PERRY Webster Gilbert was born in North Branford, Connecticut, on 1 December 1912, the oldest child of Scott and Hester Gilbert. He had only one sibling, a sister Eleanor, who was born two years later. Like so many others who grow to cherish life in the sea, Perry's early interest in the ocean began with family trips to the seashore, led by his father, a carpenter and homebuilder. At the beach, Perry and his father would fish, tread for clams, and tong for oysters, then build a bonfire and enjoy a family seafood picnic. From those pleasant childhood experiences, Perry developed a love for the sea and the life that it holds, a love that was to carry him throughout his professional career.

His early education in a one-room schoolhouse, where one teacher taught all eight grades, was not up to his mother's standards. So young Perry was put through what he calls the biggest transition of his life, moving from the little country school in North Branford to a big city school of 600 students in New Haven, a 10-mile trolley ride from his home. There he was labeled a hick by the other students, until they learned he lived on a beautiful farm, and if they played their cards right, young Perry would invite them out to his farm for the weekend. By his last year at the school, Perry had become president of his class.

However, the family farm had to be sold, because all the property over which Perry used to roam for arrowheads and fishing holes was about to be under water in a new city reservoir. After selling the farm for $14,000, the family moved eight miles away to Branford, on the coast of Long Island Sound. There Perry attended public high school and pursued his hobbies of collecting just about everything, especially butterflies and moths, beetles and bugs. The first books he bought were Holland's moth and butterfly books, the beginning of Perry Gilbert the true bibliophile. In summers, he worked at a cemetery, digging graves and mowing lawns for 15 cents an hour. But his real interest there was to learn from the sexton's father, a Dutchman who was the largest rose grower in Holland. Once a week Perry was allowed to work in the Dutchman's nursery, where he was taught to bud roses, graft plants, and raise evergreens.

By the time Perry graduated from Branford High School in 1930, the Depression had destroyed his father's home construction business, and his family had met with hard economic times. Fortunately, his aunt provided for his college education, and Perry was accepted into Dartmouth College, where the tuition was $400 a year. There he was mentored by Professors William Ballard, a comparative anatomist, and Norman Arnold, who taught histology and embryology, both with Ph.D.s from Yale University. After graduating with his bachelor's degree in zoology in 1934, Perry was given an instructorship at Dartmouth for two years, assisting Ballard and Arnold. During that time, he began to perfect his craft for his new love—teaching.

Perry soon realized that to get anywhere in the field he needed his "union card," a Ph.D., and so he entered the graduate program at Cornell University in 1936. With a Cramer Fellowship of $1500 a year, he pursued his doctoral research on the comparative anatomy of burrowing and terrestrial sciurid mammals. Among his teachers were embryologist Howard Adelmann and Perry's major professor, mammalogist William J. Hamilton II, an inspiring advisor as well as famous practical joker. One day Hamilton introduced his young graduate student to a man he identified as Professor A. B. Howell, an anatomist whose scientific papers Perry greatly admired. After fawning all over the visitor, Perry later learned that the man was actually a local farmer consulting Hamilton on how to get rid of moles.

While in Hamilton's mammalogy course at Cornell, Perry met Claire Rachel Kelly, an attractive senior undergraduate and excellent biologist in her own right. The two got to know one another over mousetraps, which they de-