

Q. What was your first encounter with the Farleys?

A. They used to live in Kingston. And we lived in Kingston; we both came to the valley at just about the same time. We came in 1935; I didn't meet him until 1936. We met at Sue Cassidy's dancing school. Sue Cassidy had the dancing school for the entire community. If you wanted your child to get instruction in any kind of dancing, but mostly ballroom dancing, you took him or her to Sue Cassidy's school. Sue Cassidy's still here, incidentally, in Shavertown; she's no longer teaching dancing--beyond the point. But I met Eleanor there; she had Bob in the class and I had my daughter, Barbara, in the class; they were both taking dancing of course. But we found that we had things in common as we sat on the sidelines watching the kids go through their gyrations. We found that we had quite a lot in common; we exchanged names and then we found that we both lived within five blocks or so of each other in Kingston. And so social relations started between us and the children got together some. I used to take the older girl down to Virginia Beach with me when I took my own children for a vacation; so they got quite well acquainted.

But Genie, Genie was the one who really took my heart immediately; he had been ill -- he had rheumatic fever -- and he was just getting over it, and he had been

exposed to his mother for nearly six months, practically constantly because he couldn't lift his head from the pillow for a while -- he wasn't supposed to - and she had indoctrinated him in music and literature and all the things that went to make up Eleanor Farley. She was a very remarkable woman: she had studied to be a concert pianist and she had varied talents. We took painting lessons together sometime later and she was a very good painter. Genie had become completely well by then, but he was still the child of Quaker parentage who couldn't possibly have done anything to disturb anybody. He was an unusual youngster - also with great talent.

Bob I never knew very well because he wasn't the age of any of my boys. Ethel I got quite accustomed to; she and Barbara got along very well together, though their interests varied of course. But the thing that you want is how they happened to choose the hill above Beaumont for their home.

Well, they sat down one summer; it must have been about 1938 -- and they figured up what it would cost to go on a vacation with all of them. Gene and Eleanor decided that it would cost a great deal to take them all on a vacation and that when they got through with the vacation they would have nothing left. So they tossed the money into the pot and bought the hill. It had a barn on it, a very disreputable looking barn at the time. I mean, bats sailed in and out, you know, through the cracks. And they started

building it into a house. For a while it didn't even have enough flooring and you could see through the roof to the sky overhead. It was not fit for anybody to live in except in the summer. They had a ball at the time.

I remember seeing Gene, big Gene, sitting up astride the roof pole, swinging Bob from a rope as Bob shingled part of the roof underneath. Gene, of course, was not about to let Bob fall. They didn't know anything about scaffolds at that time, so they just climbed up and did the job. They roofed it in first because the rain came in some and soaked the bunks. It developed. They built the big fireplace later, that tremendous big fireplace. Each year they did something to it, but for a while there it was very primitive. There was one of those family two-holers out back -- I don't know if it's still there or not -- and the wrens used to make nests in it. It was a very folksy sort of spot. And we used to have picnics at the top of the hill, far up beyond where you go now. They have their picnic now out at the cleared spot on the side lawn, but we used to climb clear to the top of the hill and have cookouts.

Gene and Eleanor, with their children, were probably the most unified family I've ever seen. They did everything together. They all worked on this house, building it into a home. You'd go out there and there would be Gene and Bob and little Gene all stripped to the waist and carrying mortar or shingles or whatever the occasion demanded at that time. The farmhouse was there, but it was a tenant house, and the tenant farmer still lived in it for some years. Finally he left and then they began to do something to that house. That was a more formal type of house of course; it even had plumbing -- right from the beginning it had plumbing I think. And there was that beautiful well -- I think the well is still there -- with sweet water. There was no water up at the other house; the water had to be carried for a long time. It was a project lasting over a number of years; I think

it's still going on because the lower barn has been remodeled a little -- not as much as the upper barn, but it's a very usable place. It's a lovely spot.

Chuck Reif and Eleanor and Gene used to come to our square dances; we had square dances in our house in Kingston at the time. And you'd see Chuck standing on his head in a corner, just to evidence how happy he was at being there. I'm not the best friend of the Farleys, remember, but they were my best friends. There's a world of difference in the two. You don't necessarily reciprocate. They had a tremendous connection with all sorts of people, and it was necessary for Eleanor to keep up with all sorts of things that I didn't have to keep up with. But every once in a while, up to the day of her death, practically, Eleanor would call me up here at the Post and say: "Come out to lunch." And I'd say: "Well, I've only got about an hour to spend" and she'd say, "Well, come anyway, I'll have something on the table and I have things to talk about."

We always did have a great deal to talk about. Eleanor was the kind of person with whom you could take up the friendship or lay it down and it would always be in the same place when you went back to it. You can't say that about very many people. She was one of those very rare people. At the time of her death I wrote an editorial for the Dallas Post that I thought expressed Eleanor very well. I said that I thought a woman such as Eleanor leaves a heritage far greater than mere wealth. She'll be remembered forever here I think. She was a wonderful woman. Gene, big Gene, was apt to explode at times. I think of him as having his foot perpetually in his mouth and Eleanor going around after him pulling it out again and smoothing down the feathers. The Quaker atmosphere was very marked. There is a Quaker blessing at meals where you hold hands silently. A very nice thing, for just a minute. Somebody says the blessing, perfectly quietly and solemnly; complete silence, then just the press of the fingers releases the blessing. That was the first time I'd ever experienced a Quaker blessing and we use it right along in my daughter's household now because I was impressed with it.

There were a lot of frustrations, of course: there are bound to be anytime any man takes an administrative position in a college which is growing up from a small college into a different type of college entirely. Instead of being Bucknell Junior it became Wilkes and for some little time it was only a two-year course; then it became a three-year, and then it began to be a four-year course. And now I understand that it is going on into graduate work a little, which I think is a very fine thing. At first it was a purely local thing. The first youngster who came in from outside the area lived in the Farley household on Northampton Street at the time and was a member of the family. He was the foundation for all the dormitory activities that have been going on recently. Little by little people donated to the school their homes, as they no longer had need for them! They were rather elaborate homes usually and through the passage of years they were just -- hard to keep up. Some people died and some people just left, and they donated their mansions to the new college. And the halls of course bear their names -- Kirby Hall, for instance: They moved away from the area and gave their home. Eventually I suppose the college will swallow up every home on River Street, and it should, because it's a fine place for a campus, except for lack of parking space.

I hear from Gene occasionally; I don't go to the hill anymore because I can't bear to go without Eleanor. I've never been out there since her death, I just can't do it, because she was the very spirit of that place. We used to sit and watch the sunset and as the dew fell we could smell the fragrance of the white petunias she always planted - they grow with the advancing dusk.

Gene was exasperatingly perfect. What the father said was law, and it was the right kind of law. He was much venerated in his own family and by I think everybody in Wilkes Barre who realized he was doing a tremendous job for the community by heading that college. He had never expected to be an educator you know: never, it was more or less wished on him when he was a young man. I wish I knew more about it, but he's a remarkable person. I sometimes thought that he ruffled people unnecessarily; he's always

been pretty flat-footed. But everything he's said has always been so completely true and borne out by facts. I don't think ~~anybody could have~~ he's ever gone off the deep end. And he has done something which I don't think anyone else could have done, and I think it's because of his Quaker upbringing. He's always hewed to the line - truth was truth and justice was justice and that was it. And he brought all those things to the new college. Every youngster who went to the college he considered his own special obligation. I don't suppose it can be that way anymore, but it used to be when the college was relatively small. The Farleys knew all the students by their first names and the students liked them, respected them - a student uprising of the sort that you've seen at Columbia recently couldn't have happened at Wilkes because Dr. Farley was the kind of person who wouldn't go along with anything like that; he wouldn't have stood for it. I can't see any percentage in letting anybody get away with anything, but then I belong to an old generation and I wasn't allowed to get away with anything -- I never wanted to get away with anything. I was brought up to behave myself and do what I was told. And he was too; he expects cooperation; he expects a decent sort of bowing to the amenities. He wouldn't expect any sort of trouble on his campus. I think he'd be highly astonished if it happened and I think he'd take measures immediately; I don't think he would permit anything like that to grow: it's the growing that's important; you have the seeds of course in any student body, but they need nourishment in order to grow.

I don't think he ever had any idea that the college was going to grow as big as it did, because he and Eleanor were both very commonsensical people; they took things as they came; they didn't expect too much -- but neither did they expect too little. I don't think they had the slightest idea that the college would grow the way it has; I think it's due to Dr. Farley that it has grown; I don't think anybody else could have done it. A different type of man would have gone off to another college where he would have got more money, but money didn't influence Dr. Farley. Not ever. It was something he was accomplishing. I know that he's had any number of chances to step up in the

educational world, but I don't think he would ever do it. Because this is his college; he built it. He brought it up from a pup, and he has put himself into it, his life into it; Eleanor put her life into it.

They weren't the kind of people who ever put on any kind of dog whatsoever. I don't think that being completely wiped out would have bothered the Farleys one particle. You don't understand that unless you understand Quakers: they take what comes and make the best of it. They always had enough because they made it be enough. I know that his salary wasn't tremendous at that time.

I wouldn't have any idea exactly how to encapsulate either of those people in terms of character, except to say that they're both very rare people.

Theirs was love. Absolutely, utterly, and completely. Love like that is a very rare thing; it is something you don't run into very often.

Gene, their youngest, who has married a doctor up in Rochester, is going into a very interesting family medicine experiment right now that is very much on the order of the old-fashioned family doctor, with a great deal more to it because it embraces so very much more than what one person could do. He's doing research on that now and also practicing and teaching. They were extremely bright children -- all three of them were extremely well endowed with brains, what you would call brilliance, I'm sure. They went to public schools. The family moved from Kingston very shortly after he started building the college; I think the first place they lived was Northampton Street. The girl went to West Town School, which is a Quaker School over near Philadelphia; she was in ninth grade; it was a boarding school. But, as far as school goes, I can't tell you about the boys at all.

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