I think it is time to begin, on this beautiful day of July 31, 2011. We are at Ross Lake, and the family is gathering, in part as usual in the summertime, but especially this year, because we have a little celebration in the works. Tuesday we will be driving to St. Ignace due to take the ferry to Mackinac Island for an overnight. We will be staying at the Windermere Hotel. Unfortunately, not every one in the family will be able to make this occasion, but still there will be a goodly number: Mary, Reid, Karen, Jennifer, Orus and Jennifer Coffield, Audrey and Victor Soria, with Joaquin, Robert and his girlfriend Amy. Thus, there will be a total of 13 of us. Marty and Mal are in Africa(Malawi). Peter is in Champaign, learning the ropes of a new job; Pat similarly is involved in urgent work-related activities. Anna is at a camp, Henry is involved in a Shakespeare Company in New Haven, and Ian needs to be bear to stay with Henry.

So what is the occasion? In January of this year Audrey and I celebrated our 60th wedding anniversary. It seemed very appropriate that we gather as many of the family as possible to share in that celebration during our traditional summertime gathering. I could say a great deal here about what a wonderful 60 years this has been, but if I go off in that direction it may be a long time before I get to the point of this exercise, which is to write a sort of autobiography. I don't imagine that there is a particular best time to begin an autobiography, but marking the passage of all these years of marriage and the growth of our family certainly provides something of an impetus for making a start.

**A little ancestry**

To give a sensible account of my life I need to relate some things about those who went before me. My mother, Martha Elisabeth Kedinger, was born on November ex-ex-, 1907, on a farm near Algoma, Wisconsin, a small town near Green Bay, Wisconsin. She was the youngest of nine children born to Michael Kedinger and Mary Borgman Kedinger. Her parents, my maternal grandparents, were devoutly Catholic immigrants from Germany. They entered the United States through Ellis Island on or about [dates?], and settled in Wisconsin to farm in the area around Green Bay. After a time the family moved to Kansas. I suppose my grandfather was lured there by the promise of cheaper land, but whatever the motivation, the move was not a success. Before many years had passed they had returned to Wisconsin to the same area from which they had left. However, they were in Kansas long enough for the eldest child in the family, Anna, to meet and marry Joseph Westermann . I think Anna and Joseph stayed in Kansas for a time, before eventually moving back to Wisconsin. At some point in the 1920s my grandfather decided to quit farming and moved to Green Bay. My grandparents bought a house at 611 N. Chestnut St, and in addition acquired a quadruplex apartment building at the corner of Dousman and Ashland Avenues, several blocks away from the Chestnut Street house. I don't know about the conditions under which he owned those properties; that is ,whether there were mortgages on them. My grandfather also worked in a meat packing plant. I’m not sure about the years in which he held that or some similar job, but it was probably the case that he needed to work to cover his expenses. He was in his late 50s, early 60s. The original social security act was passed in 1935, too late to be of any assistance to Michael Kedinger. My mother went to high school at West High School. I am unsure as to whether she actually graduated.

My father, Lawrence Albert Brown, was born in Mill Center, Wisconsin on October 15, 1928. Like my mother he was one of nine children, the eldest boy in the family. His parents were Samuel Brown and Estelle ? Brown. Both Sam and Estelle grew up in the vicinity of Mill Center, which is about 10 miles outside Green Bay. They had a farm, on which Lawrence was obliged to work as the season called for it. As a result his schooling was quite irregular, and he did not advance beyond about the seventh grade. I had the impression that Sam was a demanding father and husband. I'm not sure whether he was a good farmer; he got involved in local politics and at one point was, I am told, a deputy sheriff. I don't believe that Sam was religious, nor did their family life provide much opportunity for Estelle to attend church. I believe, however, that she came from a Catholic family.

Sometime in the 1920s, I am unsure of just when, my father left the farm and struck out on his own. I don't know what sorts of jobs he held. I remember his telling me that for a time he worked on a railroad, probably shoveling coal in the locomotive compartment. A major rail line, both passenger and freight, ran from Green Bay through Milwaukee to Chicago. I often wonder what life must have been like for him at that time; a naïve young man with not much education, a father who was unlikely to have been a good role model for living an orderly life on one’s own. It would have been easy to take up with other young men such as himself, with little education and not great job prospects. Away from the familiar social life of Mill Center, hanging out with other men and drinking could easily have been the major form of social life. Those were, after all, the roaring 20s. On the other hand, Lawrence was a good-looking man and he apparently learned how to dress well. My mother often remarked that he was quite impressive when she met him. They apparently danced quite a lot during their courtship, so he must have picked up in a modicum of dancing skills.

My parents were married on May 6, 1927. I’m sure it was a Catholic marriage, but I know none of the details. I believe that Larry and Martha took up married life at the Chesnut Street address. My mother was at that time probably employed as a sales clerk in downtown Green Bay, at the F. W. Woolworth five and dime store. My unmarried aunt Gert, who worked in a women’s dress shop downtown, was almost surely living at Chesnut Street. Gert had a good job as those things went; she had some sort of managerial responsibility, as I recall. There may have been one or more children still living at home, but I don’t think so. However, as I will relate later, that situation changed dramatically in the 1930s, as the depression and other factors came into play.

**My Early life**