A Mother's Ardent 'Project'

Disciplined Young Bradley Was Coached to Achieve - Part 1 of 6

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Susie Bradley's unforeseen journey to motherhood began its final leg in a hearse. Her husband of three years, rigid with arthritis, felt unequal to driving the Cadillac. In that wartime summer of 1943, the nearest substitute with a reliable supply of gas belonged to Gentry Politte, the undertaker.

A funereal ride up Highway 61-67 conveyed the 34-year-old schoolteacher, in labor all the way, to disappointment. Susie Bradley believed in "mind force," the power of will to make itself felt in the world. She yearned for a daughter hard enough that the odds, by her accounting, should have improved. When she first laid eyes on her newborn child at Deaconess Hospital in St. Louis, said her younger sister, Hardeman Bond, she cried.

"Well, it's a boy and I wanted a girl!" she lamented. On further inspection, Bill Bradley struck her as a "long, skinny, ugly baby – I'm just being honest, "Bond recalled. "He was so thin that she thought it was a challenge to get him to look – well, everybody envisions a plump baby."

Susie Bradley set about conforming her son to that vision, the first of many. A woman of formidable drive, she woke him for feedings to fatten him and required house guests to wear masks lest they give the boy a germ. As the years went by she devised a program of enrichment – boxing and French, church and golf, diction and etiquette, piano and trumpet – whose ambitions surpassed the norms of the place and time. The Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., Works Nine, might be the "anchor for the whole life of this town," as Bradley declared many years later, but it had no part in Susie Bradley's plans for her son.

Looking back from adulthood, Bill Bradley would write wryly that he had been his mother's "greatest project." He was hardly hers alone. As the adolescent Bradley shot up in height and renown – leading Crystal City's Hornets to the state basketball finals, preaching a teenage sermon at the Grace Presbyterian church, rising through Troop 549 to Eagle Scout – others joined in engineering him. Coaches, teachers and newspaper columnists projected vicarious ambitions. Famous preachers and Christian athletes, including basketball's Bob Pettit and football's Fran Tarkenton, developed an interest in his soul.

Strikingly early, the road they mapped for Bradley led to the White House. Each milestone – state and national student council, Princeton all-American, Olympic champion, Rhodes scholar – brought new believers. Other high school principals in those days may have imagined their standout graduates as president. Not many could have had the image taken seriously, as Edward Rapp did, in a New Yorker magazine profile that cemented Bradley's place as the most celebrated collegian of his day.

On April 5, 1964, seven months before Bradley cast his first adult vote, New York Post columnist Leonard Shecter pioneered a ritual that recurred hundreds of times over the years. He asked Bradley, "Would you like to be president?" Then, as he devoted a column to admiring "the perfect boy," he heard what he wanted to hear in Bradley's reply. "In 25 years or so our presidents are going to have to be better than ever. It's nice to know that Bradley will be available," Shecter wrote.

What Bradley actually said to Shecter was this: "For somebody 20 years old to answer that question either way would be presumptuous."

From boyhood, Bradley met extravagant claims on his future with that kind of pivot. He sidestepped expectations, neither rebelling against them nor adopting them openly. Sometimes he appeared to thwart his sponsors' hopes, but it often turned out that he had similar hopes himself. He found a way back to them from a flank. To protect his autonomy – a value fostered by his stoic, self-made father, Warren – Bradley became famously circumspect about conversations with his inner voice.

Alternately drawn and repelled by the spotlight, Bradley is now running for president more than 30 years after it became commonplace to say it was his destiny.

"From the time when he was a junior in high school, however you define his world, he was – if not the king of it, he was at the very least a prince," said investment banker John Garber, who became Bradley's Princeton roommate after meeting him when they were 17- year-old student body presidents at a national convention in Janesville, Wis. "With Bill, 38 or 40 years of promise have turned into something real now."

Twelve years have passed since serious people – a leading presidential historian, a party chairman, Hollywood moguls, the chief of a New York banking house – began instructing Bradley that he had an obligation to run. Eight have passed since peers declared his best, if not quite last, chance at the job; four since he quit the Senate with a pox-on-both-your-politics parting address. By the time he announced for president, a year ago, the common view among Democrats was that Vice President Gore had the nomination under lock and key.

Michael Kaye, once the closest of Bradley's political advisers, saw him again for the first time in July, almost a decade after they drifted apart over a botched 1990 reelection campaign. Kaye found him a changed man: exuberant, less cautious, projecting only delight in his against-the-odds role.

"If there was ever a perfect scenario for this guy, given his mentality, this is it," Kaye said. "For the first time, expectations aren't preceding him. For the first time in his frigging career, he's like an underdog. Do you realize how that frees him in every way?"

The 'Bully' and the Banker's Son

Bradley's grandfather, August Reitler, liked to meet the boy halfway as he walked the mile home from elementary school. They usually found each other at the bridge on Mississippi Avenue, then strolled to the square that Bradley's stone house shared with his father's Crystal City State Bank. One day in the second grade, Bradley did not reach their rendezvous.

Worried, Reitler returned alone to 35 Taylor Ave. Susie Bradley flew out the door. According to the account she gave three relatives and a neighbor, she started up her maroon Cadillac and retraced the path to school. Seeing nothing, she pulled over and peered down from the road to a playing field below.

There she spotted fifth-grader Donny Howard, holding her son in one hand and a slender branch in the other. As he whipped the switch across the younger boy's legs, he jeered, "Dance, banker's son!" Bill, according to the account his mother gave his uncle, George Bond, "was crying, because he was hurt." Wordlessly, Susie Bradley observed the scene. After a few minutes, she got back in the sedan and drove home. A quarter of an hour passed. Then Bill, not yet 8 years old, walked through the door.

"He comes home rumpled up, and she just asked him casually, 'How was your day?' " said Carol Cunningham, the next-door neighbor. "She literally told me this story once." Bradley's response, like his mother's question, gave nothing away. He never spoke of the beating, and neither did she. Until this month, in the last of five hours of interviews he gave for this series of articles, Bradley never knew his mother had watched.

“I’m unaware if she witnessed this,” he said, squeezed into a cramped office in his West Orange, N.J., campaign headquarters. He tried to dismiss the subject. “My true feeling about all of this is this is all reconstructed BS.”

Pressed, he offered this: "I probably wanted to do things on my own, wanted to handle things with these kids on my own, didn’t want parental intervention on my behalf.”

Cunningham, who grew up with Bradley and loved his mother like her own, called that a driving theme of Bradley’s childhood. Susie Bradley’s force of personality required her son to struggle for every boundary. “I think honestly Bill would rather have been beaten to death than have his mother come down there,” she said.

For his mother’s part, another relative explained, the silence was pedagogical. “Knowing Susie like I did,” said Grace Trautwein, first cousin to Bradley’s father, “she was hellbent – scratch that, she was determined – to make a gentleman and a scholar out of Bill, and sometimes she felt she had to play the mother role and the father role both, because Warren wasn’t able to participate” with calcified arthritis that left him unable to reach his socks. Allowing the beating to take its course, she said, “maybe made his character a little stronger, to know that he would have to fight.”

The story has three epilogues, and they catch a side of Bradley sometimes missed in the portraits of his genteel upbringing. The first is that Bradley grew up to be a millionaire senator and Howard a garbage collector, a disparity that Cunningham imbues with “a certain poetic justice.” The second is that Howard, like everyone with an opinion to be found in Crystal City, now regards his contact with Bradley as a brush with greatness. The third is that Bradley has found opportunities, just the same, to exact revenge.

The tales Howard wants to tell a visitor now are not of elementary school, though he does not dispute that one. He speaks of the time he pulled a tractor load to New Jersey, signed in at a Secaucus truck stop, and never had to buy a drink all night because it was Knicks country and the motel clerk saw “Crystal City” in his address. “You know Dollar Bill?" the clerk asked. Another story he tells came a couple of years before.

Bradley paid a visit home, Princeton and the Olympics behind him, heading toward a pro basketball career. Passing some time in his old high school gym, he came upon Howard and a few friends from the Trask Moving Co. Talk turned to a pickup game. Broad and strong, if tending a bit toward fat, Howard and his fellow laborers made no attempt at finesse.

“We never had referees or anything like that,” Howard said. “There wasn’t no fist throwing, but it got rough. We’d hold onto his shorts and step on his feet and laugh about it.” Battling for a rebound, Howard thrust an elbow and “popped him in the chest pretty good. I left a mark.” With playground solicitude, Howard asked, “You all right, Bill?"

Next time the two men hit the boards, Bradley “popped me on the top of my head so hard he drove me down to the floor,” Howard said. “He brought water to my eyes.” Bradley stood over his fallen opponent. “You all right, Donny?" he asked, matching Howard’s inflection exactly.

Another 30 years passed. Bradley published his memoir, “Time Present, Time Past.” In it he told a few unflattering stories, seldom naming names when he did. One name he found room for, on Page 11, was “Donny Howard, a bully who beat me up in second grade.”

Howard was mortified. Tom Haley, Bradley’s childhood friend, pointed out the passage and told Howard it would be his epitaph if Bradley became president. When a St. Louis bookstore threw Bradley a book party,

Howard made a point of driving there. At the Feb. 8, 1996, event, which was videotaped, Howard told the story of the shorts, the rebounds, the elbows. “Far as I’m concerned,” he said that evening, “me and him’s even for the beating I done to him.”

“Donny,” Bradley rejoined. “I never hit you.” On the videotape, the crowd erupts in laughter at Howard’s expense.

‘Whatever Raced Inside Me’

It was not intellectual brilliance that first made Bradley’s name. He had a good head, but Susie Bradley used to say his cousin, Steven Trautwein, was “much smarter.” Their late neighbor, pharmacist Norville Dorsey, in an oral history recorded by filmmaker Michael Ahnemann in 1967, said Susie Bradley “didn’t cow him and break his spirit,” but made sure to remind him “there was no use for him to get any ideas he was any different.” Haley, Bradley’s best childhood friend, said Susie also happened to be right: "Bill wasn’t the smartest guy in the class by a long shot. He was in the top 10 percent.”

What distinguished Bradley were physical gifts and otherworldly discipline. New Yorker profiler John McPhee, a friend of 35 years, described the latter recently as “the Calvinist monkey on his back.” Backspacing aloud, he refined the image: “Ape!”

Here the old legends of Bradley are true. On a backyard asphalt court poured under the family’s sweet gum tree, he began a regimen at age 7 that persisted and intensified to adulthood. Thousands of shots a week, progressing methodically around the court, synchronized his hands and his eyes. John Schwent, a schoolboy teammate, remembers standing on an eight-foot ladder for hours, waving his arms so Bradley could practice his hook.

Sports Illustrated would write of Bradley at 19, when the Princeton sophomore twice surpassed the NBA record of 56 consecutive foul shots, that “he scorns pleasant explanations like ‘touch’ and ‘good eye.’ ” Bradley told writer Frank Deford: “A soft touch is no more than practicing the right way. All shots can be scientifically analyzed.”

By then, Bradley wrote later, “whatever raced inside me was more demanding than any pressure applied by parents or teachers.” But the earlier demands made a start. Warren Bradley preached the virtues of self-reliance and had him fill in for Alex Maul, the bank janitor, when Maul took vacation; Susie, her son once told a college roommate, used to rap his knuckles with a ruler if he did not curl his fingers properly at the piano.

Sterner still was Arvel Popp, the man who remained Bradley’s lifelong model of a coach.

Popp took a heavy wooden paddle to the buttocks of any of his high school players with a grade below a C; for Bradley, who was supposed to be special, B- sufficed to warrant a beating. Teammate Eddie Evans, a standout baseball and football player there, described Popp in an interview as “an evil bastard.” Bradley, in his first book, called Popp “inspiring to boys like me, cruel to those unprepared or unwilling.”

When Popp put the freshman Bradley on varsity basketball, an event without precedent in a town that liked its traditions, he went out of his way to show he would not coddle his young star. One afternoon Danny LaRose, a recent Crystal City graduate playing Division I football at the University of Missouri, stopped in at the old gym for a visit.

“Danny went up to Mizzou sort of pudgy and sort of a bully, and he came back built like a ‘V,’ ” Haley

recalled. “He’d been working the weights pretty hard. Coach said, ‘Okay, Bill, you’re old enough, let’s you and Danny box.’ ” Popp laid down blue vinyl mats on a stage above the lacquered basketball floor and formed the players in a ring. LaRose, on his way to all-American honors and a pro career with the Detroit Lions, weighed 218 to Bradley’s 165. He rocked the 14- year-old, but recalled recently that Bradley took advantage of his bad left eye to score with a couple of rights. “His reflexes and his reactions were good enough that he could fend you off and keep himself from getting killed,” LaRose said. “He wasn’t a baby, and he wasn’t a chicken.”

His Mother’s Zeal

As Bradley progressed from all-county high school standout to all- state and all-American teams, the one constant in his basketball life was the scene made by his mother. She had a regular seat at home games – top row of the collapsible bleacher, behind the scorer’s table- -and she shouted alternating imprecations at the referees, the other players and her son. With all her bolting up and down, her coat finished most games under the stands.

Steven Trautwein, Bradley’s cousin and teammate, recalls a regional tournament played at the Flat River Junior College field house. “Evidently the referee had made an unfavorable ruling,” he said. “Mrs. Bradley was yelling, ’Referee, you’re a jackass.’ And it was one of those moments, by the time she got the last syllable out the rest of the crowd had shut up.”

Crystal City loved Susie Bradley, a magnet for children and a woman of generous charisma. The townfolk treated her zeal as a force of nature, well-intended and beyond anyone’s control. Her husband disclosed his preferred response in an interview recorded before he died: “We’re usually seated separately. I enjoy a game in my own way. I enjoy it in silence.”

Susie Bradley reserved her loudest fervor for her son, broadcasting advice from the tactical to the aesthetic. “I love to see him screen,” she said on one of the Ahnemann tapes, recorded on reel-to-reel for a documentary film. “I’d rather see Bill pivot than bring a ball down the court and score a goal. I’d like to see him do it in a graceful, clean way. Not just run down the court and knock everybody down.”

“She’d tell him after a game, ‘You played like a nincompoop,’ ” Susie’s brother-in-law, George Bond, said. His wife, Hardeman Bond, Susie’s sister, interjected: "She had goals for him, a lot of goals. Being critical is sometimes an expression of love.”

When Hardeman Bond left the room, George added a quiet amendment. On the day he told Warren Bradley he aimed to marry Hardeman, the bank president invited him into his private office. “Warren said, ‘Don’t let them take charge of you, because they’ll try to breathe for you,’ ” George Bond recalled.

Susie Bradley bred disparate enthusiasms over the years. One such, when Bill reached his twenties, was astrology.

“I asked someone to do the progressions on Bill for the next year,” she told Ahnemann, the filmmaker, describing astrology texts she had brought for her son’s first New York Knickerbockers game. “We will know what’s going to happen. And if there’s anything evil, your mind can change it. I believe in mind force, and I think your mind can change these things, if anything is going to come about which is not harmonious.”

Bill Bradley’s strategy for his mother, contemporaries said, resembled his father’s. “She would yell, ‘You didn’t shoot correctly! Why didn’t you pass the ball?’ ” said Cunningham. “I can still see Bill. It was as if

he tuned her out. By no mannerism, facial expression or anything could you even tell he heard her." Warren Bradley, she said, "would be in his folding chair, waaaayy down the baseline."

On the court, Bradley turned occasionally to a teammate. "He'd say, 'You hear her yelling?' " Haley recalled. "And I'd say, 'Yeah, I hear,' and he'd say, 'Don't pay any attention.' My God, that woman didn't let up."

Betty North, Susie's younger first cousin, is often described in family lore as the sweet little girl Susie had wanted. Now a clinical psychologist practicing in Cambridge, Mass., she used to baby-sit for Bradley during summer visits. She said Susie Bradley must have conveyed enormous love along with reproval.

"Someone who had a very harsh, critical parent, if it wasn't leavened with a lot of other things, would not usually have emerged with so much autonomy and so much strength, as he has," North said. "So something, apart from whatever criticalness she had, somewhere there was an awful lot of faith in him that came through with that."

The faith could have a covert quality. For years, Susie Bradley kept huge black leather scrapbooks of her son's achievements. Oversized bank ledgers, their stiff cream paper mounted with exhibits, filled a basement shelf. "Think of the hours she spent cutting out, clipping and putting stuff in there," Hardeman Bond observed. Between pages of one of them was a six-page index in Susie Bradley's spidery script, beginning with, "First Accomplishment: Member, Little League Baseball Teams (3 yrs) Including member of All- Star Teams."

About a year after his mother died in 1995, Bradley asked Cunningham to help him clean out the house where he grew up. His old friend and neighbor inquired what he wanted to do with the scrapbooks. Bradley, Cunningham said, asked what she was talking about. "He naturally was unaware that she had made them," Cunningham said. "He had no idea they were there."

Even when it was apparent, Bradley grew up ambivalent about praise. In college, he would tell roommate Daniel Okimoto that "crowds yelling wildly sounded like a mother to him," Okimoto said. "I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said something like, 'They're wildly emotional, euphoric, expressive of all their dreams and hopes. You want to please them as an athlete, but over time you block them out.' "

Bradley displayed both sides of his dual impulse, to court and to fend off admiration, when he set about learning the showiest move in basketball. "After he found out he could stuff it, why, he'd dribble the baseline, come up and dip it in with two hands," Popp, his high school coach, recalled in Ahnemann's audio archive. "The crowd goes crazy." But then Bradley abandoned the move. "He'd just go up there and shoot this ordinary shot. They were crying for him to stuff it, and he was just bound and determined: 'To hell with you. I'm not stuffing that ball just to hear you let out a big whoop.' "

His Father's Politics

In the fall of 1960, social studies teacher William Bogue had the notion of assigning two students to debate the unfolding presidential campaign. Janet Biehle, daughter of the Glassworkers Local 63 union chief, played John F. Kennedy. Bradley, the banker's son, became Richard Nixon.

Bradley restated the vice president's platform, including anti- communist riffs on China and the defense of the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. He criticized Kennedy's support for government arbitration in place of strike-breaking injunctions despised by unions. The class took a vote: Nixon, and Bradley, lost.

As early as the fourth grade, Bradley handed out "I Like Ike" buttons in school. Warren Bradley had been an elector for Thomas Dewey in 1948. Through the Great Depression, he kept a picture of Herbert Hoover on his wall. Ruth Hagan, the widow of Warren's longtime business partner, Tom, said she doubted either Bradley parent ever voted for a Democrat.

When Bradley speaks to union crowds today, he likes to tell the story of his uncle Cecil Partney, who worked in the lead factory outside town in conditions that make today's construction sites look plush. He said he "learned early on in my life the importance of a union" from his Uncle Cecil's lack of one.

Cecil's wife, Elizabeth Partney, was another of Susie's sisters, a candidate for local office as far to the right in those days as Jefferson County Republican politics got. Partney was anti-union and disdainful of the black men who worked alongside her husband in the factory. Garber, Bradley's college roommate, said she used language about race "that nowadays would make the hair on anybody's head stand up."

Bradley writes in his memoirs that he "would get angry and argue with her" about those epithets. He does not mention that in high school he tended to agree with other planks of her platform, on unions and social policy alike.

Apart from presidential politics, the great debate in Bogue's "Contemporary Issues" class centered on a minority public housing project under construction in St. Louis, called Pruitt-Igoe. Bradley argued in class, according to Janet Biehle, who now goes by her married name of Kayarian, that "it was a waste because the people needed educating more than buildings they didn't know how to live in. He said they'd put coal in the bathtub because they didn't know any better."

"I was my father's son," Bradley said in an interview. "I didn't see that my politics might be different from my father's until I went to college."

What he did see was that politics appealed to him as a career, though he has long been ambivalent about acknowledging that he harbored such thoughts in his youth. In an interview conducted Oct. 12, Bradley expressed skepticism about a story told the previous week by Eddie Evans, his Little League and high school teammate. "When he was 12 and I was 13," Evans had told The Washington Post in an interview, "he told me, 'One of these days I'm going to become president of the United States.' " Bradley said he remembered nothing like that. Since then, Bradley's campaign has filmed and published on its Internet site a clip of Evans repeating the claim.

Recollections aside, there are artifacts of Bradley's frame of mind that suggest his principal was not the only one thinking of politics for the boy. On graduation day at Crystal City High, Bradley wrote this in the yearbook of his old social studies adversary, Janet Biehle: "I apologize for all the arguments about Labor & Management, Democrat & Rep., we have had the past two years. I really don't think Kennedy is doing such a bad job for a Democrat... I hope you continue in the field of social studies because the Democrats need bright, young devoted women. If I ever run for an office and want to know what the other side is thinking, I'll call you up & you can give me all the strategy."

Cutting the Apron Strings

The 3,066 points Bradley scored in high school attracted recruiters from every college basketball power. Kentucky's Adolph Rupp, a four-time NCAA champion and the most famous coach of his day, cooled his heels for more than an hour when he turned up without an appointment at the Crystal City State Bank. Warren Bradley had never heard of him. In the end, Bradley applied to five colleges and got 75 scholarship offers in the mail.

Bradley's choice boiled down to Princeton and Duke, with his parents on opposite sides. Warren Bradley nudged his son toward the Ivy League. Susie, won over by Duke, made a comparative chart of its virtues: basketball, academics and a religious ethos of which she approved.

On May 10, 1961, Bradley signed a letter of intent to play for Duke. "It was quite a disappointment to me," Warren Bradley told Ahnemann in the unaired audio recording of 1967. By way of unspoken appeal, the banker arranged for his son to tour Europe that summer and see a wider world. "The purpose in sending him over there, at least in the back of my mind, was to cut these apron strings," Warren Bradley said.

Crossing the Atlantic aboard the Queen Elizabeth, Bradley met Jay Gunther, a Princeton sophomore who had just been admitted to the university's selective Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. "I'd just got in, and I was all excited about it," Gunther recalled. Later, the tour stopped at Oxford University, where Bradley walked enthralled through the Tudor battlements and manicured gardens of Christ Church, an architectural gem among the university's three dozen colleges.

Back in Crystal City, the 17-year-old Bradley read more about Oxford, decided he wanted to go there one day, found out "there was something called a Rhodes Scholarship," and discovered that Princeton won more than its share. Crystal City, he said recently, "was a wonderful place to grow up and yet by virtue of its size and its – I'll just say by virtue of its size – there was always a larger world, and the larger world was always what I was curious about."

By late August, Susie Bradley had dispatched her son's aluminum steamer trunk to Duke, but the young man was reconsidering. On the Friday night of his last weekend home, he took his girlfriend, Susan Fortney, out to the Stoplight Drive-In. " 'I have a major decision to make. I'm so confused. I don't know where I'm going to go,' " he announced, as she recalled it recently. "But he couldn't even discuss it with me."

The next morning, Sept. 2, Warren Bradley phoned Austin P. Leland, Princeton's St. Louis alumni representative, to ask if it was too late for his son to change his mind. Leland dialed Princeton's admission director and caught him at home, raking leaves. William Van Cleve, who took part in the call, said Bradley was readmitted on the spot, with two provisos. He had to send a letter to Duke that day, with a postmark from Crystal City, clearing Princeton of involvement in his change of heart. And he had to be on campus Monday morning, like everyone else, for registration.

"Sunday morning I saw him in church," recalled the former Susan Fortney, whose married name is Pelster. "He said he'd made a decision: 'I'm not going to go to Duke, I'm going to go to Princeton University, and I have to leave right now.' There was no discussion. There was no time. He was gone."

Bradley caught a plane to Newark. Fortney called Cunningham, sobbing. Cunningham, the next-door neighbor, said Susie Bradley was equally upset. Both of them, she said, "realized that Bill would never come home."

Staff researcher Madonna Lebling contributed to this report.

'He Needs to Work With His Voice'

In late 1967, when Bradley was 24 years old, independent filmmaker Michael Ahnemann shot a documentary on the Rhodes scholar turned New York Knick. Here are unaired excerpts of his interview with Bradley's late parents, Warren and Susie:

Dad: Did you know he can make a pretty good speech? . . .

Mom: But he needs to work with his voice. The content of his speeches is excellent, ordinarily, but he needs better diction and he needs to enunciate.

Dad: Now, Bill sounds pretty good on this [film], doesn't he? The tone of his voice?

Interviewer: He sounds fine. He's not the speaker that Demosthenes was, probably, but –

Mom: But I want him to be. The voice needs work.

Interviewer: What about marriage for Bill?

Mom: Well, I certainly want him to get married.

Dad: But . . . this one subject we discussed often: that of boys marrying too early in life and the things you missed... I don't think any feeling's greater than the feeling of independence that you have in yourself.

Mom: But I do feel that maybe we presented this a little too much. Because he seems so invulnerable to women.

Dad: I don't take it that way, Susan. He doesn't have time right now... This is one of my pet phrases also: He who travels alone travels faster.

Mom: But you're pretty lonely sometimes when you do.

Dad: Maybe you get more out of accomplishing something at this point rather than so many unnecessary dates...

Mom: I hope he does have dates. I hope he has lots of dates. I have no doubt that he will select a real nice girl some day. I hope it'll be in the next three years. I don't want to be blind and deaf before I have grandchildren.

Mom: Now do you want to hear his bad traits? He procrastinates. He puts off and puts off and puts off until the necessary time. Then he comes through – always – with shining colors... Now I call that a fault. A definite fault.

Dad: Yeah, we don't have that.

Mom: I believe in promptness and punctuality. Of course I know sometimes this can't be. But Bill will absolutely leave things until the last minute...

Dad: Well, I know, but he does schedule too many things.

Mom: That's a big fault, scheduling too many things in one day.

Interviewer: He's young.

Mom: He's not young anymore, he's a man. Let's think of some more things. This is your business... What are some of his other bad faults?

Dad: Well, I can't think of any other bad faults.

Mom: Oh well, you never could. You should think of one, though. We ought to have some bad things in this.