The following letter is addressed to me, Lennart Holmquist, by my father, Bernard Holmquist. It was never sent for a reason unknown to me. In 2011 I discovered it in one of my father’s journals. The date of the letter is July 24, but the year is difficult to read. Could be the year is 1980.

Though the letter was apparently in answer to a question I had asked my dad about my childhood the letter reveals far more about my dad than about me.

My father’s handwriting is a bit difficult to read, so I am transcribing the letter. In footnotes I include my own comments. My comments will, hopefully, reveal more about my dad, and will no doubt reveal something of myself. I hope this is interesting to you.

I am also correcting a few minor errors in the letter as I go and adding a few paragraph breaks for the sake of readability.

North Carolina, November 2011

7-24-‘8-

Len –

I have been going over the conversation we had a lot in my mind. You were asking about yourself whether you were outgoing and how much you mixed with other children.

I think it is important that you do probe into your past to find answers to your present stresses.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As a little kid, ages one to four you were out-going as any other boy, full of fun and laughter. But then, after that, there were a lot of changes in our life. Somewhere along the way perhaps you were disturbed by circumstances in the family. You were becoming old enough to feel tensions in our family life, but you didn’t know why these tensions existed, nor could you understand them. Other children had a stable home life in which to grow up and to make friends, but your home life was always changing.[[2]](#footnote-2)

When you were one year old we moved to Denver when I attended Conservative Baptist Seminary for a year. My dad[[3]](#footnote-3) hated to see you go for he loved you very much. He wrote a letter once to Doris[[4]](#footnote-4) thanking her for bringing you into the world.

Denver was difficult for us. I was hired to manage the Christian Service (military) Center there, which was financed by the evangelical churches of Denver. I opened the center at 12:00 noon and couldn’t close until 10:00 PM, getting away perhaps as late as 10:30. This went on seven days a week. Finally I told them I had to have Mondays off to rest which was grudgingly given to me.

Dad came out for Christmas and they didn’t want to give me Christmas eve off, but I said I was taking it off to be with my father. That was the last Christmas eve and Christmas we had with Dad, although he lived a little over a year longer. That Christmas day Dad worked with us in the Center, which we all enjoyed. I had no money to provide Christmas eve dinner for Dad (the church provide a big Christmas dinner at the Center), but a couple of days before that a member of the board [of the] Center (and chairman of the board of [the] Christian Business Men’s Committee) and his wife, J. Russell Byron filled our ice box[[5]](#footnote-5) and a large box with food. Mr. Byron always was very encouraging and often gave us food.[[6]](#footnote-6) But I worked hard and spent mornings at the seminary (no school on Mondays), was always tired.

We rented a basement apartment from a Mrs. Janey[[7]](#footnote-7) who was a battle-ax[[8]](#footnote-8) and gave Mom a bad time so we moved to Inglewood and found a peaceful basement apartment there. How many of these pressures you absorbed I don’t know.[[9]](#footnote-9) That was during the 1951-52 school year.

Then I moved you and Mom to Aunt Almeda Carlson’s home in Chicago, while Mom was expecting Meilynn. Almeda was a battle-ax too. She was strict with you. I had to go to St. Paul [Minnesota] to get a job and an apartment, staying in Bethel’s [Bethel Seminary]. Meilynn arrived May 28th [[10]](#footnote-10) and a few days later I returned to Chicago over the Memorial Day week-end. But I had to get back to the Twin Cities,[[11]](#footnote-11) where I was working at the Twin City Arsenal. Can still remember when I left, can still see you vividly. You stood in the front window of Almeda’s home, crying your heart out. You can imagine what that did to me. Mom was still in the hospital with Meilynn. Then you caught whooping cough when Mom returned home. Almeda was very hard on mom, and so she moved out to “Aunt” Ruth Anderson’s.[[12]](#footnote-12) I was so appreciate of Ruth taking you all into her home. We have sent her a Mother’s Day gift every years since.

When we were in the Twin Cities during the 1952-54 school years you had to make adjustments at age two to a little sister. This is always difficult for a child. There are so many mixed emotions they experience.[[13]](#footnote-13) Not only does the baby get most of the attention instead of the older child, but there is the negative factor of the older one is disrupted. This is especially true when he is rough with the new baby. Once you pulled Meilynn off the couch and received a scolding.[[14]](#footnote-14) I know it has been difficult to be first. You had to do things first and more was expected of you than other children. You had to be better at everything because you were older.[[15]](#footnote-15) They would copy you as their model, but you had no one to copy.[[16]](#footnote-16) That is hard. Then there was sibling rivalry; they each wanted to compete with you and beat you at the things you were good at doing and win over you.[[17]](#footnote-17) That was not only true with arguments you had among yourselves, but as far as skills are concerned too. Remember Meilynn telling you once, when she was angry with you, Nennie[[18]](#footnote-18) I am almost as big as you, but just as smart.[[19]](#footnote-19) Believe it or not, but I would not be surprised if some of this rivalry still exists.[[20]](#footnote-20) It is natural, one of the things in life we have to live with. My brother Al was not as considerate as you have been with your brothers and sisters. He has kept Rusty[[21]](#footnote-21) down, never letting him be his equal (there is two years difference in the ages). This has hurt Rusty greatly over the years and given him many emotional traumas. Al tries to do this with me too (and the rest of the family). I just stay away.[[22]](#footnote-22) Yet Al is a fine person and I love him greatly. But family members (his siblings) still are a threat to him.[[23]](#footnote-23)

But I suspect you have let your “siblings” make you feel inferior to them in one way or another. Meilynn has a mate, children, and home. Carey has a trade. Cookie despite many things, is doing well too with a mate, children and a home. And what does Len have? That question can eat away on a person.[[24]](#footnote-24) But remember you chose to serve the Lord and follow him where he would lead you. You are not so proud as to put yourself up as a missionary, but humbly accept the title.[[25]](#footnote-25) Let me say that I am cautious of people who like to set themselves up with titles.[[26]](#footnote-26) Our commission is to love and serve the Lord and do his bidding,[[27]](#footnote-27) call it what you will. If I may give you advice here, it is to claim the promises the Lord has provided to people like you his Word and you will see that you are more fortunate than anyone else. Read these promises, and by faith claim them for yourself. They are yours.[[28]](#footnote-28)

There were pressures in Minneapolis you could not understand. For instance, I worked 10 hours a day. I would have worked less, but I had no choice. Part of the time Mom worked too in convalescent hospitals. I studied mornings a Bethel Seminary and tried to keep ahead of by Greek (a wonder that I passed it). Little sleep. Part of the time I went out weekends with men who would speak Sundays at various churches for the United Temperance Union,[[29]](#footnote-29) thus gaining preaching experience. I tried to give the family Saturdays, going for a drive and doing other things.[[30]](#footnote-30)

I have felt that Mom often has considered my books and studies a rival of hers. Can’t blame her. When she wanted to talk to someone I was typing a paper; and I can’t talk[[31]](#footnote-31) when someone is talking to me. Also there always has been a bit of competition of who wore the pants in the family.[[32]](#footnote-32) I believe a husband and wife should work together as equals, but God’s Word makes man the head of the household: he has the final say. Not sure if Mom agrees with this. Also, Mom comes from a varied cultural background. This gives her much broader vision in her outlook on life. It is hard for her to feel at home with others, especially women, who are very narrow in their views on things. In China (and Sweden too I think to a lesser extent) women are [unreadable] forceful and domineering. They [unreadable] the household and the husband. The oldest matron of the Chinese house rules the roost. The males stay away from home as much as they can. When one realizes the low state of women (financially non-productive) in the Chinese society, one can realize she has to be strong to survive.

Undoubtedly mom displays some of these characteristics in her attitude in the house.[[33]](#footnote-33) Like a good chinaman, the only way I could get peace sometimes was to go for a walk.[[34]](#footnote-34) Have had to get her off my back somehow. This is hard for a little boy to understand. He knows his mother and father love him very, very much, and the loves them very much too. How can he take sides between them when he sees what appears to be unhappiness and lack of love between them. But between Mom and me there always has been love. In a world of so much divorce, we have been around 33 years. Maybe if one parent was [unreadable] to the little one he could love only one. But to love both under the above circumstances just about tears him apart.

So you see, Minneapolis had a lot of tensions, and how much of that can effect a boy between town and four, I don’t know.

When I graduated seminary, I was very tired, “battle fatigue”. Several times I almost quit school to [unreadable] only to work. But somehow I made [it]. But I felt for little or no reason, damaged. I felt no one really cared a “darn for me.” Too much work for too long with little opportunity to fulfill ambitions, and no encouragement. I was thirty-one and feeling very tired and discouraged.

Dr. Virgel Olson arranged for me to fill the pulpit of a little church in South [unreadable] on Sunday. I thought the pastor was away. But they didn’t have a pastor and they might have called me. But Mom didn’t want to be living out in the middle of Minnesota farm country. I loved the little church and the small pastor’s study. So I said I was applying for missions and didn’t think I should take it, but was open to the Lord’s leading. Apart from the leading of the Lord, maybe I should have taken it. But one wonders if circumstance would still have provided a girl named Cookie and guys named Steve, Josh, and Jeremy.

There was no work in Minneapolis in 1954 because the Korean war was over. So we drove our 1946 Plymouth two door, pulling a trailer piled higher than the car, over Downer Pass into California. We were so close on our finances that our failure to sell a washing machine in Minneapolis might have influenced us to stay there, food or not.

In Reseda was a pastor I knew casually in Denver. His name was M[?] Holmgren. He was pastor of the General Conference Baptist Church, although he had never gone to Bethel [Seminary]. He had been on the board of Service Center in Denver. So I stopped at the church, and a member took us in for about three weeks.

I got a job at Bendix in North Hollywood, and [amply paid my benefactors?]. Holmgren and I never hit it off, although I still don’t know why. We lived across the street from the church. He expected me to do more for him than time or strength made it possible to do. I arrived home from Bendix at 2:30 AM, and didn’t get to sleep much before 4 A.M. I tried getting up to teach a Sunday School class, but found it impossible. With the prospects of a class in a very few hours, I was not likely to get to sleep. In addition I was still [unreadable] from my studies at Bethel Seminary. I asked the pastor once if there was anything I had done to offend him, and he just “climbed all over me.” Perhaps his problem was [with?] his home situation. He and his wife weren’t getting along. Later they were divorced and he married his secretary. I really needed him to get a start in the ministry or missionary work. He let me down.

Perhaps the Lord was teaching me many lessons. We think we are so indispensible to the kingdom of God. Also we think God values us according to how much we do for him. Neither is true. God will get his work down with or without us. It’s not our problem. We [unreadable] far more for God can [letter ends here. Perhaps the letter was unfinished.\

1. I’m not sure what present stresses my father is talking about because I am not sure what year he wrote this letter. If this letter was written in 1980 I was living at Heidebeek in The Netherlands. I might have been struggling with finding a direction for my life. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I don’t remember much of my life before age five. I do remember that by age five we were living in California and I was entering kindergarten in Granada Hills. I was extremely shy, so much it was difficult for me to get to know kids and even join in with their play in the school yard. If conditions or event(s) affected me to be this way, it was on or before age five, but I don’t recall what if anything. However, I’ve guessed over the years that our frequent moves from age 0 to age five and beyond had a negative impat on me, but I am only guessing. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Theodore Holmquist. I don’t remember him. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Doris Holmquist, my mother. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dad always called a refrigerator an ice box. Probably in his early childhood that was what they were., box with a door containing a block of ice. When a kid I too called a refrigerator an ice box because in our house, that is what it was called. Only later I came to realize that a true ice box was cooled by a block of ice. A refrigerator, also called a fridge, use electricity. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Dad always appreciated kindness shown to him and remember it always. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Name is difficult to read so may be misspelled. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dad used the word “battle-ax” to describe women who were demanding, impatient and generally hard to get along with. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I don’t remember this time of my life and so don’t know if I was affected by it in any way. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 1952 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Minneapolis and St. Paul. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ruth Anderson was not related. I believe mom and dad knew her through church. She took mom, me and Meilynn in. Mom and Dad were forever appreciative and kept in touch until aunt Ruth passed away. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I don’t remember that I had mixed emotions about my sister, but then I was rather small so perhaps would not remember much anyway. On the other hand my father may have simply been assuming I was experiencing what he had read about sibling rivalry. His bachelor’s degree was in psychology. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. I have heard this story before. It may have been thought that I pulled my sister off the couch because I was jealous of my sister, but I wonder if this was necessarily true. I don’t remember at all being jealous of Meilynn then or in following years. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I don’t remember ever feeling I had to be better than my brother or sisters. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I never thought about not having an older sibling to copy. Then again childhood may have been easier if I had one – depending upon the sibling. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. I never felt sibling rivalry toward my brother and sisters. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ‘Lennie’ was my nickname, but my little brother an sisters could not pronounce the ‘L’ very well when they were small, so I was often known as ‘Nennie’. My two sisters still call me this now and then. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Actually, I think she is smarter. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Doubt sibling rivalry exists. Not on my part at least and I doubt on theirs. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. One of his brothers. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. From what Dad said over the years to me, much friction existed between many of Dad’s brothers and sisters. Dad said one of the reasons he moved to California was to get away from this, and that if he did not live close to his family, he would not become embroiled in the in-fighting and so could get along with all of them. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. I had heard many times from my Dad over the years about tension and bad feelings between his brothers and sisters. It is one of the reasons he said that he moved from the Chicago and state of Indiana where his family lived to California. Most of these individuals I met only once in my life, excluding when I was an infant, so never saw or experiences their relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. I never felt inferior to my brother and sisters , thank goodness. Never felt superior either. They were just who they were, my brother and my sisters.. That they were married, and a ‘mate’ or a trade did not concern me. I was going to school and afterward travelling the world. I didn’t feel my brother and sisters were more fortunate than I was. Actually I think I felt the opposite. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I was working for a Christian pseudo-mission organization during this time, Dilaram House and later Youth with a Mission. I would not use the working that I ‘chose to serve the Lord’. This was rhetoric my dad used. I felt that I was simply doing work through a Christian organization that could, hopefully, benefit people. My dad’s part in this was that he backed me up in this work, which I appreciated, and got the our church back in California to support me. That was helpful. I needed very little money, but the money I did need, I really needed it.s [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. People who tried to make them superior in some way, such as with titles, etc, always bothered Dad. On the other hand if a title or honor was simply given to a person, he was fine with it. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Dad often used religions terminology and phrases, e.g., “do his bidding”, when speaking about God. I think he picked it up in the church he attended as a child and in adopting some of the language used in the King James version of the bible, which at his time was considered the authoritative English version. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Not sure what promises Dad is speaking about here, but receiving things from God by faith was and is common rhetoric in the evangelical world. Seems the idea is that God often or sometimes does not just simply give you things as you go on in life, but after meeting certain qualifications, you take them because they are yours to take. Perhaps some of these things would be joy, peace, contentment, security. Frankly, I never experienced receiving any promises. Seems that my life and the life of all Christians I have known is very similar to the non-Christians, people of other faiths, atheists and agnostics. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. My dad and these men would speak about the evils of alcohol. They stressed total abstinence. Later, after I was out of college, this became a heated subject between my dad and myself on occasion. I had figured out that the Bible did not say it was a sin to drink alcohol. The bible only said one should not get drunk. Dad could not consider the question objectively. This is understandable in that had as a boy come from a conservative religious background that had adapted the temperance social and political platform in the first half of the 20th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. My father liked piling us all into the car and driving off into the countryside for a few hours. Actually it was pleasant getting out of the house, sitting in the back seat of the car with all the windows rolled down (no air conditioning) feeling the wind buffet you, and occasionally sitting up watching farms pass you by. I don’t remember doing other things. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. He probably meant ‘type’. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. I heard my father use this expression many times. Wearing the pants in the family meant you had the final say in everything, hopefully, after consulting everyone else. I don’t think my mom thought that dad should always have the final say though she often went along with a decision of his just to keep peace in the family. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. I doubt that Mom picked this up from Chinese society, and mom was not domineering or ruled the home. She had her own opinion on things that did not always conform to what opinion Dad had. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Sometimes Dad simply went for a walk when he was frustrated with someone, especially Mom, or with something. However, this was often preceded by a lot of yelling, occasionally breaking things, and a few times kicking a wall or door, both of which he put holes into. He would then shout, “I’m leaving and I’m never coming back.” This was difficult for me to hear as a kid because I didn’t know if it was true or not. I very much loved my dad, and I very much wanted him to come back, which he always did after he cooled down. Dad’s anger and demonstration of anger during these times often upset Mom, and put her in tears. To his credit he later felt badly about it and sometimes would apologize for his anger and try to explain that he was under a lot of stress, which he often was. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)