alumni organization for five years. After a disastrous fire burned down the Phi Gam house in 1967, Proc was a leader in raising funds to rebuild it. Brother Dean shares Proc's interest in K.U. and Phi Gam, as well.

Out of his personal experience, Proc has focused on related causes such as Wichita Cerebral Palsy, for which he chaired a telethon; and the Polio-Plus Campaign of the Wichita Rotary Club, where he was co-chairman. He had been especially active in Rainbows United, a school for severely-handicapped children. He was one of the original sponsors of the Rainbows United building fund drive. For his efforts, the building is named the Proctor Ritchie Center. The organization honored him on May 6, 1998, at a dinner gathering which they billed as "Celebrating Friends Celebrating Proctor Ritchie's Life." Proc found the accolades he received on that occasion to be embarrassing; however, they reflected the feelings of family and friends:

A son: "He's sharp as a tack and has immense inner strength." He spoke of Proc's brothers and sisters, sons and daughters—a close-knit family whose members had all benefitted from Proc's influence and example.

Others used terms such as "wit"…"grit"…"tenderness."

Still others spoke of his "wisdom"…"courage"…and "determination."

Jack Spines praised his "patience and understanding of people. His friends owe him a debt of gratitude. We call him 'Saint Proctor.' He has shown all of us the importance of keeping families together."

To which Proc replies, "I don't know what the fuss is about. All I did was try to do my best with what I had."

Proc at his daughter Anne's wedding in 1969. Brother Dean is manning the wheelchair.

Afterword

Proctor Ritchie died on May 24, 2004, at the age of 86, after a long life filled with every emotion that a man can experience in a lifetime. He died peacefully on his specially equipped bus while Armando, his driver, was running an errand. Two hours prior to his death, he and his two brothers had spent some time playing backgammon, as they'd done before the younger one, Dave, moved to California. It was the first time they had had an opportunity to do this in many months. For those of us who are left, it seemed to give his life a happy closure, as Proc was obviously failing.

As time went by, he had more and more difficulty breathing, more and more difficulty sleeping, more and more difficulty with bodily functions of all kinds. However, he ploughed ahead. About the time we all felt that he would soon be leaving us, he would bounce back and demand another game or two of backgammon.

Proc had endured his own personal Gethsemane. Imagine the despair he must have felt as a loving husband and a father of three small children, condemned to a life dependent on others. How do you come to terms with that? You beg God that you will not have to drink this cup.

But Proc was a realist, and he came to realize there was no going back, that he must turn his face to the road ahead and do the best he could with the rest of his life. He once told me that the hardest thing to accept was the face that he could not commit suicide and relieve his family of the responsibility for his care. Once in awhile, when they left him out of the iron lung a little too long, he would pray that they would not come back in time. But they always did, and he was finally forced to face the fact that there was nothing to do but meet adversity head-on.

Proc told me that he made a conscious decision that he would do the very best he could with what he had left so he could feel he really did have a contribution to make, and that other peoples' lives would not be blighted as they tried to come to terms with what had happened. "I didn't want to be a bother!" was the way he put it. Bob Pearson use that expression for the title of his book.

So Proc became a legend in his own time. All his friends came to measure their misfortunes against the problems Proc was facing. Within a very short time it became apparent that he was becoming an inspiration to others whose courage was failing. He said to me once, after I had told him how much he had helped me in learning how to deal with misfortune, "That's wonderful, Barbara. But I am tired of being an inspiration. I would rather be able to get up and walk."

Early in the game, his spirit, sense of humor, resilience and playfulness helped us to feel comfortable being around him. And that was exactly what he wanted. It worked. And I know that meant a great deal to him. He knew we loved him very much.

In 1990, Proc lost his wife, Vivian, to heart disease. This was a terrible blow, although not unexpected as her health had been declining for some time. Vivian was the glue that held everything

together from the very beginning. She refused to give up. She refused to let Proc give up. It was Vivian who convinced him that there was a new life to be had out there if he would just reach for it. She gave him back to us.

As the years rolled on, the Post Polio Syndrome reared its ugly head. His diaphragm muscle, with which he had breathed for so many years, started to fail. He was finally forced to depend on a respirator. From that time, Proc began to slip physically, although his mind remained active and inventive until recently when he started to have memory problems. Not surprising for a man of his age.

For the last thirteen years, Proc has enjoyed the companionship and support of his second wife, Bette. They had the same sense of humor, loved to tease, loved to talk to each other and share their joys and sorrows. She took the loneliness out of his life and gave him a steady presence to rely on, even as her own health declined. She was a remarkable lady.

And through it all, for the last twenty-seven years, Armando Sanchez has taken daily care of Proc. He has bathed him, dressed him, driven him endless hours in the bus, argued with him, lost to him at backgammon, beaten him at backgammon and loved him like a brother.

So now Proc is gone from our sight. What will happen after we take our last breath is a mystery, but something in us sense that this is not the end. My father wrote the following words when he knew he had not long to live:

"*As I am unable to conceive the precise resting place of my soul, which I believe is immortal; I like to think that it will pass on into limitless space from the instant that it is separated from my mortal remains. My desire is that my body be cremated, and that my ashes be taken aboard ship and that, with a prayer of thanksgiving to Almighty God for all his goodness, emptied from the urn to be carried away by the wind.*

Anyone who, at night, has stood under the upper deck of a ship in the darkness and has listened and felt the wind as it constantly sweeps on the ship and beyond into space, must have experienced a vivid consciousness of the limitlessness of the universe, and have wondered whence in all this vastness the night wind might find a resting place. That passing of the wind on into the infinity of space so closely typifies my conception of the passing of the soul that those who have loved me on this mortal earth will be comforted by the thought that my mortal remains are being borne on and on into the great unknown, where my soul has gone before.

I pass on, believing in the mercy of Almighty God and that, by his goodness, we shall all meet again in a higher estate, where we can make amends for the failings of our earthly lives."

I like to think of Proc, free at last, flying on the wings of a Kansas wind into the heart of this great mystery.

Barbara Ritchie (sister-in-law)
August 2004