To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Janet Claire Rahamut entitled "Family Relationships in Selected Young Adult Novels by Cynthia Voigt and Sue Ellen Bridgers." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Theodore W. Hipple, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN SELECTED YOUNG ADULT NOVELS BY CYNTHIA VOIGT AND SUE ELLEN BRIDGERS

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Janet Claire Rahamut

August 1995

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful family:

My parents, Elbert and Lila Hunnings

My brothers, Ron and Larry

My sisters, Cheryl, Sandra, and Karen

and

My beautiful children, David, Daniel, and Jennifer.

All of them have been a source

of inspiration and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Ted Hipple, my committee chairperson and one of the most talented men I know, for his support and encouragement as I worked on this dissertation. I also wish to express my heart-felt thanks to the other members of my committee, Dr. Glennon C. Rowell, Dr. Thomas Ryan, and Dr. Allison Ensor, for their help and suggestions. In addition, I extend sincere appreciation to Dr. William Shurr and Dr. Mark Christiansen, both of whom have been sources of friendship and encouragement during my years at the University of Tennessee.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Paul Conn, Dr. Ollie Lee, and Dr. Carolyn Dirksen of Lee College for all of their kind support and encouragement.

Abstract

This study examined family relationships among siblings, parents and children, husbands and wives, and extended families in the Tillerman cycle novels by Cynthia Voigt and the rural North Carolina novels by Sue Ellen Bridgers, two popular and prolific young adult novelists. The nine novels selected for this study were as follows:

Cynthia Voigt:

Homecoming, 1981

Dicey's Song 1982

The Runner, 1985

Sons from Afar, 1987

Seventeen against the Dealer, 1989

Sue Ellen Bridgers:

Home Before Dark, 1976

All Together Now, 1979

Notes for Another Life, 1982

Permanent Connections, 1987

A content analysis of each novel provided data which answered seven specific research questions. Both Voigt and Bridgers depict a variety of families ranging from severely dysfunctional to extremely strong and healthy. Some families are strong throughout a given novel while others have weaknesses but progress toward strength over a period

of generations; still others give evidence of severe dysfunctions but make no substantial advances toward wholeness as a family unit.

All the sibling relationships that are adequately developed in these novels are either positively presented throughout the novel or they are a realistic blend of both negative and positive interactions, resulting, finally, in a positive relationship.

In Voigt's novels, father-child relationships are extremely negative in the two primary families but unusually positive in two minor families; in Bridgers' novels, older fathers of adult children are usually more positively presented than are younger fathers.

Mother-child relationships are complex, especially in the Bridgers novels, where more traditional mothers tend to relate more positively to their children. In Voigt, the two minor ones are positive and the two primary ones are negative.

The husband-wife relationship of Voigt's primary couple is extremely negative while that of the two minor couples is very positive. Bridgers' husband-wife relationships are, in general, positively depicted.

Extended families are important in the lives of the adolescent protagonists and are generally more positively presented by both Voigt and Bridgers than are the nuclear families.

Approximately three-fourths of the families experienced conflicts, and about one-half either fully or partially resolved the conflicts. Despite some similarity in conflict type and in manner of resolution, no discernible pattern emerges in these family units.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"We are forged in a crucible called family," says Susan Forward in Toxic Parents (166). Some individuals emerge from that crucible strong and emotionally healthy; others join the morass of dysfunctional men and women that populate the world. Peter Collier says, "your family is what you've got. . . .It's your limits and your possibilities." He continues, "Some people get crushed by their families. Others are saved by them" (qtd. in Curran 1).

In The Adolescent in the Family, Patricia Noller and Victor Callan say, "There is a significant body of theory about family functioning that points to the vital role played by the family in the development and adjustment of adolescents" (2). They believe that a strong, supportive family can play an important role in helping adolescents cope with the many physical and emotional changes that occur during this tumultuous period in their lives (vii). Just as with adults, family relationships are central in the world of adolescents. Unfortunately, but perhaps understandably, writers often emphasize negative family situations in their fiction. Leo Tolstoy once said, "All happy families

resemble one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own fashion" (1). As far as family relationships are concerned, many young adult authors depict dysfunctional, unhappy families not only because those families tend to be more interesting and intriguing than are happy, well-adjusted families, but also because many adolescents have to grapple with the plethora of problems that surface in family life. Educators Ruth Cline and Karen Hartman say that the American family can be an appropriate topic in the classroom (38). Students need to understand that there is no appropriate structure for the "family"; that the problems of families are many and varied; and that coping skills can be learned from classroom discussions about family problems. Cline and Hartman contend that one of the best ways to open the door for such discussions is through the study of young adult literature (38). Selected novels that present families in various states of function and dysfunction can be a legitimate pedagogical tool. Students "can learn coping skills from the fictional characters that will help them in their own lives" (Cline and Hartman 38).

Some young adult novelists do not write about family relationships, choosing instead to give preeminence to other types of relationships. In many young adult novels, for instance, some writers emphasize boy-girl relationships and place parent-child, sibling, and other relationships on the periphery. Fortunately, some writers do give a more

balanced view of the family. Two very popular writers who do present both positive and negative family relationships are Sue Ellen Bridgers and Cynthia Voigt. The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare family relationships in selected young adult novels of these two authors. This study consists of seven chapters. Chapter one includes an introduction, rationale, selection of writers and novels for analysis, the design of the study, and the research questions to be answered by the collected qualitative data; chapter two provides a review of related literature on the family and on Voigt and Bridgers; chapter three describes sibling relationships in selected novels by Voigt and Bridgers; chapter four describes parent/child relationships; chapter five describes husband/wife relationships; chapter six describes extended family relationships (grandparents, uncles, and aunts); and chapter seven gives a summary of the findings and presents conclusions and implications for further research.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

While young adult literature as a distinct genre has been popular since 1968 when Paul Zindel's The Pigman, S. E. Hinton's The Outsiders, and Ann Head's Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones were published, only relatively recently has critical attention been accorded the writers of young adult novels.

Scholars have examined family relationships in adult literature. Two representative studies include Ellen Millsaps' The Family in Four Novels of Eudora Welty and Christopher Flint's Disrupted Legacies: Family Structure and Narrative Form in the 18th Century Novel. Research in the study of family relationships in young adult novels is minuscule, as is critical attention to literary criticism of the works of specific young adult authors. Two such studies include W. L. McBride's Parent-Adolescent Relationships and Familial Environments in the Realistic Problem Novel and M. J. Tingle's An Analysis of Family Relationships in Fiction Recommended for Adolescents. These existent studies barely scratch the surface of the wealth of material that needs to be addressed by literary critics and researchers. More work needs to be accomplished in the area of family relationships in young adult literature. This present study seeks, in part, to fulfill this need, to examine how Voigt and Bridgers, two popular and prolific young adult novelists, depict the family in selected novels.

SELECTION OF WRITERS FOR ANALYSIS

Voigt and Bridgers form the basis for this study because of their popularity with young adult readers and because of the acknowledgement accorded them by the literary community. Both of these authors appear on multiple award

lists; both have a substantial body of work to their credit; both are currently writing and publishing young adult novels; and both present young adults in situations involving rich and complex family interactions.

Bridgers' writing career covers a span of time from 1976 to the present and Voigt's from 1979 to the present. In Literature for Today's Young Adult, authors Kenneth Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilson include Bridgers and Voigt in their "Honor Sampling." To arrive at this list of "best" books, they examined many published sources, such as the "best books" lists of Booklist, English Journal, School Library Journal, and The New York Times Book Review. They also examined the yearly lists from the American Library Association and conferred with a sample of approximately twenty-five young adult librarians and twenty-five college instructors of young adult literature before they selected what they considered the best of the best. Donelson and Nilson included in their "Honor Sampling" all books that were named by four out of six sources (17). During the years 1967-89, four books by Bridgers were included and three by Voigt (Donelson and Nilson 562-73).

In addition to the lists given above, two others which include Bridgers and Voigt are Books for You: A Booklist for Senior High Students, edited by Donald Gallo, and Your Reading: A Booklist for Junior High and Middle School Students, edited by James Davis and Hazel Davis, et al.

Also, leaders in the field of adolescent literature recommended Bridgers for inclusion in the 1989 English Journal survey of best adolescent novels; both Bridgers and Voigt were included in the 1992 survey. Both of these surveys were conducted by Ted Hipple.

The recurrence of Bridgers and Voigt on numerous lists suggests their popularity with both young adult readers and with experts in the field of adolescent literature. Thus, these two authors seem to be excellent choices for examination in this study.

SELECTION OF NOVELS FOR ANALYSIS

The literary works analyzed in this study are the Tillerman cycle novels by Voigt and the rural North Carolina young adult novels by Bridgers. Both authors are generally published as young adult novelists, but both have published materials that cannot be termed "young adult" novels. For example, Bridgers has published one novel, Sara Wills, which she herself has labeled "adult" fiction. Voigt, on the other hand, has written several children's books. Bridgers' rural North Carolina novels and Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels that are labeled "young adult" in Books in Print and published as young adult novels are analyzed in this study. Listed below are the novels that are addressed:

Cynthia Voigt

1. Homecoming, 1981
2. Dicey's Song, 1982
3. The Runner, 1985
4. Sons from Afar, 1987
5. Seventeen against the Dealer, 1989

Sue Ellen Bridgers

1. Home Before Dark, 1976
2. All Together Now, 1979
3. Notes for Another Life, 1982
4. Permanent Connections, 1987

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Considerations

This theory-based study is qualitative/descriptive in nature and involves the content analysis of the rural North Carolina young adult novels of Bridgers and the Tillerman cycle novels of Voigt. The novels are analyzed according to the following types of relationships: sibling, parent/child, husband/wife, and extended family.

A procedure for content analysis suggested by Fred Kerlinger in Foundations of Behavioral Research: Educational and Psychological Inquiry is used. According to

Kerlinger, a viable method for analyzing literature is the examination of three units: theme, character, and thema. He defines "theme" as the dominant idea presented in the literary work; "character" refers to the protagonist(s) and other characters who appear in the literature; "thema" refers to the particular sequences of events that confront characters in a literary work, the response of those characters to the situation, and the characters' perception of the consequences of that behavior (544-53).

This study is grounded in both systems theory and symbolic interactionism, sometimes referred to as role theory. According to Stephen Bahr, in systems theory the family is viewed as "a system that is more than the sum of the individual characteristics of each family member" (16). In other words, family members must be seen as they interact (Bahr 16). Closely aligned to systems theory is symbolic interactionism. Bahr says that this theory is widely used in studies of families. The basic assumption is that "Humans live in a symbolic environment and use complex symbols" (Bahr 13). Symbolic interactionists see the family as a "group of interacting personalities on a stage" with each member having a role with definite expectations (Bahr 13).

Projected Research Questions

1. Is the family as a unit presented positively?
2. Are sibling relationships presented positively?
3. Are mother-child relationships presented positively?
4. Are father-child relationships presented positively?
5. Are husband-wife relationships presented positively?
6. Are extended-family relationships presented positively?
7. What are the primary causes of familial conflict, and are these problems in family relationships resolved in the selected novels? If so, how is resolution achieved?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE: THE FAMILY

An abundance of literature on the family is published each year in both book-length and scholarly-article form. While most of the family therapy journals publish experimental research, almost all of the book-length studies are descriptive in nature.

Much attention has been given to the significance of the family in society and to the delineation of family types within that society. Kalmuss and Seltzer say that the family is a "dynamic system of role relationships between spouses, siblings, parents, and children" (340). The family is one of the most important vehicles for the socialization of the young; it is "a key environment for teaching children the values and behaviors that will make them functional members of the larger social group" (Kalmuss and Seltzer 339). Along with many other researchers, Kalmuss and Seltzer see the traditional nuclear family as a rarity in modern American society. Researchers, they say, can no longer assume that individuals have only two contexts for family socialization: the family of their childhood and the family of their marital relationship. Instead, there is the

likelihood that individuals will be involved in the "formation and dissolution" of several families during their lifetime. Researchers see the contemporary American family as a dynamic institution that requires new conceptualizations of its structure (Kalmuss and Seltzer 340-41).

Cynthia Meyer and Paul Rosenblatt believe that the definition of "family" should be as "all-encompassing as possible. It should include, for example, cohabitating couples, childless families, and gay and lesbian families (249). This broadening of the definition of "family" is necessary, says Pepper Schwartz, who sees the family as an institution that has been undergoing a metamorphosis for the last one hundred years. Schwartz says that current research does not reflect the changed state of the family and that all research "should have to contend with the fact that the corporate model of family endeavor is defunct" (455). Instead of the traditional nuclear family as the primary family type, Schwartz says that three major types have been created because of the individual's interest in self: (1) The single-head-of-household family, which is primarily found among the poor and the "economically unstable"; (2) the blended family, which is most often found in the middle class; and (3) the executive family, which is a dual-career couple or a couple that is secure enough financially that the wife may choose not to work. What these three types

have in common is that they all show concern for themselves first of all and then for their children and extended family members (Schwartz 457-58).

Thomas Holman and Marion Woodroffe-Patrick's study of family structure has revealed four family structural types:

> (1) Intact: Both biological parents live with the child;
>
> (2) Single-parent: One biological parent is in the home;
>
> (3) Reconstituted: One biological parent and one step-parent live in the home;
>
> (4) Other: Grandparents or some other adults fill the parent role. (217)

A. J. Voiland and her associates have developed the following classification system from a study of 888 families:

> (1) The perfectionistic family: Open conflict is avoided and unrealistic expectations are common;
>
> (2) The inadequate family: Family structures are resisted; family members look to outside sources for help in solving problems;
>
> (3) The egocentric family: Parents are self-centered and opinionated; thus, problems with the children are intensified;

> (4) The unsocial family: Family members lack social skills and more than one person in the family is socially maladjusted. (qtd. in Schaefer, Briesmeister, and Fitton 229)

In addition to defining "family" and delineating family types, some researchers have attempted to differentiate between healthy families and dysfunctional families. According to Irene and Herbert Goldenberg, much more attention has been given to "pathogenic," or dysfunctional, families than to competent, healthy ones (39). They say that a competent family is one with "parental relationships that presumably help develop capable, adaptive, healthy individuals" (39). Viktor Gecas emphasizes the nurturant function of healthy families. He says that, regardless of the form or structure of a family, its primary function is "the nurturant socialization of children"; without that function, neither families nor societies would exist for very long (434).

The research of J. M. Lewis, W. R. Beavers, J. T. Gossett, and V. A. Phillips gives the most useful information on how healthy families function. These researchers worked with intact families that had at least one adolescent and no family member identified as a psychiatric patient. The researchers interviewed seventy volunteer families; thirty-three were designated "healthy" based on scores they received on the Global Health-Pathology

Scale. Twelve healthy families were selected for intensive study of the interactions of family members. The results indicated that there was no single quality in all the families that made them functional and healthy. The researchers saw the health of the families as a "tapestry reflecting differences in degrees along many dimensions" (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 39). However, they did discover that the key factors seemed to be the capacity of families to communicate with each other and the strength of the husband/wife alliance. They found that families that function "optimally" expect their "transactions with one another to be caring, open, empathic, and trusting" (40-41).

Goldenberg and Goldenberg say that it may be problematic to attempt to categorize families as either "normal" or "abnormal"; however, some families do function in a more effective, competent, and resilient manner than do others (28). In dysfunctional families, family members often appear hostile, isolated, alienated, and guarded. Family members are likely to respond to each other in a "passive, powerless, controlled fashion" (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 42). Such family members may be revealing a weakness or dysfunction in one of the sub-systems of the family. According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg, the basic sub-system in a family is the husband/wife one. Any dysfunction in this relationship "reverberates through the family" and adversely affects every member (37). Goldenberg

and Goldenberg note four common expressions of dysfunctional behavior within a family:

> (1) Pathological communication: This behavior may be defined as faulty or unhealthy communication. Two examples of pathological communication are double-bind and use of mystification. Double-bind means that no matter what response one family member makes to another in a situation of conflict, he or she loses. Double-bind covers over the underlying sources of conflict in the family. Mystification refers to one family member's giving a message that obscures the real issue of conflict.
>
> (2) Enmeshment and disengagement: Enmeshed family members are over involved in each other's lives; disengaged family members feel separated and alienated.
>
> (3) Scapegoating: One family member is set apart and labeled as the cause of disharmony in the family.
>
> (4) The persistence of family myths: These beliefs that are accepted by all family members help them to maintain and to justify many of the dysfunctional patterns in their interactions (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 72).

Family therapist Virginia Satir says that every family has unwritten rules, many of which involve the expression of feelings that could cause pain. She asserts that "dysfunctional families follow dysfunctional rules." For

instance, some families refuse to verbalize such things as the mother's alcoholism or the father's philandering (qtd. in Goldenberg and Goldenberg 31).

W. R. Beavers, in his research on family competence and individual functioning among adolescent children, distinguishes five levels of family functioning: (1) optimal, (2) adequate, (3) midrange, (4) borderline, and (5) severely disturbed. Families that are moderately and severely dysfunctional are less flexible and less efficient as a unit or system than are those in the optimal and adequate range. Children from moderately dysfunctional families are more likely to be neurotic and have behavior problems while those from severely dysfunctional families are more likely to be schizophrenic and antisocial (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 43, 47). According to Barrington Moore, many of the problems of children and adolescents come about as "the result of the dysfunctional and obsolete family systems" that predominate in modern American society (qtd. in Sebald 35).

Viktor Gecas says that dysfunctional families lack the ability to provide "nurturant socialization." Some of the negative consequences of this lack of nurturance include low self-esteem, anti-social behavior, alienation, poor cognitive development, delinquency, drug use, teen pregnancy, school dropouts, teen runaways, teen suicide, and violent crimes of all sorts (Gecas 435-36).

Researchers have also studied family responses to stress and to crisis situations. Dysfunctional families respond quite differently from functional or competent families. A. Y. Napier and C. A. Whitaker distinguish three types of family stress:

(1) Acute situational stress, which refers to predictable crises for almost every family sometime during its life cycle. Some examples of this type include serious illness, a job change, a more to a new place, and the death of a family.

(2) Interpersonal stress, which refers to conflict and disunity within a group or family.

(3) Intrapersonal stress, which refers to a conflict within an individual. This type of stress is the result of "extreme pressures...that the individual internalized" (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 28-29).

Researchers David Kaplan and associates studied crises that led to requests for psychiatric hospitalization. They identified four general types of crises:

(1) The "bolt from the blue": those crises that arise from forces outside the individual and the family system. Examples include a fire, illness, and accidents.

(2) Developmental: those crises that occur in the normal stages of development. Examples include the first date, graduation, marriage, retirement, and death.

(3) Structural: those crises which arise from the family structure itself. Examples include alcoholism, violence, suicide attempt, and philandering.

(4) Caretaker: those crises which occur when the family becomes dependent on outside helpers who have the power to disrupt the family (Pittman 255-59).

The crises that competent, healthy families weather with a moderate amount of stress can be debilitating to a dysfunctional family. Schaefer, Briesmeister, and Fitton say,

> In order to mitigate the debilitating force of ...crisis-producing situations, the family must call upon its collective functioning capability and recuperative power. The nature and degree of the family's resources determine how effectively the family will weather the crisis. Unless a family has developed a sense of integration, cohesiveness, adaptability, and organization and has established open channels of communication, it may disintegrate in the face of tragedy. (47)

One type of family crisis that has been well researched is that of divorce and, subsequently, the problems that result from living in a single-parent family. As Cline and Hartman observe, 60% of all divorces involve children (38). Thornton and Freedman cite alarming statistics on divorce rates. From 1860 to the early 1960's, divorce rates

increased gradually at a rather steady pace; however, from the mid-1960's to the 1980's, the divorce rate more than doubled. In 1981, a record number of 1.2 million divorces were awarded by the courts (Edwards 356-57). According to Carol MacKinnon, "Divorce is a disruptive event for parents and children" (469). A study by Hetherington, Cox, and Cox on "Effects of Divorce on Parents and Children" reveals that children, particularly boys, are adversely affected by the divorce of their parents. The children "exhibit more aggressive, impulsive, and noncompliant behavior than do children from nondivorced families" (MacKinnon 469).

Debra Kalmuss and Judith Seltzer say that family violence is more likely to occur in "post divorce single-parent families than in never-divorced families" (348). According to studies conducted by Bloom and associates and by Hetherington and associates, the stress associated with a transition from a two-parent household to a single-parent one is immense. The family members often experience turmoil as they adjust to the loss of a primary family member and to the decrease in financial security. Divorce and the resulting single-parent family unit frequently produce "overwhelming emotions, including depression, loneliness, confusion, guilt, anger, and anxiety" and the risk of violence within the family is increased (Kalmuss and Seltzer 348-49).

Much research indicates that single-parent families tend to be less stable than intact families; however, some traditional intact families may be considered dysfunctional because of the inability of family members to communicate effectively with each other. Goldenberg and Goldenberg say that "to function effectively, families must establish and maintain clear communication channels" (71). Caroline McKinney believes that communication problems in families sometimes arise because adolescents long for independence from adults. When that attempt at independence is thwarted, the result may be the construction of walls or barriers that prevent communication. According to McKinney, "out of frustration, anger, and fear, the adolescent may build fences where there should be bridges" (35). Raymond Calabrese says that the alienated adolescent is "disruptive, rebukes authority, drops out of school or becomes a passive participant, is prone to suicide, abuses drugs and alcohol, and rejects the norms established by family, school, and society in general" (qtd. in McKinney 35).

Some sociologists and family therapists believe the modern American family may be in an extremely fragile state. Demographer Paul C. Glick says that "the relatively fragile state of American family life at present is undeniable in view of the prospect that close to one-half of the first and second marriages of young adults will end in divorce (438). Recent statistics reveal that Americans cannot honestly take

an ameliorative stance where the family is concerned. Viktor Gecas reveals that 50% of all marriages begun in the early 1980's will end in divorce; 50% of today's children will spend some time before age 18 in a single-parent family; 75% of divorced people will marry again, thus creating more families with step parents and step siblings (434). Alan Booth adds that many children will not have the benefit of a male-parent role model and that most children whose parents divorce will not have a good relationship with the "noncustodial parent" (429). It is unfortunately true that, while all family members are at risk when the family unit becomes unstable, "the population most at risk is children in adolescence" (Booth 429).

Because the problems in American families today affect the entire population in general and the adolescent in particular, a study of family relationships should find its proper place in the modern classroom. Educators Ruth Cline and Karen Hartman say that the American family and its "demise" can be "an appropriate topic for class discussion, for interdisciplinary study with history, sociology, or family living classes, or a thematic unit in an English class" (38). Cline and Hartman point out that students need to understand that there is no one appropriate structure for the family; that the problems of families are many and varied; and that coping skills can be learned from classroom discussions about family problems. Cline and Hartman

contend that one of the best ways to open the door for such discussions is through the study of adolescent literature (38). Selected novels that present families in various states of function or dysfunction can be a legitimate pedagogical tool. Students "can learn coping skills from the fictional characters that will help them in their own lives" (Cline and Hartman 38).

The literature on family types and on family problems is abundant in both descriptive and experimental form. The preceding literature review on the family provides necessary background material for a content analysis of family relationships in selected young adult novels of Cynthia Voigt and Sue Ellen Bridgers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE: CYNTHIA VOIGT

Cynthia Voigt has been given substantial critical attention since the publication of her first novel. At least one book-length critical commentary has been published on Voigt, Presenting Cynthia Voigt by Suzanne Reid. In addition, numerous critical articles have been published and continue to appear each year in such journals as The English Journal and The ALAN Review. A small portion of that criticism focuses on family relationships. According to comments made in Children's Literature Review, critics often praise Voigt for "her expertise in fashioning memorable

characters and rich relationships in which both adults and children grow in understanding" ("Voigt" 223).

Voigt herself considers her character development a strength in her novels. She comments that defining and developing her characters is similar to "pulling out a thin piece of torte" (qtd. in Kauffman 876). She continues,

> You have an insight that will enable you to connect even though you can't really explain who they are. You can't pin them down as to who they are, but you can connect with who they are, talk to them and see what they're trying to communicate. It's that narrow sliver connection from which you intuit outwards. I think that's how most of my characters are connected and absolutely different. (qtd. in Kauffman 876)

Joanna Shaw-Eagle in "Cynthia Voigt: Family Comes First" says that Voigt's characterizations have "dimension and depth. The reader really cares about the characters" (B2). One such character is Dicey Tillerman, the heroine of Homecoming, Dicey's Song, and Seventeen against the Dealer. According to Shaw-Eagle, Homecoming "deals with the pain of losses--death, separation, poverty--but also with responsibility, friends, wisdom, happiness, survival. It's about insecurity but, above all, love and happiness through family" (B2). Voigt wants her books to focus on serious

themes, on those "bottom-line situations" to which young people can relate. She appeals to many young adult readers because her novels "depict problem solvers who are young, dealing with their problems in unusual, resourceful ways, and as part of a family who love one another very, very much" (Shaw-Eagle B2).

Concurring with Shaw-Eagle's assessment of the importance of family in Voigt's novels, Ann Martin-Leff says that Voigt's books are "captivating stories" with "richly drawn characters with all the idiosyncrasies of real people and a fine-tuned understanding of the complexity and importance of family relationships" (20). Very often some family relationships in a Voigt book are challenging and even depressing. Concerning Homecoming, Kathleen Leverich describes Voigt's characterizations of most adults as "alarmingly hostile"; the children in this novel, however, relate well with one another and are more positively presented. She says that the novel's "disturbing undercurrent of hostility and cynicism is counter-balanced by the family's obvious love and loyalty to one another" (38).

The importance of family relationships in Voigt's novels is reflected in the search for a place to be, a home of some sort, in Homecoming. E. Colwell says that the novel is "a moving story of a search for what everyone desires--a home" (147). David Russell believes Homecoming to be a fine

example of the modern family story. He says, "By recalling the time-honored literary heritage of Western literature, Voigt imbues her work with a multi-dimensional quality speaking to the significance of the family in modern society" (83). Russell believes that Voigt's novels become a "re-affirmation of the modern American family's enduring strength and resilience" (83). James Henke in "Dicey, Odysseus, and Hansel and Gretel: The Lost Children in Voigt's Homecoming," comments that the theme of the novel is that of the "lost child," a theme that is developed through Voigt's depiction of a lost home and an abandoned family. He says that readers connect with the novel because "at some point in our lives (and perhaps more than once) we all have been the lost child," the one who has "outgrown the familiar and comforting certitudes of childhood" (52). Of the family relationships in Homecoming, Nancy Hammond says that the novel is "tense with rejection and deprivation" (654); however, the sequel, Dicey's Song, "teems with restorative life" as the four children bond with their grandmother and then become secure enough to relate to others around them (654). Robert Flynn says that the theme is "loving and caring" (408). Eliza Dresang points out the significance of family relationships in her discussion of music and symbols. For instance, "Amazing Grace," says Dresang, is "the family song for Dicey" because it emphasizes the significance of coming home. Also the large, very old tree in the

grandmother's yard is a symbol for the Tillerman family, Dresang says (36).

Critic Gloria Jameson also gives attention to familial relationships in her discussion of several of Voigt's Tillerman novels. According to Jameson, Voigt uses "home as a focus in Homecoming, as a frame in Dicey's Song, and as an evolving reflection of the protagonist is A Solitary Blue" (3). She believes that Voigt's characters and humankind in general all "long to be healed, to have a home, to go home, to be secure in our home" (14). Suzanne Reid discusses the healing of families in "Reaching out, Holding on, and Letting Go: Images of Music, Wood and Sailing in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman Series." She says that Voigt's characters escape from damaged relationships by reaching out of themselves, holding on to the natural strength of familial bonds, and finally letting go of ties that imprison them" (10). Betty Greenway draws parallels between fairy tales and Voigt's Tillerman novels to point out the strength of children who are abandoned by family members. Greenway says that one metaphor for the child is the fairy tale hero, "the orphan cast out from any parental security but journeying to find a mature love and life of his or her own" (16).

The Runner, Voigt's fourth book about the Tillerman clan, has been given substantial critical attention, perhaps because of the intensity of the relationships described therein. Ruth Lynn says, "The Runner is about connections--

severed, denied, sustained, treasured" (321). Alice Digilio finds the relationship between the mother and son a favorable one. She says,

> Besides running, the other anchor in Bullet's life is his mother Abigail. As strong and stoic as Bullet, she bends but never breaks under her husband's tyranny. She and Bullet have a relationship of mutual respect, trust, and certainly love, although neither seems able to express it. . . .Much is communicated through silence in the Tillerman household. (8)

Mary Hoffman says of Bullet, "Physically he is an instrument for running, tuned to concert pitch. Emotionally he can't even manage a scale" (28). Of The Runner, Susan Mengers says that sacrificing one's self for others' advancement may create a harmful situation, one that is detrimental to both the giver and the receiver of the sacrifice. She sees the character of Abigail, the mother, as a self-sacrificer and says, "Abigail's commitment to what she believes is appropriate behavior for a wife and mother inflicts lasting damage on her children and threatens to harm her grandchildren as well" (251). Mengers extends her discussion to other Voigt novels, suggesting that families can be emotionally destroyed by inappropriate and inadvisable self-sacrifice.

Seventeen Against the Dealer, Voigt's last Tillerman novel, has received scant critical comment on family relationships. Hazel Rochman notes "some preachiness" in the depiction of the family members, especially of Maybeth (1276); Trev Jones says the novel is primarily about the importance of "nurturing relationships rather than taking them for granted" (103). Overall, critical attention to Voigt's novels is sparse, primarily consisting of book reviews.

The above comments that speak to the issue of family relationships in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman novels are very few; however, the number of critical articles on Voigt increases every year.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE: SUE ELLEN BRIDGERS

Sue Ellen Bridgers, master story teller, has been called "one of the most skillful and perceptive writers of young adulthood literature" ("Bridgers" 20). At present Bridgers has written five young adult novels and one adult novel, several of which have received awards from the literary community. One book-length study of her work has been published, Ted Hipple's Presenting Sue Ellen Bridgers, and at least one dissertation has been written about Bridgers, Pamela Sissi Carroll's Sue Ellen Bridgers'

Southern Literature for Young Adults. In addition, several critics have closely examined Bridgers' novels and have published reviews or articles; most of the Fall 1990 issue of The ALAN Review is devoted to critical studies of Bridgers' work. Much more critical attention needs to be accorded this outstanding writer. This review of critical literature on Sue Ellen Bridgers centers on that which comments on family relationships.

According to Children's Literature Review, Bridgers' small-town life in Sylva, North Carolina, helps her to create novels "which reveal her belief in the ability of family and place to bring self-awareness, comfort, and healing to adults as well as to young people" ("Bridgers" 20). Bridgers herself notes the significance given in her novels to place and family. She says,

> Because I feel this attachment keenly I write about life in families. I find that the lives that interest me most are not isolated ones but those involved daily in the complicated footwork of family living. People related by blood share whether they want to or not, a past and prospect of a future as real and as important as their present. I believe that a nurturing figure, whether it be mother, father, grandparents, or some other adult, is essential to family life but I realize, looking back on my accumulated efforts

> as a writer, that I do not have many successful mothers. Forced to face this subject, I have tread on troubled waters of my own psyche to discover that for me, motherlessness provides the ultimate, the all-consuming conflict. No matter what the relationship is, close or distant, strained or loving, mothers are still our source. They are perhaps the most unique and certainly the most complex attachment we will ever have. (qtd. in "Bridgers" 21)

Bridgers' novel Home Before Dark has been called "an outstanding first novel" (Holtz 165). This novel tells of the difficulties of a migrant family as experienced and described by a fourteen-year-old girl, Stella Willis. Jean McIntyre comments that the novel centers on the social and personal conflicts of the Willis family. According to McIntyre, Bridgers focuses on "sex as it embroils all the main characters from the aging spinster Maggie Grover to the barely adolescent Toby Brown" (94).

In All Together Now, Bridgers' second novel, family has an extremely significant place in the depiction of the loves and trials of the Flanagan family. Sister Gregory Duffy sees in this novel a "commingling of love at all levels of life" (B6). Katherine Patterson speaks to the importance of family in All Together Now when she says it is "a story of the members of an extended family reaching towards one

another"; she likens the novel to a square dance with four couples who dance together, interact with each other, and then return home (K1). Critic Joseph Milner says, "The presence of the family, as it attends vertically and horizontally, and of the larger community runs deep in the account of Casey's summer with her grandparents" (176). He asserts that Bridgers "pays homage to powerful adults" who participate with strength in families (176).

In Notes for Another Life, Bridgers depicts a family grappling with dysfunctions of various sorts. According to Dick Abrahamson, Bridgers focuses on the coming together of a family to help Kevin deal with rejection and suicidal tendencies (75). Joan Atkinson calls Notes for Another Life "definitely a candidate for YASD Best Books"; Bridgers' depiction of life in a family setting seems to be one of the strong points of the novel. According to Atkinson, "Topics of contemporary interest--suicide, mental illness, divorce, living with loss--are placed in the context of family living so skillfully that they appear as universal rather than contemporary themes" ("Review" 20). Atkinson says that family life in this novel is "multi-faceted--a mix of love and loss, or responsibilities accepted and rejected, of forces controllable and out of hand, of disappointment and support" ("Mote" 57). Diane Donovan refers to the novel as "an excellent portrait of life's varied influences upon one family" (318). Donovan says the novel very powerfully

"encompasses the lives and thoughts of one family" (317). Charlotte O'Brien and Margaret Cook see in the character of Wren Jackson in Notes for Another Life a synthesis of "the best traits of male and female to provide new role models for young readers who must resolve the pain that accompanies the loss they experience when families disintegrate" (82). Finally, Doris Betts, in "Themes and Variations of Family Life," avers that in Home Before Dark, All Together Now, and Notes for Another Life Bridgers "endorses the survival of family love and values" (17).

Permanent Connections also has much to say about family relationships. Hazel Rochman says the novel "affirms the bonds of extended family and community, part of a general trend in adult and teen-age fiction that shows young people coming of age by finding roots and staying home" (21). As with Bridgers' previous novel, this novel depicts family as both inflictor of pain and as healer of wounds.

Of Bridgers' novels in general, Ted Hipple comments in Presenting Sue Ellen Bridgers that "the parents of teens are weak or nonexistent and the powerful shapers of the teenagers are older women" (48). Hipple discusses the thematic issue of families that permeates Bridgers' fiction. He sees the nuclear family as dysfunctional in Bridgers' works while the extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins "almost borders on the supernormal, the too good" (Presenting 68).

Like Cynthia Voigt, Sue Ellen Bridgers has so far failed to receive adequate critical attention, but as both writers continue to produce young adult novels, it is inevitable that scholars also will continue to scrutinize their works, thus bringing much-deserved recognition to these two writers.

CHAPTER III

SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS IN VOIGT AND BRIDGERS

Sibling Relationships in Voigt's Tillerman Cycle Novels

In Enabling and Empowering Families, Carl Dunst, Carol Trivette, and Angela Deal say that a family system may be considered a group of "interconnected individuals" who function as "sources of support and resources to one another" (70). This definition may be applied to the Tillerman children in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels; these four children possess qualities that create a fictional climate for satisfactory family functioning. The young Tillermans, when first introducted by Voigt, have so much going against their success as a family: an absentee, irresponsible father; a mentally ill, impoverished mother; and an uninvolved extended family. What Voigt reveals in her novels is how such a family not only can survive but actually rise above difficulties to maturity and strength.

Voigt's consistency in her characterization of the Tillerman children is shown in four of the Tillerman cycle novels: Homecoming, Dicey's Song, Sons from Afar, and Seventeen Against the Dealer. The Runner is excluded from the discussion of sibling relationships because, in that

novel, Voigt goes back in time to a depiction of an earlier generation of Tillermans, one in which only one son is the main character. The previously mentioned four novels cover a span of a little more than eight years. Homecoming begins the story of the Tillerman family, setting up roles, personality traits, strengths, and weaknesses which are continued throughout the cycle. The children are Dicey, aged thirteen, the primary protagonist who assumes the role of mother to her younger brothers and sister; James, aged ten, the intellectual Tillerman who loves learning; Maybeth, aged nine, slow to learn but swift to feel and to show compassion for others; and Sammy, aged six, lively, free-spirited, and stubborn.

The richest relationships in most of Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels involve these siblings. A word that perhaps best describes their relationships is "complementary." Each child possesses unique strengths that complement the weaknesses of the other siblings, and only by this compensation can the children survive and progress toward a satisfying life. Taken together, the children form a close-knit, functional family unit, despite the dysfunctional qualities of most of the adults in their lives. As Homecoming begins, Liza and her four children, having been evicted from their shack on the beach in Provincetown, are on their way by car to Bridgeport, Connecticut, to live with Aunt Cilla Logan. Along the way, Liza stops at a shopping

mall, tells the children to obey Dicey, and then disappears. After a two-day wait, Dicey takes charge and sets out walking toward Bridgeport with the three younger siblings in tow. With little except ingenuity, perseverance, and a measure of good luck, the Tillermans make it to their destination. Along the way, they encounter teenaged runaways who give them tips about how to make it on their own, two college men who befriend them and provide food and a temporary place of respite from the pouring rain, kind adults who give money for the hard work the children do, and concerned circus people who protect them from the evil intentions of Mr. Rudyard. When the children finally arrive at Bridgeport and discover that Aunt Cilla has been dead for some time, they attempt to make a life for themselves with their Cousin Eunice, but when the family is threatened with separation because of Maybeth's slowness and Sammy's quickness to fight, they set out again, this time for Crisfield and their grandmother. Their reception is less than warm but the grandmother has found her match in Dicey. After a difficult adjustment, grandmother and grandchildren finally become a real family.

While all four siblings work together to create an environment conducive to growth and progress, the focus in Homecoming is on Dicey. Thirteen-year-old Dicey's strengths are her courage and ingenuity. She is one of the most admirable of young women because of her determination to

keep her family together after the loss of their mother. When her mother, Liza, gives her parting words to her children, "You be good. You hear me? You little ones, mind what Dicey tells you" (Homecoming 9), the heavy responsibility of fulfilling the role of mother falls on Dicey's shoulders. Apparently, though, Liza increasingly had depended on her oldest child to fulfill the mother role, even when they were all together. Once when her mother had said, "You always look for the worst," Dicey had replied, "I like to be ready" (Homecoming 12). Yet immediately after Liza's desertion, Dicey questions how her mother could expect her to take care of them. She thinks, "Dump it all on Dicey, that was what Momma did, she always did, because Dicey was the determined sort" (Homecoming 13). Dicey does rise to the occasion as her mother has apparently anticipated and asserts to herself that she will get the children to Bridgeport and to a safe home.

Dicey, functioning as a substitute for her absentee mother, finds that her mother role requires her to be provider, protector, nurturer, and disciplinarian to her siblings. Throughout the trek from Provincetown to Crisfield, Dicey is intent upon providing food and shelter for her family. These duties, she discovers early on, are difficult ones to accomplish. They begin their journey with no food and very little money. After they have walked only a few hours, Sammy and James express concern about the

difficult walk and their hunger, causing Dicey to focus on a plan:

> "I've been thinking," she answered. "If we walk for a while, then rest a little, that's the best way. So we'll walk another hour or so and I'll go into a supermarket. We should have fruit every day, and maybe some doughnuts and milk. I'll see what they have. We've got to make our money last." (Homecoming 25)

The other children, because they do not fill the role of provider, complain on occasion about the food or lack thereof. Sammy, for instance, remarks that he is tired of doughnuts and wants, instead, hamburgers and french fries. The best Dicey can do, however, is to offer peanut butter spread with their fingers on some bread. She later splurges and buys chicken wings and potatoes but even after they are filled with the hot food, they speak wistfully of what they would love to have: corn on the cob with butter, watermelon, and chocolate sundaes.

Dicey becomes increasingly aware that supplying food for her siblings is well-nigh impossible without money. When they spend a few days in a park near the beach, they do manage to catch enough mussels, clams, and fish to stave off hunger. Then Louis, a runaway teenager who has been living on the beach with his girlfriend, tells Dicey that the area

is a game sanctuary and that fishing is not allowed. Dicey's response is one of anger and frustration:

> How were they supposed to eat then, Dicey asked herself. By buying food, she answered. The whole world was arranged for people who had money--for adults who had money. The whole world was arranged against kids. (Homecoming 65)

Only with effort does Dicey convince herself that "she could handle it. Somehow." (Homecoming 65). And handle it she almost always does, working at odd jobs along the way to earn money for food. She washes windows at a gas station and carries groceries for shoppers, for example. Also, she economizes as much as she can, buying such inexpensive foods such as bananas, bread, and stale doughnuts. Despite her best efforts, on many occasions the children have too little to eat. In one especially poignant scene, Dicey divides two small fish and two rolls evenly among the four children and they go "silent to sleep, hungry, thirsty, huddled together to keep warm" (Homecoming 78). During the next day, Dicey reaches one of her lowest points as she despairs over not being able to provide for her siblings:

> No money, no food, no way to go forward. The silence behind her told her that her brothers and sister were watching her. Maybe they could just all stay right here, without moving, and turn to stone. Then her troubles would be over. . . .

> There was nothing more she could do. Nothing. She had done her best and that wasn't good enough and now she could do no more. (Homecoming 79)

Dicey even has a day dream about food. In this day dream, she has bought enough food to last for several days. Then she trips and falls, the food scattering everywhere and being squashed by cars and stolen by a dog. Everyone around her who witnesses the loss ignores her and goes away from the store carrying his or her own groceries. The dream indicates Dicey's state of mind as she struggles to provide the bare essentials for her family.

Dicey's struggles as primary provider increase her own personal identification with her mother. She questions,

> Was this how Momma felt? Was this why Momma ran away? Because she couldn't think of anything more to do and couldn't stand any more to try to take care of her children. (Homecoming 80)

Unlike Liza, Dicey almost always manages to summon forth enough courage and determination to try one more time, to make one more attempt to get her family to a place they can call home. The struggle for food, however, takes its toll on all of them. On one occasion when Dicey tells her family that they have "nothing to eat and no money to buy food with," they

> greeted this announcement without a change in expression. They did not speak or sing any more,

> just followed Dicey meekly. If she had food to give them, they ate it. If there was no food, then they said nothing. (Homecoming 92)

Throughout their travels, Dicey takes the lead in providing sustenance for her siblings; despite her moments of despair and feelings of helplessness, she does, with the help of a few adults along the way, succeed in taking care of her family's need for food.

Not only does Dicey provide food for her family, but she also takes upon herself the task of providing shelter, no easy feat since much of their journey requires travel on busy roads through well-populated towns. Soon after their mother's desertion, Dicey, with great reluctance, prepares to leave their car, seeming to recognize that it would be the last secure shelter they would have for some time. Dicey sits quietly in the car, surrounded by her sleeping brothers and sister, and thinks, "The car was a cave within which they were safe. It held them together; and it protected them from outside forces, the cold, the damp, people (Homecoming 21). She thinks of the car as a "cocoon of darkness" where she should feel safe (Homecoming 14), but perplexing thoughts of her mother's abnormal behavior disturb the cocoon and reality impinges on Dicey. She feels obligated to devise a plan that will move them toward their goal of a place to call home. Fear of discovery by the police forces them to leave this shelter behind and begin

their arduous journey to Bridgeport. Along the way, Dicey is alert to potential places of shelter. Despite her vigilance, at times she is unsuccessful in locating adequate facilities for her family:

> They spent a night on a shaly beach with no shelter and no fire. They spent a night in a grove of pines that stood at the entrance to an estate, where Dicey woke frequently with the fear that they would be discovered by the owners of the big stone house that lay at the end of the driveway. (Homecoming 91)

Dicey's last bid for shelter before reaching Bridgeport is also one of the most taxing on her physical and emotional strength. After walking for a long while across the city of New Haven, Dicey realizes as night approaches that they will have to find shelter near a college campus in the center of the city. In despair, Dicey chooses a cluster of bushes for their sleeping place and instructs the children to curl up together under overhanging branches for a little protection from the rain. Recognizing the inadequacy of this shelter and regretting their plight, Dicey succumbs to tears.

> Dicey thought the rain had grown warm, until a stuffiness in her nose and an ache in her throat (like she was trying to swallow an apple whole) told her she was crying. (Homecoming 94)

Only through the intervention of two college students do the Tillermans have their need for shelter met on that occasion. They not only take them into their dorm room but they also arrange for them to be driven to Cousin Eunice's home in Bridgeport, saving them many days of walking.

Not until several weeks later when the children leave Cousin Eunice's home for their grandmother's in Crisfield does Dicey have to concern herself once again with providing shelter for her family. As the Tillermans near Crisfield, Dicey, on one occasion, reflects that they all need a permanent shelter, a real home. As a child herself, Dicey recognizes that she cannot be the provider of such a shelter, that the provision of a permanent home must come from an adult. After she meets Gram and discovers that she does not intend to welcome them with open arms, Dicey concludes to herself that Gram's <u>home</u> is what they need, not the grandmother herself.

> Maybe their grandmother didn't know just what she wanted. Or maybe she didn't really want anything, except to be left alone. Four kids, they were an awful bother. Cousin Eunice said so, again and again. And an expense. Dicey could manage the bother and they'd figure out a way to cover the expenses. . . . They could leave their grandmother pretty much alone. It was the place Dicey wanted, the big house, the acres of farmland, the barn,

> the water and the boat. It didn't have anything to do with the woman. (Homecoming 273)

All the young Tillermans, and especially Dicey, need a permanent home. After the long journeys from Provincetown to Bridgeport and from Bridgeport to Crisfield, Dicey seems to have grown weary of being the chief provider of food and shelter, so much so that she says bluntly to Gram, "You should let us live with you" (Homecoming 317). Earlier on their journey, Dicey had considered the need for a home and had shown a preference for independence. Dicey

> didn't feel like finding a harbor. She knew she needed one, and they needed one, but she would rather just sail along, dreaming, not caring where they were going or when they would get there or what they would do there. Couldn't you live your whole life without going into harbor? (Homecoming 203)

By the end of the novel, however, Dicey sees the advantages of a permanent shelter, a place where basic needs can be met with relative ease.

Not only does Dicey become the provider of the basic necessities of food and shelter as she assumes the mother role in her relation to her siblings but she also becomes the protector. Near the beginning of their journey, Dicey notices a gas station attendant glancing their way and she hurries her charges away. She says, "I don't want anyone to

know who we are, or that we're alone. . . . You can't tell who to trust" (Homecoming 47). Throughout Homecoming, Dicey's distrust of outsiders is demonstrated in her facility for lying well under pressure. She lies with aplomb and with regularity but almost always to protect or provide for her family. One such lie that she uses throughout their journey to Bridgeport is that she is a boy named Danny. She responds to James' "Why?" with "It's safer to be a boy than girl. . . . People leave boys alone more" (Homecoming 53). Throughout the novel, Dicey lies about who they are and where they are going because she fears harm to her family, even when harm is not intended. Dicey encounters some people who are potentially harmful to her family even though they believe they are being helpful. When the Tillermans are at Cousin Eunice's, for example, James is accepted without qualms by the teachers at the Catholic school because of his keen intelligence and his tractability. Sammy, however, because of his stubbornness and quickness to fight, and Maybeth, because of her mental slowness and social backwardness, are put on trial. Cousin Eunice and Father Joseph frequently speak with Dicey about the problem with Sammy and suggest the possibility of a foster home. Sister Berenice hints at a special boarding school for Maybeth where she will receive the attention she needs. Watching her family on the brink of falling apart,

Dicey tries to convince herself that these "outsiders" are really trying to help them. Father Joseph tells Dicey,

> "You should think of these things. . . . I know you don't want to, but you must think them through and be ready. Think of yourself also. You are still a child yourself." A child? Dicey felt a hundred years old or more. (Homecoming 145)

The longer the Tillermans remain in Bridgeport at Cousin Eunice's, the less Dicey feels capable of protecting her family. When Sammy comes home from his summer school with bruises and cuts, he tells Dicey he has fought because a boy said the fathers are going to put him in a foster home because nobody likes him. Sammy says,

> "You wouldn't let them do that, would you Dicey? I told Johnny and he said you couldn't stop them."
>
> Dicey felt helpless, absolutely helpless, with the two little ones holding her hands. She knew how Sammy felt. She wanted to fight somebody herself or to run, fast, not waiting for lights to change. But she had the two little ones holding onto her. (Homecoming 161)

So new to the role of protector, Dicey struggles with what is the right thing to do for her siblings. Her brain feels so clouded and confused at Cousin Eunice's that she even begins to believe what the teachers and Father Joseph

say about Maybeth. It is only when she hears Cousin Eunice and other adults talk about adoption procedures and say that Maybeth and Sammy are "on trial" that Dicey summons forth the courage to protect her family by finding another home with their grandmother. She makes plans to take a bus alone to Crisfield to ascertain if their grandmother will accept them; however, James discovers what Dicey is planning, accosts her, and convinces her to take them with her. Recognizing the truth in James' statements, Dicey and her siblings set out on the second half of their journey towards a permanent home. As they travel, Dicey reflects on their Bridgeport experience and draws some important conclusions:

> Cousin Eunice's house wasn't free; it was expensive. The price was always remembering to be grateful. And there was danger to Sammy and Maybeth, of being sent to foster homes or special schools; danger to Dicey and James of forgetting and saying what they thought before wondering if it would sound ungrateful. . . . She no longer hoped for a home. Now she wanted only a place where the Tillermans could be themselves and do what was good for them. (Homecoming 172)

In part two of the novel, one key scene reveals that Dicey has regained her authority in the Tillerman family as protector. This scene, which involves Mr. Rudyard, indicates Dicey's ability to provide physical protection for

her family. As they walk the last leg of their journey to Crisfield, Dicey sees a sign saying, "Pickers Wanted" and hires out herself and her brothers and sister to Mr. Rudyard. Dicey senses right away that "something was wrong here, something she couldn't put her finger on" (Homecoming 222), but concentrating on providing money for her family, she ignores her feelings. His threatening behavior, however, prompts James to say, "He's crazy, Dicey" (Homecoming 224). She orchestrates their escape from Mr. Rudyard and his huge guard dog and they flee to Hurlock, a town where they can hide if he pursues them. The experience with Mr. Rudyard affects Dicey's perceptions of others and makes her even more cautious than she has been heretofore. As they walk toward town, she thinks, "Danger lurked all around them, always, she knew that now" (Homecoming 227). Dicey finds herself scrutinizing every house they pass, thinking that each one is "a secret place, a fortress, within which anything might be going on." Every house is "perhaps a trap" (Homecoming 230).

When Mr. Rudyard spots them near the circus entrance and pursues them, Dicey's main concern is how she will be able to keep them safe. As he approaches with his fierce dog, Dicey becomes physical protector of her siblings. Turning to face Mr. Rudyard and the dog so Sammy will have time to escape, Dicey prepares to fight the dog if he attacks but is saved by Will, the circus owner, and Claire,

one of the circus performers (Homecoming 232-35). In her role of protector, Dicey shows willingness to risk personal harm to save her siblings from danger.

The roles of provider and protector are most clearly in evidence as Dicey leads her family to Crisfield. However, other important "mother roles" she assumes are those of nurturer and disciplinarian, roles that are intertwined throughout Homecoming. Dicey grows into a nurturer of her siblings during their journey. At the beginning, she is short-tempered and impatient, and she accepts with seeming reluctance the responsibility of helping the emotional hurts of her family.

It is evident that all the younger children need nurturance. James is inordinately concerned with the possibility of inherited mental illness. Maybeth struggles with insecurity and fear. In one scene, Maybeth surrounds herself with a ring of stones, perhaps symbolizing her need to be protected from the intrusion of the outside world. Sammy also has a great need for affection and reassurance. Of all the children, he has been closest to the mother; thus he misses her the most and rebels at the thought of leaving their old car to begin their journey to Bridgeport, believing that his mother will come back to the car and find them. For that same reason, he hinders the progress of the others during the first few days of their journey, picking fights with James, refusing to follow Dicey's instructions,

demanding to be carried on Dicey's back. Stretched to her own physical limits on the journey, Dicey seems unable to supply the nurturance Sammy needs. Her typical response early in the journey is to grind her teeth and stamp her feet to demonstrate her anger. On one occasion, she even threatens to leave Sammy:

> "I'm not going anywhere," Sammy said. "And you can't make me any more. You can't." Dicey's patience was at an end. She spoke bitterly. "No, I can't. And maybe I don't even want to. You've been a pill all day. I'll tell you what; you don't think I'll leave you, but I will. I'll be glad to leave you behind." (Homecoming 38)

In her anger, Dicey does not hear Sammy's quiet "I know" when she threatens to leave him, nor can she see how much he is hurting because of his mother's desertion; thus, she lashes out instead of soothing that hurt, perhaps because of her own inability to understand why her mother has left them alone. In the above scene, Dicey, unrelenting, carries out her bluff and walks away from Sammy with James hesitantly following. Dicey, less sensitive than Maybeth at this point, watches as the younger girl goes to Sammy and simply holds out her hand to him, helping him to rejoin the group. At this juncture, Dicey does not grasp that his compliance seems to indicate his fear of being deserted by Dicey, his mother-substitute. However, as their journey continues, she

becomes more understanding of Sammy's needs and begins to praise his efforts and respond with more positive reinforcement, even as she has to administer discipline. In one scene, Sammy steals a bag of food from a picnic table and gives it proudly to Dicey and says, "I wanted you all to have something to eat. . . . I wanted to help out" (Homecoming 64). Dicey lectures him about stealing but then reassures him that she still loves him. She says,

> "I don't know how we would have gotten you back if you'd been caught."
>
> "Would you get me back?" Sammy asked.
>
> Of course. What do you think?. . . We'd just have to get you back." (Homecoming 64)

By drawing upon her mother as a role model, Dicey learns how to reassure Sammy, James, and Maybeth when they encounter problems on their journey.

James, as well as Sammy, needs both support and discipline on occasion. When he steals twenty dollars from Stewart and Windy, two college students who befriend them and give them food and a place to spend the night, Dicey lashes out in anger and threatens to leave him behind if he does not obey her precisely until they reach Bridgeport. However, to Stewart and Windy, she apologizes for James and says, "I guess James doesn't understand. . . . He's not bad" (Homecoming 106). After her anger has dissipated, she thinks, "James was her brother and she would have to stick

by him; and she wanted to stick by him. How could Stewart know James? He couldn't, but Dicey could" (Homecoming 106). For both Sammy and James, Dicey is quick to discipline but she is also quick to compliment Sammy, when he helps her work to earn money, or James, when he gives advice or helps her figure out an answer to a problematic situation.

Sammy continues to need the most nurturance after their arrival in Bridgeport. James and Maybeth seem to fit into Cousin Eunice's life very well but Sammy struggles, demanding more and more of Dicey's attention, wanting her to play ball with him or race on the sidewalk, needing her to tuck him in each night.

Dicey becomes concerned about his many fights at school and pleads with him to have more control over his anger. She says, "Would you do it for James and Maybeth and me? . . .Can you try?" Sammy responds, "You sound like Momma. . . . When she'd ask me to be gooder, that was the way she'd talk" (Homecoming 155).

Nurturance apparently had been her mother's strength with Sammy, and Dicey has learned the art of nurturance through her enforced role of mother-substitute. This quality grows even more pronounced in Dicey once the family reaches Gram's home in Crisfield. Dicey's main thought after an unwelcome reception by her grandmother is that she is glad she insisted that her siblings stay in town while

she introduced herself to the grandmother. She does not want them even to meet Gram because "why should James and Maybeth and Sammy have to be disappointed," she thinks (Homecoming 255). Later on, when they succeed in settling themselves in their grandmother's home, Dicey still takes the lead in both nurturance and discipline. A key scene occurs near the end of the novel when the family are gathered at her grandmother's dinner table. Gram, attempting to punish Sammy for disobeying Dicey, tells him to go to bed without dinner. Dicey, upset but hesitating to speak out against her grandmother, wonders

> Why did every adult send kids away from the table? Maybe because nobody sent them to bed hungry. Maybe they'd forgotten what hungry was. But it wasn't right. Dicey knew what hungry was, and so did Sammy. (Homecoming 295)

Sitting at the dinner table with her family, Dicey grapples with fear, sensing that a wrong response may jeopardize their already tenuous position with Gram.

> She was afraid to speak and lose what they had gained of a place for themselves in this house; she was afraid to keep silent and lose what she felt was right for Sammy, for her family. This was a more difficult danger than any she had faced before. It wasn't the kind of danger you could run away from, or fight back at. . . . She just

> knew she had to stand by her brother and her family. (Homecoming 295)

Finally, Dicey's protective nature takes preeminence and she responds to her grandmother's order by saying,

> "No. . .It's not right to send him to bed hungry. I can't let that happen, and I was wrong to let Cousin Eunice do it. . . . You don't understand, not what it is to be hungry. It doesn't serve any purpose to punish Sammy that way." (Homecoming 295).

In her love for Sammy, Dicey is willing to risk everything. When she, in turn, disciplines Sammy more appropriately by taking away his bike-riding privileges for two days, she demonstrates to him her fairness in discipline and also her love for him, even though he has been disobedient. Dicey demonstrates just how much she has learned in her mother role about nurturance and discipline.

Masha Rudman, in Children's Literature: An Issues Approach, calls Dicey "superhuman" in her "ability to earn a living, to respond to emergencies, and to maintain the family" (23). It is true that Dicey's strength in leadership is clearly evident from the beginning of the novel to the end; it is also true that she fulfills very well her role as substitute mother as she provides for the basic necessities, protects, nurtures, and disciplines her siblings; however, also evident are Dicey's weaknesses in

providing for the physical and emotional needs of her brothers and sister. In such instances of lack, her siblings step in to compensate. On several occasions, Maybeth shows uncanny ability to gently persuade Sammy to comply with Dicey's wishes, thus assuming the role of nurturer; on other occasions, Sammy steps forward to help Dicey provide food for the family; in still other instances, James provides a listening ear to Dicey's inquiries and a wise word of advice. Dicey is not superhuman, but she is an indispensable component in the sibling relationships in Homecoming.

According to Donelson and Nilsen, "When the adults in children's lives are so flawed, space is cleared for fully developed sibling relationships" (10). Through the interactions of Dicey, James, Sammy, and Maybeth, Voigt more than adequately depicts sibling relationships characterized by love and respect.

Such is true not only in Homecoming but also in other Tillerman novels. "Learning, not knowing, is what it's about," Cynthia Voigt says about the real difference between adults and children (qtd. in Donelson and Nilsen 376). She believes that, in general, "kids expect themselves to be learning and adults expect themselves to know" and these expectations impact their attitudes towards people and experiences. She theorizes that

> My understanding of who I am, myself, is that I am changing, growing, adding to myself. If I expect myself to know, then I stand before the world as a completed creature--and I am bound to be a disappointment to everybody concerned in the encounter. (qtd. in Donelson and Nilsen 376)

Voigt's attitude toward learning and knowing is reflected in her second Tillerman novel, Dicey's Song, which focuses on the learning of a wider range of family members than does Homecoming. While the grandmother-grandchildren relationship predominates, sibling relationships also have an important place. Once again, as in Homecoming, Voigt focuses on Dicey and her perceptions of her siblings. The time span covered by Voigt in this novel is less than one year, approximately five months, but during that short time, much learning takes place for all of the Tillermans.

In Dicey's Song, Dicey is released from being the constant provider, protector, nurturer, and disciplinarian to her siblings. She is more than happy to relinquish the mother role to Gram, once she becomes convinced that Gram loves them and wants them to live with her. For instance, when Gram tells Dicey of the music teacher's request for a meeting about Maybeth, Dicey tells her she will see him as soon as possible but is relieved when Gram says,

> "I'll go. . . . I was planning to . . . . You're not the only one responsible, girl. You've been

> responsible a long time and done a good job. Take a rest now." (Dicey's Song 21)

Dicey's relinquishing of the mother role results in her increasing dependence on Gram and a corresponding increasing detachment from her siblings. For instance, she overhears her brothers quarreling and simply ignores them, telling herself that "Gram would settle it" (Dicey's Song 56). Enjoying her independence, she refuses to permit Sammy to help her repair the old boat which she has discovered in Gram's barn, and she turns down his request for her to play catch with him.

As much as Dicey enjoys time to be herself and do what interests her, which is working on the sailboat in Gram's barn, she seems to feel unnecessary on occasion. In one scene, she attempts to help her siblings but finds they require no help from her. She offers to play checkers with Sammy, but he prefers Gram, saying, "No, her, she's more fun anyway" (Dicey Song 34). Then Dicey offers to help Maybeth read, but Gram replies, "I already did that" (Dicey's Song 34). With mixed feelings, Dicey admits to herself that

> They were all turning away from her. . . . When this had happened before, at Cousin Eunice's house in Bridgeport, it had been bad for the little kids. But here, with Gram, on the farm, with a home, it wasn't bad for them. . . . Anyway, nobody was talking to Dicey, so she guessed they were

> doing all right without her. . . . It was a relief, in a way, not to have all that responsibility. It felt pretty good to be able to do things without worrying about the little kids. (Dicey's Song 37-38)

Dicey seems to be drifting into nonchalance about her siblings when Gram finally pulls her up short with these words: "Snap out of it. You've had weeks and weeks without worrying, but the vacation is over now. You've got to help out" (Dicey's Song 69). Dicey wonders how long she will have to worry about her siblings but at the same time acknowledges that "Gram was right; she'd had a nice long rest from it, longer than any she could remember ever in her life. And she couldn't fool herself that her family didn't matter to her" (Dicey's Song 71).

Voigt uses several metaphors to describe the family relationships in general and sibling relationships in particular in Dicey's Song. When Dicey is sinking into a lackadaisical attitude toward her brothers and sister, she imagines herself as a "little boat on an ocean, without any land around" to describe, at least partially, her feelings about her place in her family. She enjoys being the "tillerman" of her own life and, while she is no isolationist, she can appreciate her temporary independence from the sibling anchors that hold her grounded in port.

In addition to the boat metaphor, Voigt also makes use of the metaphors of reaching out and holding on to elucidate the sibling relationships. Dicey takes to heart Gram's advice: "You have to reach out to people. To your family too. You can't just let them sit there. You should put your hand out. If they slap it back, well, you reach out again if you care enough" (Dicey's Song 28). Dicey realizes that her love for her siblings is great enough for her to make the effort to reach out to them and help Gram meet their needs and give them direction. She also sees validity in Gram's urgent request to hold on to the family. "You've got to hold on. Hold on to people. They can get away from you. It's not always going to be fun, but if you don't--hold on--then you lose them" (Dicey's Song 74).

Dicey discovers that holding on to her siblings is sometimes complicated and difficult. She knows that Maybeth needs help with school work but she feels inept and too unskilled to help her learn to read; she perceives James' concerns about social acceptance among her classmates, but she cannot adequately identify with her need to fit in since she, herself, is basically self-motivated and independent; she recognizes that Sammy's newly acquired meekness in his classroom and acquiescence to his teacher's every request are not normal or healthy for Sammy, yet she wonders if obedience is preferable to his previous fighting spirit.

Eliza Dresang, in "A Newbery Song for Gifted Readers," comments that "Dicey must take the risk of valuing the relationships around her" by reaching out and holding on to those important people around her, but "no clear-cut answer is given" as to how Dicey is to proceed (36). Dicey can only attempt to "organize and live in accordance with the value system she develops" to help her deal with the difficult situations her siblings face (Dresang 36).

After expending much time and energy helping James, Maybeth, and Sammy, Dicey knows that reaching out is difficult and holding on is time-consuming; she realizes, though, that holding on to her siblings is "what she had been doing as long as she could remember" and that it is "what she wanted to do" (Dicey's Song 96-97). No longer totally responsible for fulfilling the mother role for her siblings, Dicey, nonetheless, works diligently with Gram to provide necessary love and care for them.

The focus shifts from Dicey to James and Sammy in Sons from Afar, chronologically Voigt's third novel in the Tillerman cycle. Sons from Afar is primarily a continuation of the quest motif set forth in Homecoming. In the earlier book, the questing is for a home and a family to which to belong. In Sons from Afar, the two sons, James and Sammy, search for a father. While they never do find him, they do learn much about him and about themselves as they follow their quest. As far as sibling relationships are concerned,

the novel focuses almost entirely on the two brothers, James and Sammy, approximately sixteen and twelve years of age, respectively. Dicey is away at college but still has some interaction with her siblings but not, of course, to the same extent as in Homecoming and Dicey's Song.

As Sons from Afar begins, Gram speculates about the differences between James and Sammy. James' introspective, reflective nature, evidenced in the earlier novels, is even more apparent here. He, for instance, begins many sentences with "Do you ever wonder--?" Sammy, on the other hand, is an active, vigorous boy who loves hard physical work. The great differences between the two brothers create dissention on occasion. In an early scene in the novel, Sammy gives evidence of resentment towards James, resentment caused perhaps by a lack of understanding of a personality so different from his own. The two boys have been sent by Gram to bale the water out of her boat. Sammy industriously does the job while James stands to one side, deep in thought. Sammy knows that the older James will help with the chore if he is asked; however, it seems to Sammy that "James shouldn't be waiting around to be asked, shouldn't just sit there, a pale blob in the dim air" (Sons 7). Sammy seems to resent James' unspoken criticism of anyone who actually enjoys physical labor. Sammy thinks, "James was always thinking about something, wondering about something; it was almost as if he was always trying to make Sammy feel stupid,

showing off a busier, smarter brain" (Sons 7). Of a truth, James is smart and knows he is smart; when James tries to convince Sammy that they need to know more about their father, he runs into resistance caused primarily by Sammy's practicality. According to the narrator, "James gave up on trying to explain to Sammy, who didn't care about anything that wasn't right under his nose. Intellectual curiosity, that was what Sammy didn't have" (Sons 9).

While James expresses disdain for Sammy's lack of mental prowess, the real reason behind his comments is his own private fears and low self-esteem. James believes people think he is "one of the dorks--a wimp, a nerd--whatever--a jerk" (Sons 16). His low self-esteem is evident in the following passage:

> He was so afraid--name it and he'd get anxious about it, war, any disease, death, people seeing how dorky he really was. He did his best, he did what he could, but what could you do when you were weak and skinny and didn't look cool, and couldn't ever say what you were thinking because people would think you were showing off. (Sons 16)

James is often embarrassed and ashamed about himself, and his negative feelings affect his relationships with his siblings, especially with Sammy. James feels proud of so few things in his life; however, he considers the help he has given Maybeth with her lessons one of his greatest

accomplishments as a human being. He is also proud that he sometimes has good ideas which really do work. He has, for instance, offered advice to Gram about how the family could benefit financially by renting some of their acreage to a nearby farmer. James does, then, recognize that he is strong in some areas. In general, though, James thinks his siblings are much stronger and more successful than he is. He says of Sammy, "Everybody thought Sammy was cool, a cool dude. He was a natural athlete, and good-looking and he didn't care about people so people cared about him" (Sons 18).

James also is quick to recognize and acknowledge Dicey's strength of leadership. When James journeys to Annapolis to search in the Hall of Records for information about his father, he reflects on the last time he was in that city, years ago, when Dicey had led the Tillerman children to Gram's house. James wonders

> how Dicey had done it, had gotten them down to Gram's and kept them safe. She was something, his sister. He couldn't have done it, even if he'd been the oldest. He wondered if he had ever thanked her, and he didn't think so, and he thought he wanted to. (Sons 126)

Just as James compares himself unfavorably to Sammy and Dicey, so he sees himself as unequal to Maybeth in some areas. He, along with everyone else who hears her play and

sing or who interacts with her, recognizes her great musical talent as well as her quiet, peaceful spirit. Comparing himself to his two young siblings, James says,

> Those two, they'd gotten their Momma's good looks, her golden good looks, and he'd gotten--he didn't know what he'd gotten. He'd gotten lost and helpless and confused. He'd gotten the bad differences. No wonder he was such a dork. (Sons 20)

James denigrates his appearance and physical abilities to such an extent that he hides from his family details about his baseball games, hoping that they will never attend to see him sitting on the bench throughout each game. Sammy is impatient with his brother, not understanding why James even plays ball since he does it so poorly. Only Maybeth intuitively knows James' motives in joining the team and also in wanting them to stay away. Maybeth "looked at him as if she knew how much he hated it, as if she understood how every day, he had to make himself do it" (Sons 32). Going to the heart of the matter, Maybeth says, "I don't think James wants us to come watch. . . . I think he really doesn't. I don't think we should" (Sons 94). In response, James feels like hugging his sister and thinks she must be "the smartest one of them all" (Sons 94). She seems to understand his great need for acceptance and achievement.

Sammy himself seems to have no problems with a poor self image. He frequently sees himself as superior to James in some areas that really matter to him. For example, in one passage James and Sammy are working in the vegetable garden, taking out the weeds, or rather, Sammy is pulling weeds and James is thinking about ideas.

> Sammy knew how James worked at things he didn't like--carelessly, that was how. If James were to help out, Sammy would have to watch him, to be sure his brother was thorough enough, getting the tiny new weeds as well as the bigger more full-grown ones. He'd have to check that James picked them all up, because if you left any behind they'd just root where they lay. That was the way weeds were. Weeds would just root down wherever they found themselves. Like the Tillermans, Sammy thought. (Sons 129)

Sammy concludes that James is not like a weed, that he needs more careful attention in order to thrive; Sammy, however, proud of his independence and strength, thinks that he "just wanted to be left alone, like a weed, to grow on his own. Into whatever he was going to grow into" (Sons 130).

Even as Sammy and James recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, they also acknowledge how much they love and depend on each other. The last section of the novel

recounts the brothers' final attempt to discover information about their father. Their search takes them to Baltimore to the Merchant Seaman's Union for leads. When they finally are beaten by Chief, a huge, drunken sailor who has a grudge against their father, Francis Verricker, James and Sammy barely escape to the alley before the police arrive to break up the fight. James, with bruises and broken ribs, looks fondly at his sleeping brother and feels such love and gratitude for Sammy and pride in the way Sammy fought the antagonistic Chief. He thinks to himself, "He didn't envy Sammy, but he admired him. And loved him. . . . mostly loved him" (Sons 218). Later, Sammy expresses just as much pride in James when he gives his own version of the incident. He tells how he likely would have been killed had James not come to his rescue by saying to Chief and the other unruly men, "I can't imagine any jury being sympathetic about men beating up on a couple of kids" (Sons 213).

Just as James admires Dicey and watches over Maybeth, Sammy does the same. Sammy apparently admires Dicey more than he does anyone else. He expresses his love for what she is, not for what she does for him.

> He knew she wasn't perfect, but there wasn't anything he'd change about her. Most people wouldn't agree, but he thought she was fine looking; he liked the way her eyes saw things and

> reacted, he liked the way she held her chin high, he liked the way her body looked, lots of angles. . . . He liked the way Dicey liked the water. (Sons 40)

Sammy, like James, is also protective of Maybeth, agreeing with James at the end of the novel that they both will take her to the school dance so she will not feel lonely.

From Homecoming to Sons from Afar, sibling relationships have changed and strengthened. With the Tillermans' six-year stay with Gram has come much stability, so much so that the children no longer have to be inordinately concerned with the basic necessities of life. Instead their focus has begun to turn inwardly to an examination of the kind of people they are and how they relate to others outside the Tillerman clan. However, the family is still of utmost importance to the Tillerman children, and especially to Sammy and James in Sons from Afar. In the course of their search for a father in this novel, Sammy and James have come to better understand what it means to be brothers.

Seventeen Against the Dealer, Voigt's last novel in the Tillerman cycle, focuses on Dicey's maturing relationship with her boyfriend, Jeff, and on her career as a boatbuilder more so than on sibling relationships. James is away at Yale University, but interactions among Dicey, Maybeth, and Sammy reveal a continuation of the respect, love, and

concern evidenced among the siblings in the earlier Tillerman novels. According to Suzanne Reid in Presenting Cynthia Voigt, "By the time of Seventeen Against the Dealer, Dicey's family is strong enough to let her take the risk of letting go" (47).

In this novel, Dicey, twenty-one years of age, has dropped out of college to learn how to build boats by working in boatyards in Annapolis and Crisfield, and, finally, after almost two years, has her own shop; James, aged eighteen, is a freshman at Yale, studying to become a doctor; Maybeth, aged seventeen, still struggles with academics but excels in music and homemaking; and Sammy, aged fifteen, works hard to realize his dream of being admitted to a good school, via an athletic scholarship for tennis, where he can prepare for a career as an astronaut.

Each sibling seems sure of his or her strengths and weaknesses and each one works hard for success. A reviewer in Booklist calls Seventeen Against the Dealer "a candid, detailed celebration of work--its joys and drudgery" (Rochman 1276). In the shift from survival in Homecoming to success through hard work in Seventeen Against the Dealer, the Tillerman siblings seem to have found comfortable familial roles in which to gravitate. In a secure home life with Gram, each child has flourished emotionally as well as physically. In considering her family, Dicey thinks, "They just wanted to be able to take care of whoever they were

supposed to, just to earn a living--because your living wasn't a present; it had to be earned" (Seventeen 13).

Taking care of "whoever they were supposed to" and reaching out and holding on require much effort, Dicey has discovered in the past eight years since she first led the siblings in search of a home. However, in Seventeen Against the Dealer, Dicey relinquishes much of the attention she normally gives her siblings because of the time constraints of her job. After her shop is burglarized and her tools stolen, Dicey, in need of money, accepts her landlord's offer of painting his thirty poorly crafted boats. By working night and day with time at home only to eat a quick sandwich and go to bed, Dicey sees the number of boats slowly decrease. What she fails to see is how her continual absence affects her family. She is too busy to help Maybeth study for her exams, too preoccupied to permit Sammy to share his disappointments, too absorbed with her own affairs to maintain contact with James and other important people in her life. Dicey has "a place to get to," a place of success in her career, that precludes, at least temporarily, much attention to her siblings (Seventeen 67).

Sammy and Maybeth still reach out to Dicey, however, even though they recognize the pressure she is working under and seldom impinge on her time. Sammy confides that he has not been accepted for a scholarship to an expensive summer tennis camp because the judges have never seen him play and

do not know whether or not he is good enough to be given a scholarship. Sammy, well aware that the family cannot afford the sixty-five hundred dollars plus airfare, says to Dicey, "I just wanted to tell you" (Seventeen 111). He still seems to need his oldest sister's empathetic attention and good naturedly chides her for spending so much time and energy on work:

> "How many times have you been home for dinner this month? You're away from home right now. You live here in the shop. All you don't do is sleep here." (Seventeen 113)

Maybeth, too, misses the close companionship of her sister. Maybeth is the gentlest of the Tillerman siblings, supportive of her brothers and sister. For instance, she says to James, "I know James will be a good doctor," and to Dicey, "You washed the floor, Dicey. It looks nice, doesn't it?" (Seventeen 21, 142). Dicey reflects that Maybeth always notices things and takes the trouble to compliment and affirm. Yet even Maybeth ever so gently hints to Dicey that something in the family is amiss. When Sammy and Maybeth go to the boat shop to show Dicey James' grades, Dicey says, "Later. I can't even make sense out of the address at this point. . . . I'm so tired, I'm not even thinking straight"; Maybeth quietly responds, "We know--" (Seventeen 103).

Dicey, of course, loves her siblings and is proud of all of them; even when she is most distracted by her work, thoughts of pride come to her when she thinks of James, Sammy, or Maybeth. On one occasion, Dicey reflects, "Sometimes, in the course of a day, she might feel wound around with her family, trapped in some spiderweb of love and responsibility, but most of the time she would look over the years they'd spent together and feel how lucky she was" (Seventeen 129). While Dicey never willfully excludes her siblings from her life, she does drift away from them and their concerns. The impetus that thrusts Dicey back into active interaction with her siblings is Gram's serious bout with pneumonia.

When the doctor confirms Maybeth's and Sammy's fears that Gram is seriously ill, Dicey feels ashamed for not having noticed how ill her grandmother is, ashamed for not taking time out for her family. Putting her boat work on hold, Dicey reassumes primary care of her family while Sammy and Maybeth go to school. In the evenings, she has opportunity to observe Maybeth and Sammy and to reflect on how important they are to her life. Dicey, looking at her sister, thinks of "how lovely Maybeth was, and gentle and patient, what good care she took of people--how Maybeth was about the exact opposite of Dicey" (Seventeen 136). Feeling as if she has failed in her boat business because of lack of

forethought and business acumen, Dicey ponders Maybeth's approach to failure in school:

> Maybeth endured failures like a patch of marsh grass, rooted in the mud, letting the water wash over it. She stayed planted while the water moved in its strong way; then when it was finished she'd sort of lift her head to see what was there. . . . That was the same way Maybeth did school, like marsh grass, being there, being what she was, high tide or low tide, winter cold or summer warmth, being who she was. (Seventeen 164)

With time on her hands as she nurses Gram back to health, Dicey has time to admire Sammy as well as Maybeth. She listens as he speculates on his future after high school and thinks, "He was right about himself, he was a tryer, he'd keep on trying different things until something worked out" (Seventeen 165). Challenging him to a game of checkers, Dicey thinks, "She admired Sammy. And liked him, too, mostly just--liked him" (Seventeen 165).

In Seventeen Against the Dealer, Dicey is reminded once again of the importance of family. She acknowledges that "she might well have lost Gram, who'd have neglected herself into the grave if Sammy and Maybeth hadn't been around to prod Dicey into action" (Seventeen 196). Dicey recognizes that she probably will continue to make mistakes in her career as well as in her relationships but, surrounded by

the love of her siblings and other important people in her life, she knows they will not be ashamed of her but will reach out and hold on to her as she does the same to them.

Sibling Relationships in Bridgers' Novels

"I see family life as the core of my writing," says Sue Ellen Bridgers ("Stories" 22). This important core includes sibling relationships in all four of the novels discussed in this study. Of the four, only Notes for Another Life focuses on the involvement of the teenaged protagonist with a sibling. The other three present sibling relationships among adults.

Bridgers is expert at requiring the reader to delve into the past to understand the relationship between adult brothers James Earl and Newton Willis in Home Before Dark. This first Bridgers' novel tells the story of a migrant family's return to the Willis home place in rural North Carolina. James Earl, his wife Mae, and their four children, Stella, William, Earl, and Lissy, travel from Florida to the family tobacco farm where the younger brother Newton gives them a decrepit tenant cottage to live in. The children, especially fourteen-year-old Stella, love the feeling of permanence in their new home, but Mae fears the new life style of stability and longs to return to their former rootless, migrant existence in which they had no

commitments to any relatives or anyone other than their own immediate family.

Stella, with the help of Newton's wife, Anne, begins to develop into an attractive young woman. The novel recounts Stella's burgeoning interest in two boys, Toby and Rodney, and also relates James Earl's romantic involvement with Maggie Grover after Mae is killed in a lightning storm. When James Earl marries Maggie and moves his family into Maggie's home in town, Stella adamantly refuses to leave the tenant cottage, her first real home. By the end of the novel, however, Stella realizes that she needs her family and rejoins them in her new home at Maggie's.

Bridgers gives little attention to Stella's interaction with her three siblings, even though Stella is the primary focus of the novel. Because her mother has given birth to either a dead or live baby almost every year of Mae's married life, Stella has necessarily had to take on much responsibility for the care of her younger siblings. It is only after Mae is killed, however, that Stella seems to experience anything remotely maternal concerning her brothers and sister. After her mother's funeral, Stella rises to the occasion and takes care of her family, doing such mundane tasks as preparing the meals and keeping the house and children clean. She seems content with her new role and even anticipates taking care of her siblings until they are old enough to care for themselves. However, her

father confides that he may ask Maggie Grover to marry him. He says,

> "She's got that big old house, so big we could just about get lost in it. She's got the store. I wouldn't mind working in a store if it meant having things for you children--for myself too. Maggie could help bring up William and Earl and Lissy. They need a woman, and we can't expect Anne to take care of us forever." (Home 143)

Stella's response is that she and her father together can "bring them up" (Home 143). Although she evidently loves her siblings and does what she can to nurture them, she does not seem to mind when Maggie assumes the day-to-day care of the younger children after she and James Earl marry.

A much more intriguing sibling relationship is that of James Earl Willis, aged thirty-two, and his brother Newton, aged twenty-six. When Home Before Dark begins, James Earl has been away from his rural North Carolina home place for sixteen years, having left home years before to join the military. When he appears penniless before Newton, with a wife and four children in tow, the embarrassment and tension are almost palpable as Newton apologizes for the state of the tenant cottage he has permitted them to use. James Earl responds, "You've done fine with the whole place, and I know I'm not bringing anything to this arrangement but two hands and a back" (Home 11). Although wealthy and successful,

Newton seems to need affirmation of his worth from his older brother, whom he has both hated and admired since their childhood days. Instead of harboring resentment, Newton brings the whole topic of the past into the open. As they dig through old furniture stored in Newton's attic, he says to James Earl,

> "I thought you were the greatest thing on two feet. . . I could always see where I stood in the family. It wasn't just being the youngest. It was being so different from you. You could always do everything better than I could.
>
> I was glad when you quit school and joined the Air Force. I thought, 'Now it's my turn. . . .'" (Home 15)

Newton seems to be working out his own feelings for his brother, wanting to love him and welcome him back home but, at the same time, also wanting James Earl to recognize his reduced status in the Willis family.

Newton, some people in the community believe, has every right to be resentful of James Earl. Newton, after all, "had to give up things, like playing baseball when he was the best hitter Montreet High ever had, because somebody had to work those spring afternoons" (Home 57). Despite the potential for rivalry between the brothers, Newton and James Earl succeed in overcoming any negatives in their relationship. A key scene which reveals the love they have

for each other occurs when the tobacco harvest is almost completed. James Earl, asking his brother to let his family stay a few weeks longer in the cabin, says, "I figured with the tobacco about in, you wouldn't be needing us much longer" (Home 84). Newton responds, "I need you as long as you need me," and then opens his heart to his brother:

> "All those years you were gone, when Mama was dying and even before that, when things were bad with Daddy and I couldn't do all the things kids think they've got to do to be somebody, I hated you for going off. . . . And then you come home . . . . I thought to myself, I ain't my brother's keeper. You went out and got married and got them children, and you're responsible for 'em. But then I started seeing something. All the time, I've loved you. And now I love them all . . . ." (Home 85-86)

This same sincere effusion of love surfaces again as he comforts James Earl during Mae's funeral and as he rejoices with him during his wedding to Maggie. As the novel concludes, all seems well between the two Willis brothers.

In All Together Now, Bridgers writes of a teenaged protagonist, Casey Flanagan, who spends the summer with her grandparents in rural North Carolina because her father is a pilot in the Korean War and her mother is working two jobs in the city. Casey unwillingly agrees to the summer-long

visit, but by the end of her stay she has learned much about the love of friends and family.

Family relationships are extremely close in the Flanagan family as a whole. While Bridgers emphasizes husband-wife relationships in this novel, she does include two sibling relationships, those of David and Taylor Flanagan and Alva and Dwayne Pickens. Both relationships are subsidiary to the main plot involving the affection, with some misunderstandings along the way, of four couples: Ben and Jane Flanagan, Casey's loving, supportive grandparents; Pansy and Hazard Whitaker, long-time friends of the Flanagans; Taylor Flanagan and his girl friend, Gwen; and Casey and her new friend, Dwayne, a thirty-two-year-old retarded man who loves baseball and hates girls.

The Flanagan brothers are depicted positively. David is a few years older than Taylor, who is twenty-eight in the novel. While David has the responsibility of a wife and child, Taylor remains unmarried; however, both share a love for adventure. Taylor's great love is racing fast cars while David's has always been airplanes. In one revealing scene in the novel, Taylor takes Casey and Dwayne to the lumber yard to teach them to drive. Taylor tells Casey,

> "This is where your daddy learned to drive. Then he taught me when I was your age. Lord, I loved to drive. So did your daddy. But what he really

wanted to do was sprout some wings. Wheels didn't go fast enough for him." (All 74)

Taylor's thoughts of his older brother are positive throughout the novel. Taylor comments to Casey that they have not been close for a long time because of the five-year age difference and because they have gone such different directions as adults. Nonetheless, he remembers an apparent high point in their childhood when David permitted his younger brother to enter into his dream of flying. After Casey's prolonged bout with a viral infection, Taylor surprises her with a trip into the past when he shows her a facsimile of a World War I plane David built when he was Casey's age. Taylor speaks admiringly of David's wonderful imagination and ability even as a young teenager. He also remembers the fun he had helping David build the plane.

Bridgers gives no indications as to how David perceives his relationship with her brother. From Taylor's perspective, however, David has been a positive force in his life.

The second sibling relationship described in All Together Now is that of Dwayne and Alva Pickens. Dwayne is thirty-three years old but has the intelligence and demeanor of a twelve-year-old boy; Alva, Dwayne's older brother, appears angry at Dwayne throughout the novel, even to the point of attempting to have him committed to a mental hospital.

When Dwayne first meets Casey after she arrives at her grandparents' home, he says, "You know my brother Alva? He gets so mad at me! Really mad" (All 12). Unlike his angry older brother, Dwayne is friendly and transparently open with others. He lives by a simple, yet profound truth which he explains to Casey: "You be nice to folks and they be nice to you right back. That's one thing for sure" (All 40). Everyone except Alva and his wife, Marge, seems to love Dwayne and accept him as he is. When Dwayne gets involved in a mismatched fight at the race track to help Taylor, Alva has his brother held in jail overnight until hospital attendants can come the next day to place him in a mental institution. Taylor summarizes what many of the townspeople believe when he says,

> "Alva is a peculiar man, very big on his public image. . . . He's the sort of man who gets a kick out of his name on brass plates in public buildings. So here he is, saddled with Dwayne, and instead of enjoying him just the way he is, he thinks he's got to improve him or else hide him away." (All 115)

Taylor's mother adds, "Out of sight, out of mind. No blot on the royal family then. Sometimes I think Alva Pickens is the only person in this town who doesn't love Dwayne" (All 144).

When the Flanagans appear in full force at the town meeting to object to Alva's treatment of Dwayne, Alva expresses his feelings for his brother. He says that he is sending Dwayne away from home "for his own good," that no one will be able to care for him after his mother dies, and that he does not "know what to do with him" (All 156). Taylor Flanagan, more like a brother to Dwayne than Alva is, says, "You don't have to do anything with him, Alva. You never did. He's as much our brother as he is yours" (All 157).

By the end of All Together Now, the Pickens brothers are not reconciled. Dwayne is saved, not because Alva relents due to compassion or love for Dwayne but because he is shamed into withdrawing his petition to have his brother placed in a hospital. Bridgers gives only a slight hint of any redeeming qualities on Alva's part when she has Ben Flanagan say, "I've known Alva Pickens since the day he was born and he's not all bad" (All 158).

In Notes for Another Life, Bridgers recounts the varied connections of members of the Jackson family. Thirteen-year-old Wren is the primary focus of this novel of both loving and dysfunctional family relationships. Bridgers tells the story of Wren's relationship with her mentally ill father, Tom; her ambitious, career-oriented mother, Karen; her sixteen-year-old troubled brother, Kevin, who, in the course of the novel, attempts suicide, in part because of

the rejection of his girlfriend, Melanie, and the rejection of his mother; her loving, supportive grandparents, Bliss and Bill; and her boyfriend, Sam.

Bridgers treats the sibling relationship between Wren and Kevin in a more substantial manner than she does in Home Before Dark and All Together Now. Kevin has a defensive attitude throughout most of the novel even though he obviously loves his sister and wants to protect her from hurt; Wren, on the other hand, mature beyond her years, is almost always understanding, supportive, and concerned about her brother. Most of their conversations center on their feelings for their parents. Their desire for their mother's love and attention colors their own relationship. Both of them seem to take turns hoping something will bring Karen back to them, that she will decide not to live in Atlanta or Chicago but will settle for simply being their mother in rural North Carolina. Time after time, their hopes are dashed, however, and it is during those times that their own connections are strongest. For instance, when Wren expresses to Kevin that perhaps their dad's most recent bout of illness or perhaps their mother's seeing them again would cause her to come home to stay, Kevin says, "Don't think that, Wren. . . . Don't ever think that" (Notes 8), knowing the hopelessness of the situation and the potential for renewed hurt in both his life and his sister's.

Wren, likewise, feels the need to protect her brother from the pressures of life that he so obviously struggles against. Wren

> didn't know exactly what protection she could provide Kevin, but she offered it nonetheless. Protection against their grandparents' silent concern, against their mother thinking them less than perfect, against upsetting their father's unsteady progress with yet another situation he was incapable of handling. (Notes 12)

Both siblings admire the ability of the other to do something well. Kevin excels at tennis while Wren has great musical ability. Kevin acknowledges to himself that "Wren had given him music" (Notes 91). After witnessing her daily hours of practice year after year, he knows the price she has had to pay for perfecting her gift.

Wren and Kevin lean on each other when other relationships in their lives are amiss. For example, after Kevin is devastated by the rejection of his girlfriend and by his mother's hesitance to allow her son to live with her in Chicago, Wren comforts him with these words: "No matter what happens, we have each other" (Notes 182). Yet even though Kevin agrees, that very night he takes an overdose of sleeping pills, confusedly believing death is desirable as long as Melanie and his mother feel sorry that he is dead. Later, when he is recovering in the hospital, he admits that

he just had not considered what his attempt would do to his sister and grandparents. He permits only his grandmother and his sister to come into this hospital room after he first awakens:

> It was Wren who came to his other side. . . and put wet, trembling lips briefly to his cheek, as if she feared her touch would do him harm. . . . He released tight fingers from the sheet and held out his hand to Wren so that both of them were touching him now, holding on. (Notes 186)

Kevin relies strongly on the soft kindness of his sister, recognizing the nurturant qualities in Wren that he cannot see in his mother. At the end of the novel, with Kevin well on his way toward emotional and physical healing, he hears Wren talking to Karen on the telephone, "drawing their mother into their circle, making her there with them, smoothing the ragged edges" (Notes 249). Admiring his sister for her ability to relate well to others, Kevin thinks, "He could do that too. It was something he could learn" (Notes 249).

Although Kevin is the more needy of the two siblings, both Wren and Kevin offer support and protection for each other throughout Notes for Another Life. In the final scene, as Bliss drives her two grandchildren to the mental hospital to visit their father, Kevin places his hand over

his sister's as they join together with Bliss to sing a familiar tune.

In Permanent Connections, the final Bridgers novel included in this study, Bridgers explores seventeen-year-old Rob Dickson's tenuous connections with his extended family of uncle, aunts, and grandfather, and with Ellery Collier, a teenaged girl who is as unhappily transplanted into Tyler Mills, North Carolina, as Rob is.

Compelled by his father to remain in Tyler Mills for three months to care for Uncle Fairlee, who has a broken hip, and to assist Aunt Coralee and his grandfather, Rob faces his stay with antagonism until he is attracted to Ellery, daughter of divorced Ginny Collier from Charlotte, North Carolina. During the novel, he struggles with his feelings of alienation, rejection, and anger and turns to alcohol and marijuana to help him temporarily blot out the difficulties he has brought upon himself through his own negative attitude. His drug use results in the wreck of Uncle Fairlee's truck and Rob's arrest and subsequent trial. Finally, Rob comes face to face with the sobering fact that his actions are responsible for his grandfather's broken ribs and punctured lung, for the deterioration of the relationship with Ellery, and for his perceived alienation from his family.

In this novel, sibling relationships are secondary in importance, as is also true of the three previously

discussed novels. Rob does have a sister, Allison, who is twelve, but he gives little thought to her except to remark sarcastically that his "perfect" sister is a "pain in the butt" (Permanent 6). A slightly more fruitful examination of sibling relationships involves Rob's father, Davis Dickson, his two sisters, Coralee and Rosalie, and his brother, Fairlee.

While Davis relates well with kind-hearted Coralee and with cheerful, optimistic Fairlee, he prefers to avoid Rosalie whenever possible. He sees Rosalie as bossy and overly dramatic, especially when it concerns her relatives. She complains to Davis about her father and Coralee: "Papa's half senile. . . . And Cora, well, I don't really know what ails her. You ought to see for yourself, Davis. You ought to come" (Permanent 8-9). While Fairlee and Coralee seem to be able to see Rosalie's positive points, Davis has more difficulty doing so. He sees her as a complainer who wants everything to go her way.

On the surface, Rosalie seems not to relate well to her youngest sibling, Davis. When Rosalie becomes distraught over Rob's drunkenness, she reveals some of her long-held feelings about her brother and his wife. She says, "Davis and Carrie might have book learning but there's not a lick of common sense between them. Never has been. All Davis could ever think about was getting away from here" (Permanent 146). Her negative feelings toward Davis even

flow over to Coralee, whom Rosalie sees as virtually helpless because of her agoraphobia. Rosalie lashes out at her when she tries to help Rob: "Leave this to me, Cora. . . . You never could take care of anything" (Permanent 147).

Fairlee, the oldest of the four siblings, sees through Rosalie's bluster and tells Rob that she criticizes Davis because she has always loved him too much and she wants to hold on to him. Rosalie's daughter, Leanna, and her boyfriend, Travis, also have an opinion of Rosalie's seemingly negative response to relatives. "That's the way Mama talks to everybody," says Leanna (Permanent 245). Travis also sees through Rosalie's crusty exterior. He says, "I got her figured a long time ago. The more she's got to complain about, the happier she is" (Permanent 245).

On the surface, all is not totally harmonious among the siblings, especially when Rosalie is around, but when family closeness and support really matter, they work together for the good of the family. Incidents in the novel such as Fairlee's broken hip, the grandfather's broken ribs and punctured lungs, and Rob's trial for drug use bring out the best among the four siblings.

This chapter focuses on the relationships of siblings of all ages. In Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels, the two sisters and two brothers generally relate well, especially as they mature. Sammy, as a very young child, has some

difficulty accepting the authority of his older sister Dicey; however, in the final Tillerman novel, he and all his siblings have matured into young men and women who recognize the importance of family and who love and support each other.

In Bridgers' novels, more emphasis is placed on adult sibling relationships than on relationships among children. In fact, in Home Before Dark and Permanent Connections, the teenaged protagonists' siblings are barely mentioned, and in All Together Now, the adolescent is an only child. Among the adult sibling relationships, love is always present as an undercurrent beneath any misunderstandings that exist among the siblings.

CHAPTER IV

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN VOIGT AND BRIDGERS

Father-Child Relationships in Voigt's Tillerman Cycle Novels

The two generations of Tillerman parents, and especially the fathers, do not fare well in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels. Voigt presents an extensive view of the Tillerman parents in the five novels included in this study. In Homecoming and Dicey's Song, little mention is made of parent-child relationships, but Seventeen Against the Dealer and Sons from Afar address the father-child relationship while The Runner reveals much about the teenaged boy's relationship with both parents.

Metaphorically comparing strong families to flexible reeds, Eddie Stone says, "They bend, they change, they adapt; and when the storm is over they are still intact" (33). Adaptable like those reeds, the Tillerman children described in Homecoming, Dicey's Song, Seventeen Against the Dealer, and Sons from Afar have survived the storm of abandonment by both mother and father because of the strength of the sibling relationship. Together with Gram, the children emerge as a strong family unit despite the hard blows that life has dealt them.

Understandably, the children question the desertion of their parents. In Homecoming, James says to Dicey, "We're the kind that people go off from. First our father and now Momma. . . . Is there something wrong about us?" (42). While James seems to blame himself and his siblings for his parents' desertion, Sammy chooses denial. He will not admit even to himself that his mother may never return, and he denies that he has a father. He says to James, "I never had a father. . . . I never want to have one" (Homecoming 43).

Of the four Tillerman children, only Dicey can remember their father. She recalls his appearance, with his dark hair and hazel eyes; his attention to her when he carried her about on his shoulders, calling her his "little only"; and his anger on the day he left them, anger over Liza's being pregnant with Sammy (Homecoming 42-43).

Dicey's Song gives no new information about the father, but the search for a father is the main emphasis of Sons from Afar. Both James and Sammy agree that a father should be on the child's side, should know what the child wants and needs, and should want him to have those things. James, however, is less secure than Sammy and more in need of a father's care and attention. James seems preoccupied about his father because he is looking for a key to understanding himself. Just as in Homecoming he is afraid he may have inherited his mother's tendency toward mental illness, in this novel he is concerned about what his father's genes

have given him. He feels an urgent need to know, hoping perhaps that something positive about his father will emerge. Not having ever known the reality of a father, James idealistically believes a father can right all wrongs that come against a child. He tells Sammy, "Fathers are--like a constant. . . . They're always there, they don't change, they know how things go, they have experience, or knowledge, anyway, they're pretty wise--so they can help you decide" (Sons 13). Telling his brother the story of Daedalus and the death of Icarus, his son, James comments, "He should have listened to his father. His father knew" (Sons 13).

While James longs to begin the search for his father, Sammy is convinced, only with difficulty, to join him. Early on in Sons from Afar, he says, "Seems to me the last thing we need is a father" (10). Sammy, resenting what his father has done to his wife and children, readily admits to being angry when he thinks of him. He says, "You don't go around just starting babies and--ignoring them. Abandoning them. Or their mother either" (Sons 13).

James begins his search for his father by asking questions. He thinks he cannot talk to Gram about him "because she wasn't a teen-aged boy who needed to have a father. Or, if he couldn't have one, at least needed to know about the one he didn't have" (Sons 15). Thus he turns to Dicey, trying to get her to talk about their father. She

dismisses him with "How am I supposed to remember something that wasn't even important then?" (Sons 38) but, feeling guilty, shares the little she knows about him. Getting the father's name, Francis Verricker, from the children's birth certificates, James finally has a lead into his father's past, one that becomes darker as the search continues.

James and Sammy discover that Francis Verricker was extremely smart but not motivated to stay in school; that he tended to break rules and constraints; that he gambled and cheated others; and that he shunned responsibility. They receive negative reports from several people who have known Francis well. At the Merchant Seaman's Union, a guard who knows him says, "Frankie's never around when you want him. That's his way" (Sons 193); another sailor says, "I've known him for years, and I never knew Frank to do more than take a woman for all she'd give him, and then leave her" (Sons 204).

James' and Sammy's search for a father never produces a real person to whom they can relate; however, the father issue is somewhat resolved for both of them by the end of Sons from Afar. James does not dispute the note of admiration in Sammy's voice when he says, "He must have been something, our father. I mean, however bad he was, he went his own way. Nobody could make him do anything. So whatever else you have to say about him, you have to admit that" (Sons 219). Sammy later speculates that had his

father remained with the family, he and Sammy probably would have fought a lot and they most likely would not have gotten along well. He asserts that "without a father, it was like being lost without a map" (Sons 262), but he recognizes the element of adventure in such a chartless future and he willingly embraces it.

Both James and Sammy have learned much about how a father should not be, and they put that learning into practice with Maybeth, their sister who has the same temperament as their mother. Sammy reflects that he "doesn't want anyone like their father moving in on Maybeth and making a mess of her life" (Sons 262-63). He and James resolve to take on the role of protector that Francis Verricker would have assumed had he remained with his family.

In Seventeen Against the Dealer, the final novel about the Tillerman family, Voigt allows the reader to meet Francis Verricker, that is, if one assumes that the character Cisco is indeed Francis Verricker. Critic Hazel Rochman suggests that such can easily be the case ("Books" 1276). Suzanne Reid concurs with Rochman's suggestion, saying he may be the father because "he asks a lot of questions and then absconds with the money that he may feel is rightly his" (47).

If Cisco is the Tillerman children's father, he relates only with Dicey in this novel. At twenty-one, Dicey is

attempting to earn a living building boats when a drifter arrives on the scene, offering to help her for very little in return. He is a mysterious man who seems to be unusually interested in her family. Voigt gives other hints that connect him with Francis. He is personable, even charming; he has a past that includes work on a ship; he comments that he left school as quickly as he could; he gambles; he is dishonest in his business dealings; and he inquires more than necessary about the children in the Tillerman family and about their mother, so much so that Dicey finally asks, "What is it you're trying to find out, Cisco?" (Seventeen 91).

Dicey comes to depend on his labor, but Cisco quickly proves that to be a mistake. When her grandmother becomes very ill and Dicey has to take care of her, she asks Cisco to deposit some money into her meager account. He steals the money, presumably leaving for the gambling scene in Atlantic City. Dicey recognizes that Cisco may be concerned about others, may even like or love them, but he is the kind of man who will always put himself first. If Cisco is Dicey's father, his act of treachery reveals that he has changed little in the more than twenty years since he and Liza ran away together. He has been thoroughly unsatisfactory as a father.

Despite the abandonment by their parents, the Tillerman children seem happier and more well adjusted than the first

generation of Tillermans. The Runner, a prequel to Homecoming, tells of the dysfunctional relationship of Abigail and John with their children, Johnny, Liza, and Samuel (nicknamed Bullet).

The Runner, set in 1967, primarily tells the story of Bullet, the youngest child in the family, who moves quietly through his days as a high school student, communicating only sparingly with his family, teachers, track coach and team, and fellow students. Like his two siblings, Bullet leaves home as quickly as possible, enlisting in the army for the Viet Nam War, in which he is killed. Johnny has gone on to California to go to college on a scholarship, and Liza has been gone since 1963 with Francis Verricker.

While Bullet is outwardly quiet, his insides churn with anger at his father, whom he disdains most of the time. In fact, the first line of the novel is "Bullet was angry" (Runner 3). Critic Ruth Cline believes he has cause for anger. She says, "The father at age 60 is intolerant, psychologically abusive, and 'boxes people in'" (82). An enlightened man because of his enjoyment of books and learning, John Tillerman does not permit his acquired knowledge to transfer to his relationship with his children. He seems unable to differentiate between important matters and trivia. For instance, he complains about Bullet's long hair and orders him to have it cut, but when Bullet responds by having his head shaved, his father treats him as an

outsider, even refusing to have him sit at the dinner table or eat the food his mother has prepared. Bullet sees through his father's words to the truth: "It wasn't haircuts the old man cared about; it was being able to give orders" (Runner 10).

Bullet's description of a typical evening in his home reveals the dysfunctional nature of his family:

> Evenings, Bullet's father read books, silent at his desk, alone in the living room with the door closed. His mother baked, preserved, knitted, sewed, cleaned. Bullet stayed away. . . . (Runner 50)

Lack of communication seems to be a great hindrance in the Tillerman family. According to Dr. Nick Stinnet in Secrets of Strong Families, his study of over three thousand healthy families reveals six important areas of concern in the strong family: "commitment, appreciation, communication, family time, spiritual wellness, and coping ability" (qtd. in Stone 30). Communication in a strong family involves both talking and listening in a supportive atmosphere (Stone 31). Unfortunately, Bullet's family members tend to isolate themselves, primarily because of the father's despotic power over them.

Mary Jean DeMarr and Jane Bakerman believe a male adolescent turns most often to the father as a role model. When that father is not a positive force,

> boys all too often plunge into ever greater confusion, often into suffering, anger, and rebellion. When attempts to evade parents' or guardians' strictness are met with demands for submission, even for blind obedience, boys eager to seize the power awaiting them sometimes rebel. (DeMarr and Bakerman 149)

John Tillerman is a disastrous role model for Bullet. His effect is basically negative. Bullet does admit that his father is a "crack shot" who always gets his prey and that he has a good mind for learning, but he also confesses that his "old man" is "a nothing, nothing but right answers and holding on to his precious farm" (Runner 7). In truth, many of John Tillerman's negative qualities have influenced Bullet. He is withdrawn, self-isolated, remote, and prejudiced. According to M. Crouch, Bullet is "a character whom we can pity but certainly cannot love" (120). Mary Hoffman calls him "a disastrous role-model" for teenaged readers (28); and Alice Digilio says he is "exasperating . . . . arrogant and inscrutable" (8). Even Bullet himself recognizes some of his father's traits within himself and fights against them. Just before the climactic showdown with his father in which Bullet rejoins the family for dinner and refuses to leave the table when ordered to do so, Bullet thinks of how like his father he can be: "He hoped

not, he hoped he wasn't, but he couldn't be sure. He just didn't know how much like his old man he was" (Runner 184).

Near the end of the novel, Bullet recognizes that he must leave home as his brother and sister have done before him. Hazel Rochman says that Bullet "sees how much he is like his father, and that his mother, Abigail, is trapped in a cruel marriage, her pain intensified in the cross fire between father and son" ("Books" 1052). Thus, to save himself and his mother, Bullet ceases all relationship with his father by running from the unhealthy environment he calls home.

While the two primary fathers are negatively presented, Voigt does include brief depictions of loving fathers who are positive role models in Dicey's Song and Sons from Afar. Mr. Smiths, Mina's father, for instance, understands the vast differences between Mina and the other children in his family and appreciates Mina for her own unique talents and strengths. Immense pride is evident in his voice as he speaks of his children. Another positively presented father is Mr. Horton, Robin's step-father, whom he calls "dad." While Robin tells Sammy about his real father's metals and honors as an Air Force colonel, he tells of his dad's attention and love for him. He admires his real father, but he has not seen him for five years; by comparison, Mr. Horton effectively communicates with Robin, listening

intently when Robin speaks and sharing of himself with his step-son.

Father-Child Relationships in Bridgers' Novels

In the Bridgers novels, fathers are basically peripheral figures, but, in general, they are a more positive force than the mothers in the lives of their children. In Home Before Dark, the most important and most positive father-child relationship is that of Stella, the teenaged protagonist, and her father, James Earl Willis. All references to their relationship indicate that love, trust, and connection are important to both father and daughter.

James Earl is not despotic but is, instead, gently in charge of the life of his family. He is able to express his love for his children through words and through actions. In one scene, he quietly walks through his house, checking on the children before he goes to sleep. Stella, hearing him approach her bed, holds her breath and tries to lie still as James Earl leans over to touch her: "His cool hand touched her cheek, her hair. There was love in his hand" (Home 52).

In a similar night scene, Stella has an opportunity to reciprocate her father's love with a kindness of her own. Shortly after her mother's death, she awakens to hear her father sobbing in his bedroom. Longing to comfort him as a mother might her baby, Stella feels that "He was one of her

children--had always been that--and she was coming to bring him comfort" (Home 108). Tender towards her father, she "lay down on top of the sheet beside him and took his hand, holding it in hers until he went to sleep" (Home 108).

The love James Earl feels for his daughter is coupled with wisdom at the end of the novel when he permits her to live alone in the tenant shack after he and the other children go to live with his new wife, Maggie Grover. He says to Stella, "I admit it hurts me. I worry about you, and I miss having you with me. I always thought we got along pretty good together," and she responds, "We did, Daddy. We still do" (Home 166). Being assured of their love for one another, James Earl can allow his daughter time and space to adjust to their changed circumstances, and Stella, likewise, can finally open her heart to accept Maggie and her home as an important part in her father's life.

In All Together Now, two generations of Flanagan fathers are briefly mentioned. Ben Flanagan is the father of two adult sons, David and Taylor, and David Flanagan is the father of one daughter, Casey. Bridgers presents Ben as a reliable man with strong family values; he works consistently and steadily in his lumberyard, providing employment for his son Taylor, taking good care of the financial needs of his family. He also, however, seems to

have his finger on the pulse of the inner workings of the Flanagan family.

Bridgers gives only brief mention of Ben throughout the novel, but he is an exemplary role model to the other Flanagan males and a source of strength to the entire family. In one scene, Ben presides over the supper table, serving the baked fish that Jane has prepared. As he waits on his family, he thinks about his son Taylor, who is exuberant at having won his car race that afternoon. Ben has insight into Taylor's emotions, seeing at a glance his feelings for his girlfriend Gwen. There is no fear, no condemnation, no required silence at the table over which Ben Flanagan presides but only pleasant, familial companionship.

David Flanagan is not an active character in the novel since he is away, serving as a pilot in the Korean War. However, his daughter Casey reveals some important information about her father. He obviously cares greatly for his daughter and he has, in the past, enjoyed spending time with her. She recounts times her father has taken her fishing, patiently teaching her to do such things as maneuver the boat, bait the hooks, and pull in the fish. She remembers enjoying fishing with her father "as much because it was something they did together as for any other reason," but she also remembers loving her father's praise when she caught a fish" (All Together 131).

The emotion that surfaces most frequently during Casey's memories of her father is fear. She remembers his careful explanations of bad weather, "as if he could make her never fear the elements" (All Together 114). Casey conjectures that "maybe that was why her daddy knew so much about weather--to keep himself from being afraid" (All Together 114).

Fear even dominates Casey's dreams. Her dreams of her father are always shrouded in the fear that he will not survive the war. On one occasion, she has a nightmare in which her father is turning to hug her when he is stopped by military police who take him away from her. She can scarcely think of her father without an associative fear of loss. On one occasion when she is in an arcade with Dwayne Pickens, she almost weeps with apprehension when she sees Dwayne playing a game of machine guns shooting down airplanes. She thinks, "It would be that easy to have her daddy never come home, to have her life forever different" (All Together 72). Finally, she speaks to her Uncle Taylor of her fear of losing her father: "Sometimes I think that he'll never come back. . . . I imagine what it would be like with just Mama and me, and then I'm so afraid, like thinking will make it happen" (All Together 173). Casey's deep love for and dependence on her father magnifies the potential of loss. Even though David Flanagan is a minor character in

the novel, what Bridgers does reveal about him is that he is a positive force in the life of his daughter

In Notes for Another Life, Bridgers describes, in part, the sad relationship of Wren and Kevin Jackson with their mentally ill father, Tom. Of the two children, Wren relates better to her father than does Kevin, who practices avoidance throughout most of the novel. Wren, on the other hand, goes to the hospital every week to visit him and, when he is at home, spends time with him. Even though she puts forth effort to communicate, her father's illness prevents reciprocation. The following typical scene reveals the poignancy of the father-daughter relationship:

> They had nothing to say to each other, for Wren had long ago discovered that he didn't really hear her account of the day even when she embellished it, contriving stories she thought would draw his attention and make him laugh. He never laughed, and so the canned television track laughed for them; they sat together in their own quiet, separate but not, she thought, altogether alone. (Notes 29-30)

Despite the obvious futility of trying to connect with her father, Wren maintains hopefulness that one day he will overcome his illness. She says to Kevin, "There's always been a feeling between Daddy and me. Even with him sick, I

still feel close to him. . . . I always know he's my father and I'm not ashamed of him or anything" (Notes 50).

Kevin's response toward his father is perhaps more typical. According to Rice, Ekdahl, and Miller in Children of Mentally Ill Parents, children living in a family with parents who have mental illness are often embarrassed and sometimes show "confusion, bewilderment, fright, or sadness" (73-74). Kevin is not as optimistic as Wren is, and he does feel a confusing blend of anger, shame, sorrow, and guilt when he thinks of his father. On the one occasion when Kevin visits Tom in the hospital, he creates chaos and turmoil for his father by telling him of Karen's plans to divorce Tom and move to Chicago. When his father goes into convulsions, Kevin runs to his aid, sobbing, "I didn't mean to hurt you, Daddy"; yet "even while he cradled the man in his arms, he wasn't sure" (Notes 111).

According to Phyllis Vine in Families in Pain, a mentally ill person can "fracture a family," keep them off balance because they never know quite what to expect (211). Kevin, like many relatives of a mentally ill person, questions his own motives in responding as he does to his father. In some instances, he remains aloof because he is unsure about what his response should be. Vine says that adaptive changes in the family's routines are to be expected when one lives with a mentally ill person; she believes these changes can have an "emotional component" in that

"anger or rage, helplessness or frustration, guilt or remorse are likely to well up at different stages of seeking help and trying to fathom the unknown" (197).

The hurt that Kevin has experienced because of his father's illness and his mother's absence has resulted in the building of defensive walls of protection around himself. Once, when his father reaches out his hand to Kevin, Kevin thinks, "Touching was dangerous. It meant there was a connection between them. If they embraced, he would suddenly be Tom Jackson's little boy again, and he couldn't afford to be a child" (Notes 108). Kevin strives for utter detachment from his father, whom he wants to view as a total stranger, as one who cannot penetrate his defensive shell to expose his pain and vulnerability.

Through several traumatic experiences in the novel, Kevin eventually becomes more open to the possibility of showing love to his father. Near the end of the novel, Kevin takes an active part in caring for his father's physical needs, bathing him, brushing his hair, feeding him. Through his own traumatic experiences, he seems to have gained some insight into his father's tormented world. While feeding his father, he caries on a one-sided conversation, saying, "Tell me about the hospital, Dad. What do you like about it? People take care of you, right? . . . They're all strangers, aren't they? You don't have to care about them. That's it, isn't it? You don't have to

care about them" (Notes 235). Getting no response from his inert father, Kevin continues his ministrations, lifting him into the bath tub. As he begins the gentle washing of his father's unresponsive body, Kevin murmurs, "I will always love you, Daddy" (Notes 236).

Although the father is incapable of sustained interaction with his children, he, nonetheless, has had some positive impact on their life. Both Wren and, ultimately, Kevin come to understand that their father loves them despite his inadequacies as a parent. During his lucid moments, Tom attempts to reach out to them, to convince them that he does love them. Were it not for his periodic bouts of mental illness, Tom likely would have been a kind, loving father.

In Permanent Connections, Bridgers once again presents two generations of father-child relationships. The first generation of Dicksons includes the aged father and his four adult children, Coralee, Fairlee, Rosalie, and Davis. As an elderly man, Mr. Dickson is cantankerous, rude, and controlling. Throughout most of the novel, he seems angry at life in general and at his children in particular. When Davis and his son, Rob, arrive at the old home place in Tyler Mills, they are greeted by Davis' smiling, congenial sister Coralee and also with Mr. Dickson's complaints that dinner is delayed. "He's all the time complaining," says Coralee, paying little attention to his anger. His sister

Rosalie seems to take the father in stride also, treating him like a senile old man for whom one has to make allowances. Fairlee also makes excuses for his father's rude behavior. They seem to relate to their father by either ignoring or resignedly tolerating him.

Much is revealed about father-child relationships in the scene depicting Fairlee's return home from the hospital following a leg injury. The old house is full of relatives, and Mr. Dickson says, "You all ought to be going back where you come from. It's too crowded in here" (Permanent 76). Fairlee, making excuses for his father, responds, "He'll calm down. . . . I think he's been worried about me, but he'd never say so" (Permanent 76). Later, Coralee comments that her father has "acted old all his life," doing things his own way. When Coralee thinks of what life would be like with Fairlee gone, she is filled with loneliness. She thinks, "Pa wasn't company at all unless you wanted a quarrel. Talking to him was the same as spitting in the wind; it came back on you" (Permanent 101).

Mr. Dickson relates least well to his youngest son, Davis. He seems to view Davis as a deserter of the Dickson ranks. In truth, Davis has returned home only three times in seventeen years, preferring to avoid conflict with his father. A turning point comes when Mr. Dickson is hospitalized for injuries resulting from a fall as he searches for Rob in a storm. As Davis and his son wait with

Mr. Dickson, Davis holds his sleeping father's frail hand and whispers to Rob,

> "When I was a boy I used to look at his hands at . . . . the torn nails, the permanent ridges of oil and dirt on his knuckles, the calluses, and I'd feel such contempt. I hated the work they did, that scratchy roughness when I couldn't avoid his touch. . . . I was a grown man, a father myself, before I could admit my hands are exactly like his, but even then, I couldn't let go of that fear of being like him. . . . I still can't. I haven't been any better son to him than he was father to me, but I could have been." (Permanent 239-40)

Jolted by the fact that his father could have died as a result of his injuries, Davis looks beneath his father's crusty facade and gains a new appreciation for his father. Coming to grips with his feelings for his father helps him to become a better father to his own son, Rob.

Throughout most of Permanent Connections, Rob is an antagonistic, spoiled, troubled teenager who does not relate well to his father. At the beginning of the novel, Rob awakens to his parents' arguing about him. While he cannot hear their words, he knows what is typical; he knows his mom will be worried and defensive, and his dad will criticize his laziness, his driving, his friends, and his drinking.

Rob seems to know that his father and mother love him and want what is best for him, but he consciously chooses to rebel against their plans for his life. Rob believes "they had done all they could to make him safe and it wasn't enough. . . . He was not a solvable problem" (Permanent 4-5).

Forced to accompany his father to Tyler Mills to visit and help care for his Uncle Fairlee, Rob purposely determines to distance himself as much as possible from his father, having learned through previous experiences that revealing too much about himself is risky. Rob has learned to "keep his mouth shut" to his parents and to avoid revealing any vulnerable spot that they can "pounce on, investigate, pick clean with their sharp little know-it-all teeth" (Permanent 11).

Not wanting even to be with his father and the Dickson relatives, Rob works at being uncooperative and sullen, giving no word or look to encourage any comraderie from his father. His feelings of antagonism are deep-seated; he can remember a traumatic visit to his father's family when he was eleven years old. Miserable throughout the visit, Rob felt

> panicked by his dad's hard expectations for him. All day he'd been getting messages off Davis' creased brow, from his clenched jaw, the way he worked his hands, kneading his fingers as if

> recovering from the contact of a hard punch: Behave yourself, don't shame me with your privileged life, don't give Rosalie or Papa reason to criticize" (Permanent 29)

Still resenting his father's expectations, seventeen-year-old Rob gives very little effort to improve his relationship with his father. Davis Dickson apparently has made a success of himself, getting a college education and moving to New Jersey, far away from his Appalachian roots. His main complaint about his son is that he does not try hard enough to succeed. On one occasion, he says to his son, "Look at the kids struggling to survive--no money, broken homes, living conditions you wouldn't let a dog live in and they manage. They make something of themselves" (Permanent 47-48). Rob takes these words to mean that his dad wants him to be just like he is, and Rob is determined not to be that.

Rob's actions during this three-month stay in Tyler Mills reveal teen rebellion and hostility, but even more so, fear. Rob seems to believe that he can never live up to his father's expectations of success, so he not only does not try to do well but he also seems to look for trouble. He sleeps through most of his classes at school, he gets drunk and smokes marijuana, and he verbally insults the Dickson relatives. A turning point comes in the relationship between Rob and his father near the end of the novel when

Rob acknowledges that he is at fault for his grandfather's serious injuries. In a telephone call to his father, Rob says,

> "Dad, it was all my fault." Rob was crying now. His body shook like a windup toy that had been left to run its course.
> "You just hang on, Son," Davis said. "I'm coming." (Permanent 234)

After father and son meet later, Davis expresses his anger and concern, saying, "Part of me wants to throttle you and that's the truth, but I don't know what good it would do so let's just see if we can get through this mess somehow or other" (Permanent 237). He promises Rob that he will be with him during the upcoming trial for Rob's drug use.

By the end of the novel, both Rob and his father are working towards a successful relationship. Rob's difficulties have helped him put down his defenses long enough to see that his father cares deeply for him and wants the best for his son. When Davis puts his arm around his son's shoulders, Rob responds in kind:

> The contact they made was unnatural to them--only estrangement was familiar--and yet Rob did not move. There was no pulling back, no studied maneuvering that would give one of them advantage over the other. Rather the hand on Rob's shoulder provided an unexpected solidarity, an attachment

> as true as the blood tie between them. They both knew there was no escaping that. (Permanent 240-41)

Although Bridgers gives a positive resolution of sorts for the two Dickson father-son relationships, she presents no real solution for the father-daughter relationship of Ellery and Ted Collier. Ellery, aged seventeen, has been transplanted from Charlotte to Tyler Mills by her recently divorced mother, Ginny. Ted's perspective of his relationship with his only child is not revealed; however, Ellery's thoughts and words about her absent father reveal much about their relationship. She apparently has not been emotionally close to her father, but she has come to appreciate the middle-class, suburban stability he represents. Ellery remembers his behavior at home as somewhat withdrawn:

> He liked the orderliness of the bank, people's lives in computer terminals, not played out in a human frenzy. At home he read studies on the economy and watched television. . . . He didn't know what to do with a fifteen-year-old who stayed on the verge of giggles or tears. (Permanent 65)

Ellery fears her father may have been too willing to let her go live with her mother. She recalls that "He never said: Don't leave, stay with me. If he had to fight to

keep her, he'd rather let her go" (Permanent 65). She says to Rob,

> "I never spent much time with him, either. I was always practicing my flute, hanging out with my friends, reading and listening to music in my room. Sometimes when I practiced in the living room, I'd see him fold his paper and close his eyes. . . . but he never applauded or said anything. He just went back to his paper" (Permanent 125).

The relationship between father and daughter does not improve during the course of the novel. Her father sends her two hundred dollars for her birthday, "guilt money," Ellery calls it, because he has not come to Tyler Mills for her birthday. She vacillates between staying with her mother or going to live with her father, but she seems to recognize that if her father really wanted her to stay with him he would have offered her some encouragement. At the end of the novel, she says to Rob, "We brought a lot of junk with us, but lately I've been getting rid of some of mine. . . . There's no going back to Charlotte" (Permanent 262).

Thus Ellery seems to have resolved some of her troubling thoughts about her father. Bridgers, however, does not permit the reader to see enough into Ted Collier's feelings for his daughter for one to speculate about whether he desires to improve their relationship.

Mother-Child Relationships in Voigt's Tillerman Cycle Novels

The mothers in Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels are kinder and softer than the fathers, yet they are ineffectual for the most part. Liza's mental illness prevents her from much active participation in the lives of her four children. As a character, Liza speaks only a few words of instruction at the beginning of Homecoming when she tells the younger children to obey Dicey; however, as a memory, Liza impacts her children to a certain extent. By thinking of what her mother does not do any longer, Dicey reveals what Liza was once like: "Momma didn't talk to them any more, not even to scold, or sing, or make up games the way she used to" (Homecoming 11).

As the oldest child and the one on whom most responsibility falls, Dicey seems to resent her mother after she abandons them; she also fights against being like her mother. In one scene in Homecoming, Dicey, trying to earn money to feed her family, thinks, "Was this how Momma felt? Was this why Momma ran away? Because she couldn't think of anything more to do and couldn't stand any more to try to take care of her children?" (80). Concerned about her own depression over her situation, Dicey says, "I'm getting as bad as Momma" (Homecoming 80), and quickly she turns her mind to action, the antithesis of Liza's accustomed behavior.

mind to action, the antithesis of Liza's accustomed behavior.

Overall, Dicey and the other Tillerman children in Homecoming express both love and regret for the loss of their mother. Dicey's Song continues that expression of sorrow for a lost mother. Sammy, the child who has been the closest to his mother, attempts to control his anger and curb his fighting with kids at school because he believes he is partly responsible for his mother's illness. He says to Dicey, "Sometimes I wish I'd been better, when Momma wanted me to" (Dicey's Song 87). Fearing that his rowdiness may cause some similar harm to Gram, he seems determined to avoid conflict of any sort until Gram and Dicey convince him that he has done nothing to cause Liza's mental illness.

Near the end of Dicey's Song, Liza dies in a mental hospital, never reviving from her comatose state to say goodbye to Dicey or to her mother, Abigail. As Dicey waits near her mother, she feels as if she is "broken into pieces" and does not know how to "gather herself together again" (Dicey's Song 176). In the hours of waiting in Liza's hospital room, Dicey recalls all of her memories of her mother:

> She remembered Momma moving around. She remembered Momma's voice singing. She remembered Momma's eyes looking glad or worried, or laughing. . . . Momma loved her children. You could tell in

> the way her hands rested on their heads. . . . And in her voice when she talked to them. You could tell in how long she tried, how hard she worked. (Dicey's Song 177)

James is the child who struggles most with negative feelings of his mother. It is only in Sons from Afar that James expresses his conflicting emotions about her: "He stopped remembering because it hurt him, the confusion of feelings toward his Momma; he'd felt so sorry for her and been so angry" (Sons 22). So mentally astute himself, James has difficulty identifying with someone who succumbs to mental illness and gives up all her attachments to the real world, including her children.

The mother-child relationship is not a point of emphasis in Voigt's depiction of the first generation of Tillermans. In The Runner, the father's domination of the family negatively impacts the mother-son relationship. Abigail and Bullet obviously sympathize with each other's entrapment in John Tillerman's "box," yet they have difficulty verbalizing their feelings. Abigail remains quiet throughout most of the novel. For instance, when the father demands that Bullet have his hair cut, his mother says nothing in his defense, despite her obvious displeasure, shown by "her eyes dark and angry, her mouth still as stone" (Runner 5).

Bullet acknowledges the limitation of his communication with his mother: "He could read her and she could read him--which was the closest they came to talking. You might say it wasn't too awful close, Bullet thought, and grinned" (Runner 18).

As a mother, Abigail passively accepts all of her husband's mandates toward the children. Just as she had not tried to prevent Johnny and Liza from leaving home, she does not intervene when Bullet is banished from all family meals; she does not intercede even when John's demands seem overwhelming. Yet Bullet remembers his mother as a different sort of woman, one who laughed and played with her children, one who had not yet been boxed into taciturnity. Bullet recalls

> how different things used to be, how different she was . . . . He could remember seeing her run, her skirt tangling at her legs and himself running to try to catch her and her laughter when she pretended he had--but that was all gone, long gone, faded away, closed off. As far as he could tell, his mother didn't miss it. (Runner 15)

In truth, Abigail apparently loves Bullet deeply, even though she cannot express her feelings. Her love is evidenced in two scenes in The Runner. In one scene, Bullet accidently shoots OD, Liza's dog, and he sits by her in the dark woods for hours, keeping her company until she dies.

When he returns home in the early morning hours, he finds his mother waiting for him outside on the steps. After Bullet relates the sad incident, his mother responds, "I dunno, boy. Innocent, weak things come into our hands, and we do such a bad job by them. We destroy them" (Runner 128). Ostensibly, she is speaking about OD, but it is obvious that she is referring to what she and her husband have done to their children.

A second event that evidences Abigail's love for her son is her attendance at one of his track meets, risking the ire of her husband. After winning his race, Bullet looks up to see his mother leaving the crowd with no word of explanation or congratulation. Bullet

> didn't wonder why she had come, even though she'd never come to any meets before, as far as he knew. He knew why she had come. She had wanted him to know whatever it was her being there would tell him, if he saw her. He didn't have to see her, because he already knew it. Now he just knew it more. (Runner 98-99)

Like his mother, Bullet expresses his respect and love for her through actions rather than words. Bullet leaves home on his eighteenth birthday, believing that his leaving will benefit his mother. Earlier in the novel, Bullet recognizes that much of his anger is the result of his inability to help his mother. He "wanted to do something,

even knowing he couldn't change anything, not the way things were, not the way things were going to be. Because he couldn't stand to be one of the things that worked to break her" (Runner 184).

Observing that his father has always used his tyranny over his children to affect his wife, Bullet determines to help his mother by removing himself from the family. He enlists in the army, not mentioning it to his mother until he is packed and ready to walk out the door. He experiences the pain of the farewell to his mother, thinking, "Nobody said it wasn't going to hurt" (Runner 209). His last words to his mother are, "Whatever I've left behind is for you," referring to one hundred dollars and a beautiful boat and motor he has bought for seven hundred dollars so that she will not be so dependent on John for transportation.

Bullet knows that he is leaving his father's "box" for the military's "box," but he is hoping the fit will be better. For his mother, he is hoping to "just loosen a board or two" of her box by providing a boat and some money for her (Runner 209).

Love undergirds the mother-son relationship in The Runner, despite their hesitance or inability to verbalize words of affection. Bullet's and Abigail's actions express profound admiration and love for each other.

Mother-Child Relationships in Bridgers' Novels

Mothers are frequently absent in Bridgers' novels, and, being absent, they assume a crucial significance in the lives of their adolescent children. In "People, Families, and Mothers," Bridgers says, "I really haven't written about women who are 'good' or even adequate mothers--in fact, I hardly write about mothers at all" (36). This is not to say that Bridgers denigrates the importance of mothers; on the contrary, she believes that

> motherlessness provides the ultimate, the all-consuming conflict. No matter what the relationship is, close or distant, strained or loving, mothers are still our source. They are perhaps the most unique and certainly the most complex attachment we will ever have (qtd. in "Bridgers" 21).

Many of the mothers in the novels selected for this study struggle with inadequacies. The mother in Home Before Dark, Mae Willis, seems sadly lacking in vibrancy and warmth. Even though she has four children and has been pregnant part of every year of her married life, Mae does not seem maternal, especially to Stella, her oldest child. She is even unaccustomed to physical closeness to her daughter. For instance, when she and Stella first see the little tenant cottage where they will be living, Mae reaches out in fear and takes her daughter's hand. Stella "was no

out in fear and takes her daughter's hand. Stella "was no more accustomed to being touched than her mother was to touching, and her impulse was to pull away. . . . She can't hold me back anymore, Stella thought, feeling the pressure of Mae's hand on hers" (Home 17).

Mae's inability to show affection for her children stems from the lack in her own childhood:

> There had been little time for affection in Mae's life. She'd never grown accustomed to touching people when she was a child, and so when her own children came she didn't know how to cuddle them without feeling conspicuous and foolish (Home 47).

While she admits to a more emotional attachment to Lissy, her baby, she feels especially distanced from Stella, whom she thinks of as having "a sharp aggressive face" that "buzzed in her brain like a nasty fly in the room" (Home 47-48).

Stella frightens Mae with her need for connections to the Willis family and the land, yet Mae also wishes to be more like Stella with her ability to make friends and fit in with their new life in North Carolina. However, she fails to adjust to a more stable, committed lifestyle, and Mae's unhappiness settles over her family. When she is killed in a lightning storm, she is missed by Stella and the others in her family, yet they all seem to adjust easily to life without her. Ted Hipple, in Presenting Sue Ellen Bridgers,

says, "They could never have admitted, even to themselves, that her death provided a kind of release for them, a chance to live fuller lives. Indeed, they wonder if Mae had wanted to die as a final self-abnegating measure to secure their freedom" (18). Whatever the case, Stella moves on to other, more open relationships with Anne Willis and Maggie Grover, who become her mother-substitutes.

In All Together Now, Bridgers does not explore more than superficially the mother-daughter relationship between twelve-year-old Casey and Barbara. On the surface, Casey does not consider herself a deprived child who has to live with her grandparents while her father is in the Korean War and her mother works two jobs. Back in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, she has learned to enjoy her independence. However, she must be bothered by the situation in which she finds herself because when she first meets Hazard Whittaker, a long-time friend of her grandparents, she blurts out the whole story of why she is in North Carolina for the summer. According to Casey, her mother is working in a bank during the day and singing at a nightclub at night. In a kind of excuse for her mother, Casey says,

> "She didn't like being home every night thinking about how Daddy might get hurt. . . . Mama said she didn't want to have me to worry about too, so she wrote to Grandma about it and Grandma called

> up long-distance on the telephone and said I should come." (All Together 21)

Although Casey never complains about her mother's nightclub job that has been partly responsible for their separation, she apparently has sublimated her true, antagonistic feelings. When Casey has a terrible nightmare of her father's being taken away from her by military police, her mother, wearing one of her sequined singing dresses, appears in the dream, reaching out ineffectually toward her husband. As Casey awakens and ponders the dream, she thinks of her mother wearing "one of those silly sequined scraps of cloth she'd paid a small fortune for" and says that she "hated those dresses" (All Together 30).

Later in the novel, when Casey becomes very ill with a debilitating virus that the doctor suspects may be polio, Barbara does not come to be with her daughter, communicating instead by telephone her concern for Casey. She says, "I wish I could come up there, Casey. . . . Sometimes I wish I hadn't let you go at all" (All Together 171). Barbara has, of course, been assured by Jane, Casey's grandmother, of her daughter's daily improvement; nonetheless, Casey cries when she first hears her mother on the phone, needing "to feel close to her mother" (All Together 171).

Although there is no indication that Casey and Barbara are estranged in their feelings of love for one another, there may be a suggestion of misplaced priorities. One

critic refers to Barbara as a "puzzling blank" because she "elects not to visit this child who experienced a potentially fatal ordeal" (Hipple, Presenting 69).

Bridgers portrays mother-child relationships at their very best and very worst in Notes for Another Life. Bliss is a patient, caring, loving mother to her mentally ill son, Tom, while Karen is a self-centered, absentee mother to Wren and Kevin.

An energetic, athletic, sixty-two-year-old woman, Bliss Jackson grieves over the "failure" in her life--her son Tom. She recognizes that she has accomplished many things during her adult years: She has taught piano lessons, taken care of her home, been active in church and club meetings, kept herself in good physical shape, "none of which matter very much. What mattered was Tom, her failure" (Notes 40). Bliss knows in her heart that she has done all the right things as a mother, yet she still feels that she is somehow partly responsible for her son's condition: "Nothing could have lessened the guilt she'd felt all these years, the agonizing hours of soul-searching she'd spend silently replaying scene after scene between herself and her son" (Notes 39). She confesses to her husband, Bill, "I see him as helpless as an infant. I see him struggling to stand, to walk--God help us--to speak. Over and over again I see him fail, those terrible slow slides of defeat. But I still love him" (Notes 61).

By contrast, Karen has not shown herself to be a good mother to her children. Her mother-in-law, Bliss, and her children, Wren and Kevin, all recognize that she has shirked her responsibility to her family in favor of a career. Wren suffers emotional hurt every time her mother comes to North Carolina for a visit. For years, she has maintained the hope that each visit will result in her mother's asking them to live with her. At the beginning of the novel, knowing her mother will be at Bliss' house when Wren returns from school, she steels herself not to cry: "I always cry when I see her, but today I won't. . . . I will not cry, she said to herself. I will not. But halfway down the street, she felt the tears come" (Notes 20). Wren takes her mother's rejection personally, not seeing Karen's need for success in the fashion world as the reason for her lack of maternal care. Instead, she reasons that she and Kevin somehow are not good enough, not acceptable enough for Karen to want them.

Karen's attitude toward her children is even more devastating to Kevin than to Wren. He seems to have an insatiable need for his mother's love but, knowing he cannot have it, shuts himself off from others. He is frequently withdrawn around his family; he admits to having no friends except for his girlfriend, Melanie; he pessimistically views the future as "dark, full of shadowy crowds, hungry- glazed-eyed people" (Notes 46). When he sees his mother during one

of her visits, he welcomes her arms around him. He lingers in her embrace "until he felt a sob grumbling in his gut, some pitiful savage cry of longing to be there forever. He pulled away then, knowing he was risking too much" (Notes 26). When Karen breaks the news that she is moving even further away to Chicago, Kevin "faced her, fists clinching at his sides, face grim and unresponsive, a sullen mannequin" (Notes 27).

Karen remembers when her son was "such an eager child, so ready to explore, to be held, to return affection. . . . Now that was closed off, like a door shut against her" (Notes 27). He is afraid to expose his vulnerability to his mother, yet he unwillingly finds himself doing so each time she drifts back into his life. After he and Melanie break up, he thinks, "It didn't matter that Melanie was gone because he still had a chance with his mother. He hadn't lost yet" (Notes 177). With that thought in mind, he tells his mother that he wants to go to Chicago to live with her. The following scene reveals some of the complexity of this mother-son relationship:

> "I want to live with you, Mom," he said. "I want to come to Chicago now." She had, how long, five seconds? How long did it take to say yes? . . . He watched the fingers tightening on the edge of the magazine. She gripped it as if she were about

> to swat an insect, eliminate some pesky interference.
>
> "All right," she said, but it was too late. She had hesitated." (Notes 178)

As Kevin leaves her presence, he berates himself for being stupid, for trusting her. He determines that "from now on, he would trust only himself" (Notes 179). However, his hurt runs too deeply for words and he takes violent action against himself. As he swallows countless sleeping pills, he thinks that "Melanie and his mother would be sorry" (Notes 186).

Both Wren and Kevin eventually find a way to deal with what they perceive is their mother's rejection of them. Wren thinks that she "wouldn't be like Karen, giving up husband and children for a career. She wouldn't abandon infants, expecting them to love her anyway in spite of all the emptiness she left" (Notes 194). She would, instead, work harder to find a way to mesh her career in music with a loving family, one that can give unconditional love and affirmation to the children.

Kevin also learns to be content with the little his mother can give, taking his cue from how Wren offers friendliness and acceptance to Karen despite her own pain. After Kevin has recovered from his attempted suicide, Karen says, "I never meant to hurt you, Kevin" (Notes 203). Kevin

> put out his arms to her. . . . Nothing could stop

> him from reaching out to her. Nothing ever would again, and yet from now on, he would always know that what he reached for was momentary, transient, inaccessible, and made all the more precious by its elusiveness. (Notes 203)

Although Karen Jackson seems the most odious of mothers to many readers of Notes for Another Life, Sue Ellen Bridgers does not think of Karen as a monster-mother; instead, she says she likes Karen and feels she makes a legitimate choice when she elects career over family (Lecture). Bridgers elaborates,

> I didn't want her to be misinterpreted; so I tried very hard to make her true to herself, to do what was necessary for herself so that she could make a life despite how people felt about her leaving her family . . . . I never wanted to be judgmental. I just wanted to present the facts of a life. (qtd. in Hipple, Presenting 77)

Bridgers recognizes that a price must be paid for either choice; so does Karen, the character. In an intimate, revealing conversation with her daughter, Karen attempts to verbalize her feelings about how her life has turned out. She admits that she probably should never have married or had children because her life as a wife and mother left her discontented and unfulfilled. When an opportunity to excel

arose, she knew then that she wanted more from life than she had. She says,

> "When I realized I could have a career, I was flabbergasted, completely unstrung with excitement. I didn't realize what it would mean. I didn't know what I'd have to give up. It was as if there were two roads and one of them looked so familiar, so ordinary. I just had to take the other one. I had to." (Notes 210)

Despite her loss of close family relationships, Karen says, "I wouldn't change my life" (Notes 211).

According to Frances Nadeau, "Young adults often need to understand their mothers in order to understand themselves" (16). Such is true for both Wren and Kevin in this novel. They still feel somewhat at odds with Karen at the end of the novel, but their experiences have taught them a measure of understanding about her and about themselves. Kevin verbalizes what is true for both his sister and himself when he says, "I think I'm going to be all right" (Notes 219).

In Permanent Connections, Bridgers briefly reveals the mother-son relationship between Rob and Carrie Dickson while she places greater emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship of Ellery and Ginny Collier. Because the conflict with his father is one of the dominant ones in his life, Rob Dickson sees his mother as an ally, a softer,

gentler force who will mediate for him when his father is angry. She is the one who will say to her husband, "He's not you, Davis" (Permanent 3) when his dad is trying to get Rob to do something his father enjoys more than Rob does. His mother is also the one "who always forgave him. She spent her days with college students and so she knew how to forgive" (Permanent 48).

Rob realizes that he has brought hurt to his mother. At a particularly low point for him, just after he is forced to stay with his Dickson relatives, Rob thinks, "Nobody cares. Who had ever cared about him? His mother, maybe. . . . He wondered if she was mourning, missing him no matter how hateful he'd been to her" (Permanent 98). Holding on to his childhood need for his mother's protection, Rob finds it difficult to accept responsibility as an adult. However, after he is responsible for indirectly causing harm to his grandfather and bringing shame to the Dickson name by being arrested for drug use, Rob cannot depend on his mother to shield him from harm. When it comes time for Rob to act as an adult and admit his wrongs, he still desires his mother's compassion but he asks for his father's strength.

The second mother-child relationship described in Permanent Connections is that of Ginny and Ellery Collier. The relationship between the two women is typical of that described in sociological literature. Researcher Lucy Fisher says, "Because mothers and daughters identify with

each other, and because their individual boundaries are not always clear, daughters struggle all their lives to separate from their mothers" (qtd. in Nadeau 14). Conflict is especially apparent in the adolescent years. According to Margaret Notar and Susan McDaniel, the relationship between a mother and her adolescent daughter is often negative because it "manifests many of the ambiguities and confusions about the social meanings of womanhood and motherhood" (qtd. in Nadeau 14).

In Permanent Connections, for sixteen years Ellery has had a traditional home and family. Her father, a banker, has been the financial provider, and her mother, the keeper of the home, the nurturer. Ginny has decorated and maintained a lovely home in the suburbs and now, in Ellery's opinion, she has "chucked it all, husband, house, furniture, banker's-wife image, watched it sail out the window like dust kitties off a rag" (Permanent 62).

Part of the conflict Ellery has with her mother comes from the great changes Ginny has forced upon her: the rugged country house, built on the side of a mountain, the separation from life-long friends, the inadequate town of Tyler Mills and its backward people. She is angry because, to her, her mother seems selfish. Ginny sees some truth in her daughter's indictment. She says, "You're right, lately I have been trying to take care of myself. That's what

women are most afraid of, you know. Being selfish. It's the ultimate sin" (Permanent 91).

Despite the admission of selfishness and despite her determination to make a new life for her daughter and herself in Tyler Mills, Ginny is fearful of what the future holds for herself and for her relationship with her daughter. As she wanders one evening through her dark house, she thinks of how much she is like Coralee Dickson, an agoraphobic neighbor who is afraid even to step out onto her porch. Ginny confides her fear to the silent darkness, "I am afraid, too. . . . Hear me, Coralee Dickson, while you are curled like an animal in a hole away from the sky and wind and sun. The demons that devour women are all the same" (Permanent 92).

In spite of her struggles with her daughter, as a mother, Ginny does some things right. She permits Ellery to express her anger without repercussion; she usually avoids conflict over trivial things, such as Ellery's shorn hair and bizarre clothing; she tries to keep the lines of communication open, making an effort to talk to Ellery even when the response is antagonistic. In one scene, Ginny tries to draw out Ellery on the subject of Rob Dickson. When she admits she likes Rob but their relationship has not worked out, her mother responds, "Do you want to talk about it?" Ellery's response is,

> Oh, what's the point? I can't talk to you, Mother. Can't you see that? Everything I say gets translated into what you want it to mean. . . . You take my words and make them yours. I want my words back. I want my feelings back. They belong to me! (Permanent 192-93)

Sadly, Ginny concedes, "I don't know how to talk to you. That's obvious. You're so volatile. Everything becomes a challenge. I'm not trying to challenge you, sweetheart" (Permanent 193).

This problem with communicating effectively is fairly typical between parents and teenagers, says Haim Ginott in Between Parents & Teenagers. He says, "Adolescence can be a time of turmoil and turbulence, of stress and storm" (24). Writing of adolescence, Anna Freud says, "It is normal for an adolescent to behave in an inconsistent and unpredictable manner, to fight his impulses and to accept them, to love his parents and to hate them" (qtd. in Ginott 29).

Underneath the turmoil, Ellery and her mother clearly love each other. Bridgers uses the metaphor of weaving to describe the mother-daughter relationship at this point in time for Ellery and Ginny. As Ginny toils over her loom, her daughter plays her flute in her upstairs bedroom.

> The music hung above her in the still air, her child's secret voice sending the coded message of

> an adagio, signatured with youthful passion and pain. She yearned to respond. . . .
>
> Her foot pushed the treadle, the harness went up, the shuttle made its journey, the beater brought the reed forward again. The loom groaned as it moved, gathering the pattern she had set while she and her daughter wove their hurts into a song devoid of harmony but played together just the same. (Permanent 74)

The unconditional love Ginny has for Ellery is rewarded on occasion throughout Permanent Connections with a rare, companionable touch or a kind word of understanding from her daughter. By the end of the novel, a more mature Ellery has lowered her defenses and has softened towards her mother.

Parent-child relationships in Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels are negative in the two primary families but positive in two minor families. Mr. Smiths and Mr. Horton are effective as foils for John Tillerman and Francis Verricker. In the Bridgers novels, with the two exceptions of James Earl Willis in Home Before Dark and Mr. Dickson in Permanent Connections, older fathers of adult children are usually presented more positively than are younger fathers.

The two Tillerman mothers in the Voigt novels are more ineffectual than cruel while the mothers in the minor families are warm and loving. In the Bridgers novels, the

older, more traditional mothers, such as Jane Flanagan and Bliss Jackson, relate more positively to their children than do younger mothers, such as Karen Jackson and Barbara Flanagan.

CHAPTER V

HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIPS IN VOIGT AND BRIDGERS

Husband-Wife Relationships in Voigt's Tillerman Cycle Novels

In Successful Marriage, W. Robert Beavers says research on marital relationships reveals that "the quality of the couple's relationship is a critical factor in the quality of family functioning" (68). Seemingly, dysfunctional husband-wife relationships tend to breed dysfunctionality in other family relationships. Such seems to be true in the primary husband-wife relationship depicted in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels.

Cynthia Voigt paints a bleak picture of marriage in the husband-wife relationship of John and Abigail Tillerman. Before John and Abigail married, Abigail was full of life and humor. Millie, owner of a small grocery story in Crisfield, tells Dicey that she remembers Abigail as a young woman:

> "I guess we called her pert. . . . She had quite a tongue, did Ab, and she'd as soon bite your head off as smile at you. She kept things hopping, wherever she was. . . . Then after she married John it wasn't the same." (Dicey's Song 106).

Bullet also has pleasant memories of his mother. He can remember her as the bright spot in their home, recalling how she

> used to cook platters of food, to feed all of them, her hands quick and strong, making bread, washing up, her voice sharp and quick. No matter how stony his father sat, she put all the quickness she had into that room. . . . Now his mother sat as stony as his father, all her quickness gone. (Runner 183)

Although it is a peripheral issue in the Tillerman novels, Cynthia Voigt examines the deterioration in the husband-wife relationship of Abigail and John Tillerman. What can cause a light-hearted, joyous young woman to become a wife of stony silence? What becomes apparent in portions of The Runner and the other Tillerman novels is that John Tillerman is a man of domination, manipulation, and cruelty.

Just as John dominates his children's lives, so he controls Abigail. He refuses to permit her to get her driver's license because he wants her to be dependent on him; he doles out small portions of money for household expenses so that she will have nothing left for herself; he also requires her to dress for dinner each night, despite the fact that she despises heels and dressy clothes. As his son Bullet comments, "The old man slapped his name on her,

slapped his name on the land, and owned everything" (Runner 11).

John is expert at trying to manipulate his wife into abject obedience. He uses his knowledge gleaned from much reading to intimidate her with what he knows. Long after John's death, Abigail says to her grandson James, "My husband used his books to build a wall to keep things out" (Homecoming 281). Also, in Seventeen Against the Dealer, she tells Dicey that it has taken years for her to overcome the fear of books brought on by her husband (117).

Abigail sees John as a cruel man. She says to Dicey, "There were times I could have killed him. He'd sit chewing and the anger and shame were sitting at the table with us. Chew and swallow, so sure he was right" (Homecoming 302). A priest who has the Tillermans in Crisfield investigated tells Dicey more about her grandfather. He says,

> "Your grandfather seems to have been a stern man. An unbending man. Overrighteous perhaps. Perhaps cruel. Nobody knows anything certain. Your grandmother always let him have his way. . . . He had his boys do a man's work, from the time they were eight. He used a whip for disobedience, a real whip. He did not tolerate disobedience of any sort. . . . He was angry--probably hate-filled too. She--your grandmother--was apparently the

kind of woman who sticks faithfully to her husband's rule." (Homecoming 143)

John and Abigail are married for thirty-eight years before he dies and leaves her free to enjoy her remaining years of life. Only after his death can she verbalize why she had remained married to such a cruel man. She says, "When you marry someone you make promises. I kept those promises, love and honor and obey. Even when I didn't want to I kept them. I kept quiet when I had things to say. I always went his way" (Homecoming 300). When she no longer has to keep those promises, she can examine her life with John and see that she was not without fault. She comes to see that he was a very unhappy man with great needs that she perhaps did not help meet. She says, "I might have learned to enjoy him, if I'd tried. I thought I was trying, but maybe I wasn't" (Dicey's Song 203).

In the last Tillerman novel, Seventeen Against the Dealer, Abigail makes an important statement about marriage: "Some horses just can't pull together in harness, and it's unkind to yoke them" (175). She goes on to say that at first she thought she had failed as a wife. Then she thought John had failed as a husband. Finally, she says, "I figured out that we failed, we were the ones failing, it took two of us" (Seventeen 174).

The destructiveness of John and Abigail's marriage impacts Liza Tillerman to such an extent that she refuses to

marry Francis Verricker, in spite of her four pregnancies and his desire to marry her. Liza seems to realize that she must not make those promises to Francis that her mother made to John, promises that she cannot keep.

Delores Curran, in Traits of a Healthy Family, says the husbands and wives must relate well if the marriage is to be healthy and happy. She says, "We marry so we can love and be loved, not feed and be fed. We join together in a search for intimacy, not protection" (10). While John and Abigail Tillerman seem a couple devoid of love and intimacy, two other couples briefly mentioned in the Tillerman cycle novels, the Smiths and the Hortons, do indeed seem to relate well and to have strong families.

The Smiths family make up a rather large group in the Crisfield community. Reverend Smiths is a local black minister, and Mrs. Smiths is a registered nurse. Mina Smiths, Dicey Tillerman's friend, is the character Voigt uses to relate information about the Smiths family. Through Mina's comments, one sees that love, pride, and togetherness are characteristic of this family. In one instance when Dicey invites Mina home with her, she says that she is "under strict orders to get back to help with supper" (Dicey's Song 149) because all the immediate family members and the in-laws are going to be at the Smiths' house. When Sammy visits the Smithses, the friendly atmosphere of the

family is evidenced in the lemonade, oatmeal cookies, and conversation extended to him by Mr. and Mrs. Smiths.

Another family briefly mentioned in the Tillerman cycle novels is the Hortons. When Sammy asks his friend, Robin, to crab with him during the summer as his business partner, he has a chance to meet Robin's family. Robin's response to Sammy's request suggests the closeness of his family. He indicates that his mother and step-father will need to meet Sammy and will have to talk over Sammy's proposition. As Sammy pays the required visit, he seems intrigued with what he learns about the Horton family. Robin tells him that he has not seen his real father, Colonel Kelly, for five years but his "dad," Ted Horton, is a teacher, as is his mother. Robin says,

> "My dad. . . stays at school to get his work done there, so he can concentrate on us when he get home. . . . He likes us. Well, Mom especially. They met at a teachers' convention and he wanted to marry her right away. As soon as he clapped eyes on her, he says." (Sons 149)

Sammy observes that Mr. and Mrs. Horton work together in the home, with Mr. Horton serving the food and doing the dishes with Robin after dinner. He also notices that they converse in a friendly give-and-take manner during the meal, jointly coming to decisions about matters concerning Robin.

While Voigt devotes only a few pages to these two families, they are presented as foils to the families of the two generations of Tillermans. The dysfunctionality of the husband-wife relationship of Abigail and John Tillerman is especially highlighted by the comparison with Mr. and Mrs. Smiths and Mr. and Mrs. Horton.

Husband-Wife Relationships in Bridgers' Novels

The four novels by Bridgers depict thirteen husband-wife relationships; however, these relationships are not the major ones presented in any of these novels. In general, Bridgers presents the relationships of the older couples as more satisfactory than those of the younger couples.

Home Before Dark relates the stories of two brothers and three wives. When the first couple, Mae and James Earl Willis, are introduced, they are en route from Florida to the Willis farm in North Carolina. Mae and James Earl are crowded into their dusty white station wagon with their four children and all of their belongings. Mae seems "propped up against her will between the door and a bundle of household goods that separated her from her husband" (Home 3). This separation seems symbolic of the gulf that widens between Mae and James Earl as they become increasingly attached to the Willis land. In truth, Mae does not desire this journey to Willis territory where she will be drawn unwillingly into a family she knows almost nothing about. Nor has she ever

desired to know anything about her husband's past. She "didn't know James Earl except as her husband" (Home 8), and that is what she prefers. She does not desire to know his past or his relatives. When he stops his car in front of the old homeplace, he is overcome with emotion while his wife is subdued by fear that she will lose him. According to Mae, "all that counted for her was in the station wagon, was next to her gripping the wheel and looking tearful" (Home 9).

Mae seems to love her husband more than she does anyone else, including her children. Her prayer in the darkness is, "Oh, Jesus, let me keep him" (Home 52). While James Earl does not have much in common with his wife except their four children, he is kind to her and enjoys being physically intimate with her. When Mae thinks of James Earl, she knows "he was good to her because he was a good man. That one thing she understood. His gentleness was as inherent as the blue marble of his eyes, the shape and touch of his wiry hands" (Home 53).

After Mae is killed by lightning, James Earl misses his wife and suffers with that loss for a time. He feels "the loss, the helplessness of being a man with no place to turn because his comfort was finally, undeniably gone" (Home 96). He misses her most at night when he "longed for Mae. . . and he was alone with a body that still needed her and didn't seem to know that she wasn't there in the bedroom, half-

asleep and waiting" (Home 107). However, his pain at Mae's loss disappears so quickly that he can scarcely believe it of himself:

> He didn't want his hurt to heal quickly because he was more afraid of guilt than of pain. How could he have loved her and used her, had these children from her, and then forgotten so soon? (Home 106)

Within a month, James Earl is courting Maggie Grover, who becomes his second wife. Maggie knows as she stands beside Mae's casket that she wants to be James Earl's next wife. She believes she has "a great deal to offer a man like him--money, a house and business, the mothering of his children, comfort in his loneliness, a body eager to be given" (Home 112). On their very first date, he announces his intentions of courting her and perhaps even marrying her one day.

Unlike Mae, Maggie has a past in common with James Earl. They both enjoy remembrances of past events in their small community, the familiar names and faces of the rural inhabitants. James Earl feels that he can talk to Maggie because "she seemed to grasp his meaning better than Mae had, as if their sharing of roots gave Maggie a special understanding of him" (Home 140). When he tells Stella, his oldest daughter, of his plans to marry Maggie, he says, "We've known each other since we were children and I like being with her. We're good friends" (Home 142).

In addition to the sharing of a past with Maggie and the burgeoning feelings of tenderness and love toward her, James Earl also enjoys physical intimacy with her, which, seemingly, was his primary attachment to Mae. When James Earl and Maggie first make love, he

> felt heady with the pleasure of loving a woman who responded out of her own happiness. Already he had begun to love her strength, the resilience that let her abandon the bitterness she once harbored in her lonely past. Now he loved her tenderness as well. (Home 141)

Thus, his relationship with Maggie far exceeds the limited relationship he has had with Mae. With Maggie as his wife, James Earl seems to fulfill the expectations placed on him as a part of the Willis family. While Mae pulled him down to her migrant-worker status, Maggie helps to place James Earl where he rightfully should be, in a position of importance and status in their community.

The third husband-wife relationship in Home Before Dark is that of Anne and Newton Willis. This couple seems to have a happy marriage established on a shared past and shared goals.

Even before Anne and Newton have their first date, Anne considers him "practically perfect and very attractive besides" (Home 58). Anne has set her sights high, since Newton is the most eligible young man in Montreet County.

He is the heir to the well-off Willis family's farm and property, and he has already proven himself a capable manager who can make money and provide well for a young woman like Anne.

As a home economics teacher, Anne is knowledgeable of what is required to make a pleasant home for her husband. After her wedding to Newton, Anne invests her energies into remodeling the Willis farmhouse, making it the kind of place worthy of someone like Newton: "Her life hinged on her reputation as a wife, teacher, decorator, and social planner, and she did everything well" (Home 54).

Apparently, Anne is an even-tempered wife, consistent in her tenderness to and support of her husband. Newton knows he can rely on her strength. For instance, when the arrival of James Earl, Newton's older brother, and his large family creates apprehension in Newton, Anne "smiled and kissed him gently, urging him with her fingers on his shoulders to relax and take strength from her" (Home 16).

While Bridgers does not give much attention to this compatible couple, what she does reveal is that their relationship is characterized by mutual love and support.

In All Together Now, Bridgers tells of three husband-wife relationships: David and Barbara Flanagan, Hazard and Pansy Whitaker, and Ben and Jane Flanagan. In the first one, dissatisfactions are only hinted at; in the second, the elderly but newlywed couple struggles toward true

companionship in marriage; and in the third, love continues and becomes enriched through many years of marriage.

Bridgers focuses the least attention on the marriage of David and Barbara. For one thing, both are absent throughout the novel, David in the Korean War and Barbara in South Carolina, working two jobs. There is no outright indication that problems exist in David and Barbara's relationship; however, the conditions under which the husband and wife live seem conducive for marital difficulties.

The novel suggests at least two negatives, Barbara's growing interest in independent employment and somewhat decreasing interest in the family and the couple's long-term separation. In one instance in the novel, Barbara's daughter, Casey, goes far beyond what is necessary to explain to Hazard why her mother works in a nightclub as a singer at night and at a bank during the day. Apparently, Barbara is lonely and also is worried about her husband. When the opportunity comes along for her to sing, something she does well and enjoys, she takes advantage of a nightclub owner's offer. One wonders if, after David returns from the war, Barbara will be willing to give up the more exciting job which showcases her talents to return to the life she led before David left home.

A second hint that trouble may be brewing for the young couple is that Barbara seems more interested in herself than

in her family. Casey tells how her mother was hired by a man who heard her sing at a party she had attended with some of David's friends. The novel does not specify if David's friends are women or some of his military buddies; however, it appears that Barbara desires pleasurable distraction from the uncertainties of her life as a military "widow." Also, much later in the novel, when Casey becomes seriously ill with what the doctor believes may be polio, Barbara's mother-in-law cannot reach Barbara to tell her of Casey's illness. She calls very late at night when Barbara "should be home from her second job, but wasn't" (All Together 165). The question apparently in the mind of Jane Flanagan is never answered.

The novel gives no strong indications that Barbara and David have an unhappy marriage but seems, instead, to suggest that an absent husband and a wife overcommitted to her jobs may lead to a situation similar to the one depicted in Notes for Another Life. One wonders if Barbara Flanagan is on her way to becoming another Karen Jackson.

The second couple in All Together Now is Pansy and Hazard Whitaker who, as the novel begins, have dated each other for twenty-five years with no marriage proposal being offered. Hazard remembers well that night he first met Pansy at Jane Flanagan's house; he was certain even then that "here was the woman he'd always care about. This was the person he'd never want to lose" (All Together 27).

Despite that certainty, he waits until he is fifty-two years old before he works up enough courage to say, "I want to marry you, Pansy. . . . I've wanted to marry you for twenty-five years and I figure it's time I give you a chance to refuse me, if that's what you're aiming to do" (All Together 28).

Both Hazard and Pansy have doubts about their ability to blend two very disparate lives into a happy marriage. Pansy enjoys her well-organized, regulated life; she likes being alone; and she likes everything about her job in Dr. Kemble's office except the patients. She

> liked the figures in the ledger, even the perfectly lettered names she drew in the appointment book . . . . She believed she did her job efficiently, even kindly, but she didn't want to care about those people. (All Together 54-55)

With more than pre-wedding jitters, Pansy confides fearfully to Jane, "My life is so set, you know. I've been alone all these years. What if I don't really want Hazard living in my house?" (All Together 56).

So different from Pansy, Hazard seems to have little order in his life. At fifty-two, he sometimes has troubled thoughts about how little he has accomplished in life: "He was without almost anything that gave a man reason to look back on his life with pride--no wife or children, no home except two rooms above a restaurant, no career, no savings

account, no automobile" (All Together 15). As a dancing waiter in an Italian restaurant, Hazard does what he loves to do--entertain people with his dancing. He recognizes his gift for making people happy, for helping them go outside themselves and enter the fantasy world he creates with his dance steps. His worry is that he may not be able to be all that Pansy deserves in a husband.

With fear of failure uppermost in her mind, Pansy walks down the church aisle to marry Hazard. This thought helps her get through the awkward ceremony: "Love unused became useless, became brittle and drawn, or vanished altogether" (All Together 77). Recognizing that she does not want that fate to happen to her, she is willing to take the risk of marriage to Hazard. During the reception, as she serves her own wedding cake, Pansy tries to convince herself that marriage to Hazard will be easy: "It will be as easy as this, she thought, shifting a slice of cake deftly onto a china plate. She could make him happy as easily as this" (All Together 78).

Unfortunately, their disastrous wedding trip by train to Washington, D. C., does not bode well for a happy future. Hazard forgets to reserve a sleeping berth, and he and Pansy spend their wedding night sitting in chairs in a communal lounge car where an odd assortment of men have gathered for the night. Despite her thoughts that Hazard has failed her

miserably, she resolves to forgive him once they settle into their hotel.

The situation quickly worsens at the hotel, however. With Pansy in the hotel room preparing herself for a romantic evening with her new husband, Hazard waits downstairs for a delayed suitcase, drinking with salesmen in the bar. By the time Pansy finds him, no words of apology from Hazard can salvage their relationship. She closes her mind to him, thinking that "he did not exist for her any more" (All Together 90).

Although this marriage seems doomed for failure, Bridgers works her magic in this relationship and, through Hazard's determination to win her back and through a community crisis involving Dwayne Pickens, brings about the healing of the rift between Pansy and Hazard. Hazard, convinced that he can win Pansy back, sets up a tent in Pansy's front yard and enlists Casey and Dwayne to help watch it so Pansy will not remove it while Hazard is at work. She is nonplused by his attempt to overcome her anger, and she commands him to leave her yard. Bridgers conches their argument in martial rather than marital terms. The side of her house becomes a "fortress wall"; Hazard "invades" her territory; Pansy has "to attack," to gain "the offensive" (All Together 119). Hazard bolsters his confidence with these thoughts: "Camped outside her fortress wall, he would starve her out, make her hungry for

his touch and his voice until she would see that his winning would be her victory too" (All Together 119).

The real turning point in this husband-wife relationship occurs when the sheriff takes Dwayne Pickens to jail until he can be removed to the mental hospital the next day. Pansy hears Casey say angrily to Jane, "We know him, Grandma! How could we let him go when we know him!" (All Together 148). Pansy agrees with Casey and adds, "It's the same with Hazard and me. How could I let him go when I know him?" (All Together 148).

Earlier in the novel, Jane has said to Pansy, "Loving is truly the biggest risk a person can take, and the one that's the most worth it" (All Together 57). Pansy comes to realize the truth of that statement and welcomes her husband back into her life. When he returns from work to take up residence in his tent once again, Pansy meets him at the door and invites him inside her house. When he says, "I don't ever want to hurt you again," Pansy responds, "I know you, Hazard Whitaker, . . . and you are worth the risk" (All Together 148).

In the novel's few remaining chapters after Pansy and Hazard are reunited, Bridgers reveals a couple that has learned the art of give and take. Their devotion to one another is obvious, especially as they provide mutual comfort to each other during Casey's severe illness. This

husband-wife relationship emerges as one of the strong ones in Bridgers' novels.

The final husband-wife relationship presented in All Together Now is that of Jane and Ben Flanagan. This couple is one of the two most positively depicted couples in the novels selected for this study. They, of course, have been married for a long time, almost thirty-five years, and during those years have learned how to mesh their very different personalities.

Ben and Jane complement each other well. Ben seems to be stability personified; he has worked in the lumberyard business since before he married Jane and has owned his own successful business for many years. He enjoys his routine of working all day and coming home in the evening to the warm environment that Jane works at establishing.

Compared to Ben's calm demeanor, Jane is cheerful and fun loving, ready to joke with family and friends. For instance, when Casey rather somberly and unwillingly arrives to spend the summer with her grandparents, Jane exclaims, "Well, let's get cheerful. . . . a merry heart, you know. A happy house" (All Together 6). Also, when Hazard Whitaker comes for one of his long visits, Jane joins him in a song-and-dance routine as she performs her part in the kitchen while Hazard is on the front porch.

Jane is a caretaker of all who step inside her home, cooking and preparing meals, offering advice, soothing

hurts. She finds it easy to give her love to a husband such as Ben. She

> knew she was still in love with Ben. In love . . . . After all, she had spent years loving him, taking care of him. Her dedication to him and their sons had consumed her, energized her, probably even aged her, but still she was in love with him, could feel giddy when she looked out from the church choir to see him looking back at her, loving her over the distance of straight-backed women and drowsy, nodding men. (All Together 53)

To Jane, the attraction she felt for Ben thirty-five years before has only grown stronger. Knowing that the love she feels for her husband is reciprocated, she still seems amazed that anyone can love her that much. She thinks, "What a feeling that was, knowing someone thought about you all the time like that. Somebody cared about you that much" (All Together 53).

Although Bridgers gives only a few references to Ben and Jane's relationship as husband and wife, the strength of this couple is clearly evident in the response others give to being in the Flanagan home. Jane and Ben present a united front throughout the novel.

Notes for Another Life is a novel of dramatic contrasts. One such contrast is evidenced in Bridgers'

relationships. Bliss and Bill Jackson are perhaps the most positively presented couple in the novels selected for this study while Karen and Tom Jackson are one of the worst.

Bliss and Bill have been married for forty years, and although painful situations have sometimes invaded their peaceful lives, they have remained a strong, happy couple. They have both worked, Bill as a pharmacist and Bliss as a part-time music teacher, and Bliss has been the primary caretaker of the Jackson home and family. Bliss describes her husband as being "steady as a rock, as kind and loving as he was responsible" (Notes 42). While Bridgers does not reveal Bill's thoughts of his wife, it is evident that he also loves her and depends on her. Bill and Bliss lean on each other, drawing solace from one another to face the terrible and ongoing crisis in their lives--the mental illness of their son, Tom.

This couple communicates well, both physically and verbally. Physical touching seems to impart strength to each of them. For instance, Bill sits with Bliss in church with his arm draped along the back of the pew, "sheltering her" (Notes 14); also, after Kevin's emergency hospitalization because of a suicide attempt, Bill's touch comforts his wife as he "put his arms about Bliss, drawing her close. She let him hold her, relinquishing herself to the comfort of his familiar embrace" (Notes 187). In yet another passage, Bliss and Bill go to their bedroom,

"shutting the door behind them as if to lock out grief and find solace in each other" (Notes 193).

Perhaps the scene which best evidences the closeness between Bill and Bliss takes place in their kitchen at three o'clock one morning. Bliss cannot sleep because of a letter from Karen, her daughter-in-law, telling of her plans to divorce Tom. Bill, disturbed by his wife's absence, goes downstairs to sit with Bliss, share a cup of weak tea, and provide a sounding board for her anger at Karen. Bliss' words of anger are rare, but she feels so comfortable with Bill that she can say those angry words and know that he will still love her. She says, "I have to say it, at least to you" (Notes 61). After their lengthy conversation about their son and their grandchildren, Bliss walks upstairs to their bedroom with her arm around her husband. She remembers how

> she had come to this room so many years ago. . . . And now here was Bill, as dependable as the solid walls he'd built for her, as warm as the bed they crawled into, as dear as any memory. (Notes 62)

Bill murmurs a soft, "I love you, Bliss," and then "a cold foot rested against hers, and there was no accounting for the joy of it" (Notes 62).

In contrast to Bliss and Bill Jackson, the husband-wife relationship of Tom and Karen Jackson is highly dysfunctional. Pamela Sissi Carroll says of this couple,

"The tormented relationships that Tom and Karen Jackson have with each other and with their adolescent children, Kevin and Wren, are the novel's strongest indictments of the troubled modern family" (11).

Karen has been living apart from Tom for several years and finally has decided to divorce him. She assures Bliss, her mother-in-law, that "There's no one else. . . . Some day perhaps there will be, but not now" (Notes 159). Her reasons for leaving Tom stem, in large part, from his mental illness and her own inability to live through his continual vacillation between recovery and relapse. When her daughter, Wren, tells her that Tom is a little better than he has been, Karen, with bitterness in her voice, says,

> "I know exactly how he gets better, almost like himself but not quite. Always holding some part of himself back like a hurt he's protecting. . . . I know how it lasts a year, sometimes even two. And then one day he is here on this bed and says he feels nauseated, he has the flu, and so he stays in bed. Day after day he sleeps, eating less and less, talking less and less, until one morning he doesn't eat at all, doesn't talk at all, doesn't even sleep anymore. Just lies here staring." (Notes 26)

Karen admits that she has coped with Tom's illness by focusing on her job and, finally, by moving far away from

him; however, when she returns periodically to visit her children, she questions what she might have done differently with Tom. She tells Wren and Kevin that she tried to make her marriage work but to no avail, but doubts still overwhelm her when she visits the place where they lived as a couple. She wonders if "perhaps she could have been more patient, given Tom more time, and yet she didn't think either her staying or her going could have mattered much to him" (Notes 23).

According to Masha Rudman, "Love, marriage, and family have signaled emotional success in our society"; women "have been taught to anticipate marriage as a natural and proper part of existence" (24). At the time of her marriage to Tom, Karen Jackson in Notes for Another Life had apparently accepted societal mandates for familial success. "I thought being married would be everything" (Notes 158), Karen says to Bliss. But after she finds she is successful in her career, even sought out for promotion, she realizes she needs more than her husband and children can provide. Even if Tom were mentally competent, she still would need more; she recognizes that being a homemaker is a legitimate option for some women, but it is not an option for her. She confides to Wren that she really loved Tom when they married but that gradually she became dissatisfied. She says, "It's still impossible to explain because I had a good husband, two beautiful children, a nice home. But slowly I realized

I was more than a little discontent. Even before Tom was sick, I felt it" (Notes 209).

Karen's desire for success, independent of her traditional roles as wife and mother, coupled with the distress of living with a mentally ill husband, helps to create a dysfunctional family environment. Both Karen and Tom accept the blame for the turmoil in their family. When Wren blames her mother for Kevin's attempted suicide, Tom says, "Don't blame your mother. . . . I'm responsible too" (Notes 193); Karen, likewise, is willing to accept the blame for her failure as a wife and mother. She is not, however, willing to change her life to compensate for her mistakes. Nor should she have to, according to Bridgers, who says that Karen is "taking action to save herself" ("Bridgers" 22). What Karen has to do, however, is accept the difficult consequences of her decision.

Perhaps the marriage of Karen and Tom has not been successful because neither partner has been able to meet the needs of the other. At the end of the novel, they are still mutually cordial, but they respond to each other as acquaintances rather than as husband and wife.

In the next novel, Permanent Connections, Bridgers makes very brief references to two husband-wife relationships: Carrie and Davis Dickson and Ginny and Ted Collier. These couples are the parents of the novel's teenaged protagonists, Rob and Ellery.

Both husband and wife work in the Dickson family. Carrie is a college professor and Davis has a good job, so financial problems are not the source of their frequent arguments. Usually they argue about their teenaged son, Rob. The novel records only one example of an argument, as imagined by Rob, but much is revealed through this exchange. Davis argues with a voice of "grumbling thunder" and sarcasm, while Carrie speaks sharply and defensively. He makes accusations, and she responds with some of her own. Rob says that eventually

> They would fall into each other's arms, defeated by their fears. His mother's face would be blotchy and flat with exhaustion, her eyes wet, but she wouldn't cry. . . . They would finally fall asleep barely touching each other. (Permanent 3-4)

Later, Rob hears his mother's voice, "pliant now, inviting forgiveness as if she, rather than her son, were to blame" (Permanent 4).

No other references to Carrie and Davis as a couple appear in the novel; however, from various comments from Rob, one understands that Carrie seems to be gentler, more forgiving, quicker to make amends, while Davis tends towards condemnation rather than affirmation. However, both share a love for their family and a desire for their children to have a good life.

More is revealed about Ted and Ginny Collier, the financially successful banker and his dissatisfied wife. As Permanent Connections begins, Ginny and Ted are already divorced, and Ginny is living with her daughter, Ellery, in Tyler Mills, North Carolina. Ellery's memories of what life was like in Charlotte with her mother and father tell the tale of a husband and wife at odds with one another.

Ginny indicates that for quite a few years of married life, she was happy with the lifestyle Ted provided--the perfectly decorated house in just the right neighborhood and the cocktail parties at the club with the socially elite. However, somewhere along the way, Ginny became dissatisfied. When Ellery says of her father, "He wants us. He loves us," Ginny responds, "You he loves. Me he tolerates, just like I do him, and it just isn't worth it anymore. I'm not who he thought I was" (Permanent 63).

Ginny has come to desire more from life than Ted is able to give. She refers to him as slow, ponderous, and boring, but her daughter considers those flaws insufficient reasons for a divorce. Ginny seems to disdain Ted when she says of him, "There is no other woman, Ellery. No outside interference. He doesn't have the courage" (Permanent 63).

Because of her lack of fulfillment with Ted, who tends to isolate himself at home to read or watch television, Ginny becomes a discontented wife. She seems to comfort herself with the time she spends with her daughter. While

Ginny becomes a discontented wife. She seems to comfort herself with the time she spends with her daughter. While Ellery does not recall being close to her father, she remembers the close times she has shared with her mother:

> The two of them at the beach climbing dunes of burning sand, forcing each other to the summit because neither of them would give up. . . . her mother at her piano studying the notes with fierce concentration as she accompanied Ellery's flute . . . . Ginny teaching her how to stuff a leg of lamb. (Permanent 64-65)

Finally, Ginny's persistent marital dissatisfaction becomes severe enough that she leaves behind husband, home, and security and establishes a new life of independence for herself and her daughter. Being happy and fulfilled becomes more essential than being safe. Near the end of the novel, Ginny says to Coralee Dickson that she once believed she could not survive without a feeling of safety. She says,

> "I married because of it. I did everything I was told because of it. But in the long run, being safe meant being in prison. It took a long time, but I came out of it. I guess I thought for years somebody had to open the door for me. . . . But the truth is, the door was locked from the inside. Nobody could open it but me." (Permanent 134)

Mitchell, Ginny is an example of an adult woman who is "coming of age" (53). Carol Gilligan believes that some women undergo the "'ultimate crisis of connections'" in which they must choose between being good and being selfish"; she believes that a portion of society considers a woman "moral" if she serves others, if she "meets obligations and responsibilities for others, if possible without sacrificing herself" (qtd. in Mitchell 53). What Ginny discovers in Permanent Connections is that her marriage to Ted represents an untenable sacrificing of herself. Once she determines to break free of the constraints of her marriage, she advances rapidly in her independence, even to the point of starting her own successful weaving business. Thus, at the end of the novel, though she is husbandless, she seems happier and more content in her independence.

This chapter has discussed three husband-wife relationships depicted by Cynthia Voigt in the Tillerman cycle novels and ten husband-wife relationships presented by Sue Ellen Bridgers in her rural North Carolina young adult novels. Of the thirteen relationships, Abigail and John Tillerman in the Voigt novels and Karen and Tom Jackson in Bridgers' Notes for Another Life are depicted most negatively. Two older couples, Jane and Ben Flanagan and Bliss and Bill Jackson, are presented most positively;

however, in general, the majority of the marriages that are presented by both authors are positive ones.

CHAPTER VI

EXTENDED-FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN VOIGT AND BRIDGERS

Extended-Family Relationships in Voigt's Tillerman Cycle Novels

"I'm family too," says Gram to her granddaughter, Dicey, in Homecoming by Cynthia Voigt (255). Even though Dicey at first finds those words difficult to believe, she and her siblings finally come to rely on and love their Grandmother Tillerman. Gram takes the role of extended family in four of Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels. Next to sibling relationships, Voigt places most emphasis on the relationship between grandmother and grandchildren.

By the time the Tillerman children reach Crisfield, they are all in need of a secure home. They have just left Cousin Eunice's house in Bridgeport after an uneasy few weeks of feeling obliged to show gratitude for her taking them in. However, since the grandmother is an unknown entity to the children, after they arrive in Crisfield, Dicey walks the seven miles to the Tillerman farm without her siblings, fearful that she will face a rejection that she would prefer her siblings not experience. Her family's past experiences on their long journey to Crisfield and her uncertainties about her grandmother have made Dicey

cautious. She has heard rumors about Abigail Tillerman's craziness. Millie, the grocery store owner in Crisfield, for instance, tells Dicey that Abigail is "crazy as a coot," giving proof of it by telling of the day she threw her telephone through the telephone company window because she had been informed by the military that her son Bullet had been killed in Viet Nam.

The old farm house that Dicey discovers at the end of her walk does not seem inviting:

> The house was silent, vacant, neglected. Long weedy grass grew up, as high as the porch floor. Honeysuckle spread over the screens of the porch, and its long fingers reached for the trees in the yard (Homecoming 248-49).

When she locates her grandmother sitting on the back porch steps, she finds no encouraging welcome. Instead, Abigail, pretending she does not know who Dicey is, talks insanely about how delicious human babies might taste and about death. Finally, as Dicey turns to leave without another word to Abigail, the old woman says, "I know who you are. You hear me? I know who you are and you can't stay here" (Homecoming 253). Despite that unpromising introduction, the children do stay there, and Gram finally agrees to take on her new role of grandparent to Liza's homeless children.

Abigail Tillerman is an odd woman, not insane, but "crazy as a fox," according to James (Homecoming 270). She

is prickly, defensive, even rude. Her social skills seem to be non-existent, and she often responds bruskly to the children. In one scene, Maybeth spills some milk at the table because she has a pulled tendon in her right arm. Gram "stormed up from the table and threw a dishcloth at Maybeth," commanding her to clean up the mess (Homecoming 284). When she discovers the injury, however, she is gentle to Maybeth as she rubs ointment on the injured arm and bandages it.

Near the end of Homecoming, Gram finally is able to verbalize why she thinks she cannot permit her grandchildren to live with her permanently. Besides her lack of money to care for four children and her hesitation to give up a life alone in which she has to care for no one but herself, Gram is afraid. She says of her own three children, "I failed them. I let them go. I told them to go. . . . I'm responsible. I won't have that responsibility again. Not to fail again" (Homecoming 302).

Gram seems convinced that her failure as a mother will carry over to this new generation of Tillermans. Dicey and her siblings, however, have made a difference in Gram's life and have broken through her defensive exterior to touch her heart with love. Dicey thinks of all the things she likes about her grandmother: "She liked her all prickly and contrary. She liked the way her grandmother said one thing and then the opposite, because it made sense to Dicey, the

heart with love. Dicey thinks of all the things she likes about her grandmother: "She liked her all prickly and contrary. She liked the way her grandmother said one thing and then the opposite, because it made sense to Dicey, the same kind of sense Dicey made to herself" (Homecoming 304).

Seeing how James, Maybeth, and Sammy have enjoyed becoming acquainted with Gram, Dicey voices what all of them feel: "You should let us live with you" (Homecoming 317). Gram opens more than the literal door to her home when she says,

> "I give up. I do, I give up. You've worn me out. You can stay, you can live with me. . . . You'll live with me and we'll see lawyers about adoption and take government money--and we'll plant Christmas trees and raise chickens, whatever we have to do, whatever ideas James cooks up that we can't talk him out of." (Homecoming 317)

With her declaration, Gram opens herself to the possibility of failure, but she also places herself in the middle of a dynamic new family that is bursting with potential for success. Earlier in the novel, Gram has explained to the children why the paper mulberry tree in her front yard needs several strong wires to support it. She says,

> "Mulberries are fragile. . . . It's the way they spread out at the top, it's the way they grow. If

> you didn't brace it, the weight of the leaves and the growing branches would pull the tree apart. Like families." (Homecoming 261)

Metaphorically, Gram has added her wire of love and commitment with those of her grandchildren to help support the Tillerman family while it continues to grow toward greater strength.

Gram's inexperience as a grandmother is much in evidence throughout Homecoming as she grapples with the heavy responsibility that has been thrust upon her. Yet, as the Tillerman saga continues, Gram realizes that her need to be "family" is as great as the children's need to have one. As critic James Henke indicates, "without her grandchildren she is as incomplete as the mutilated nameplate on her mailbox that reads 'llerma' instead of 'Tillerman'" (51).

In Dicey's Song, which begins timewise where Homecoming stops, Dicey thinks of her grandmother as "home":

> A home with plenty of room for the four children in the shabby farmhouse, room inside, room outside, and the kind of room within Gram too--Dicey had seen Gram and how she listened when Maybeth sang, how she talked with James, how her eyes smiled at the things Sammy said and did--the kind of room that was what they really needed. (Prologue)

Although Gram seems determined to do better by these children than she did for her own, she still struggles with deficiencies. For one thing, she does not encourage the physical demonstration of affection that seems to characterize healthy families. When Gram patiently tries to explain away Sammy's worries about his mother's never coming back home, Dicey longs to get up from the kitchen table and hug Gram except "they never did that kind of thing, the Tillermans, hugging and kissing" (Dicey's Song 11). In addition to that lack, Gram also is still often gruff in her approach to the children, seemingly not sure enough of herself as head of her new family to risk softness. Her lack of an affectionate demeanor is understandable, of course, given the long years of virtual silence during her marriage to her husband. Gram evidently is out of practice as a nurturer. She does improve with experience; later in the novel, when Maybeth is unexpectedly delayed and arrives home very late, Gram, in one of her few physical demonstrations of affection in the novel, puts her arms around Maybeth in relief that she is safe.

Overall, Gram proves to be far more than adequate in her care of her grandchildren. Concerned about the finances required to support four children, she bends her pride and accepts the hated welfare checks each month. She also provides a telephone and an automobile for her grandchildren. More importantly, she intervenes in their

lives to right the wrongs that come against them. For instance, when Sammy gets into fights at school, presumably because some of the kids make fun of Gram's craziness, Gram goes to school during lunch recess with a bag of marbles and wins everyone's marbles. Then, calling herself the Lone Marble Ranger, she teaches the children all she knows about shooting marbles. With great humor, Sammy relates the story to Dicey, saying, "And then she gave everybody back the marbles she won. Because she said she had so much more practice. . . . And Custer said he wished he had a grandmother like that" (Dicey's Song 158). Critic Eliza Dresang says that this incident "reveals, all at once, her individuality, her caring, and her sense of humor" (36-37). Definitely, her action to help Sammy indicates that she takes very seriously her position as grandmother.

By the end of Dicey's Song, Gram has grown emotionally as much as her grandchildren have. She is finally able to verbalize her feelings about what "family" means to her. She says to Dicey that she has learned this lesson the hard way: "You've got to hold on. Hold on to people. They can get away from you. It's not always going to be fun, but if you don't--hold on--then you lose them" (Dicey's Song 74). Later, she adds another word of advice to Dicey. She says, besides holding on, "You have to reach out to people. To your family too. You can't just let them sit there, you

should put your hand out. If they slap it back, well you reach out again if you care enough" (Dicey's Song 128). Reaching out and holding on to family has been a difficult lesson for Gram to learn. She realizes that she had not made a strong enough effort to hold on to her own children, but she has purposed not to make that mistake with her grandchildren.

In Sons from Afar, which is set six years later, Gram calls her experiences with her grandchildren a "second chance for her life" (4). As she reflects on the first day her grandchildren sat at her dinner table, she remembers that "from the first, they had crowded up against her loneliness and crowded it out" (Sons 2).

Since that first year, Gram has become more active in the children's lives and more understanding and nurturing. James, who at sixteen is struggling with such expected adolescent concerns as appearance, self-image, and acceptance by his peers, realizes that

> whatever else about his life, he was incredibly lucky to have Gram--and a feeling rose up and blew through him, taking his breath with it temporarily, as he looked at the woman across from him, with her unruly curly hair and her lively eyes. (Sons 96)

Gram reads all of James' English assignments along with him so they can discuss them; she wants to keep up with all the

children's interests because, as she says, "I'm your grandmother" (Sons 33).

In the last Tillerman cycle novel, Seventeen Against the Dealer, Gram's serious bout with pneumonia and the children's fear of losing her reinforce the feeling of being "family." The strength of the Tillerman family has produced individual growth and courage in each of them, so much so that they have been able to extend to others outside the family. As the giant paper mulberry tree in Gram's front yard comes "into leaf later than any of the others" (Sons 57), so the Tillermans have finally come into their own as a real family.

Extended-Family Relationships in Bridgers' Novels

Extended families are important in each of the Bridgers' novels selected for this study. Usually the grandparents are the major source of stability and care for the adolescents, but in Home Before Dark, the extended family includes Uncle Newton, his wife Anne, and Maggie Grover, the step-mother to Stella Willis and her siblings.

Newton and Anne Willis are surprised when James Earl, Mae, and their four children show up on their doorstep, tired from their long drive from Florida to North Carolina. Surprise, however, quickly turns into aid for the destitute family who have all that they own packed into their old station wagon. Newton gives them a tenant cabin to live in

and some furniture from his attic; he also provides a job for his older brother on his tobacco farm. His feelings for his brother are a complex mixture of love, hate, and fear, yet Newton recognizes the importance of family. He tells James Earl that when they arrived at his house he tried to convince himself that he was not obligated to help them. He says,

> "I thought to myself, I ain't my brother's keeper. You went out and got married and got them children, and you're responsible for 'em. But then I started seeing something. All the time I loved you. And now I love them all. . . because they're yours and you're mine and together we're all that's left of the Willises." (Home 86)

Thus, Newton learns to love James Earl and his family and to feel that they are connected to him. Anne, Newton's wife, also extends herself as a type of surrogate mother to her niece Stella. Anne "felt protective of Stella, more of her than of the other children who probably needed her more. . . . Stella was brimming with strength and wildness, and Anne wanted to mother that willfulness and turn it to good purpose" (Home 73-74). Anne draws Stella into her world, buying her nice clothes and enlisting her help in decorating the nursery for Anne's expected baby. Anne continues to watch over Stella after her mother dies until Stella finally

decides to move out of the tenant cabin into Maggie's house with the others in her family.

Maggie Grover's marriage to James Earl Willis brings a large family into her life for her to mother. Only Stella holds back from her step-mother's obvious desire to extend affection to her new husband's children. While the three younger children move easily to the loving home that Maggie provides, Stella lives alone in the tenant cabin for a few months.

A turning point for Stella occurs one day when she checks out of school and goes to Maggie's house to have a heart-to-heart conversation about her changing feelings for her step-mother. As Stella waits in the hallway while Maggie rocks the baby to sleep, she hears Maggie singing haltingly to baby Lissy. The sound brings tears to Stella's eyes because "she knew she was hearing the sound of love" (Home 171). Later, she thanks Maggie for providing a home for all of them and especially for preparing the beautiful pink and white room for her. She says, "I knew it meant you cared about what happened to me--to all of us" (Home 172). She promises that one day she will be able to give up her little cabin and live with her family once again. Maggie says softly, "I can love you, Stella. . . . It's not always easier to love people more than things, but I've learned it's worth the risk" (Home 174). Maggie's kindness and

understanding help Stella make her decision to rejoin her family.

In All Together Now, twelve-year-old Casey's extended family includes her grandparents and her Uncle Taylor, yet the most significant one in the novel is Jane Flanagan, the grandmother. Bridgers says of her novel,

> All Together Now is about the heart. And it is a grandmother's heart. . . . It is Jane Flanagan, the grandmother, who holds the story together. . . . She provides the sustenance of their lives and it is not just meals, clean clothes and dustless surfaces, but also comfort and courage and a stillness at the center of things. ("Bridgers" 21)

Katherine Paterson, noted author and critic, sees the novel as "a story of the members of an extended family reaching towards one another" (K1). While the granddaughter feels like an outsider at the beginning of the novel, she quickly adjusts to the love that her extended family offers.

When Casey first arrives at her grandparents' home, she is uneasy about being there, somewhat awkward around her relatives, and a little uneasy about being the center of attention. She "didn't want her grandmother hovering over her. . . like she was an orphan or a charity case" (All Together 10). Jane, however, quickly becomes Casey's co-conspirator when, after a caution against lying, she promises not to reveal Casey's secret to Dwayne Pickens--

that she is a girl. Jane knows that she never would have permitted her own sons to perpetrate such a deceit, but she thinks that "this was her grandchild, a little girl with a father fighting a war and a mother at work--an abandoned child was one way of looking at it--who'd come to have a family" (All Together 14).

Jane and Ben recognize that having Casey spend the summer with them is a big responsibility, yet they also welcome her into their lives and try to make it easy for Casey to become part of them. For instance, on one evening when "an aching kind of loneliness enveloped her," Casey stands behind the screen door, looking out onto a porch where her relatives and their friends sit conversing. Her grandfather, noticing her, says, "We're glad you're here, Casey," thus giving her courage to join the group (All Together 59-60).

Both Ben and Jane give gentle advice to Casey about how she should give Dwayne Pickens a chance to like her for who she is instead of for the boy he imagines her to be; however, when she chooses not to listen to their advice, they do not push her to tell the truth. As Ben says, "Just think about it, Casey. It's something you've got to decide for yourself" (All Together 62).

Casey's Uncle Taylor, as well as her grandmother and grandfather, finds ways throughout the summer to affirm her and to help her feel loved and accepted; Casey responds well

to what all of them offer her. Taylor teaches her to drive, takes her to the car races, and encourages her when she grieves for her father.

Two crises bring the Flanagans even closer as a family: Dwayne's arrest and Casey's illness. After Dwayne is taken from them and placed in jail overnight, with the gloomy prospect of going to a mental hospital the next day, Casey grieves that she has not been able to do anything to rescue him. She turns to her grandmother for comfort, saying she would never forgive herself or them for letting Dwayne go. Jane just holds her close, "knowing that there was no comfort beyond arms that held gently, restfully, accepting both the guilt and the love she now knew her grandchild capable of" (All Together 152). The entire family bands together and functions as a catalyst to involve the community in securing Dwayne's release.

A second crisis which strengthens family bonds is Casey's serious bout with a debilitating virus. The family and the doctor fear she may have polio, and during Casey's many days of fever and semi-consciousness, the grandparents and Taylor, along with Pansy and Hazard, take turns ministering to her needs, all the while fearing that death may snatch her from them. As Jane presses a wet cloth to Casey's fevered body, she fights against the terror that threatens to overwhelm her. She forces herself to do what is needed of her:

> She moved silently about her task, her head bent, body intent on this saving, this salvaging of a life so close to her own. Nothing else mattered. Nothing counted but the woman and the child, the precious cooling of one body with the skill of another, the laying on of hands. (All Together 65)

When Casey finally recovers from her illness, the summer is almost over, and she has to prepare to go back to Fort Jackson. Her family and friends prepare a going-away dinner for her, which turns out to be a quiet, introspective time as each one considers the events of the summer and how close they have become. After dinner, Hazard asks Casey to sing for them and, "looking around the room, she couldn't help but want to give them something, some gift that only she had to give" (All Together 180-81). As her final love gift to her family, she sings a heartfelt "It Had To Be You."

The first line of All Together Now is "Casey came unwillingly" (1). At the end of the novel, Casey seems to go unwillingly. At the beginning, only Jane meets Casey at the bus station; at the end, the entire family and all her friends see her off, assuring her with their presence as well as with their words that she is an important part of their lives.

In Notes for Another Life, Bridgers presents yet another family made stable by grandparents but, unlike those

in All Together Now, the grandparents are the primary and permanent support of their grandchildren, Kevin and Wren.

Throughout the novel, the grandmother, Bliss, works diligently to pull her hurting family together: her husband, Bill, who uses work to forget temporarily their son's mental illness; her son, Tom, who has only a fragile grasp on reality; her grandson, Kevin, who sinks into despondency because of his alienation from his mother and his girlfriend; and her granddaughter, Wren, who grapples with the various constraints of family dysfunctions, teen love, and personal goals for her life. The pain in all of their lives is counterbalanced with the deep-seated love of a concerned, supportive grandmother. According to one reviewer, "Each time there is a crisis, it is Bliss who shoulders the emotional burden" (160).

Bliss is the one who extends herself past her own hurts and disappointments to her grandchildren and their needs. Wren sees her grandmother as a determined woman "who had and would endure" (Notes 5), as a significant role model whom she desires to emulate. Kevin also seems to see her as the strongest, most supportive person in his life. For instance, when he reflects on the competitive urgency of most of his family members, he thinks mostly of Bliss, who "cheerfully, confidently . . . guided them on, nudged them carefully toward their natural abilities" (Notes 58). A music teacher herself, she helps Wren with her piano lessons

just as she, an avid, award-winning tennis player herself, practices for hours with Kevin to help him perfect his game.

The novel reveals Bliss fulfilling a number of roles for her grandchildren. Besides urging them on to compete and win, she offers advice on love, telling Wren that she "won't be embarrassed or shy when it's the right person" (Notes 135). She also provides a buffer against the sharp hurts both children encounter when they come into contact with their mother, Karen. For instance, when Karen calls to invite Wren to spend the day shopping, Wren does not want to go and longs for a convenient excuse: "She could hear Bliss in the kitchen clearing away after breakfast, and she longed to drop the receiver and run into those arms, arms that had always been there, that would deny her nothing, not even an excuse" (Notes 204). Later, uneasy with Karen's statement that she is happy with her life and will not change it, despite her love for her children, Wren thinks of Bliss and the comfort her grandmother will offer when Wren leaves her mother's presence and returns home.

Bliss worries even more about Kevin than she does Wren, sensing his greater insecurities and his great need for affection and affirmation. She has tried to be a mother to him, but he seems to need his real mother's love as well as his grandmother's. The climactic scene in the novel, Kevin's attempted suicide, reflects his grandmother's almost superhuman ability to intuit the danger that threatens her

grandson. She awakens at four o'clock in the morning, sensing, as she checks on Kevin, that something is badly amiss. When she is unable to awaken him from his drug-induced sleep, Kevin is rushed to the hospital for emergency treatment to save his life. Later, when Bliss comes to his hospital room, Kevin feels "nothing except a flowing regret in his bowels, a rumbling sadness in his singed throat. How could he have done this to her?" (Notes 186).

Bliss comes to see that she cannot prevent the struggles or the suffering of her grandchildren. She can only attempt to be the primary constant in their lives. At the beginning of the novel, as Wren and Bliss sing together as they travel to the hospital to visit Tom, Wren notes that "there were years of harmony" between herself and her grandmother (4). Notes for Another Life ends with a similar scene, except that Kevin is now included in their song. All of their troubles have not vanished: Karen is still hundreds of miles away from her children, literally as well as emotionally; Tom is still in the mental hospital, submerged in his own dark abyss; Bliss, Wren, and Kevin still face, day by day, the hard realities of life. As they travel towards the hospital, "They were closed up, silently preparing themselves for their ordeal, building defenses, studding up walls, partitioning interiors against despair" (Notes 249). However, Bliss begins to sing, and as Wren and Kevin join in, their love for each other strengthens them.

In Permanent Connections, the extended family broadens to include an uncle, two aunts, and a grandfather. Teenaged Rob Dickson arrives in Tyler Mills with a pronounced "I'm-so-much-better-than-you-are" attitude. His relatives easily spot the chip on his shoulder but, for the most part, they prefer to ignore it, opting instead to show him kindness and concern, even later in the novel when he brings shame to the Dickson name by being arrested for using drugs.

When Rob is forced by his father to stay for three months in Tyler Mills to look after his injured Uncle Fairlee, he thinks of his "crazy grandfather" and his "weird aunts and uncle" as a "long, lingering nightmare he'd eventually pull free of" (Permanent 48). In truth, these extended family members are quite different from those whom Casey visits in All Together Now and from those with whom Wren and Kevin live in Notes for Another Life. For one thing, the grandfather is senile, cantankerous, and rude, very unlike Ben Flanagan and Bill Jackson. Also, Aunt Rosalie is bossy and prying, and Aunt Coralee is agoraphobic and childish. Rob sees Uncle Fairlee as the least objectionable of the Dickson relatives. Fairlee gives Rob some good advice when he says, "You've got to stop putting obstacles in your own path" (Permanent 76), but Rob is slow to heed. In the Dickson household, he does what is required of him; he bathes and dresses Fairlee, and he shops for groceries and supplies, but he spends the remainder of his

time in his room listening to his loud rock music. His bad attitude fosters bad attitudes in others, and Rob responds with even more antagonism. For instance, when Rob brings Rosalie's wrath down on him through his drunkenness and vomiting and she criticizes him for not being responsible, he responds with "Rosalie, I don't give a damn what you think about anything. You make me sick. If I hadn't just thrown up, you'd make me" (Permanent 147). His attack spreads to other family members as he calls his grandfather an "ignorant old coot" because of his comments about religion and the Civil War; he even says to Coralee that she is crazy. Only Fairlee escapes one of Rob's verbal attacks, but Rob seems to include all the Dicksons when he says, "I'm sick of all of you. I'd as soon be sent to hell as stuck out here with you bunch of crazies" (Permanent 157).

Rob's attitude eventually changes from belligerence to repentance when his irresponsible actions bring harm to his grandfather. Angry at himself more than with his relatives and needing some time alone to think through his troubles, Rob leaves the farmhouse during a bad storm, against the objections of his relatives, especially his grandfather who says, "This is my house and ain't no kin of mine going out of it into a lighting storm like this" (Permanent 208). Rob disregards his grandfather's words and runs out into the story. When he returns after midnight, he discovers his grandfather is missing, that he has never returned after

going out in the storm to search for Rob. After Rob finds his grandfather unconscious in a ditch and takes him to the hospital, he comes face to face with his guilt and finally admits to himself that he is responsible for his grandfather's life-threatening fall and injury. He berates himself with harsh thoughts, calling himself "a druggie, a menace to society, a pariah, a disgrace to the family" (Permanent 223).

Rob finds solace in a tiny country church where Tom Fowler, the priest, helps him to pray. After confessing his wrongs to God, Rob is later able to admit to his father, "It was all my fault" (Permanent 234). Rob is a changed boy during the remainder of the novel; he is kind to his relatives, contrite, even emotional to the point of weeping. On the night before his trial, unsure of his future, he sits in the dark kitchen of the farmhouse and ponders what it means to be part of the Dickson heritage. He envisions the long history of Dickson family members who have shared their hurts and their joys with each other in that very room. He realizes that

> he didn't feel as alone as he once had. The Dicksons, generations of them whose names he didn't even know, were there. His mother was there. They surrounded him, held him against his own flailing. Sitting there in the silent

> kitchen, it occurred to him that perhaps they always had. (Permanent 250)

Rob's realization of the importance of family is a life-changing one. As the novel ends, a much more agreeable Rob considers the possibility of remaining with his extended family until the end of the school year.

This chapter has presented the importance of extended-family relationships in all of the Voigt novels except The Runner and in all of the Bridgers novels. With the exception of Bridgers' Home Before Dark, each of the novels discussed in this chapter presents three generations of family members, and in most of the novels, the grandparents and the grandchildren are presented as stronger, more positive characters than the parents.

CHAPTER VII

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Summary of the Findings

The crucible called "family" in which the generations of Tillermans, Willises, Flanagans, Jacksons, Dicksons, Colliers, and other characters interact produces individuals of varying degrees of functionality. Both Cynthia Voigt and Sue Ellen Bridgers populate their novels with an intriguing blend of characters who sometimes struggle in their relationships with their siblings, parents, spouses, or extended families.

In her five Tillerman cycle novels, Voigt gives the reader an in-depth look at three generations of Tillermans. Abigail and John Tillerman, the first generation, seem to accept, with little attempt at rectifying problem areas, a family made dysfunctional, in part, by lack of positive communication. Voigt describes their family situation in terms of boxes. John boxes himself in with the silence of books and ideas while he attempts to box other family members in with sarcasm and with power over both the financial and emotional realms of the family. The second generation family members, Johnny, Liza, and Bullet, cope with the problems in their family by fleeing--John to California, Liza to a relationship with Francis Verricker,

and Bullet to Viet Nam. By the time Dicey, James, Maybeth, and Sammy of the third generation appear, progress is made toward a more satisfying family life as the children work together with their grandmother to deal with their problems in more healthy ways than the previous generations have done.

In the four novels by Bridgers, usually two and sometimes three generations of family members interact and, in some instances, resolve their difficulties. In general, all ends well for the Willis families in Home Before Dark, for most of the Flanagans in All Together Now and for all except Tom and Karen in Notes for Another Life; however, Bridgers seems only guardedly optimistic about the Dicksons and Colliers in Permanent Connections, not giving enough time at the end of the novel for the seemingly resolved problems to be tested.

This study examined the following five relationships in nine novels: sibling, father-child, mother-child, husband-wife, and extended family. Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels provided an in-depth look at relationships in three generations of one family. Also included, however, were brief examinations of two minor families which functioned as foils to the Tillermans. Bridgers' novels provided a less extensive perusal of relationships in twelve families.

Each of the seven specific research questions posed in this study will be answered based on the description and

discussion given in each chapter on specific relationships.

Research question #1: Is the family as a unit presented positively?

To answer this question, one must answer yet another question: What makes a healthy family? Many researchers and family therapists have attempted to pinpoint the traits of a strong, healthy family. Viktor Gecas believes one of the most important traits of a healthy family is its nurturance of children (434); researchers Lewis, Beavers, Gossett and Phillips cite open communication, trust, and a strong husband-wife relationship as characteristic of healthy families (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 40-41); Irene and Herbert Goldenberg also believe strong parental relationships produce competent, strong families (39); Nick Stinnet lists six characteristics of strong families: commitment, positive communication, appreciation, time together as a family, spiritual wellness, and ability to cope with problems that arise (38).

One of the most extensive descriptions of the strong, healthy family is Delores Curran's Traits of a Healthy Family, in which she gives a historical overview of the traditional family and discusses fifteen traits commonly found in healthy families today. Curran says that, in the past, a family was considered strong if it accomplished the following five functions: (1) achieving economic survival,

(2) providing protection, (3) transmitting religious faith, (4) educating its young, and (5) conferring status. She believes these functions could not in the past or in the present guarantee a close, loving family; people, she says,

> paid little attention to what went on <u>inside</u> a family--whether there was good communication, emotional support, or trusting relationships. People were only concerned about whether a family met the more obvious, visible family standards set by society. (7)

The family is a "constantly changing, fluid unit" which has developed new functions to meet the needs of family members today; Curran refers to these functions as "relational" (10), referring to the desire people have to relate well with those to whom they are close. Curran agrees with Eda LeShan who says,

> Our expectations are higher than ever before. We don't want to live with anyone unless there is. . . . the kind of love in which people want more for each other than for themselves and want most of all to enhance their own lives by helping someone else become all that he or she can be. (qtd. in Curran 15)

Basing her list of fifteen traits of healthy families on the responses given by 551 professionals who work with

diverse families, Curran believes the following traits characterize strong, healthy families:

1. They communicate with and listen to each other.
2. They affirm and support each other.
3. They teach respect for others.
4. They develop a sense of trust.
5. They have a sense of play and humor.
6. They exhibit a sense of shared responsibility.
7. They teach a sense of right and wrong.
8. They have a strong sense of family, with rituals and traditions in evidence.
9. They have a balance of interaction among family members.
10. They have a shared religious core.
11. They respect the privacy of one another.
12. They value service to others.
13. They foster table time and conversation.
14. They share leisure time.
15. They admit to and seek help with problems.

In the nine novels selected for this study, seventeen families are depicted. Table 1 reveals how these families correspond to Curran's fifteen traits of a strong, healthy family. Because the primary families have multiple interchanges, numerous opportunities exist for them to give evidence of family strength; however, minor families who are not the focus in the novels may not be afforded such

Table 1. Depiction of Family Strength in Selected Novels

Families	Communicate & Listen	Affirm & Support	Teach Respect	Develop Trust	Respect Privacy	Value Service to Others	Foster Table Time & Conv.	Share Leisure Time	Have Play & Humor	Admit Problems & Seek Help	Share a Religious Core	Share Responsibility	Teach Right & Wrong	Have a Sense of Family	Balance Interaction
Abigail & John Tillerman & 3 children												X			
Lisa Tillerman & 4 children	X	X	X					X	X			X	X	X	X
Abigail & 4 grandchildren	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
The Smiths		X									X			X	
The Mortons	X	X		X			X	X				X		X	X
James Earl & Mae Willie & children												X			
James Earl & Maggie & children	X	X		X	X		X				X	X		X	
Anne & Newton Willie	X	X				X	X				X	X		X	
David, Barbara, & Casey Flanagan								X							
Ben & Jane Flanagan, Taylor, & Casey	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fancy & Hazard Whitaker	X	X		X		X	X			X	X			X	
Bliss & Bill Jackson, Tom, and 2 grandchildren	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Tom & Karen Jackson and 2 children															
Davis & Carrie Dickson & 2 children		X									X		X		
Mr. Dickson & 4 adult children						X	X				X	X		X	
Ginny & Ted Collier & Silery												X			
Ginny & Silery Collier	X	X			X	X		X				X	X		X

opportunities. Based on comments by other characters in the novels, some of them seem very strong families, but no occasion exists for in-depth interactions among these minor families. In Table 1, each family trait noted with an "x" indicates that at least one example of that trait exists within that family unit in the novel.

Believing that effective communication and attentive listening are vital to family strength, Curran ranks these traits together as the most important. One of the families weakest in communication and listening ability is John and Abigail Tillerman and their children. Deplorable relationships exist in this family. The father, despotic and controlling, seems unable to converse with his family with any degree of real communication. Abigail and Bullet likewise are virtually silent, communicating with each other primarily through looks and gestures. Mealtime together as a family unit is a silent affair for the most part with John's speaking only enough to take care of necessary household matters.

Another high-ranking indicator of family strength is evidence of affirmation and support of family members. While Abigail does make at least one attempt to affirm and support her son's ability to compete at running by attending one of his races, she does not congratulate him for winning, nor does she even tell him of her attendance at the race. Of the thirteen remaining family traits, the only observable

one is the sharing of responsibilities. John and Bullet do the work of the farm while Abigail does the house work and gardening.

Through information given by Bullet about past times when Johnny and Liza were still at home, one sees that the dysfunctions that exist in the present family in The Runner also existed in the past. The major dysfunctions in the family filter into Bullet's relationships with others at school in that he is withdrawn, uncommunicative, and rebellious. However, in her depiction of the three Tillerman generations, Voigt reveals a progression toward family health and wholeness.

The second Tillerman family, Liza and her four children, is also dysfunctional but not in the same way as the family described above. While her father was too strict, Liza leans towards permissiveness and even nonchalance, responses which are exacerbated by her worsening mental illness. For instance, she tears up the notes from Maybeth's teachers because she does not want to face the problem of her daughter's learning disability. Also, Liza puts too much responsibility on her oldest child as she, herself, seems to regress into a world of childish unconcern. The family, however, is strong in several ways. Liza and her children have fun together by singing or playing on the beach; the children affirm each other's strengths and defend each other against physical and verbal

assaults from those outside their family. Apparently, Liza has given attention to teaching the children a sense of right and wrong and to helping them understand the importance of sharing responsibilities for the welfare of the family as a whole.

The third Tillerman family, that of Abigail, Dicey, James, Maybeth, and Sammy, is much stronger than the previous two. Some dysfunctionalities still exist within the children, creating problems for them outside the family. For instance, Sammy fights, Maybeth is too shy and insecure, and James grapples with problems of poor self-image. However, after the resolution of initial problems with Gram as the family head, the family unit becomes basically healthy. They communicate well, affirm and support each other, share responsibility for household chores, and even admit problems and seek help, such as when Gram, admitting to the children that she cannot afford to provide financially for their needs, applies for welfare. This family places much emphasis on mealtime as quality family time, with lively conversations ensuing as they eat. They also enjoy just being together, singing the old ballads Liza taught them. In addition, an extremely strong work ethic exists in this family, binding them even closer together as they work for the good of their family. All of the children do their share of the necessary work in the Tillerman home, cooking, cleaning, gardening, and tending the crab pots, and

they all have part-time jobs which financially benefit the family. Compared to the harshness of the first Tillerman family and the laxity and instability of the second, this third Tillerman family emerges as a strong, healthy family.

Although Voigt accords only passing attention to the Smiths family and the Horton family, they are both strong families in that they show affection and support, they enjoy sharing time together, and they have a pronounced sense of family. Both of these nuclear families serve as foils for the first and second Tillerman families, which are clearly dysfunctional.

Of the many families Bridgers depicts in her four novels, one of the most healthy family units is that of Ben and Jane Flanagan with their adult son and granddaughter in All Together Now. Ben and Jane's love for each other flows out to their son and to their granddaughter, Casey, who spends the summer with them. Jane, especially, is the instigator of humor in the family and is the one who ascertains that everyone does his or her fair share to keep the family functioning well. The family members all attend church and seem to place much value on shared family times. They all work together to involve the community in obtaining Dwayne Pickens' release from jail and in re-uniting Pansy and Hazard Whitaker, indicating their value of service to others.

Another very supportive family is that of Bliss and Bill Jackson, their son, Tom, and their grandchildren, Wren and Kevin in Notes for Another Life. As with Ben and Jane in the previous novel, the strength of the family stems from the respect and trust evidenced in the husband-wife relationship. Formerly part of an extremely dysfunctional nuclear family, Wren and Kevin still struggle with emotional problems carried over from their former family; however, their grandparents work hard to assure them of the constancy of their love. The entire family frequently affirms each other, with Kevin's admiring his sister's expertise at the piano and Wren's complimenting Kevin's ability at tennis. Numerous examples exist in the novel of good verbal and physical communication. The teenagers talk to each other and to their grandmother about their problems with their parents, and they are not hesitant to express affection by physical demonstrations such as hugging. The church is a strong influence in their lives, and the family members attend regularly and participate in church activities; Wren, for example, is a member of the choir. Another strength in this family is their willingness to admit their problems and seek help. When Kevin becomes depressed because of rejection by his mother and his girlfriend and attempts suicide, the family enlists the help of their minister, Reverend Jack Kinsey, for counseling and for emotional support. The same is true for Tom, the mentally ill son of

Bliss and Bill. The family rallies around Tom, providing the medical treatment he needs to survive.

Mental illness can be debilitating to some families, even to the point of destroying the family unit (Vine 211). According to Phyllis Vine in Families in Pain, "Anger or rage, helplessness or frustration, guilt or remorse are likely to well up at different stages of seeking help and trying to fathom the unknown" (197). In the Jackson family, the adolescent son is most adversely affected by his father's mental illness, seeming to see it, in part, as a type of rejection of Tom's children and of his life with them. While Kevin does initially struggle with his feelings of rejection by his father, due to his illness, and by his mother, due to her choice of career over family, he learns, through his observation of his sister's response, how to respond more appropriately to the stress created in his life by the actions and attitudes of his parents.

The strength of the Jackson family as a unit, then, is revealed by their response to a series of crises, any one of which can destroy a family. They successfully deal with mental illness, divorce, and attempted suicide, emerging at the end stronger and healthier than at the beginning.

Of all the families included in the Bridgers novels, the most dysfunctional is that of Tom and Karen Jackson and their two children. At the time of the novel, this family is not together as a unit. Karen is living in another town

and drops in only occasionally to visit her children and to inquire about her husband. The husband's coping mechanism against all the pressures in his world seems to be retreating into an almost catatonic state while the wife copes by focusing almost all her attention on her career. Were it not for the intervention of the grandparents in the lives of Kevin and Wren, the destruction might have been even more extensive.

Bridgers does not reveal extensive information in her novels about families such as the Whitakers and the older Dicksons; some of these secondary families are dysfunctional but do, indeed, improve by the end of the novel. However, Pansy and Hazard Whitaker of All Together Now are together as a family for such a short time that few conclusions can be drawn about the long-term strength of the relationship. What can be seen, however, is that much growth takes place in both Pansy and Hazard during their time as a family and both emerge as stronger individuals because of the increased strength in their relationship.

In addition to Pansy and Hazard Whitaker, a second family that is dysfunctional at the beginning of the novel but which resolves many problems by the end is that of Mr. Dickson and his adult children in Permanent Connections. Fraught with weaknesses, the Dickson family must deal with such problems as Mr. Dickson's negative attitude, Coralee's agoraphobia, Rosalie's bossiness, Fairlee's injury, and

Davis' disdain for his heritage. Two incidents bring the family closer to mending the dysfunctions that exist within their realm: Rob's arrest and trial and Mr. Dickson's near-fatal injury. By the novel's end, the Dicksons are much kinder and supportive of one another. Some of the family members even reach the point of seeking forgiveness for negative words and attitudes. Davis, for instance, finally is able to admit his past negative feelings for his father and then move on to mending that relationship. Rob, also, makes great strides towards wholeness as he confesses his wrong deeds and negative attitudes to his family first and then to God as he prays for forgiveness and help.

Almost all of Bridgers' fictional families share a religious core. The Flanagans and the Jacksons are involved in church activities, and Anne and Newton Willis, Pansy and Hazard Whitaker, and several of the Dicksons attend church. Interestingly, James Earl and Mae Willis do not attend church, but, after Mae's accidental death, James Earl attends church with his children and sits with Maggie Grover, a consistent church attender, who becomes his second wife and partner in a much more positively portrayed relationship than the one he had with Mae. Bridgers seems to suggest that the church is an important extension of family life and serves as a means for the family to make connections with the community.

In conclusion, both Voigt and Bridgers depict a variety of families ranging from severely dysfunctional to extremely strong and healthy. Some families are strong throughout a given novel while others have weaknesses but progress toward strength over a period of generations; still others give evidence of severe dysfunctions but make no substantial advances toward wholeness as a family unit.

Research Question #2: Are sibling relationships presented positively?

Strong sibling relationships are the focus of Voigt's Homecoming and Dicey's Song, and are important in Sons from Afar and Seventeen Against the Dealer. (See Table 2.) In these novels, much is revealed about the strength of character of Dicey, James, Maybeth, and Sammy as individuals and about their increasingly supportive relationship as they mature into young men and women. Despite the typical conflicts among the younger Tillerman children, the sibling relationship is by far the most positively presented one in the Tillerman cycle novels.

Bridgers, on the other hand, does not emphasize sibling relationships of the teenaged protagonists. Stella Willis in Home Before Dark has three siblings, but Bridgers chooses not to develop their relationship; Casey in All Together Now has no siblings, nor does Ellery Collier in Permanent Connections. Rob Dickson has one younger sister, but his

Table 2. Sibling Relationships in Selected Novels

Siblings	Pos.	Neg.	Neg.& Pos.	Insuf.Data
Dicey, James, Maybeth, & Sammy in Home.			X	
Dicey+ in Song			X	
Dicey+ in Sons			X	
Dicey+ in Seven.	X			
Bullet, Johnny, Liza				X
James Earl & Newton			X	
Stella, William, Earl, & Lissy				X
David & Taylor				X
Dwayne & Alva		X		
Wren & Kevin	X			
Fairlee, Rosalie, Coralee, & Davis			X	
Rob & Allison				X

relationship with her is not developed in the novel. The most supportive, positively presented sibling relationship in the Bridgers novels is that of Wren and Kevin Jackson in Notes for Another Life. They depend greatly on each other's support, particularly concerning the problems involving their mother and father.

Bridgers devotes more attention to the relationships of the adult sibling relationships, those of James Earl and Newton Willis in Home Before Dark, Dwayne and Alva Pickens and Taylor and David Flanagan in All Together Now, and Fairlee, Rosalie, Coralee, and Davis Dickson in Permanent Connections. Most of these sets of siblings do deal with negative emotions but in all but one instance, the sibling relationships are ultimately positive. Newton, for instance, resents his older brother for leaving home to join the military, an action which forced Newton to take on the heavy responsibilities of the tobacco farm and the care of his parents. When the brothers are reunited after many years apart, they recognize the importance of "family" and put aside any negative feelings towards each other. Similarly, some of the Dickson siblings, particularly Rosalie and Davis, are critical of each other until crisis situations bring about the recognition of their need to stand together as a strong family unit. In All Together Now, Taylor and David Flanagan seem to have a positive

relationship even though they are somewhat estranged because David has moved to another state and is at present fighting in Korea. Of all the sibling relationships, the only totally negative one in the Bridgers novels is that of Dwayne and Alva Pickens. Alva appears ashamed of his younger brother's mental retardation and seems to be afraid of being close to Dwayne.

All but one of the sibling relationships that are adequately developed in the novels selected for this study are either positively presented throughout the novel as in Notes for Another Life and Seventeen Against the Dealer, or they are a realistic blend of both negative and positive interactions, resulting, finally, in a positive relationship.

Research Question #3: Are father-child relationships presented positively?

Father-child relationships are the most negatively presented relationships in the two primary families in Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels. (See Table 3.) In The Runner, John Tillerman succeeds in totally alienating his son Bullet as he has done with Johnny and Liza in the past. John attempts to control Bullet with his superior knowledge and with his position of authority as head of the household, but he never attempts to relate to him as his son. Voigt gives a negative portrayal of a father who either has no

Table 3. Depiction of Fathers in Selected Novels

Fathers	Positive	Negative	Both Pos. & Neg.	Insuff. Data
John Tillerman		X		
Francis Verricker		X		
Mr. Smiths				X
Mr. Horton	X			
James E. Willis	X			
David Flanagan	X			
Ben Flanagan	X			
Bill Jackson	X			
Tom Jackson			X	
Mr. Dickson		X		
Davis Dickson			X	
Ted Collier		X		

love for his child or one who does not know how to show his feelings of love.

In the other Tillerman novels, Francis Verricker is an absentee father, an adventurer with a bad reputation for never fulfilling his obligations. He does not offer any financial or emotional support for his four children; in addition, if Cisco of Seventeen Against the Dealer is actually Francis Verricker, he steals his own daughter's much-needed money and flees once again from the lives of his children.

Voigt does depict two effective fathers in Mr. Smiths and Mr. Horton, both of whom serve as foils for John Tillerman and Francis Verricker. Whereas John and Francis are woefully inadequate as fathers, Mr. Smiths and Mr. Horton show love, concern, and appreciation for their children and are loved in return.

Bridgers' fictional fathers fare somewhat better than Voigt's primary ones with four very positive fathers, two negative ones, and two who give evidence of both positive and negative traits. However, like Voigt, Bridgers does not focus on fathers in the novels selected for this study.

One positive father is James Earl Willis, who shows only kindness and love to his four children, especially after Mae's death. His daughter Stella obviously feels much more attached to her father than to her mother, even taking

on the mother role as she tries to comfort him and ease his loneliness after the death of Mae. Another strong, albeit absent, father is David Flanagan. Involved in the Korean War, he nonetheless finds time to write his daughter, Casey, assuring her of his love. Casey comforts herself in his absence by remembering the happy times she has shared with her father, such as when he taught her to fish.

Ben Flanagan and Bill Jackson, both strong fathers, seem cut from the same cloth. Each is a grandfatherly man who undergirds his family with constancy and strength; each works hard to support his family but leaves the running of the house and most of the affectionate caregiving to his wife. However, each apparently has a positive relationship with his adult children.

Tom Jackson, Mr. Dickson, Davis Dickson, and Ted Collier are basically negative fathers. Tom's mental illness excuses him for his inadequacies as a father to Wren and Kevin. When he is not in a depressed state, he responds to the love proffered him by his children.

Bridgers says little about why Mr. Dickson's relationship with his children is so poor; his senility is likely at fault for his self-centeredness and his rudeness to his adult children, but even as a young, physically strong man, he was not the kind, loving father his children needed. When, at the end of Permanent Connections, he is severely injured and hospitalized, his children cluster

around him, seeming to realize how much they do love their father, even with all his deficiencies.

Like his own father, Davis Dickson has difficulty relating to his teenaged son. Davis does try to communicate with Rob, however, and even progresses toward showing physical demonstrations of affection by the end of the novel. In the same novel, Ted Collier has a negative relationship with his daughter. He lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, while she and her mother live in the North Carolina mountains; however, the emotional distance between father and daughter is even greater than the physical distance. Ellery believes he just does not know what to do with or say to a teenaged daughter. He does seem at a loss in that regard because he cannot find words to assure her of his love despite his divorce from Ellery's mother. He seems to depend on his gift of money for her birthday to convince her of his care for her. Although Bridgers does not develop this father-daughter relationship, it seems unlikely, from the information given in Permanent Connections, that the relationship between Ted and Ellery will improve. He has simply depended too much on Ginny to foster the parent-child relationship and, once she divorces him and is no longer the bridge between him and his daughter, he does not know how to be a real father to Ellery.

Thus, in Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels, father-child relationships are extremely negative in the two primary

families but unusually positive in two minor families which serve as appropriate contrasts to John Tillerman's and Francis Verricker's relationships with their children. In Bridgers' novels, older fathers of adult children, such as Ben Flanagan and Bill Jackson, are usually more positively presented than are younger fathers, such as Tom Jackson, Davis Dickson, and Ted Collier. James Earl Willis, a young father, and Mr. Dickson, an older father, are exceptions to the above observations in that James Earl is a positive influence on his children while Mr. Dickson has always had a negative relationship with his children.

Research Question #4: Are mother-child relationships presented positively?

Voigt presents mother-child relationships as generally more positive than father-child relationships. (See Table 4.) However, for Abigail and Liza Tillerman, Voigt's primary mothers in the Tillerman cycle novels, the designation "positive" seems to be true by default. Compared to the tyrannical John Tillerman and the shifty Francis Verricker, Abigail and Liza may, indeed, seem positive forces in the lives of their children. However, because they are not strong women emotionally, they do not have the positive impact on their children that they might

Table 4. Depiction of Mothers in Selected Novels

Mothers	Positive	Negative	Both Pos. & Neg.	Insuff. Data
Abigail Tillerman			X	
Liza Tillerman			X	
Mrs. Smiths				X
Mrs. Horton	X			
Mae Willis		X		
Maggie Grover	X			
Barbara Flanagan				X
Jane Flanagan	X			
Bliss Jackson	X			
Karen Jackson			X	
Carrie Dickson	X			
Ginny Collier			X	

have had, had they been emotionally healthy themselves. Several years after her husband's death, Abigail, as an older woman in charge of four grandchildren, admits that she was a poor mother to Johnny, Liza, and Bullet because she did not stand up against her husband's harsh treatment of the children. While blaming herself, she casts even more blame on her husband. Oddly enough, as a younger woman in The Runner, Abigail seems to believe that obedience to her husband precludes any outward show of love for her children. When they are very young and unable to speak out against their father, Abigail and her children apparently relate well, playing together and enjoying each other; however, when they are old enough to think for themselves and go against John's dictums, Abigail feels forced into siding with her husband because of the promises she made when she married him. Thus, one by one, the children leave home and seem to maintain little if any communication with their mother. Johnny sends a wedding invitation but never writes or calls; Liza never communicates with her mother after leaving home even when she and her own children are destitute. Homeless and jobless, Liza elects to turn to an aunt she has never met rather than go back home to her mother. Since Bullet is killed in Viet Nam, there is no opportunity for his relationship with his mother to develop. He evidently does love his mother and, before leaving home,

does what he can to make life easier for her, leaving her a motor boat and some money.

Liza's relationship with her children is better than her relationship with Abigail, but she is not a strong mother. Because she responds to situations emotionally rather than intellectually, she becomes a victim of circumstances that seem beyond her control. She loves her children, and they are all very much aware of her valiant attempts to provide for them, but she relates to them much as a child would, singing and playing with them, enjoying being with them. Unfortunately, when the responsibility for their sustenance becomes a burden too heavy for her to endure, Liza flees into a world of mental illness where trained hospital professionals take care of her; eventually, she neither speaks nor eats on her own. As Liza's oldest child, Dicey realizes more than the others that her mother actually stopped being the mother of the family long before she deserted her children in that shopping mall parking lot.

In contrast to Abigail and Liza Tillerman, Mrs. Smiths and Mrs. Horton relate very well to their children. While Voigt says very little about Mrs. Smiths, she does devote several pages of Sons from Afar to an at-home scene with the Hortons. Mrs. Horton is warm and friendly to Sammy Tillerman, who is visiting Robin and having dinner with his family. Mrs. Horton and her son relate well except he considers her too protective of him. Sammy leaves the

Horton home thinking how lucky Robin is to have a mother like Mrs. Horton.

Bridgers gives an interesting mix of mothers in her four novels included in this study. The two older mothers, Jane Flanagan and Bliss Jackson, have excellent relationships with their children, all sons. Jane is the epitome of domesticity, a mother who thrives on showing love to her children by cooking, cleaning, and worrying about them. A strong woman herself, she finds no difficulty in expressing her affection for her adult sons.

Bliss Jackson also meets all possible requirements for being a good mother to her adult son, Tom; however, the love and care she expends on him usually are unreciprocated because of Tom's mental illness. When he is at home and aware of what is happening around him, he recognizes and appreciates the love and care of his mother.

Ginny Collier in Permanent Connections experiences both positives and negatives in her relationship with her child, Ellery. Ellery thinks her mother is selfish for divorcing Ted and moving to the North Carolina mountains; she feels pressured to conform to her mother's definition of what is "normal" in such things as clothing and hair styles, even though Ginny attempts not to place a lot of emphasis on such things. Ginny, to her credit, continues reaching out to her daughter, trying to keep open the channels of communication. This mother-daughter relationship is one of the most

intriguing because Ginny desires so strongly to be a good mother to Ellery while she also needs to be true to herself and her own needs. Ultimately, their relationship will likely succeed, even though the negatives are not totally resolved, because they both realize love is the constant in their otherwise ever-changing relationship.

By far the most dysfunctional mother-child relationship is that of Karen Jackson and her children, Kevin and Wren. Karen seldom sees her children because her career requires her to live in a large city, first Atlanta and then Chicago. Essentially what she does is thrust all her responsibilities of motherhood on Bliss, her mother-in-law. Karen returns to her children on occasion, but her infrequent visits serve only to create turmoil in their lives. Karen loves her children and they love her, but Karen has been unable to effect a successful merging of career and parenting; thus, the mother-child relationship suffers.

A second negatively presented mother-child relationship is that of Mae Willis and her children in Home Before Dark. Mae has four children and has had many miscarriages, but she does not seem mother-like in her relationship to her children. She seems closest to the baby, Lissy, but she is very much distanced from the others, particularly her oldest child, Stella. Mae does not desire to remain on the Willis farm despite the advantages offered her children there. The sad truth is that her children's lives actually improve

after Mae dies. As a step-mother to James Earl's children, Maggie Grover is much more loving and nurturing than Mae has been. Despite her lack of experience as a mother, Maggie seems intuitively to know how to be one, and she finds loving her step-children a real joy.

Two mothers, Barbara Flanagan and Carrie Dickson, are not substantially developed by Bridgers, but, of the two, Carrie Dickson seems more concerned about her son than Barbara does her daughter. Rob Dickson thinks of his mother as his ally, as the one who most understands him. Casey's mother, however, is noticeably absent during Casey's serious illness.

Thus, both Voigt and Bridgers portray negative and positive mother-child relationships. As characters, the mothers are generally more interesting and complex than the fathers, especially in the Bridgers novels. In Bridgers, the older, more traditional mothers such as Jane and Bliss tend to relate more positively to their children, a fact that may be explained by the older age and advanced maturity of their children. However, one notices that these same parents of adult children are also excellent grandparents to their grandchildren. In Voigt, the number of mothers is fewer and no pattern emerges. Of the four mother-child relationships in the Tillerman novels, the two minor ones are positive and the two primary ones are fairly negative.

Research Question #5: Are husband-wife relationships presented positively?

The marital relationship of Voigt's primary couple, John and Abigail Tillerman, is extremely negative. (See Table 5.) John's tactics to assure his wife's compliance with his will are manipulation and intimidation. Throughout The Runner, he says nothing to Abigail which affirms or supports her, nor does Abigail relate to him in a warm, supportive manner. her typical response to his presence in the house is silence. She sometimes seethes with anger, but she never contradicts his word. In the other Tillerman novels, she admits her terrible anger at her husband and tells of her deep-seated resentment and hatred. She finally concludes that some marriages, like hers, are just not meant to exist.

At the extreme opposite end of the marital spectrum lie the marriages of the Reverend and Mrs. Smiths and Mr. and Mrs. Horton. Both couples works well together to create a happy home for the entire family. While Mr. and Mrs. Smiths are only briefly presented, Voigt spends more time with the Hortons, revealing their typical behavior during an evening when Sammy Tillerman is their guest. What he observes is a true marriage in action as the Hortons talk about the pros and cons of their son's working with Sammy for the summer and come to a joint decision on the course of action they

Table 5. Husband-Wife Relationships in Selected Novels

Married Couples	Positive	Negative	Both Pos. & Neg.	Insuff. Data
John & Abigail		X		
Mr.& Mrs. Smiths				X
Mr.& Mrs. Horton	X			
James E. & Mae			X	
James E. & Maggie	X			
Newton & Anne	X			
David & Barbara				X
Ben & Jane	X			
Hazard & Pansy			X	
Bill & Bliss	X			
Tom & Karen		X		
Davis & Carrie			X	
Ted & Ginny		X		

will follow. Voigt's vignette of the Hortons provides an apt contrast to John and Abigail's relationship.

Bridgers' husband-wife relationships are, in general, positively depicted. Long-term positive relationships include Ben and Jane Flanagan and Bill and Bliss Jackson, two couples who show their love through actions as well as words. While James Earl and Maggie Willis and Anne and Newton Willis do not have marriages of the longevity of the elder Flanagans and Jacksons, a number of references in the novels attest to their affection for and devotion to one another.

The most negative couples are Tom and Karen Jackson and Ted and Ginny Collier, both of whom are divorced or become divorced during the novels. Their pre-divorce relationships are characterized by a lack of positive communication and lack of affectionate regard for each other.

Other couples in the Bridgers novels give evidence of both positive and negative traits in their relationship. James Earl and Mae Willis have a dysfunctional marriage relationship that seems to center on sex, but while Mae uses her body to hold on to her husband and to keep him attached to her, she seems to do so because she loves him and desires to be near him.

A couple that struggles with hurts and disappointments but which ultimately progresses rapidly toward happiness together is Hazard and Pansy Whitaker. The outlook for

Hazard and Pansy is positive, partly because they have Ben and Jane Flanagan as excellent role models.

Finally, Davis and Carrie Dickson's difficulties in their relationship seem to exist because of their anxieties for their son, Rob, in that most of their arguments are about him. Bridgers does not develop this couple's relationship, but the little she shows reveals their love for each other despite their disagreements.

Research Question #6: Are extended-family relationships presented positively?

Extended families are generally more positively presented in the selected novels by both Voigt and Bridgers than are the nuclear families. (See Table 6.) The Tillerman extended family, which includes Abigail, Dicey, James, Maybeth, and Sammy, is significant in four of the Voigt novels. Although severe problems are evidenced at the beginning of this extended-family relationship, most of them stem from Abigail's fear of failing her grandchildren as she did her own children. Once she accepts the challenge of rearing four children, the family members then are empowered by their love for each other to work on difficulties such as authority issues and discipline. In the final analysis, the extended Tillerman family becomes one of the strongest, most well-adjusted families in the novels selected for this

Table 6. Extended-Family Relationships in Selected Novels

Extended Families	Positive	Negative	Both Pos. & Negative
Dicey, James, Maybeth, Sammy, and Gram			X
Casey and the Flanagan grandparents and uncle	X		
Wren, Kevin, and the Jackson grandparents	X		
Rob and the Dickson grandfather, aunts, and uncle			X

study. By the end of Seventeen against the Dealer, the children and their grandmother have progressed toward such health and strength as a family that they can reach out to others in need of affection, such as Jeff, Dicey's boyfriend, and Mr. Lingerle, Maybeth's piano teacher.

Of the three extended families in the Bridgers novels, only one is permanent, that of Wren and Kevin Jackson and their grandparents. Having experienced first-hand their father's mental deterioration, their mother's virtual abandonment of family in favor of career, and the dissolution of their parents' marriage, Kevin and Wren are needy children. The constancy of their grandparents' love and care is the prerequisite for their ultimate emotional healing.

Two extended families lend support to young relatives during times of anxiety and trouble. The Flanagan grandparents and uncle band together to provide Casey with much more than a place to live during the summer while her father fights in the Korean War and her mother works two jobs. They also give much-needed emotional support during her times on loneliness. Casey's summer with her extended family helps her deal with the prospect of the many physical, social, and emotional changes she will face as she continues her journey toward maturity.

Rob Dickson also is aided by his extended family of an uncle, two aunts, and a grandfather, although at the outset

he is entirely antagonistic toward all his Dickson relatives. Suffering greatly from a pronounced superiority complex, Rob thinks they are backward and ignorant and can offer little to a young man of his sophistication. He is proved wrong, of course, as he comes to appreciate Fairlee's non-judgmental attitude, Coralee's gentleness, and even Rosalie's and Grandfather Dickson's concern as he faces trial for drug use. Rob's attitude improves vastly during the time he lives with his extended family, so much so that he even contemplates the possibility of remaining with them for a longer time.

Extended families are important in the lives of the adolescents in both Voigt's and Bridgers' novels. Researcher Vira Kivett comments that "grandparents are an increasingly important link in the generational chain," providing not only financial and social support but also "contributing to the harmony between generations and to the stability of families" (165). In the novels selected for this study, grandparents, and especially grandmothers, provide a much-needed anchor of strength, love, and stability to support their grandchildren.

Research Question #7: What are the primary causes of familial conflict, and are these conflicts resolved in the novels? If so, how is resolution achieved?

Familial conflicts are evidenced in twelve of the seventeen

families depicted in the Voigt and Bridgers novels. (See Table 7.) Only the Smiths and the Hortons in the Voigt novels and James Earl and Maggie Willis, Newton and Anne Willis, and David, Barbara, and Casey Flanagan in the Bridgers novels have no conflicts, in part because none of these families are the authors' primary focus and, thus, they have little opportunity for conflict. However, of the five conflict-free families, four are very strong family units whose members communicate well and support each other emotionally.

Mental illness and the repercussions of such a problem are a source of conflict in a novel by each author. Because of the nature of Liza Tillerman's and Tom Jackson's mental illness, no resolution of the conflict is entirely possible. However, some of the family members most affected by the illness do move closer toward a satisfactory way of dealing with the problem. The problem of Liza's mental illness, for example, which is a source of conflict in Homecoming, is eventually resolved when Liza dies. As Liza's children and Abigail bury her ashes under the huge paper mulberry tree, they seem also to bury much of the disappointment and hardships caused for the children by Liza's mental incapacity.

In Notes for Another Life, dealing with Tom's mental illness is difficult for Karen, who copes by running away

Table 7. Familial Conflicts and Resolutions

Families	Causes of Conflict	Resolution	Manner of Resolution
Abigail, John & children	Power issues; lack of concern	No	
Liza & children	Mental illness	Yes	Death
Abigail & grandchildren	Power issues; lack of understanding	Yes	Communication
The Smiths	None		
The Hortons	None		
James Earl, Mae, & children	Lack of affirmation	No	
James Earl, Maggie & children	None		
Newton & Anne	None		
David, Barbara, & Casey	None		
Ben, Jane, Taylor, & Casey	Arrest of Dwayne	Yes	Securing his release
Pansy & Hazard	Inexperience & unrealistic expectations	Yes	Forgiveness and acceptance
Bliss, Bill, Tom, Kevin, & Wren	Karen's divorce and move to Chicago	Partial	Counseling for Kevin & family support
Tom, Karen, Kevin, & Wren	Career & mental illness	Partial	Divorce & job
Davis, Carrie, Rob & Allison	Rob's alcohol & drug use; need for independence	Partial	Two crises & maturation
Mr. Dickson & adult children	Senility; bossiness	Partial	Two crises
Ginny, Ted, & Ellery	Boredom; need for independence	Partial	Divorce & career
Ginny & Ellery	Need for independence	Partial	Communication & maturation

from her responsibility as a wife and mother and immersing herself in a fulfilling and challenging career. Karen's manner of resolving the conflicts in her life creates a domino effect in her children's lives as other conflicts spring from Karen's actions to preserve herself.

Most of the family units in Permanent Connections experience conflicts that are only partially resolved because the novel ends with only a hint that resolution is eminent. Rob's attitude toward his father and extended family definitely improves, as does Ellery's for her mother, but nothing occurs to test those improvements.

In two novels, a conflict within a marriage is resolved by divorce and career independence; however, in the case of both Karen Jackson and Ginny Collier, the resolution of their conflicts creates additional conflicts in the lives of their children.

In the selected novels, many of the families experienced conflicts, and approximately one-half of them either fully or partially resolved the conflicts. Most of the resolutions involved an opening of the lines of communication among family members. Despite some similarity in conflict type and in manner of resolution, no discernible pattern emerges in these seventeen family units.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze family relationships in selected young adult novels by Cynthia Voigt and Sue Ellen Bridgers, two highly acclaimed, award-winning young adult novelists. The novels selected portrayed an in-depth examination of three generations of one family in Voigt's Tillerman cycle novels and a perusal of diverse families in Bridgers' rural North Carolina novels. The nine novels analyzed in this study were as follows: Homecoming, Dicey's Song, The Runner, Sons from Afar, and Seventeen Against the Dealer by Voigt and Home Before Dark, All Together Now, Notes for Another Life, and Permanent Connections by Bridgers.

Chapter I was introductory. It established the rationale for the study, the criteria for selection of writers and novels for analysis, and the design for the study. This chapter also listed seven research questions to be answered through the analysis of family relationships in the selected novels.

Chapter II examined a review of the research accomplished in three areas: (1) the family, (2) Cynthia Voigt, and (3) Sue Ellen Bridgers. The research presented in this chapter established a foundation for this study.

Chapter III focused on sibling relationships in the Voigt and Bridgers novels. The content analysis revealed that sibling relationships were given significant attention

in four of the five Voigt novels. Of the six sibling relationships in the Bridgers novels, three were given significant focus while three were insufficiently developed. No sibling relationships in any of the eleven sibling groups were negatively presented.

Chapter IV focused on parent-child relationships in the selected novels. The relationships of twelve fathers and mothers with their children were analyzed. Five fathers and five mothers gave at least two positive verbalizations to or performed at least two positive actions for their children; two fathers and four mothers gave both positive and negative responses; and one father and two mothers were insufficiently developed by the authors. Also revealed through the content analysis of parent-child relationships was that four fathers and one mother had negative relationships with their children.

Chapter V examined husband-wife relationships in selected novels. Of the thirteen couples, five had positive relationships, three had both positive and negative interchanges, three had negative relationships, and two were insufficiently developed.

Chapter VI focused on four extended-family relationships in the selected novels. No totally negative extended-family relationships were discovered in the nine novels. Voigt's extended family of Abigail Tillerman and her four grandchildren progressed toward total positivity by

the last Tillerman novel as the family members became adjusted to living and working together. Of Bridgers' three extended-family relationships, two were positive and one began as a negative relationship but ended on a positive note.

Chapter VII presented a summary of the findings by answering the seven research questions posed in chapter one.

Implications for Further Research

This study reveals the significance given to family relationships in selected young adult novels by two important authors in the field of young adult fiction. Certainly, the novels of additional young adult authors need to be examined and discussed. Also, further examination of Cynthia Voigt's and Sue Ellen Bridgers' entire body of work needs to be accomplished to ascertain if the patterns of family relationships established in this study would be maintained.

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