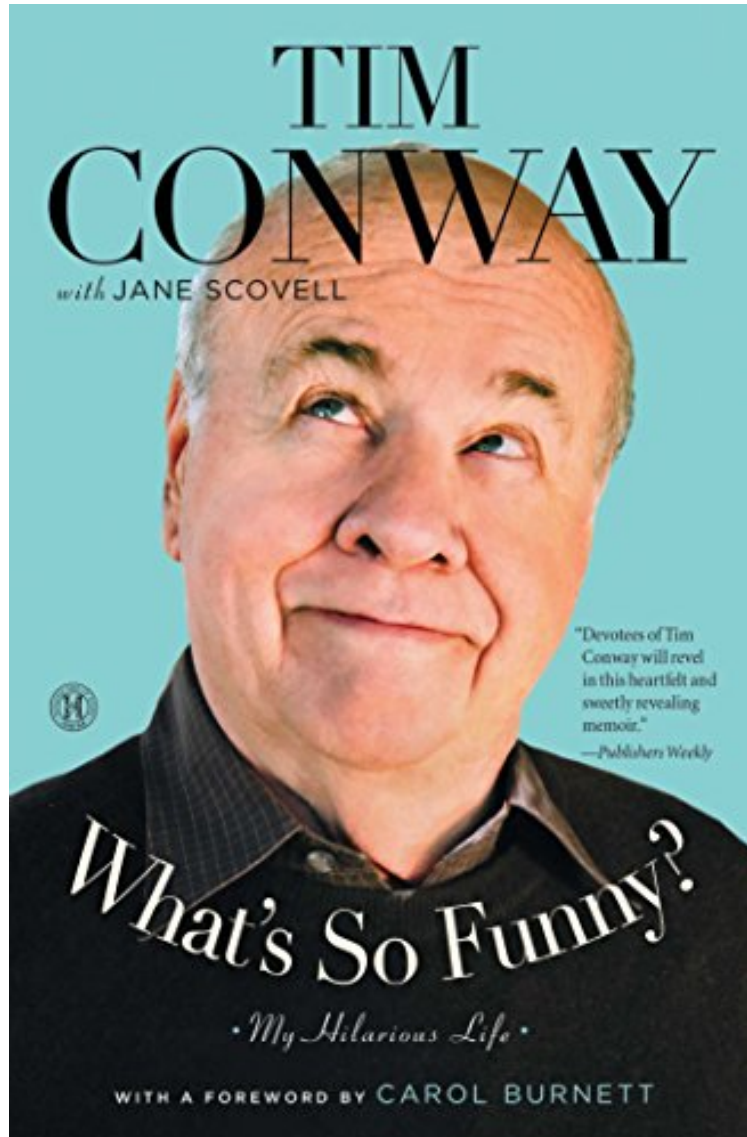


(Free) What's So Funny?: My Hilarious Life

## What's So Funny?: My Hilarious Life

*Tim Conway, Jane Scovell*

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#88792 in Books Jane Scovell Tim Conway 2014-05-13 2014-05-13 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.37 x .70 x 5.50l, .55 #File Name: 1476726531272 pages What's So Funny My Hilarious Life | File size: 38.Mb

**Tim Conway, Jane Scovell : What's So Funny?: My Hilarious Life** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised What's So Funny?: My Hilarious Life:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Pretty darned good By ricardo\_guerrero Tim Conway is one of the funniest men who ever lived, or who ever will live. He's just automatically funny. I read this book on a flight from Los Angeles to New York (and back again.) It's said that all great comedians had some strange things happen, or even tragic things, in their early lives and that propelled them into being so funny. Tim's early life, with his odd parents of

mixed ethnic groups, was quite strange indeed. While I enjoyed the book, it wasn't as detailed as I would have liked. I felt like I knew Tim better after having read it but I was hoping to know him way more, in the way Carol Burnett's books really take you through her whole life. Anyhow, I can't complain, if it's a NYT Bestseller, Tim did it right. And I defer to Tim for just about everything when it comes to what should and shouldn't be done. He's a great man and he's rightfully earned every cent he's ever made!! I'm also honored to call him my neighbor; he lives right down the road from me in Encino, California. I've never met him but anything's possible!! 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great stories wonderful memories of very funny man By B. Randall Tim Conway is one of the good ones - a truly nice guy who never misses an opportunity to do what he does best: make people laugh. His autobiography is filled with laughs, as he takes the reader from his childhood in Ohio through McHale's Navy, the Carol Burnett Show, Dorf, and more. If you are old enough to remember his most prominent TV work, this book will bring back fond recollections of some iconic broadcast moments. If you're not, you owe it to yourself to find out what you missed. Either way, you'll enjoy finding out "what's so funny" about Tim Conway's hilarious life. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Starting Over Again By John B. Jamison I just finished reading "What's So Funny" and am starting again at the beginning. Like watching one of his skits from a TV, or an episode of McHale's Navy, I just want to experience it again. Rather than like feeling like a fully rehearsed and scripted "performance" of an autobiography, this felt like we were sitting at one of the "watering holes" Tim describes, listening to him tell stories. Some of them cause a smile, some a grin, and some end up with me on the floor, gasping for air. After finishing the book, the new number one item on my bucket list is that I might have the chance to actually have an hour in his presence, just hoping a bit of his view of the world might rub off on me. Thanks Tim!

Six-time Emmy Award-winning funny man Tim Conway, best known for his roles on The Carol Burnett Show, offers a straight-shooting and hilarious memoir about his life on stage and off as an actor and comedian. In the annals of TV history, few entertainers have captured as many hearts, tickled as many funny bones, and brought as many families together in living rooms across America as Tim Conway. In *What's So Funny?* he brings his hilarious hijinks from the screen to the page. Conway's often-improvised humor, razor-sharp timing, and hilarious characters have made him one of the funniest and most authentic performers to grace the stage and studio. As Carol Burnett has said, there's no one funnier than Tim Conway. Now, Conway takes us on a seventy-year, rags-to-riches journey that is touchingly comical and ultimately inspiring, from his pranks in small Ohio classrooms during the Great Depression to his pitch-perfect performances on national TV and in major motion pictures. Along the way, Conway shares hilarious and often moving accounts of the glory days of The Carol Burnett Show; his famous partnerships with entertainment greats like Harvey Korman, Don Knotts, and Dick Van Dyke; and his friendships with stars like Betty White, Bob Newhart, and, of course, Carol Burnett, who also provides an intimate foreword to the book. As Conway continues to tour the country giving live comedy performances that enchant his always eager audiences, *What's So Funny?* brings his warmth, humor, and heart to delight and inspire fans everywhere.

"I couldn't put the book down. It was very clever of Tim to put glue on each page. Seriously, I loved it." (Bob Newhart) "What Frank Sinatra was to music Tim Conway is to comedy. He is inventive, creative, and imaginative. This book should be in everyone's library along with Anna Karenina, War and Peace, and all of my CD's." (Steve Lawrence) "I knew you were short. I knew you were shy. I knew you were talented. But funny? Oh my yes! I loved it! The book should have been 500 pages longer." (Mike Connors, actor on *Mannix*) "Tim is not only a good friend but a terrific writer. His book has all the qualities of another Mark Twain. Settle back in a chair and enjoy the writing of Tim Conway. It's worth reading because he mentions me!" (Don Rickles) "What's so funny? I'll tell you what's so funny! Almost every page of Tim Conway's new book, *What's So Funny?*." (Mel Brooks) "I grew up religiously watching the brilliance of Tim Conway. This book not only confirmed that fact but showed how his positive attitude and unending humor navigated the chaos of this sometimes insane business. Thank you for the inspiration Mr. Conway." (Tony Hale) Devotees of Tim Conway will revel in this heartfelt and sweetly revealing memoir. . . . This is a warm-hearted tribute to Conway's professional and personal life, with endearing peeks behind the television camera. (Publisher's Weekly) About the Author Tim Conway starred on The Carol Burnett Show for eleven years. He has six Emmys and is in the Comedy Hall of Fame. He went to Bowling Green State University for eleven years (he was a very slow learner). Tim was in the army (ours) for two years, protecting Seattle from the Red Menace and was in McHale's Navy for three years. His ambition was to be a jockey, but at his weight even the horses asked him to get off. He has seven children, two grandchildren, and a puppy. Tim has been married to his lovely wife, Charlene, since 1984 and does not have a serious thought in his head. Jane Scovell has written books with Elizabeth Taylor, Ginger Rogers, Maureen Stapleton, Marilyn Horne, and Kitty Dukakis, and biographies of Oona Chaplin and Samuel Ramey. She now adds Dorf, Mr. Tudball, and The Old Man to her list. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *What's So Funny? My Beginnings* At the age of eighteen, my father, Daniel Conway, left Ireland and came to this country accompanied by his seventeen-year-old sister, Madge. They were orphans when they left the old sod, and they were still orphans when they arrived in the United States. The Irish are stubborn. According to my father, he and Madge

were in the elite section of steeragethere was a toilet. Odd definition of elite, but it sounds a lot like my dad. He wasn't a big talker. Wait, he wasn't a talker, period, but whatever little he said, he had the Irish gift of wit. Back in the Emerald Isle, Daniel Conway had a profession; he was a whip. In case you don't recognize the term, whips are an essential part of the grand old sport of foxhunting. And if you're not up on that tradition, it involves a bunch of people on horseback chasing after a poor little creature that's been sniffed out by a pack of hounds. A friend of mine told me that Oscar Wilde referred to foxhunting as the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable. I couldn't have said it better myself. Whips were in charge of keeping the hounds in order. You can spot them in all those hunt paintings; they're the guys carrying whips. Apparently, my father came to this country because he thought there was a crying need for a man with his skill. As you may have noticed if you've looked out of the window on any given Saturday, not many fox hunts are taking place in America. I have no idea how long it took my dad to figure out that he might not make it big in the New World as a whip, but it must have been shortly after the boat landed. I can picture him standing on Ellis Island holding a paper bag stuffed with clothes in one hand and an old whip in the other, wondering not only how to earn a living, but where. For some unknown reason, he chose Cleveland, Ohio. Cleveland? It's a city you make jokes about. Here's an example: What's the difference between the Titanic and Cleveland? They're both disasters, but Cleveland has a better orchestra. Want more? Back in 1969, a fire broke out on the Cuyahoga River. The flames, fueled by all the oil and sludge in the harbor, went as high as five stories. It was headline news all over the country and inspired Randy Newman to write *Burn On (Big River)*. Can't you hear the Cleveland fire chief yelling, All right, men, let's get some water on the river and put this thing out! A river on fire, that's Cleveland—the perfect location for my dad. He went there; sister Madge stayed put. She had no desire for further travel, found work as a housekeeper, and never left New York. Dan if you don't mind, I'm going to call my parents by their first names arrived in Cleveland and ultimately found his way to Hunting Valley, an exclusive suburb twenty-five miles out of Cleveland. When I say exclusive, I mean exclusive. Hunting Valley is located on eight square miles containing grassy fields, rolling hills, a bona fide forest, river gorges, and elegant estates that are linked by hiking trails, polo fields, and bridle paths. A lot of prominent Cleveland families were residents of Hunting Valley as well as members of the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club. Polo was the big draw but members also participated in Saturday fox hunts. Each hunt had a chosen route, and a tried-and-true method ensured that the horses took it. Before the start of the chase, a fox was placed in a burlap bag; the minute the bag closed, the terrified critter peed. A horse dragged the bag and its contents through the woods, thereby laying the trail. The hunt began. The dogs instantly picked up the scent which they followed to the finish where, rather than a fox, a catering truck awaited. Luncheon was served. Meanwhile, the little fox had been taken back to the barn, washed off, and kept in relative comfort until the next Saturday's hunt. Look, nothing's perfect but six days out of seven, the fox did lead a good life. Although, if you ask me, since no one gave two hoots about catching the little critter, it probably would have been just as effective to drag along a pastrami sandwich. Dan got a job as a groom at the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club. While he did assist in the hunts, his main job was tending to the polo ponies. Basically, that meant scooping up horse manure in the stalls. I could go on describing my father's profession, but for now let's leave the pioneer pooper-scooper, rake in hand, and move on to my mother. Bet you think she was a fair, Irish lass, or something like that. Think again. Sophia Murgoi was born to Romanian parents, in either Warren or Columbus, Ohio. When she was four, her parents whisked Sophia, her three brothers, and two sisters back to Romania, the Cleveland of Europe. Brilliant move. It meant that, in a dozen or so years, they'd have front row seats to World War II. Fortunately, Sophia was shipped back to America before the Nazis marched in. She went to Cleveland because she knew some Romanians who lived there. As far as I know, the rest of the family remained in occupied territory. Sophia never talked about them, at least not to me. Come to think of it, except for a rare mention of his sister, Dan didn't talk about his family, either. Then again, he was an orphan. Neither Dan nor Sophia seemed to give a rap about looking up relatives, consequently I never had the luxury of aunts, uncles, and cousins. It was just the three of us, but it was enough. I do recall one time in the early 40s when Dan decided we should drive to New York City and visit Aunt Madge. We got into our trusty, rusty, second-hand, four-door Ford, headed east, slept in motels, went through the Holland Tunnel, and arrived in Manhattan. Dan drove around and around but he couldn't find a parking space. Finally, he sucked in his breath, cried out, That does it!, and then, so help me, turned the car around and went back through the tunnel. We spent the night in New Jersey. It wasn't until several decades later, after I moved to California, that I even came close to meeting my aunt. It happened when Charlene Beatty, the woman who would become my second wife, and I planned a visit to New York City. I called my parents to tell them of the upcoming trip. Look up your Aunt Madge, ordered Dan. Aunt Madge? My sister, said Dan. I know she's your sister. She lives on East Fifty-ninth Street across from some big store, continued Dan. She's a housekeeper for a church, and they sent me her address. She doesn't have a phone, so you'll have to go there. He didn't say what church or why they sent him her address. I could only assume he'd asked for it, but why? I remember thinking there's no use looking for rhyme or reason at this stage of the game. Dan said to do it, so I'd do it. Charlene and I arrived in Manhattan and after we finished doing what we'd gone there to do, we went in search of Aunt Madge. She lived in a run-down, brownstone apartment building across the street from Bloomingdale's department store. We walked up the front stoop and scanned the names listed on the directory at the side of the front door. I pressed the buzzer next to the name Madge Conway and waited. Yes?

answered a voice over the intercom. Aunt Madge, this is your nephew, Tim. You know, the one on television. I dont have a television. Really? Oh, Im sorry. Im Dans son, and he said for me to say hello. Yes? Id love to see you. I dont go out. I could come up, I suggested. Thats not necessary, she answered after a long pause. Thanks for stopping by. The intercom clicked off. I looked at Charlene, she looked at me, and without saying a word, we walked down the steps and ambled across the street into Bloomingdales. Despite her abrupt dismissal, I felt a little bad that I hadnt seen my aunt. I wanted to do something for her, but what? Maybe a gift would be appropriate. She said she didnt have a TV, so that seemed to be a good bet. We went to the electronics department, bought a small portable set, and arranged to have it delivered. When I got back to California, I received a notice from Bloomingdales telling me that the television had been returned and that the refund had been credited to my account. I thought maybe Aunt Madge didnt want to have anything of value around. Charlene suggested that she didnt want to know me. Whatever the reason, we didnt see each other. Matter of fact, to this day, Ive never met a Conway or a Murgoi. Speaking of the latter, lets get back to Mom. When Sophia Murgoi arrived in America, she, like Aunt Madge, found employment as a housekeeper. Get this: Sophia, a United States citizen by birth, spoke almost no English, and what little she spoke was heavily accented. One of the few things Sophia could say was chocolate sundae. Consequently, she spent most of her spare time watching her face break out. The language barrier didnt stop my father from courting her. How they communicated is beyond me. It had to have been some version of English since Dan never learned Romanian. My mother, a stranger in the land of her birth, remained fiercely proud of her Eastern European heritage. I was well into my showbiz career when, out of the blue, Sophia asked, How come when youre on those TV talking shows, you are never mentioning you are part Romanian? Sophia watched everything I did so she would have known I hadnt bragged about my ethnicity. Not long after her rebuke, I was on Johnny Carsons Tonight Show and, to please my mother, I decided to reveal my heritage. During my conversation with Johnny, I told him, You know Im part Romanian. Johnny drew his head back, lifted an eyebrow, sort of smiled, and then went right on talking. As for the audience reaction, normally people will applaud whatever you say your favorite city, your favorite color, your favorite ice cream flavor, the name of your first grade teacher, just about any person, place, or thing will get them going. Not one pair of hands slapped together at my disclosure. Sophia never brought up the subject again. Neither did I. Are you starting to get a picture of my parents? I have to confess, to this very day, they continue to dumbfound me. How is it that I know practically zilch about their backgrounds? They met in Cleveland, but where, how, or why, I couldnt begin to guess. If I had to take a stab, Id say that they probably met each other through friends. Anyway, its a good bet Irish Dan didnt attend a Romanian Singles Evening. Dan was a tall, slim, good-looking dude, a dapper dresser with a great head of hair. Sophia was short, a bit on the dumpling side, but with a round, pretty face. Her vivacious nature would have appealed to my taciturn father. I inherited my height and my round face from my mother and the ability to speak English from my father. Although I never saw a marriage license and though they never actually mentioned a wedding date, I presume they were married sometime before I was born on December 15, 1933. Its crazy that I know so little about my own parents, but its the truth. Neither one of them ever sat me down and said, Son, this is who we are. As I said, Orphan Dan probably didnt know and Sophia didnt seem to care maybe because what was left of her family was thousands of miles away. (I gave up trying to discover their histories, but if theres some eager genealogist reading this, be my guest.) Ive come to the conclusion that, all things considered, the only word for Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Conway is zany. You dont have to be a Sigmund Freud to figure out that if you put those two people together, youd come up with me. Dan and Sophia were living in Willoughby, a suburb of Cleveland, when I was introduced to the world on a second-hand sofa in their living room. Im happy to report a doctor was present. My official birth certificate read: Toma Conway. Eventually it was altered to read: Thomas Daniel Conway. With Dan and Sophia in charge, Im lucky it wasnt changed to Betty Lou. (Later, youll find out how I became Tim.) I was a colicky baby for the first few months of my life. During this time, Sophia kept busy looking after me; Dan found consolation by downing glass after glass of home-brewed beer, the classic Irish remedy for anything and everything. Besides upsetting my parents, my colicky state delayed my baptism. I was nearly four months old when I was hustled off to receive the baptismal sacraments in a Romanian church of Sophias choice. Would you believe it, in Cleveland she actually had a choice. At the beginning of the twentieth century, around two thousand Romanian immigrants lived in Cleveland, making it one of the largest Romanian enclaves in the country. Most of them were members of the Orthodox Church but some of them, the Greek Catholics, belonged to the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite. The difference is, the Greek Catholics recognize the Pope. Naturally, there had to be two different churches. The Greek Catholics built St. Helenas in 1905 and the Romanian Orthodox built St. Marys in 1908. (They each were the first Romanian churches of their respective faiths erected in America.) Sophia was Romanian Orthodox, so I was taken to St. Marys. Im not saying it had anything to do with me, but St. Marys was the first American Romanian parish to have a stamp issued in its honor by the motherland, Romania. I cant quite recall mine, but the Romanian Orthodox baptism is a beautiful ceremony, especially if you like incense. The priest, the parents, and the relatives (or, in my case, lacking relatives, a janitor who was selected as a witness) gather around a miniature manger. Thats right, a manger, which is placed on a low table in front of the altar. The child is put on a pillow inside the cradle and lies there looking up at the ceiling. Those present take hold of a long prayer scarf and, with heads bowed, walk around the table repeating various prayers designed to get the child through

the pearly gates when the time comes. Talk about planning ahead. At my baptism, the celebrants, deep in thought and prayer, continued to mutter and circle until the incantation ended and the participants came to a halt. Priest, parents, and janitor looked down: the manger was empty. He has risen, muttered my father. No, he has fallen, said the priest. The priest was right. While they were marching around, I had wriggled off the pillow, over the side of the manger, and from there to the floor, all without a squawk. The celebrants were so busy pushing for my future acceptance into heaven that no one noticed my earthly disappearance. A quick search ensued. The janitor found me under the table, picked me up, and put me back on the pillow. He held onto my legs, Sophia pinned down my arms, and I was duly entered into the faith. Following my christening, I was brought home and placed back in my crib, not a store-bought article but one that Dan had fashioned from a heavy-duty cardboard box used to ship polo balls. As an infant, the faint aroma of wood clung to me. Thats because, in those days, polo balls were made of bamboo. The wooden balls made a whistling noise when they flew through the air so that polo players could hear them coming and duck out of the way. Today, 90 percent of the balls are plastic and theyre noiseless. Better look out! In 1935, we moved into a cozy cottage on the estate of Thomas H. White, an outstanding player on the Chagrin Valley Hunt Clubs championship polo team. Mr. White was the founder of the White Sewing Machine Corporation, the White Motor Corporation, and the Cleveland Automatic Screw Machine Company. Need I say that polo, like foxhunting, is a rich mans sport? Dan tended to Mr. Whites ponies and, in due time, was promoted. My father became head groom, my mother continued keeping house, and I was the Little Prince. Once Id made my debut, my parents decided to have no other children. I like to think its because theyd created something so perfect they didnt feel the need for improvement. I have pictures to prove that I was a cute tyke. Just get a load of me in my sailor suit in the photo section. Ive never grown out of my baby face, and, considering my age, its a little ridiculous. We had a good life. The funny thing is, I always thought we were rich. Why wouldnt I? For me, life began in a fairy tale cottage surrounded by green lawns and formal gardens, and woods filled with all sorts of trees maple, oak, spruce, poplar, cherry, dogwood, you name it. There were stables housing elegant riding horses as well as snappy little polo ponies. And we had plenty of good food to eat. The fact that nothing belonged to us completely escaped me. Our home, in fact, was full of theyll-never-miss-them items, which was Sophias blanket excuse for her peculiar brand of petty larceny. Dont get me wrong; Sophia was honest as the day is long. She never would have thought of taking money or jewelry or furs or anything like that. However, if it came to an about-to-be-given-away garment, or extra foodstuff, that was a different kettle of fish. Bless her, she couldnt stand to see food rotting away, and lots of it did in the homes of the rich. Thus, she had no qualms about dipping into her employers larders and refrigerators to make sure her Toma was well fed. You cant imagine the fantastic cuts of meat that wound up in my stomach. More improbable, would you believe I tasted caviar before I was six years old? To say that I was attached to my mothers apron strings would be an understatement. I never left her side and, literally, lived in her shadow. She took me with her everywhere. She brought me along when she cleaned and would let me sit astride the mop handle as she pushed the mop back and forth over the highly waxed wooden floors of the rich folks she worked for. It was great entertainment for me, and a body builder for Sophia. A little over five feet tall in her stocking feet, she was strong and solid and had arms Popeye would have envied. Dan was about five feet ten and rail thin. I believe he weighed in at a swift 124 pounds. In deference to her memory, Ill not speculate as to Sophias fighting weight, but she could have sent Dan to the moon with one uppercut to the jaw. We remained in the White cottage until the winter of 1936 when we moved to Chagrin Falls, a small town on the Chagrin River. Chagrin Falls is forty minutes or so from downtown Cleveland and was named for the waterfall thats smack in the center of town. That waterfall got its name from the Chagrin River. How did the river and waterfall get their names, you might ask, and even if you dont, Im going to tell you. Ordinarily, when you hear the word falls you think of something majestic, like Niagara and its mist-covered, roaring, rushing waters. Erase that image. Think small. Chagrin Falls barely falls. Encyclopedias might tell you that the Chagrin River got its name from Shagarin, an Erie Indian word meaning Clear Water. Thats pretty dry. I prefer local lore, which goes like this: Many moons ago, a canoe bearing a young Indian and his bride floated down the river. The boat came to the falls and lurched over. Oh, Sha... garin, (Hang on!) cried the groom. The canoe overturned, and the couple hit the water. They swam to shore, took a look around, liked what they saw, and built their tepee on the riverbank. Soon, others joined them and a town sprang up. In honor of the original couple, the town was called Chagrin Falls with Brave and Squaw in the Canoe. That mouthful was later shortened to Chagrin Falls. Sometimes, residents refer to it as just plain Chagrin. Okay, youve got two choices, the encyclopedia account and what I like to call The Carol Burnett Show version. Come to think of it, the latter explanation could have been a sketch we did back then. (Cant you just picture me in the bow and Carol in the stern of a rocking canoe tipping over a fake falls?) Chagrin Falls is about as picturesque a place as you can imagine. A lot of the homes and buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Trust me, its a dream town, a living template of mid-nineteenth-century America. And, I havent even gotten to the people. The population was around four thousand when I grew up there and still is. People cared about their neighbors, really cared. Not just to stick their noses into other peoples business, but cared to make sure all was well with them. You simply couldnt go wrong growing up there. Our first home in Chagrin Falls was on Franklin Street. We stayed for almost a year whenand dont ask me why Dan moved us some sixteen miles down the road to the town of Kirtland. Kirtland was the home of the original headquarters of the Latter Day Saint

movement. Led by their founder, Joseph Smith Jr., the Saints came marching into Kirtland from Upstate New York in 1831 and stayed until 1838. The Mormons, in fact, built their first temple there and its still standing. One hundred years later, in the summer of 1938, Dan Conway moved his flock out of Kirtland and back to Chagrin Falls. That's where my folks stayed for the rest of their lives, and that's the place I call home. It hasn't changed a pebble since the day the Conways arrived, and I honestly believe that living in that wonderful village shaped my life. Upon our return to paradise, Dan rented a house on Oak Street with a kitchen and living room on the first floor and two bedrooms upstairs. We thought it was a palace. The neighbors on either side of us more likely saw it as a remodeled garage, which indeed it was. That first night on Oak Street was memorable. Lying in my own bed, on a calm summer evening, the window open, a slight breeze carrying just the hint of a coming shower, comforted by the knowledge that my Dan and Sophia were on the other side of the wall, was heaven. Most nights I asked Sophia or Dan to turn on the hall light, but not that night; the moon was my beacon. I didn't want to fall asleep, but how could I not when I was in the house of my dreams? Dream house or no, the Conways never lingered. In a little over a year 1940 to be exact we moved a few doors away to another Oak Street house. Sophia, Dan, and I actually carried our big, hunter green couch up the street to the new place. In 1942, we reached our final destination, 43 Orange Street. I spent the rest of my Chagrin years in that house, and, albeit two-family, what a house it was a beautiful one-hundred-and-forty-year-old, two-story, white-pillared mansion, one parallel street away from the river. Financially, it was a bit of a stretch. The rent was a whopping eighteen dollars a month, about twice as much as we'd been paying on Oak Street. But it was sure worth it. No question, we moved a lot in the early years. The good thing is, each house we occupied was a bit better than the previous one and usually located a few doors down the street or around the corner. Every move consisted of the same routine. Sophia would pack into boxes what few belongings we possessed, Dan would load them in our beat-up Ford, I would jump in the rumble seat, and away we'd go. At times it would have been quicker to walk than drive. No matter how close the new house was, Sophia always made the same comment as we inched our way down the street. Wait, I think this is it! she'd cry, pointing to a particular house. You'd have thought she was sighting land after a long sea voyage. Dan would pull the car up to the curb, and we'd pile out and start to bring the boxes inside the house. As a rule, our new neighbors did not greet us, mainly because they weren't new neighbors, just people who lived a hop, skip, or jump from our last residence. After we finished unpacking not a lengthy process the three of us would sit down at our blue Formica-topped kitchen table. We'd sip our respective beer, tea, and milk and assess the surroundings while the denizens of afternoon soap operas babbled over the radio. Back then, family life was centered in the kitchen. A radio set was enthroned, either on a counter or on the table itself, and the sounds from it echoed throughout the house. I grew up with Stella Dallas, Lorenzo Jones, and Mary Noble in the afternoons, and The Shadow, Lum and Abner, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, and Fred Allen in the evenings. Whichever house we were in, Sophia, Dan, and I spent our downtime sitting at the kitchen table, staring at the lighted half-moon dial on our battered Philco radio, and listening to unseen, but all-enveloping, entertainment. Our moves had a comforting sameness and never bothered me. Each time we arrived at a new residence, Sophia had to make the place ours. She did this by providing certain touches, specifically, curtains and wallpaper. Because she had a sewing machine, curtains were easy to produce; she made them for our first house and altered them to fit the windows of our subsequent homes, adding new ones if necessary. Those curtains followed us all the way to Orange Street. My Sophia had a sewing machine she operated by pumping a foot pedal. Dan was going to get her an electric model, but finances never seemed to be in the right moon, so to speak. I'd guess that the bad knee that plagued my mother in later years might have come from all that pumping. Sophia's machine was a chain-stitch model, which means that the stitches are connected to each other. The admonition, Don't pull that thread! accompanied any article she sewed and since she made most of our clothes, I heard that command a lot. One Sunday morning we were in church, and as the sermon droned on I began looking around for something to do. I spotted a thread hanging from the collar Sophia had finished making for Dan that morning. I reached over and gave it a tug. To my surprise it continued to come at me. I kept pulling on it until there was nothing left to pull. By then I had a small wad of thread in my hand, which I shoved into my pocket. The last hymn was sung and we rose to leave. As we walked up the aisle Dan's collar popped off. A lady behind us picked it up and, tapping Dan on the shoulder, handed it to him. Dan thanked her. He turned and walked up the aisle and out of the church with his tie neatly tied around his neck and his collar tucked in his pocket. I did not mention the thread in my pocket. (By the way, we went to a Methodist church when we went to church, which wasn't that often. I'd say Christmas and Easter might find us there for sure, the rest of the year was a crapshoot.) As good as she was at sewing, Sophia was a similar whiz at paperhanging. The minute we settled into our first Oak Street residence, she was off to the local hardware store with me in tow. After looking at a number of samples, and after a bit of haggling, she purchased several double rolls. She had to buy the paper, but no way would Sophia pay for paste. Paste too expansive, she informed the clerk as she picked up the rolls and dropped them in my open arms. When we arrived home, Sophia grabbed a bag of Pillsbury flour, emptied it into a bucket, and added water while I stirred. That was the way the Murgois made paste in Romania (though not with Pillsburys), and it remained Sophia's recipe. Admittedly, the resulting glue did not have the sticking quality of a commercial product. Then again, you couldn't make pancakes with store-bought stuff. I'll never forget the wallpaper she chose for my bedroom. Perhaps in deference to Dan, it showed a fox hunt complete with horses, riders,

fences, and trees. A challenging pattern, under the best of circumstances, was made more so because our home, the converted garage, had uneven walls very uneven walls. Armed with the paper and paste, Sophia and I began our work. She masterminded; I assisted. It was almost impossible to match the seams and the result was a helter-skelter display of horses running in one direction in one segment, and the opposite way in the next. In the corners, you'd see a horse jumping a rail fence with the nose of the horse following him jammed up his butt. One day, a friend came over to play. We went up to my room where he immediately eyeballed the wallpaper. Why is the black horse sniffing the rear of the brown horse while they're jumping over the fence? he asked. Dan overheard our conversation and called out, They're trained to do that so they won't lose their way home. Sophia and I did a lot of paperhanging back then, and an awful lot of rehanging. Why? In cold weather, the heat from the furnace dried out the Pillsbury paste, causing the paper to crack and loosen. You could hear the snap, crackle, and pop all through the night, and the next morning there'd be shreds dangling from the wall. I worried most about the corners; the horse with the other's nose up his behind was a valuable asset. I needn't have worried; the rehanging simply brought the horses a little closer. Eventually, the wallpaper in my room stopped cracking and stayed firmly fixed. By that time, the black horse was stuffed up to his hind legs inside the brown one, and my wallpaper had become a neighborhood phenomenon. Friends were treated to private showings of the bizarre fox hunt that graced my walls, and they were suitably floored.