

Erwin Hirschmann:

A Full Life Well Lived

Call me Erwin. I was born the seventeenth of July in 1924. My parents were Karl Hirschmann and Maria Huber. My father was a blacksmith who also worked for the railroad. He had his own blacksmithing shop with his brother Konrad in the basement of the apartment buildings they had built with their father in Wien, Austria in 1900. In fact, it was these apartment buildings in which I was born and raised. My family, which included Mama and Papa, my older brother Walter, my sister Charlotte and myself (and later my younger brother Friedrich) lived in the building on Linkewienzeile while my Uncle Konrad and his family lived in the neighboring building, which faced Mollardgasse. My early childhood was a pleasant experience. My parents were truly wonderful people who loved us and doted on us.



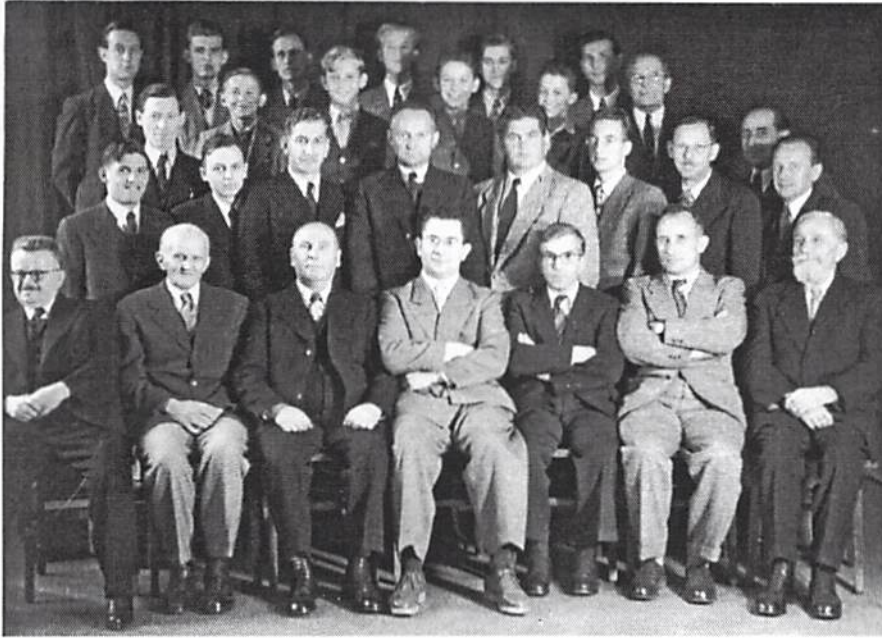
When I was six years old, I began four years of Volkschule. My school was in Wien's sixth district and was called Gumpendorf. The school was on Sonnenurgasse #3. I remember that we had summer vacations during July and August. My teacher for all four years was a Mrs. Appel. The format was such that each grade was in separate classes, but the teacher followed a single class through each grade and the entire, terrible ordeal.



Needless to say, I did not like her very much. Whether a cause or a consequence of that, she thought I wasn't a very good student and she gave me grades that reflected that. However, it also threatened my ability to remain in school.

When I was in the fourth grade, my father rescued me because he insisted that I remain in public schools. My weakest subjects were the German language, history and geography. I was also the only student who was raised "Confessionslos," or without religion. Because my family and I were one of the few Viennese members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the principal and the teachers at my Vokschule saw me (and similarly my brother Walter and Lotte) as a heathen. At that time in Austria, the Mormons were not considered an accepted Church by the Austrian government as were the Catholic, Lutheran, and Jewish faiths. In fact, official recognition of the Church would not come for many years.

Despite the small size of the Church in Wien before the war, we had a very active Branch and were blessed with several very committed members. Mama, for one, served for many years as the Relief Society President. Before the war, I taught a youth class in the branch in Wien. This was to the youth between 14 and 16. I taught this class with a young American who was studying in Wien. In addition, I was involved in the Sunday School organization, serving at one time as the



Sunday School President. I also had the opportunity to serve with Friedrich Docekal during the war as one of his counselors when he was the branch president. But it was in this branch that I literally grew up. It was here that I became a deacon, a teacher, a priest and then after the war, an elder. .

We also had a small scout group. Our first Scoutmaster

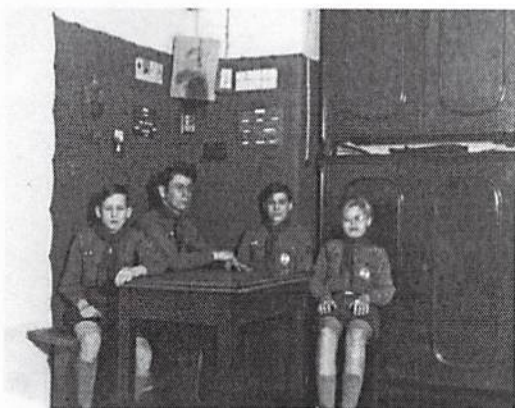
was Alex Przybyla. The Scoutmaster after him was Anton Kuerbler. Walter and I both participated in the Boy Scouts until Hitler took over and the Boy Scout program was ended and replaced with the Hitler Youth. On the day Hitler came to power in Austria, I was sent home from school because it was assumed that with my name, Hirschmann, I was Jewish. My father went to the school and explained to the administrators that we were in fact not Jewish. With this, they agreed to let us return to school.

In the branch we also had an orchestra before the war. Walter and I both played violin. He and Hans Vaculik played first violin while Heinz Teply and I played second violin.



After my first four years of Volkschule, I was transferred to the four year Hauptschule





(high school). During my first year of Hauptschule, I attended school in the Stumpfergasse. That first year also went better than my previous four years at the Volksschule, despite the fact that I only got a "gut" rather than a "sehr gut" for my behavior. The next three years in Hauptschule were in the Hirschengasse 18. I especially remember a Professor Hauser which I had in my third year of Hauptschule. He encouraged us to build gliders. Guido Marschall, a friend of mine since first grade, and I decided that we would build one. It had a wingspan of two meters and flew beautifully. Professor Hauser took the whole class to

the mountains one day and we flew the gliders that we had built. The glider that we had built would fly for up to five minutes in the air. During one of the landings, however, it unfortunately struck a man and broke in pieces. We had to then go home and repair it. After that, we never did fly it again. At the end of our Hauptschule years, in trying to decide who should keep the glider, we felt a fair, Solomonic solution would have been to divide the glider in half. However, Guido was kind enough to leave it to me. I kept it for many years.

Overall, my success in Hauptschule was somewhat average. I really just wanted to become a farmer, but both my father and my brother, Walter, discouraged me. When I was about 14, Walter suggested that I should attend the Staatlichegewebeschool. This later became the engineering school in Wien. At the time Walter was attending this school and he thought that I should get the same education that he had. To be able to attend this particular school, I had to pass an entrance exam. Indeed, I passed it on the first try and ended up doing very well in my classes. I attended four years (eight semesters) of this engineering school and was the only one from my class to graduate with honors. As a result, my graduation gave me the opportunity to go on and attend the Technical University in Wien.

During the summer of 1940, while I was still off from classes at the Staatlichegewebeschool, I worked at the Allgemeine Elektricitäts Gesellschaft in the Gumpendorferstrasse. At the time, Walter was employed there as a project engineer in the planning office. My own job involved working for a group which installed electrical wiring. The next summer of 1941, I worked for the Donier Flugzeugwerke in Friedrichshafen am Bodensee, Deutschland. Walter had been drafted into the army a little before I started working there. He was drafted into a Cavalry unit and sent to Stuttgart in Germany. A few months later, he was sent to the Russian front. In my job, I worked in the design office doing drafting for the installation of wiring on airplanes.



In December of 1941, my father was seriously injured at his job and on January 3, 1942, he passed away. Fortunately, my brother Walter, who was in the service, at the time was able to come home for the funeral. This was a very difficult experience for my mother who had just myself and my four year old brother, Friedrich (Fritz), at home with her. But she had a number of spiritual experiences in the form of dreams that told her that my father was where he needed to be and that he was teaching the gospel in the spirit world.



It was in the following March of 1942 that I took and completed the Matura exam with the only award of Auszeichnung (excellent – or honors). Following my graduation and receiving my Ingenur degree, I began working at Siemens und Halske A.G. (S&H) in Wien on Appostelgasse 12 in die Arbeitsvorbereitung (planning office) for Ing Leistner and Toni Schmidt.

About this same time I learned that there was the possibility of working at the railroad, perhaps in the rank or position of inspector. I was quite interested in the position and applied for the job. However, my application had at least two black marks against me. One was the fact that I had been a less than enthusiastic member of the Hitler Youth. The second, and perhaps more significant, was that I was a member of the LDS Church. My application resulted in my being called before Hitler's Gestapo -- an experience that terrified Mama -- and being asked on two separate occasions to prove my loyalty and citizenship. In order to address their questions about the Church, I gave them a pamphlet on the Articles of Faith at our first meeting. When I was called in the second time, I was asked to sign a paper swearing loyalty to my country. The result of this experience was that I did not get a job at the railroad and it almost certainly contributed to that fact that I was shortly thereafter drafted into the army.

After working at RAD, I went back to work at Siemens und Halske A.G. (S&H) until I was drafted into the military on 10 December 1942. My original orders sent me to Braunschweig, Germany and into the seventeenth Regiment of the Infantry. After 2 months of boot camp (Grundansbildung) we were transferred to Neuschatel in Belgium and later to Dieppe, France which was on the Channel near Rouen. I found myself in a Prussian infantry unit since the German army refused to put Austrian soldiers in their own units. All non-German soldiers were sprinkled throughout German units. But once in France, I was able to take a leave for two weeks. I took the opportunity to visit my family in Wien where I became sick with pleurisy. I was sick for a total of about nine weeks and was mostly in an Army hospital. After my time in the hospital, the Army sent me for recovery to a Sanitarium in Goisern in Salzkammergut for four to five weeks. In Goisern, I met a soldier named Waldemar Fuellner. He used to live in Gotha, Tueringen. We took many long walks together and became quite good friends even though he was about 15 years my senior. He was a Doctor of Philosophy who had studied theology and we had many long talks about religion. In addition, he was quite an accomplished poet. I was very impressed with him and kept in contact with him until after the war. After my time in Goisern, I was transferred back to my reserve unit in Braunschweig. From there I was sent to the Nachrichteneinheit Abteilung 30 (NEA-30) (a communications unit) in Hanover exactly one day before I was supposed to be transferred to Russia to our combat unit. I readily admit that this transfer to my reserve unit as opposed to my combat unit most likely saved my life.

In Hanover I again had boot camp (Grundansbildung) and every night experienced air raids over Braunschweig and Hanover. After boot camp, I was transferred to the special troop NEA-50 that was directly under the command of the Supreme Commander of the German Army. Our specialty was in the area of microwave communications. We operated the "Michalequipment" at a wavelength of 67 cm. I also worked on the so-called "Stuttgartequipment" which operated at a wavelength of 20 cm by using magnetrons and klystrons for wireless transmissions. One interesting tidbit associated with my work with this unit was that my last assignment took me on an airplane into Berlin to see Telefunken Co (the telephone company) for certain hardware components for our receiver-transmitter in January 1945. This, of course, was just a few days before the Russians encircled Berlin.

I stayed in Flensburg until shortly before the end of the war at which time we were transferred to Ploene. This village in the Schleswig-Holstein area was to be where the members of my communications unit were to serve as combat soldiers. These were our orders despite the fact that, up to this time, we had had absolutely no combat experience. But it was during the final days of the war and every possible person was being pressed into combat duty. The British and Americans were approaching from the west and the Russians were coming from the east. For the first week after arriving in Ploene, we were not given any food and we did our best to avoid the strafing machine gunners of British aircraft. We saw a number of deserting sailors who came through the area. Our commanding officer acknowledged to us that the war was lost and we would be better off fending for ourselves and trying to get home the best that we could. So he signed, albeit illegally, our release papers and we all set out for our respective homes. Incidentally, the officer who signed our papers lived nearby and as a result had some personal reasons for doing this, but he took huge risk doing this, even at this stage of the war.

The first thing we did was to bury our guns and abandon our communications equipment. Then we all had to find some civilian clothes. Traveling in uniform, needless to say, was not a particularly smart move. A railroad worker was kind enough to give us some very old, patched up clothing. This allowed us to discard our military uniforms and actually allowed us to walk through the British, American and Russian prisoner of war camps without easily being detected as German soldiers. Nonetheless, traveling on foot by anyone was very restricted



by the occupying powers. We were not supposed to travel more than seven miles each day. In addition, we were supposed to know exactly where we had come from and the exact location of, say, the village to which we were headed. This was, of course, to prevent former soldiers in the German army, like ourselves, from doing exactly what it was we intended to do – traveling hundreds of miles to get home. To add to our worries, we also had to avoid certain SS troops. At the end of the war they had turned on and were fighting German soldiers in order to keep them from deserting.

So, with my comrade Toni Raab, a small handcart, and our Habseligkeiten we began the long walk home. We left at the beginning of May 1945 and I arrived in Upper Austria towards the end of June or beginning of July. For a number of reasons, we tried to avoid the Russian front line which extended along the Elbe. By traveling through the British and American zones of occupied Germany, we were able to avoid most of the Russian zone. For most of the way, we traveled by foot or on bicycles. At Hitzeacker we found someone who took us across the Elbe by boat since all the bridges were essentially destroyed. Because we had neither food nor lodging, we were



dependent on local farmers and such for these things. One night, we had been allowed to sleep in a farmer's barn and some SS troops came through the area. Fortunately the farmer woke us and warned us to leave so as to avoid any problems with the SS.

One amusing experience on our trip from Flensburg after the war was when a farmer that we met wanted us to stay and have Toni marry his daughter. Needless to say, I was upset since I didn't want to travel alone and Toni wasn't interested in

marriage at this point.

At Nuernberg, Toni Raab and I parted ways, and I began to travel alone. In Nuernberg, I was lucky enough to go with some American Troops on their truck with my bicycle to Regensburg. From Regensburg I bicycled on to Passau, on the border between Germany and Austria. At the German--Austrian border, the American soldiers did not want to let me go further east into Austria. By this point in time, the occupation had become well organized, and the borders between countries were being much more tightly controlled. I told them they should call my Uncle Franz Rosner who lived in Haag am Hausruck. Once my uncle identified me, the Americans agreed to let me go further, traveling east on my bicycle.

Once I arrived in Upper Austria, I stayed several weeks with my uncle Hans Huber in Rothenbach and helped with the hay and grain harvests. While I worked there that summer, I was very seriously injured when a horse stepped on my right foot and I got blood poisoning. I became extremely ill as the poisoning spread to my right hand. It became so bad that my arm turned almost black. I received operations on both my hand and my foot in order to try and remove the infection. The doctor had essentially given up on me and expected that I would die. However, my uncle and Heinz Jankovsky administered to me and I recovered completely. It was a great testimony to me of the power of faith and of the priesthood.

In August I went with Hans (a friend of Herbert Rosner) to Wien because I had not heard from Mama and Fritz for the several months since the Russians had entered Wien in April 1945. The Americans had not yet arrived in Wien -- only the Russians. Our journey home took us from Haag and Rothenbach in Upper Austria through the mountainous Steiermark region. With the train, we traveled to Muerzzuschlag after which we got off and then walked over the Semmering mountains to the village of Gloggnitz. The reason for doing this had to do with the various zones of occupation and differing restrictions on travel as imposed by the different occupiers. For instance, Haag and Rothenbach were in the American zone, Muerzzuschlag was in the British zone, and Wien, although eventually a divided city itself, was surrounded by the Russian zone. The Americans, British and French would allow relative freedom in traveling between their respective zones. However, the Russians were essentially allowing no one into or out of their zone. Nonetheless, rumor had it that they were not particularly enforcing the border at the top of the Semmering, so we were told that if you wanted to get into Wien, one had to go over the top of the mountain. So, we had walked over the Semmering and on to Gloggnitz intending to go on by train into Wien.

However, in Wiener Neustadt the Russians took control of our train, forced everyone off, and demanded the identification papers of everyone on the train. My friend, Hans, who had been traveling with me was taken by the Russians and put back into a prisoner of war camp. He had documents showing that he had been released from an American prisoner of war camp, but the Russians refused to accept them. When I was asked what I was doing going to Wien, I was able to show them a civil document which I still had from before the war which showed that I was, in fact, from Wien. When they asked what I was doing in Gloggnitz, I told them that I had gone to visit my grandmother and was now returning home to work. After finally letting us go, they commandeered the train's engine thereby leaving the train's passengers stranded for several days until we could get another engine to take us the remainder of the way.

Once I got to Wien, I found Fritz and Mama reasonably well off. Our apartment building was in the French zone in Wien, but our summer home and garden in Purkersdorf were in the Russian zone. The conditions in Wien were horrible. Money was worthless and for the next six months there was essentially no food to be had. The Russians, on their entry into Wien, had emptied the storehouses and used the contents for themselves. People got only what they could scavenge from farmers in the vicinity around Wien. Many people starved.

Our Branch President, for instance, lost about 40 pounds in these months. There were many suicides and hospitals were filled with women who had been raped by the Russian soldiers. For the most part, we spent our time in Puerkersdorf since we enjoyed slightly better conditions there because of our garden.



I returned to my studies at the Technische Universitaet in the fall of 1945. I visited my former professor, Dr. Poetzlberger, from the Engineering School asking for his advice because I had been fired from my previous job at Siemens and Halske. The company had been pillaged of all of its hardware and assets and had no choice but to let go all of their previous employees. The question then was what should I do. His advice was to go back to school and study physics.

The two apartment complexes owned by our family in Wien, on the Linkeviewzeile and on Mollardgasse had both been severely damaged in the bombing of Wien in February 1945 before the Russians entered Wien. The

Mollardgasse apartment had been severely damaged and had received a direct hit on the foundations. The result was that part of four of the floors had to be torn down and rebuilt. The rebuilding was undertaken under the direction of the architect Vetrovsky. This was quite a serious situation for our family because we did not have any money and, initially, we were unable to get a loan for rebuilding. Fortunately, we found some families that were willing to go in with us in order to rebuild. We ended up doing much of the work. For instance, the Linkewienzeile apartment had also suffered considerable damage in that the roof had caved in. We ordered the replacement shingles and then did the work ourselves of laying them. We did receive some help in this from one of our renters, a Herr Schaefer. In addition to some of the exterior damage, there was also damage inside some of the apartments. All of the windows in both buildings had been destroyed and the ceilings in most apartments sagged badly. All of this had to be repaired, and, to be honest, the effort of restoring both buildings is still going on today, 55 years later.

The Church was anxious to help the members in Europe to begin recovery from the war and its devastation. Elder Ezra Taft Benson visited Wien in 1945 in order to bring help in the form of food and clothes to the members of the Church in Wien. On the day he was to arrive in Wien, we waited for two hours for him to come. It was a very touching meeting with the Apostle as we had had no contact with Church headquarters since the start of the war in September 1939. Missionaries had been pulled out of Austria in August of 1939 and the members had been on their own until Elder Benson's visit. There were about 90 to 100 members attending this approximately 2 hour meeting in the Seidengasse building.

I decided to go back to school and study physics. These four years of University study passed in some very difficult circumstances. We had no heat, no light and no gas for cooking. We didn't even have windowpanes in our windows to prevent the rain from coming into the auditoriums. We would go to lectures with umbrellas during the rain and gloves during the winter. We did have oil lamps during my first year while studying at home. In addition, we burned wood which we hauled in from the Viennese Woods. There was very little to eat. I had a savings account and some money which, unfortunately, was completely inaccessible. We received some help in the form of soup for the students from Sweden (Schweden Hilfe) and CARE packages from the USA.

My first university exam (Erste Staatspruefung) was in February 1948. In November 1949, I finished my studies by passing the second of these state exams. During the second set, the exams were in theoretical physics, experimental physics, and technical physics. I received a certificate signifying that I had successfully passed these exams. Unfortunately, I couldn't eat the paper certificate, because after graduating, I tried to find a job. It was a very difficult time to try and get a position in physics or even a job at all. At the time, Austria had over 200,000 unemployed. So, for that reason, I went



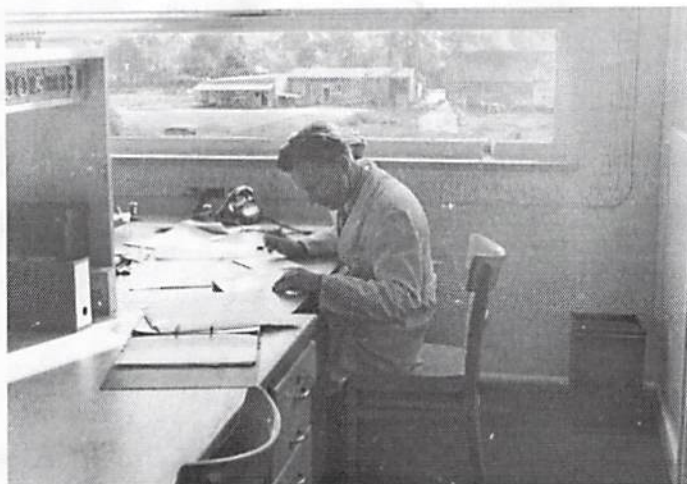
back, in January 1950, to Siemens and Halske using some of my contacts in the manufacturing office before I had returned to school (Toni Schmidt, Reichl, Reinsch, etc). After a year there, I was transferred to the fabrication office under Mader and Bruckner.

In December 1952 I decided to quit Siemens and Halske because I was very dissatisfied with the pay. I was getting only about 1500 Austrian Schillings. When I had originally started, my pay had been 741 Schillings. In addition, I wanted to become self-employed. In particular, I wanted to start my own roofing business. As a step in this direction, I began to work for a man by the name of Maier who promised me that I could eventually take over his business. As it turned out, it was a fiasco. On my birthday (July 17) in 1953, the business shut down leaving me with considerable debts. I had borrowed money from a number of people in order to help make the business viable and when the owner bailed out, I was left holding the purse.

I had no job and no money. I tried to go back to my old job and I sent out numerous resumes, but all to no avail. I helped our electrician, a man by the name of Berger. He had, over the years, done quite a bit of work on our apartment complexes, and he took me on as his paid (under the table) help. We also worked out an agreement where I also tutored his two sons who were in the Realschule. The work I did for him was done at a number of different places around Wien. One day, though, as I was in a foundry laying wire, I found a two week old newspaper in which, among other things, there was an advertisement for a Swiss firm, Hasler AG, that was looking for physicists. Two years before, I had taken a vacation while working at Siemens and had been in Switzerland and had happened to stop by Hasler and asked at the time about possible job openings there. I was, after all, still trying to find a job in physics rather than the manufacturing I was then doing at Siemens. On finding the advertisement, I immediately wrote to Bern and the personnel chief, whom I had met during my vacation, asking about a position. He wrote back and said that he would be in Wien in two weeks to interview me. His name was Kesselring. Before this, I had approached at least 10 different firms and none had offered me a job. In one case, the firm Elin wanted to hire me, but the union had prevented it. Hasler AG made me an offer which I accepted. With the job came a salary of 940 Swiss francs. I began at Hasler in Bern January 1954.



I was in Switzerland for two years at Hasler. During this time, I was able to pay off all of my debts. In addition, the temple in Zollikofen was built. The groundlaying was in the summer of 1954 under the direction of President Stephen L. Richards, First Counselor in the First Presidency. The Temple dedication was in September 1955 under the direction of President David O. McKay. Many of my family were there for the dedication, and within a few days of the



dedication, Fritz, mother, Lotte, and myself were sealed together as a family and mother and father were sealed to each other, my father by proxy.

At the end of December 1955, I moved to Munich where my brother, Walter, was already working for Siemens and accepted a new job in the research lab of Siemens and Halske doing solid state and semiconductor physics. One of my reasons for leaving Switzerland was that every three months I had to renew my work permit and the possibility of

becoming a Swiss citizen was remote. In addition, only three companies in the world did the kind of work Hasler did and which I worked on -- in the field of quartz oscillators and filters so the possibility of changing and advancing in my job were slim. Both Walter and I were in the same laboratory. Walter was working on transistor applications and I was doing transistor development. At the time, I lived at Oggenheimer Strasse 6.

From a coworker at Siemens I learned about a program that tried to attract European workers to the United States. This program, called "Paper Clip", was the same that took Werner von Braun to the US. I received an offer to stay in the US for one and a half year and work at Harry Diamond Laboratories (HDL) for the Department of the Army. My annual salary was to be \$7,200. In addition, they gave me the possibility of remaining in the US after the year and a half were up, provided they liked me. Otherwise, they would send me back to Europe at their expense. I left for the United States February 1958. HDL was located on Connecticut Avenue in Washington D.C. near the National Bureau of Standards. First, I lived with a family, Peter Heppen, in 3617 Pheasant St in Washington D.C. After one and a half years, I went to live with Sister Sanford at 4922 Albemarle St, Northwest Washington.

In August 1962, I went to work for NASA at Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. At the time, I bought a house for \$28,000 and rented out the entire house (with the exception of one bedroom and one bath) to Andrew McCullough. On the thirteenth of July 1963 I married Wilma Harper in Washington D.C. We were then sealed six days later (19 July 1963) in the Swiss Temple. Until August 1964, we lived in the Springhill Lake Apartments in Greenbelt. But in August 1964 we moved into our home at 35 Lakeside Dr in Greenbelt.