



CHAPTER ONE

FAMILY CONCINNITIES

After the death of John Andrus I in 1934, his eight children went off in different directions. Some siblings moved away from New York, and others had grown estranged from one another. Helen Benedict was concerned that the family was drifting apart. In 1966, Helen, then in her late seventies, hatched a plan to reconnect the family. She invited 37 third-generation family members to be her guests on an eight-day cruise to the Caribbean on the S.S. United States, an affair she dubbed “Operation Bang-up.”

By all accounts the cruise was a joyful affair, and Helen’s plan bore fruit. Many cousins met one another for the first time, and others formed close and lasting friendships. Moreover, the reunion sparked an interest in the history of the Andrus family. Helen commissioned a biography of her father, *The Multimillionaire Straphanger*. The title referred to John Andrus’ frugality; he preferred to pay five cents to ride the subway to his office in Manhattan than to be driven by his chauffeur. The cruise also inspired John Andrus III to compile the first family tree. Originally a scroll, it has since grown into a spiral notebook to hold all the names. And seven years after the cruise, in 1973, three cousins organized the first reunion and named it a “concinnity,” a word meaning a skillful, harmonious arrangement of parts.

*concinnity (n) : a skillful, harmonious
arrangement of parts*

The Concinnity became a tradition, gathering the family together every five years. At the 1994 Concinnity, the Surdna trustees were invited to discuss the work of the foundation and the Homes. That presentation marked the first genuine acknowledgment of the link between the extended family and the family’s philanthropies. That same year, the Surdna board produced a video capturing a piece of Andrus family history.

It featured third-generation family members sharing their memories of the founder and his daughter Helen Benedict. The video was distributed as a keepsake to all family members who attended the 1994 Concinnity.

In 1999, some 237 family members representing four generations and eight branches attended the fifth Andrus Concinnity. Even those individuals most at the center of family activities don't know all their cousins by name. Yet, the large turnout speaks to the value they place on family ties. The Concinnities function like tribal gatherings—a reminder that each family member is an integral part of the Andrus family's history, culture, and traditions.

Larry Griffith describes it this way: “Family was very important to my grandmother, Edith Davenport (the third child of John and Julia Andrus), and to my parents. I'm proud and happy to be a Davenport and a Griffith, and when I'm at the Concinnities I'm proud and happy to be an Andrus. Just being there you know that you are part of something big, something magical. I feel blessed to have been born into this family—for the values it passed on to me and the opportunities it gave me. On top of that, I've had the privilege of sitting on the Surdna board and chairing the board of the Children's Home. I can't begin to describe what that has meant to me.”