

Thanks to a mother's determination and a stranger on horseback,

MY MOST
INSPIRING MOMENT

By IRVING STONE

Author of "The Agony and the Ecstasy"

A Poor Boy Goes to College



The forces that fired young Irving Stone, so touchingly described here, sent him considerably beyond the freshman class at the University of California. His beloved "Pearl" had hoped he would become a doctor, and under-

graduate Stone had considered the law profession, but he finally decided to teach.

Stone won his bachelor's degree in three years, did graduate work, then taught economics at the University of Southern California and his alma mater.

Turning to writing more than a generation ago, this gifted author has since produced more than a dozen best sellers, most recently, "The Agony and the Ecstasy," a biographical novel of the life of Michelangelo. His other famous works include "Lust for Life," the story of Vincent Van Gogh; "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," and "Love Is Eternal," a biographical novel of Mary Todd Lincoln.

MY MOTHER'S NAME was Pauline, though I called her Pearl. She loved me. This was for me the one certain fact in an otherwise dubious world.

My mother had no education. Her father, though he arrived in San Francisco just after the Civil War, when millionaires were in the making, preferred spending his days with his three brothers, playing pinochle. As a result, his children were forced into the factories and shops of San Francisco around the age of 12, to help keep the family pot boiling.

But my mother had a mind. In a day before adult education, she craved books and knowledge but had nowhere to find them.

From the very first moment that I could understand the meaning of her words, around the age of five, my mother began drilling into me one passionate belief of her life:

"You must get an education. Only through education can you rise in this world."

Since I was not yet in primary school, I had no idea what my mother meant. But intuitively she knew what she meant by education, and it was her determination that I should learn this at the earliest possible moment.

She chose my 12th birthday, for that had been the day she had been obliged to leave school and go to work in a store. It also fell on a Sunday,

which was her only day off from work.

We rose early, and packed a lunch of cold meat and rolls. We also had a bag of stale crumbs for the sea gulls. After breakfast we took the streetcar down Sutter Street to the Ferry Building, where we caught the 8:10 Southern Pacific. By 9 we were in Berkeley.

This mysterious but all-important journey, I had learned in advance, was to the University of California. My mother did not know the meaning of the word "university"; she kept calling it, reverentially, "college."

Since these were the days before the great space devoted to college sports in the newspapers, I had no idea what a college was. None of our friends or relatives had ever seen a college, let alone attended one.

It was one of those sparkling, brilliantly clear days which only San Francisco can produce. We leaned over the white rail of the ferry, throwing crumbs to the screaming gulls while the boat made its slow, patient way toward the Alameda mole. From there we took the long train ride through the quiet city of Oakland.

My mother bought some powdered sugar buns

in the Shattuck Bakery, where she asked a few timid questions and learned the general direction of the college. It took us perhaps half an hour to find the first open, and hence to us official, gate. One or two steps inside and we were in fairyland: green swards in front of classical structures; a running brook; magnificent shrubs and ferns; and winding paths under tall, fragrant eucalyptus trees that led up a slight incline to a series of white stone buildings glistening in the sunlight against the red poppy-covered hills of Berkeley.

We walked slowly, hand in hand, a little frightened, past the building with the names of great scientists on it; then another with the names of poets and humanitarians, and then past the majestic pile of the library. There were few students around this early Sunday morning, nor would we have been so bold as to ask them for information even if they had sauntered by.

Pearl and I were as though in a foreign land. We had no knowledge of how one got into a college, what the requirements might be, how much money it cost, nor what one studied.

Yet our strongest emotion was that somehow we did not belong here, and that if the authorities should come along they would promptly escort us out the sacred gate. We both had the uneasy feeling that college was only for the top layer of society and wealth, not for us.

After a couple of hours of wandering about

the beautiful grounds and climbing through the poppies to the top of the hill to gaze down over the bay, we returned to a little wooden bridge and sat by the side of the creek, eating our modest lunch. Then my mother turned to me.

"Son," she said, "you have to give me your word of honor. I may not be here to see it, and I may not be able to help you, but today you must promise me that no matter what happens to you, you will come to this college."

There was a burning intensity in her voice. Though I was too young to understand the hunger and ambition behind it, I was deeply moved.

"I promise, Ma."

"Once you go to college, you can make a way of life for yourself. You will have a choice. You will not be forced into work you don't like, and at wages that give you little more than a bed to sleep in and food for your stomach."

"But how do you know all these things, Ma?" I asked. "How can you be so sure if we don't know anything that goes on here?"

"Because education makes a man grow," Pearl's voice rang out above the noise of the brook. "With it, he can be free. He will be his