

**GROWING UP IN THE THIRTIES**

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San Diego, California

## Growing up in the Thirties

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## Preface

This is the way I remember some of the things that happened to me. The depression was tough on a lot of people, but it also brought them together. At first there was no government programs to rely on, and it was *just people helping people*.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all my family for making my life worthwhile. It must have been very hard for my parents to keep all of us kids fed and safe. My brothers and my sister were my gang. The teachers at Sierra High School were more than just my teachers; they were my friends. I never stayed in any other school long enough to get to really know any of the teachers I had before high school, and if these little stories bring a smile to your face by stirring up some pleasant memories the book is a success.

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## The Early Years



Richard Nickels Poston (DICK); born January 28 1922 in St. Joseph, Mo. My family: Father, Frank Ellis Poston, Mother, Laura (Densborn) Poston, and brother Frank Ellis Jr. (Bud) born 1917, Casper, Wyoming. Sister, Blanche Virginia Poston, (E-O) born Dec. 2, 1918, St. Joseph, Missouri, Brother Roy Martin, born 1925, Torrington, Wyoming. Brother, Donald Charles, (Don) born

1934 in Lincoln, Nebraska and one baby not named that died shortly after birth.

My name was supposed to be Richard Nickolas; named after my two grandfathers, but some one spelled Nickolas without the "a" so I became "Nickols" officially.



The photo above is of relatives of my mother. From left to right they are: Great Grandfather Preop, Harmon Preop (his son), Great Grandmother Preop, Lena Preop Densborn (their daughter, my grandmother), and Nikolas Densborn (my grandfather). I don't know the dog's name.

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### **1925 WHERE'S DICK?**

We lived in St. Joseph, Missouri three years, right around the corner from where Jesse James was killed. The first thing I remember is finding a way to crawl under the porch. I crawled way back under the steps. I heard my Mom come out on the porch and call me. "Dick, Dick where are you?" I thought I would play a game with her. My brother Frank came along and Mom asked, "Where's Dick?" I kept saying to myself "Where's Dick, Where's Dick?" I stayed under the porch and caused a panic. All the neighbors were looking for me. I wasn't very popular when I tired of the game and came out covered with spider webs and dirt. The only thing I remember about that house is underneath the porch.

My brother Roy was born in 1925, but I don't remember anything about it.

### **1926 WINE DRINKERS**

We moved to the country outside St. Joseph to a house on a little hill. My Father didn't farm, for he worked in town as a Boiler Maker. Most people in the area had vineyards and made lots of wine. We had several barrels in a storm cellar.

My parents were away one day and my brother Frank figured out a way to get into the cellar. I didn't do anything but taste the wine. Frank hit it pretty hard, and Blanche kept telling us that she was going to tell on us. She didn't tell but didn't have to. When my parents came home Bud was rolling in the grass and about the only sound he could make was giggling.

### **THE HOT HEAD**

My mother and my sister were cooking doughnuts, and I was playing on the kitchen floor. Having doughnuts was a very special event at our house. They were large raised doughnuts cooked in a big skillet full of grease. When the dough was put in the grease they just crackled. When done they took them out of the skillet and roiled them in powdered sugar. Just hearing the crackling was enough to make any sweet lovers mouth water.



The day I'm talking about didn't go well for me at all. I was sitting on the floor pretty close to the stove when Blanche decided to carry the skillet of hot grease to the sink. It was too heavy and the skillet twisted in her hands and some of the hot grease poured out right on top of my head. I saw shooting stars going in all directions. I don't remember any pain and when I came to I had a white hat that I couldn't take off because my hands were tied to my belt.

## OVERBOARD

I was with my Dad and brother in a pickup truck in St. Joseph and talked my Dad into letting me ride in the back. I had been told to sit down in the bed of the truck with my back against the cab. After going a few blocks I decided that I was too low to see what was going on so I sat on a coal oil can that was in the truck. The can rolled, and I went over the back of the truck, which is all I remember but learned later I fell in front of a streetcar. The conductor stopped and picked me up. He caught up with the truck and yelled at my Dad. I saw my Dad both glad and mad.

## BUGGY IN A TREE

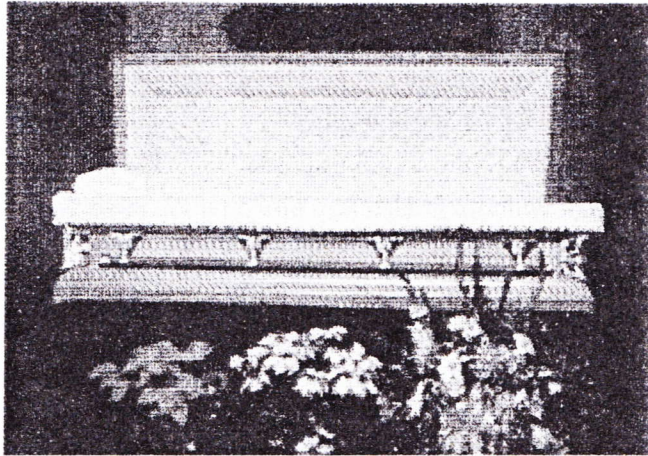


A tornado hit our house one night, and it was turned around on its foundation. All the windows were gone and most of the plaster had come off the walls and ceiling. A spring buggy my Dad had landed in the top of a big tree across the creek from the house. The buggy was undamaged. The problem was the limbs supporting the buggy in the tree were not strong enough to support a man to take it apart. I don't know how my Dad got the buggy down. The barn and other out buildings were gone. It seemed strange to look out

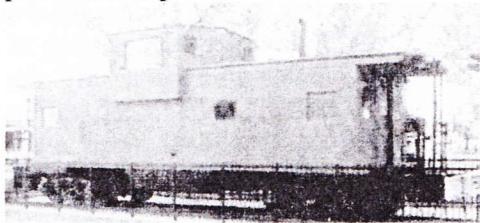
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where the barn was and see no barn. There was a horse in the barn, but we never saw it again. Where we stayed after the tornado hit is gone from my memory.

### FUNERAL 1926



The next recollection after the wind destroying our house is the last part of a trip. My Father wasn't with us, and we were riding in the caboose of a freight train. I have no idea how that was arranged or even if it was unusual at that time. I never saw a passenger train go through Node, Wyoming so there probably wasn't one and that's why we rode in the caboose. I don't remember getting on the train or any part of the trip.



It was dark when we got off at Node, and we walked cross-country to my grandparents ranch. (About five miles) We went there to attend my grandfather's funeral. He was laid out in a casket in the front room. Seeing him there is the only memory I have of him. He was buried at Node and the service was at the cemetery. My Father came the day of the funeral with all our stuff, and we stayed.

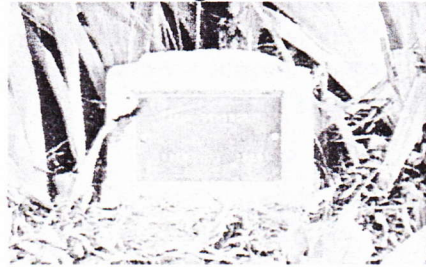


## GERMAN LESSON



My grandmother had a garden where she raised strawberries and vegetables. I was sent out to pick strawberries with Blanche. The strawberries were so good that I was eating them as fast Blanche picked them. She finally ran me off and picked enough for supper. She washed the strawberries and put them in the kitchen, I found them and ate them all. When Grandma went to get the strawberries and found the empty bowl she knew whom to look for. I was under the table, but she found me and started to tell me what a bad boy I was. She was a little upset and began in English then switched to German. I was so interested in the German that she forgave me and taught me a few words.

### Grandmother's grave marker



Grandmother Densborn died in 1939. Uncle Charley sold his half of the ranch so he could start a junk yard in Lusk. He took Grandmother with him. She was infirmed by this time and was issolated to a cot in Uncle Henry's sparce living quarters. She lived with Uncle Charley and suffered terrible bed sores, which we all think Uncle Charley ignored. The country Doctor came once and looked at her, and we think he gave her a shot and put her out of her misery. The family buried her in Node in 1939.

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The ranch was composed of the land that the two brothers had homesteaded, 160 acres each. That is one-half square mile of land. When Uncle Charley sold his portion it ruined the ranch because it was on his section that all the valueable hay land was. Uncle Henry continued to run his half, but he was always nearly broke. Uncle Henry died of a herinia in 1958. It is Don's opinion that he died of loneliness. He had to live on that ranch miles from any neighbor for years, and he never married. In his old age he asked Mon if he could go with her, but she refused. He let the heria go for years because he was scared of surgery. Don and Mom attended his funeral, which was in Lusk.

I had told Mom that I wanted the land that was left, but she ignored my request.

## 1929 SICKNESS

For a while there were a lot of people sick with Rocky Mountain Tick Fever, and we couldn't go into town, and they closed the schools. I thought that was great because my brother and sister were around to play with me. There was a lot of talk about all the people who were dying. We were told that we couldn't get the fever unless a tick bit us, but people were afraid and kept to themselves. It was almost impossible to buy food or other supplies because people closed their stores. My Dad got the fever, and for days he was out of his head. After he could get out of bed he sat in the kitchen and talked about a herd of horses that were running across the prairie. He kept pointing at the kitchen cook stove and saying, "Look at them run, look at them run". He seemed so sure there were horses I thought there must be something wrong with me. I tried hard but couldn't see horses.

## ROOSTER POWER

We all went to visit some people my folks knew that had a lot of chickens. I don't remember why I was in the chicken pens, but I was in the wrong place for sure. A big rooster decided I was in his territory and attacked me. The next thing I knew he had me on the ground and was standing on my stomach and doing his best to peck my eyes out. I covered my eyes with my hands and screamed for all I was worth. Someone rescued me but by that time I was bleeding from my eye-

brows and I thought I was blind. I still have scars in my eyebrows from that encounter.

## **DEATH 1929**

There was a new baby but after a few days the baby died. My Mom just sat and stared out the kitchen window for many days after the baby was buried. No one talked about the baby for many years.

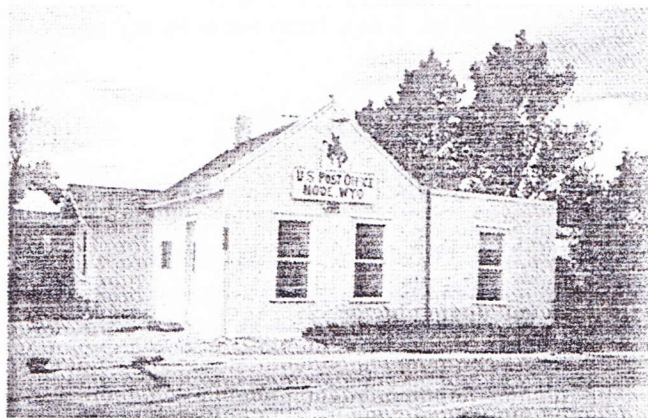
## **THE BOOTLEGGERS**

The oil field job ran out and Dad got a job in a sugar mill. One day he came home and told about a friend of his that got his arm caught in the gears at the mill. He said they never found the arm and it got in with the beets and was now part of the sugar. I didn't put sugar on my oatmeal for a while.

The house we lived in was big and one of the bedrooms was used as a place to keep a still. One day my mother went into the room to check the still. I was standing in the doorway watching her when all of a sudden she yelled, "run Dick, run". She scooped me up on her way out and got as far as the kitchen before the still blew up. Plaster from the ceiling rained down on us. Stammie, the man that helped with the whiskey deliveries and took care of the still at night came out of a bedroom in his long johns yelling, "What happened! Where the hell are my pants?" I think they were buried under the plaster. It was a very rude way to be awakened. My brother Frank Jr. (Bud) who couldn't whistle let out a long whistle. I don't know why Bud was not in school that day, but it was a school day and Blanche, my sister had gone to school that morning. A lot of things were going on all at once.

After the dust settled we checked the damage. There were no windows left and the chimney was in the driveway. The roof and ceiling of the house had been lifted clear off the walls and when it came back down it no longer matched the walls. Aside from being pelted with plaster no one was hurt. We were lucky there was no fire. I think the explosion blew out the kerosene stove. By the time my sister got home and my Father returned from work the car and trailer was packed, and we headed for the ranch.

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Node, Wyoming 1992

## **NODE, WYOMING**

From time to time in these little stories I will refer to Node. In order for you to get the lay of the land I will tell you about Node. Just west of the Nebraska state line on highway 20. The country is rolling hills covered with sagebrush and other prairie grasses. In the spring when the sage blooms the air is filled with one of the most pleasant odors on this planet. Sage keeps it smelling well into the late fall, but after the spring season it's just a hint of what it was.

The road goes straight west for about two miles to Van Tassel, Wyoming. Don't blink or you will miss it. Another ten miles west, northwest and you have arrived at Node. The road is on the south side of railroad tracks and a small two-story railroad Station is on the other side of the tracks (In 1935 they gave the building to my Uncle Henry if he would tear it down so it is now gone.) A county road (dirt) goes south from the highway, flat for a little way, then up and over a little hill and out of sight.

On the west side of the county road, about a quarter of a mile from the highway is a one-room schoolhouse with the required out-house. Just past the schoolyard is a small cemetery. Where my grand parents are buried)

The Post Office, General Store and a home all in one building is about a half a mile east and one quarter of a mile south of the corner of the highway and the county road. The rest of Node is a small barn,

corral, and windmill and watering tank. The population in nineteen thirty was three.

## TO TORRINGTON, WYOMING

My Dad helped out on the ranch but didn't get along with one of my uncles. The biggest problem was my Uncle Henry had a bad temper and sometimes mistreated his animals. My Dad also was a hot head, and he couldn't stand for anyone to mistreat "a dumb animal". The result was a fistfight between a Bantam Irishman and a 6 foot 4 inch German. The fight took place in the barn, and they did more damage to the barn than to each other. The Irish won, but we lost a place to stay.

Dad left and went to Torrington, Wyoming and found a job in the oil fields. As soon as he had a place for us to live we left the ranch. We lived in a house out of town and right out back was abandoned gravel pits that made great fishing. We caught crappy (I think) about 5 or 6 inches long. My mother never seemed too thrilled when she cleaned and cooked them.

I had not started school, and I remember waiting in the front room with my nose against the window watching for the school bus that brought my sister and brother home. I could just see the top of the bus from our house when it came down the county road and stopped at the corner. It seemed like a long time after the bus was gone that they came into sight as they came from behind the hill. Sometime after that my Dad would come home from work, and we were all over him to see if he brought anything home for us in his lunch pail. Usually he had some tid-bit for us. Just a little thing but it meant a lot to us and no doubt it pleased him to see us happy.

## MUSIC

Dad played any of the country music instruments. Mom played Church music on the piano. It's a mystery to me when Mom learned to play. There wasn't a piano at the ranch in Wyoming, and we never had a piano in any of our many houses. Perhaps she learned when she went to school in North Dakota.

Whenever we all went to a barn dance in Wyoming Dad always ended up playing a borrowed instrument, generally a fiddle but

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as often as not a banjo or guitar. He also called the square dances. Those dances were great fun. Everyone danced and it was not uncommon to see a teen-age boy dancing with his grandmother or an eight-year-old girl. Everyone just had fun. I can hear it now "All join hands and circle to the right. Ladies to the center, men outside. Get your ladies and Doe-Si-Doe, Promenade".

It seemed strange to me that I don't have any music ability. I spent one whole winter out on the prairie herding sheep and trying to play a mouth organ. After about a year the best I could do is a mournful rendition of "Red River Valley" and "Old Black Joe". As far as singing goes I did fair till I had trouble with one of my ears. From then on I can't carry a tune. The rest of the kids, except Bud were like me, but they could at least carry a tune.

Bud like my Dad could play whatever he wanted to. His favorite was the accordion, and he pushed and pulled on that thing till he drove the rest of us nuts. However his music made him popular at barn dances in Wyoming and in the mountains of California.

## FRONTIER LIVING

My folks had some friends that lived in the mountains someplace in Wyoming and we went to see them. They lived in a log cabin that was just one big room with a loft for a bedroom. That was the first time I had ever been in a log cabin and it seemed to me to be rather crude. Half of the floor was dirt and the other half was a rough-hewn log with the spaces between filled with dirt. All the dirt was about as hard as cement. The windows were some kind of material with grease or something rubbed on them that made them so a little light came through.

The people were very glad to see my folks, and we stayed about a month. Dad worked with his friend putting up a Soddy. A Soddy is a house made from mud and prairie grasses or straw with a roof of lodge pole pine for rafters and covered with dirt. After several weeks the roof had prairie grasses growing on it and was waterproof if it didn't rain very hard. Once in a while a snake fell out of the ceiling. There was always lot of bugs falling in the food and the beds. (Fun). A Soddy is cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Most sodas were dug into the side of a hill so were about half underground.

My brother Frank and I spent our time exploring a canyon that was right next to the cabin. The canyon was about a half mile across



and was flat on the bottom. It had a little stream that was a watering place for sheep, deer and antelope. My brother Frank shot a deer for fresh meat, and we cut it up and packed it out of the canyon on our backs. The deer was cooked outside over an open fire on a spit that we turned by hand. We ate outside most of the time, and it was like a month long picnic. I was sorry when we had to go back to the ranch. There is an interesting story of how the mountains southeast of Lusk got the name, Rawhides. It seems that in the days of the wagon trains the trail went past the mountains and the Indians who were friendly came down to trade. There was young man on one of the wagon trains that was eager to fight off the Indians and shot one of them as they came to trade. The Indians gave the people a choice, give them the murderer or they would wipe out the entire group. The wagon master took a vote and gave the man to the Indians. They took him up on the mountainside and removed his skin, inch by inch. (Rawhide) They say the people on the wagon train could hear him scream for about half a day. I found out later there are about seven versions of that story.

## **HERSHEY, NEBRASKA-1929**

My Father went off to look for a job. The depression was getting worse and men came on foot to the ranch looking for work. Most were willing to work for their board (food) only. The men were given a meal and sent on down the road.

We moved to Hershey, Nebraska where I attended my first school. I did well in the first grade because my brother and sister had taught me to read when they were learning, and I had read all the books they brought home from school. After that I read all the books I had in school the first week. I never could understand just reading a little bit just to get the next lesson. That habit served me well because for the next ten years I spent less than half my time in school. I didn't get along well with the other kids, but it didn't bother me because I lived with my real friends. My heroes were my big brother and my Dad and my buddy was sister Blanche who I called "E-O".

My Father worked as a salesman, selling patent medicine for livestock to the local farmers. Whenever he made a good sale he would come home and gather everyone around him and give us all some money. One of the things that I always remember about my Dad was he always shared what he had. It was impossible for him not to

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help anyone who was down and out. I know he quite often gave away his last nickel to someone that he figured had less than he.

We lived there for a while then moved into a house across town. A nice lady lived in a large house about a block from us. She had a huge Great Dane dog, and I remember riding the dog like a horse around the house (outside). Perhaps the dog wasn't as big as I remember, and I was probably pretty small.

The whole family was on the way to North Platte in a Chevrolet sedan. A big truck forced us off the road and the car turned over in the ditch. My Father had a broken neck, and I got my head caught between the ground and the roof of the car. (Outside the window) No one else was hurt badly. We were both taken to a hospital in North Platte where we both stayed for some time. I think we were both sent home at the same time. Soon after we came home my Father fell over the banister of the stairs to the second floor and landed on the first floor. He survived without any after affects.

I was told latter that I wasn't expected to make it and if I did would probably not be right. I sometimes wonder if they were right. After a couple of days they built a wire cage around my head and put little screws in my skull and wired it in place till it healed. The top of my head is still a little bumpy. The only thing I remember is looking out through the cage. I thought this must be the way a bird in a cage feels. I could see (in my mind) a bird in a cage with its feet sticking out the bottom walking around. Shortly after getting out into the world again I tried to jump across an automobile oil drain pit and broke my leg. My brother Frank jumped it so I was sure I could make it.

The house we lived in Hershey, Nebraska had a barn on the back of the lot, and we were told not to go in it. The temptation was too much, and it wasn't long before Blanche, and I found a way to get in. The barn had a lot of furniture and farm equipment in it. In the hay-loft was a trunk that was locked, and it became our one ambition in life to get that trunk open. We finally just pried the lock loose. There were all kinds of old pictures and clothing and trinkets. Someone's dearest possessions, and we were pillaging them. We both felt guilty and talked about what we were doing being wrong, and what was going to happen to us if we got caught, then went right on with what we were doing. I found a small bundle about the size of a fist and eagerly unwrapped it. A pair of false teeth fell out into my hand. We never went back into the barn.

## **PALS**

Blanche and I were great pals, and we often went to a canal across the highway to try to catch (baby) ducks. I don't remember getting any ducks, but a bull almost got me. I was just about to jump in the canal to get away when the bull gave me a big boost. I was very lucky that I didn't get hurt. After that we stayed on our side of the canal.

Blanche and I were the same size and we liked to change into each other's clothes to see if we could fool Dad when he came home. Some times we did because he had been having a few with his Irish buddies. I think most of the time he just played the game with us. We lived in three houses in Hershey. Each house was smaller than the one before. I think my Dad had called on all the farmers within fifty miles and his sales were fewer and fewer.

## **POOR PEOPLE**

The depression was talked about but I didn't understand what it was all. It didn't seem to me to have anything to do with us at that time, and I didn't worry about it. Some way or another we always had enough to eat. By today's standards we were very poor and deprived. We were one step away from being homeless. We were lucky we always had the ranch to go to when things got really tough. No one came around from the county and told us we were poor so as far as I was concerned there were two kinds of people. The rich and the rest of the people like us. We had it better than a lot of people at that time. In 1991 we would be getting food stamps, surplus food, children's assistance, rent supplement and there would be no way for my Dad to make enough to match that so we would live on the taxpayers from now on. (That would have killed my Dad)

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## **North Platte, Nebraska**

### **SKATERS**

We moved to North Platte, Nebraska where I attended my third school. I fished in the river with my Father and brother Frank. I roller-skated with my sister Blanche on skates we got for Christmas from my aunt Blanche. She always saw to it that the Poston kids had a good Christmas. She was a great lady. Blanche, my sister and I skated all around town. We weren't used to the big city of about sixteen thousand people and was hopelessly lost two or three times. Someone always pointed the way for us. That was the first place we lived that had sidewalks.

There was an old woman who lived about four houses down the street that yelled at me whenever I skated past her house. Those old steel wheeled skates made lots of noise. Of course I skated past her house every time I got the skates on. Sometimes I even dragged a few tin cans tied on a string behind me to make more noise. One day she came out of the house yelling and waiving a big butcher knife. I went as fast as I could, but she was catching up. She was probably not as old as I thought. I went up on a porch and pounded on the door. There wasn't time to wait so I went in and slammed the door behind me. The lady in the house laughed about what happened. I didn't think it was funny, and I skated in the other direction after that and to this day I get a jumpy feeling in the pit of my stomach whenever I approach a big front door with a stained glass window.

### **THE SWIMMING LESSON**

I remember going fishing with my Father, my brother, sister and a friend of my Dad's and his kids to the North Plate River. I was fishing in a deep hole all by myself. My Father and his friend had the Ford blocked up and were working on it. It was hot and after a few beers both of them were asleep under the Ford. I remember getting a big tug on my line and the next thing I was trying to remember what I had been told about how to tread water. In any case about the time the boy who was with us noticed my problem and jumped in to save me the current had carried me to shallow water. I lost my fishing tackle

and Dad got hell when we got home because everyone had to tell my mother all about it.

My Dad insisted I learn to swim shortly after almost drowning. His way of teaching me was showing me how to move my arms and legs then tossing me in a canal with a long cord tied around my waist. He stood on a bridge, held the cord just tight enough to keep me from sinking and I swam against the current. The other kids stood on the bank and yelled advice. I learned to swim in one afternoon.

I also learned that I could give the cord an unexpected yank and have company (Dad) in the water with me. We may have been short on worldly goods, but we did have fun.

## **HALF SAVED**

Sometime after learning to swim I was fishing with my Dad. We were using a throw (Trot) line, and I took the end of the line and swam across the river with it. I dropped the end of the line then swam back. On about the second trip I was very tired, and I panicked. I started yelling for help and Dad jumped in with all his cloths on and swam for all he was worth. About the time he got to me I had drifted to a shallow place and my hand touched bottom. He looked up and there I was, standing in water about knee deep. He didn't say one word; he just stood up and walked to the bank. I noticed a smile on his face when I arrived back at his side.

## **HIGH TECH IN 1930**

Dad bought a kit to build a small radio called a crystal set. How it worked was a great mystery to me. There was a little shiny stone, wire wound around a little cardboard tube, a pointed wire you used to touch the shiny rock, called a crystal and an earphone. There was a wire stretched between a shed out back and the house and another wire attached to a water pipe in the basement. The radio worked so good that Dad bought a larger kit.

The new radio was about twenty inches long and about eight inches high. The front was some kind of material that was black and shiny like plastic. There were all kinds of things I didn't understand in that radio. There were tubes that looked like small light bulbs but didn't burn very bright. There were a couple of things that looked like two stacks of metal but with space between each peace and half of the

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pieces could be moved by turning a knob. Dad called them condensers. He said that made it possible to hear many stations. There were wires running all over the place that were soldered in place.

It must have been quite a task to get that radio put together. There were drawings and instructions that had all kind of words that I never heard of before. Dad also had two or three books on radio that he spent a great deal of time reading. When he was trying to assemble parts he had two extra heads and four extra hands in the way most of the time. One of the things I never understood about my Dad was that he was such a hot head, and yet he almost never got in the least upset with any of us kids.

When he got the radio all put together it worked great. The only thing was we had five people to listen to it and one set of ear-phones. The thing I remember hearing most was "Whatcha hear? Whatcha hear?" and "It's my turn."

## THE TOY MAKERS

The kids growing up in the thirties had a big advantage over the children of today. We made most of our own toys and learned in the process. The only store bought toys that I remember were the ones my aunt Blanche sent us for Christmas. I received a pair of skates and a toy truck and a couple of games. All other Christmas gifts we received were more practical, things like something to keep us warm or we could eat.

Once I saved my money and bought a couple of two inch long toy racers made of pot metal. I improved them by filling the hollow bodies with wax from Mom's supply she used to seal the jar tops of her home made jelly. The cars were heavier with wax inside and rolled faster down a track dug out of the side of a bank and paved with thin mud, smoothed out by hand and let dry. It was a tough choice of getting two racers for five cents each or going to the matinee to find out how the hero saved himself or the maiden from the impossible predicament they had gotten themselves into. Typically Pauline was left tied to a railroad track with a train roaring towards her or had just been pushed over a cliff. Unlike the movies of today they taught that right always wins and kissing was limited to the cowboy and his faithful horse. The show was ten cents and was a bargain; you saw two features and the weekly chapter of the serial.

We made racers from any wood box we could find, fitted with wheels, not necessarily all the same kind or size. Most of our racers were guided more like a horse than a car. Steering wheels were a little too complicated for us till later when we learned to wrap the ropes used to steer the racer around a shaft made from a broomstick and fitted with a small wheel. You must remember that wheels were hard to come by; every kid in the neighborhood was looking for them. The best sources for wheels were worn out baby buggies or little girl's doll buggies. Most girls did not leave their buggies outside unattended. I still hate to pass up a good set of wheels any of my neighbors put out for the trash man.

Scooters were made with the front and back wheels from a single roller skate nailed to a two by four about twenty or so inches long with a box nailed to it for handlebars and a place to carry our valuables.

We made little tractors from thread spools, a rubber band and wood clothespin. Skateboards were made like the scooters but without the handle bar box. (Almost as good as the skateboards selling for ninety dollars today) We made crystal sets and learned all about how a radio worked. (I'm still not quite sure.)

We played with a wheel and a handle made from two sticks nailed together to form a T. We called the set a Hoop. (As in barrel hoop) The idea was to make the wheel go where you wanted. We made stilts and put the foot pieces as high as we could, we were ten feet tall, at least while on the stilts.

There were two wheeled vehicles that we hooked onto a wagon whenever we could without my uncles or Dad noticing us. I remember being hooked up to my uncles spring buggy and going down a prairie road. The buggy wheels were in the smooth ruts and we rode on the high centers, a bumpy ride and the cart didn't last long. Once I was hooked onto a hay wagon and was involved in a runaway. That was quite a ride while the cart lasted. Most of the two-wheeled vehicles were the result of not having four wheels.

We made musical instruments, Whistles, Flutes, Sweet Potato (Ocarina) and Reed Trombones. As I remember it was very hard to find a gourd the right size to make a Sweet Potato. In any case I couldn't play any of them.

Rafts and boats were made from anything that would float and sometimes things that wouldn't. We rode many unsafe water vehicles down the Platte River and walked many miles back to where we started. Our starting places were wherever we lived, places like North

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Platte, Hershey and Sutherland. I often daydreamed about our rafts going all the way to the ocean. We learned by doing and it was great fun.

### **THE BIG FREEZE 1931**

I don't know what caused the move, but we went back to the ranch. It was wintertime when we arrived, and it was right after a blizzard. My Uncle Henry was out looking for his horses. My Dad took Frank Jr. and me out with him. The horses were found standing against a fence frozen stiff. Henry lost everything because he had borrowed the money to buy the horses. He kept the ranch only because the bank didn't want to foreclose.

After it started to thaw we skinned the horses and left all the carcasses except one in the pasture. That one we dragged in to the corral and let the hogs have it. Henry didn't like to furnish the coyotes all that winter food, but that's all we could do. Any way the birds got a large share of the meat. Helping skin twenty frozen horses in the wintertime is not my idea of fun.



#### **WYOMING SCHOOL**

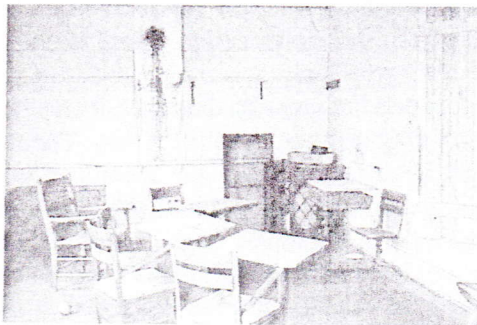
The school at Node was open, and it was decided that Frank, Blanche and I would attend. The school was about five miles cross-country and all three of us rode one large horse. That may sound kind of crowded, but it sure was a lot warmer, especially if you were in the middle.

There were about four other students so when we came we almost doubled the size of the school. I really liked that school because all the classes were in one room, and I got to hear all the things the older students were learning. All the kids got along well and the only thing I remember being teased about was a poem the other kids made up about three kids on a horse. "Rub-A-Dub-Dub, three kids on a plug.



We only went about two months and something happened to cause the school to close, and we were told that everyone would have to go to Lusk and board with someone to continue. We dropped out because there was not enough money to board out three kids. We kept the books, and I read them over and over.

Here you can see the inside of that school about like it was then.



## **PEDDLERS**

### **On the ranch in Wyoming 1930 +**

One of the things the women looked forward to was the Watkins salesman that came to the ranch about once every three months. He had what was probably one of the first RVs. It was a Ford delivery truck that he had modified to hold and display his products. It had a bunk bed a little wood burning (or cow chip) stove. He had a large assortment of seasonings at a good price. The women seemed to prefer Watkins to the products in the store in Lusk. He also had a small assortment of patent medicines, salve to rub on your chest and cough medicine. He had a few pots and pans the women oved and aahed over but I don't remember them buying any. The skilletes they had were iron and they didn't wear out in one lifetime. Even most of their pots were iron, the rest were porcelain and lasted well unless they were dropped and the porcelain cracked, then they rusted through quickly. Some of their pots had been patched with a small bolt, two washers and a couple of small pieces of rubber.

The other Peddler I remember came in the largest wagon I had ever seen pulled by a team of Morgan horses. It must have been some

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sort of freight wagon or maybe he had it made special for his business. He came three times a year, spring, summer and fall. He had an assortment of hardware that was much more interesting to us "men", Bolts and Nuts, an assortment of Horse Shoes, Hand Tools, Axes, Shovels, Pitchforks, Knives, Pots and Pans and a few guns and ammunition. He always had medicines like Sheep dip and Horse Liniment. There was also an assortment of catalogues that you could order all kinds of things at a better price than the Sears catalogue. He even had catalogues of Justin boots and Stetson hats, a cowboys dream. Most of the things my Dad and uncles bought were paid for with a golden tinted liquid in fruit jars direct from the storm cellar. There were always a few jars hidden away for the peddlers.

It seems like every time a peddler came to the ranch it was just before meal time and if it wasn't they were delayed till it was. The ritual both parties went through in order to delay till mealtime was interesting. Uncle Henry would pick out some small thing he could use and ask the price. He was given a ridiculously high figure. Henry would act shocked and say he would have to think it over. They talked about what was going on around the country and then returned to the haggling. The closer it was to mealtime, the closer to an agreement on the price. Most of the time Henry got the item as a present. (After dinner)

As soon as the meal was over and the dishes done we all sat on the porch and heard the news about the people around the country. Grandma and my folks knew or at least had heard of everyone within twenty or so miles from the ranch and were always eager to hear about who got married, what couple had a baby or who had been hurt or died. There wasn't a newspaper or radio so the best source of news was visitors. I don't know why, but we didn't seem to get much information when we went to town or to a square dance.

The trade of a meal and a little feed for the team for news was a good deal for everyone and the peddlers and the ranchers accepted it. It was a fine deal for the peddlers because the ranch women always laid out the best they had for visitors (After all they wouldn't want it told they weren't the best cook in the country). I think the peddlers were pretty smart because all the news they had was never the gossip kind. Of course they didn't want to make anyone mad at them. You always hear that everyone in a small town knows what everyone else is doing. Look at it this way. The prairie is like a small town; it's just spread out more. Instead of having a neighbor across the street you have them across the next county road, a few miles away. You didn't

hear about what went on last night you heard what happened during the last three months. The Peddlers were the town criers of the prairie. The wild, Wild West in the thirties was more like a tame west.

## **The WATER FIGHT 1931**

No one was home except Mom and us kids. It was a hot day and we were all out by the windmill and water tank. Someone splashed a little water on someone else, that someone cupped water in their hands and threw it on someone else. The citation then rapidly developed into a full-fledged water fight. Every one was throwing water with any kind of a container that was handy. It wasn't long before all four of us were in the water tank and most of the water was out on the ground.

About the time everyone was exhausted and about to run out of water my Uncle Henry and Dad came home. Henry didn't think there was anything funny about what was going on and when he stopped yelling about the stock not having any water we were invited to leave at our earliest possible convenience. We didn't leave and Henry got over his mad by the next day.

## **PRAIRIE FIRE 1931 (nine years old)**

It was hot and dry. Good weather to get the hay in so Dad and Uncle Henry were out early to get the first load. Uncle Charley was getting his homemade tractor ready to cut and rake. Frank Jr. and I did the chores so we would be ready to help unload when Dad and Henry came in with the first load.

We talked about prairie fires once in a while but I didn't give them much thought. As far as I knew there never had been one on the ranch or anywhere near. I couldn't see much that would burn out on the prairie. I didn't think about houses, barns, sheds, corrals, hay stacks, hay-fields, fence posts and grazing feed for the cows and horses.

The first the rest of us knew of any trouble was when someone noticed the wagon coming up the lane as fast as the horses could run.

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Hay was being scattered as they bounced and by the time they came into the ranch yard the wagon was empty.

When they announced there was a fire we didn't understand what they were talking about, we didn't see a fire anywhere. They told us a truck had come by on the county road and was spreading the word that a prairie fire was south of us and was coming fast.

Every one was assigned a job to get ready for the worst. I was told to get my horse and go to the southeast and drive all the stock to the fence by the county road that went north and south, they could then driven north to the oiled highway. After completing my job I was to go back to the house and help there if needed then get a shovel and go south to the county road. If the fire couldn't be stopped at the county road south of the ranch it surly would be stopped at the highway because it was wider and more help would be available.

The county road was not necessarily the best place to try to stop the fire. The road was just two ruts between two fences and in most places the grass was higher than in the adjacent fields because it wasn't heavily grazed. It was a location that everyone was aware of without a lot of confusion.

Uncle Charley hooked his home made tractor to a disk and started to disk a new firebreak around the buildings and corral. If the fire got that far there should be enough help to stop it from burning the buildings.

Frank Jr. was sent to the Klopfers (our neighbors to the north) to warn them and tell them to send as many as they could to the county road, then return home to see what to do next. As I remember they had a hired hand and Fred would no doubt be there. If Frank wasn't needed at the ranch he was to go to the county road with a shovel and a couple of gunnysacks and a small milk can full of water.

Mom, Grandma and Blanche were to get every bucket and anything else that would hold at least a quart of water, fill them and place them near the house. The water was to be used to put out sparks carried to the house by the wind. They were also to move everything they could from inside the house to the porch so it could be put on the truck in a hurry if it was necessary. If the fire got close to the buildings we were told to not use any of our water on the barn. It was a hay barn (made out of Hay) and there would be no chance of saving it with sparks flying through the air from the fire.

Dad and Uncle Henry took the truck and headed south toward the fire. They took a milk can full of water, axes, shovels and gunny-

sacks with them. We were all (except the women) told to go to the county road with a shovel when we completed our tasks. We were not to go south of the road under any circumstances.

By the time I was ready to start for the pasture we could smell smoke in the air and the sky started to turn a little dark. The fire suddenly turned into something real and frightening. I just got started to the south and ran into the horses headed north. The cattle were not far behind. They evidently had smelled the smoke and were headed away from the fire. The stock had no intention of going any direction other than north and there was no way I could make them go by myself so I went ahead of them and cut the fence so they could get through to the North. There were no more fences between there and the state highway and I figured someone would let them through if the fire got that far.

By the time I started south to go to the county road the sky was filled with smoke. The wind had shifted around and was now coming from the Southwest. By the time I got to the county road it seemed like everyone in the country was there. Some of the men were starting fires on the south side of the road and then putting them out. They were also cutting the prairie grass with shovels and covering it with dirt.

All the kids were told that if we got trapped by the fire we were to get on our horses and go straight through the fire at a dead run and then just keep going till we reached an area where the ashes had cooled. If there was anyone around without a horse we were to pick them up and ride double. It was kind of a thrill just thinking about doing that.

We could see parts of the fire on the horizon as it came over the tops of the hills, probably three miles away. It looked like a long line of dashes constantly changing. As the fire came over a hill and started down our side it would gradually disappear in the middle, blotted out by the top of a nearer hill then both ends would spread out. The smoke was like a huge curtain in the sky. As it approached us it became a solid line of bright yellow fire. The sun was blotted out and daylight turned to gray,

Rabbits, a few coyotes and a small bunch of antelope come across the road but didn't seem to be in a hurry. The land south of the road had been overgrazed and there wasn't much fuel for the fire and the wind continued to shift around until it was blowing the fire back. The fire just went out except on the east end. The men talked it over

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and several truckloads of them went in that direction. By nightfall the fire was out and everyone started home.

Two days after the fire Frank Jr and I rode our horses to the place where the fire had burned. We expected to see a lot of burned animals but when we got there all we found was thousands of fresh tracks in the ashes. There were lots of places where the small prairie animals had rolled in the ashes and some places where they had dug up roots of plants to eat. We did find a couple of burned up bird nests that looked like they might have had chicks in them. All the small animals had to do was go into their borrows to get away from the fire. I don't know if it is true or not but I was told that they go in then plug up the entrance so the smoke can't get in and the oxygen is saved so they can breathe as the fire burns over them. After the next rain the area where the fire came through turned green and the grasses grew better than ever. There is no doubt in my mind the Indians knew better how to take care of the land, but they didn't have all those things that would burn. At that time most of the lush prairie grasses were gone and the land could support only part of the animal life it once could. Now the land supports many more animals because the present day ranchers understand how to take better care of the land. Most of the sage and cactus are gone and good feed grasses have been planted.



### **THE OUTHOUSE** **Wyoming winter 1932**

The outhouse was about thirty yards from the house in the wintertime. It was so cold out on the prairie the odor from the outhouse froze so it could be closer to the house. A rope was fastened to the porch railing and to the outhouse so you could find your way in a blizzard. My uncles always moved it further away in the spring after things thawed out a bit. A new pit was dug some-

where downwind from the house and the outhouse moved to its new location. The old pit was covered over. Once in a while I would forget it had been moved and have a little panic attack when I headed out and looked up, and it wasn't there.

Going to the outhouse at night in the middle of the winter was something to be avoided. You soon learned not to drink much liquid late in the afternoon and did your best to go before bedtime. You didn't have to go outside to pee but just getting out of that warm bed and going in a slop jar was pretty chilling. Getting wrapped up for the trip out in the cold was bad enough but to take them off and set on that cold seat was torture. The one good thing about the whole thing was getting back in the warm feather bed and snuggling up to my big brother. Sometimes I got kicked a little.

In order for you to understand exactly what happened it is necessary to describe how I dressed to go to the outhouse. First as I already had on long underwear with the flap in the back I did not bother to put on pants. I also didn't put on shoes, for I just wore my overshoes. Overshoes over bare feet fit very loose. I put on a jacket and a long overcoat but did not put my arms in the sleeves. I just held the coat closed from the inside. A warm hat, scarf and mittens completed my wardrobe.

One real cold night I woke up with the urge to go and after laying there for a long time hoping the call would be canceled I gave up and started out. It was snowing out and about as dark as it gets so I used the rope to guide me on my way instead of lighting a lantern. I was sitting there in the dark and the toilet began to shake and the noise seemed enough that whatever was about to get me was coming right through the back. To say the least I was terrified and I went out of there running. I hit something about waste high and went head over heels and lost my overcoat and jacket. I got back to my feet and started out again. That time I went in the wrong direction and hit the guide rope about belly button high and did another flip, this time losing my hat and overshoes. The next mistake was finding the rope again and going the wrong way. If there was anything I didn't want was to be back at the outhouse.

I arrived back at the house in my long underwear with the flap open and the scarf still around my neck. In the morning I looked out to see where my missing clothes were and there was two of my uncles big old boar hogs out by the outhouse. There were several mounds of snow where my coats, hat and overshoes were. The lessons I learned that night were always take a light, the frozen ground is very hard and no matter how fast you go your behind gets cold if your flap is down.

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### WHISKEY STILL

In the spring my Uncle Henry and my Dad set up a still in the storm cellar and after a while many visitors came to the ranch. One day Dad and Henry were sampling their product and agreed they had an exceptionally good batch of corn whiskey and decided to save some of it. They had a couple of small oak kegs so they filled them, wrapped them with tar paper and poured melted tar over that. They buried both kegs out on the prairie so many steps this way and that from the corner of the barn. They refreshed themselves as they worked. All the time they kept telling me not to tell anyone where the treasure was buried. We had a secret from every one else.

One day the police came to visit. They set on the porch and talked about how bad things were. They all had some lunch and a few drinks and took a couple fruit jars full with them. When they were in their car, and ready to leave the one in charge said "I know you fellows don't have a still here, but I just thought you should know we are going to raid this place tomorrow." After they were on the way down the county road we all went to work getting the still out of the storm cellar. There was about three barrels of mash working, and we carried it out in buckets and poured it in the hog troughs. A lot of mash was spilled on the ground on the way to the pigpens, but it didn't matter because the chickens were eating the grain about as fast as it was spilled. The still was put in a depression out in the pasture and covered with tumbleweeds.

The police arrived the next morning waving a paper and saying. "Henry we understand you have a still here, and we are going to find it." They looked in all the out buildings and then looked in the storm cellar. When they opened the door they all took a few steps back and told Henry he ought to be more careful about letting potatoes rot in the cellar. They all sat on the porch and my mother fixed something for them to eat. When they were ready to leave one of the policemen said, " Henry you fellows ought to take a look at your hogs and chickens. There must be something wrong with them." All the hogs were laying out in the pigpen waving their feet and grunting. The chickens were just flopping around. One rooster was trying to get by the snubbing post in the middle of the corral but just couldn't make it. Every attempt resulted in a collision with the post. That post must have looked like a picket fence to him. They were all right the next day, although somewhat less active than usual. We worked most of the



next day putting the still back in the storm cellar. A couple of days later my mother said the eggs tasted funny.

In those days if the law wanted to catch people making whiskey all they had to do was find out who was buying large amounts of sugar. Henry and Dad bought sugar from a man from Torrington who delivered it right to the ranch in a model T Ford truck. The truck was always loaded with sugar and was headed for Nebraska to make more deliveries.

## **BEDFELLOWS**

Dad, Henry, Frank Jr. and I went to the Rawhide Mountains to get lodge pole pine to build a hay barn. (Not a barn to put hay in, this is a barn made with a frame of lodge pole pines with hay piled against the walls and on the roof. When it is finished its like hollow haystack). A hay barn can be real handy if you are short on feed for the livestock before the spring thaw and new green grass.

We took two teams and wagons with rubber tires my Uncle Charley had made from old truck parts. They were much easier for the horses to pull than the old steel rimmed wheels and a heck of a lot smoother to ride on. When we got to the mountains Dad and Henry decided to sleep in a little tarpaper shack that some woodcutter had put up. Frank Jr. and I made our beds on one of the wagons.

Just about daybreak I woke up and heard my Dad say in a hoarse whisper "Hank, wake up, Hank wake up" after a little pause he said, "Hank, wake up, Hank you Son of a Bitch, wake up." I knew something was really wrong because that was the first time I ever heard my Father swear. Frank Jr. and I got up and looked in the shack and there was a large rattlesnake on my Dad's bed. It was curled up between his arm and his side with its head pointed right at his face. There was no way for him to move without waking the snake. Frank Jr. very slowly reached across my Dad and the snake and pulled the blanket over it then rolled it up in the blanket. He took it outside and unrolled it. Dad shot it with a shotgun and that woke up Uncle Henry. On another trip to the Rawhides as usual Dad and Henry was sleeping in the tarpaper shack and Frank and I were on one of the wagons. We had a canvas stretched across the wagon over a couple of poles as a sort of roof to keep out of the morning dew or water if it rained. The wagon was setting in a dugout place on the side of the hill to make it

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level and easy to load. One side of the wagon was about even with the ground.

It had been raining but had cleared up and the moon was full and bright. Just before daybreak a wolf (or coyote) came into camp looking for something to eat. Frank Jr. woke up and shot at the intruder with a 22 rifle. The shot woke everyone up and mass confusion set in. For whatever reason the animal jumped on the wagon with us. The canvas was knocked down and Frank, the wolf (coyote) and I had one thought in common, get out from under the canvas and off the wagon and as far away as we could. All three of us made it out from under and went in three directions. The smell of a wet wild animal in bed with me is something I'll never forget. There was a long discussion about the advisability of shooting anything bigger than a rabbit with a 22.

## The Hunter

On one of our trips to the Rawhides I begged to go hunting for deer. After about three days of nagging my Dad finally gave in and gave me a rifle and one shell. He told me that when they heard the shot someone would come and help me carry the deer back to camp. Help was necessary because most any deer that I would shoot would probably weight more that I did. No one mentioned the possibility that I might miss. I understood without being told that it would be a long time before I got another chance if I missed and someone walked up the mountain for nothing. Besides the ammunition cost about eight cents a round. That's the day I found out how close I could get to a deer if I was downwind and moved very slow. I got close enough to shoot after about the third try and got a deer. I was one proud kid for a while. Think about it, I put meat on the table for everyone.

## CHICKEN KILLER

Sometime that summer we moved to Sutherland, Nebraska where I attended my forth school but don't remember much about it. I helped my brother deliver papers on his bicycle. Bud's (Frank Jr.) bike was too big for me, and I could ride it only by putting one leg through the frame. That made it impossible for me to reach in the bag on the back of the bicycle to get a paper. If I let go to reach for the paper the

bicycle, papers and I landed in a heap. I did a lot of stop and go on that paper route.

I killed a chicken that belonged to a neighbor that kept straying into our yard. I was a pretty good with my slingshot but maybe it was just luck, I hit it in the back of the head. After chopping its head off and it quit flopping around I presented it to my Mom. I caught hell for killing the chicken, and I had to go to the neighbor and tell them about my criminal act. I had to work spading up their garden to pay for the chicken. The chicken tasted good.

## **AMERICAN JUSTICE**

### **1931**

My folks and their friends talked about a "Nigger" that the people in North Platte had caught that had raped a teacher. The mob found him under the house that he and his family lived in. They tore the floor out of the house to get to him. They tied him to the flagpole on top of the one room schoolhouse and set it on fire. The mob then went to the part of town where the "Niggers" lived and put up signs for all Niggers to be gone by the next Saturday. Later the teacher admitted that she hadn't been raped and had never ever seen the "Nigger". Why that particular man was singled out as being the rapist I never knew. That was the first time I ever heard of any problem with colored folks. Up till that time I had no contact with them. I thought they were just like everybody else except they were colored. My Dad took my brother and me to North Platte and showed us the house where the mob found the victim. We saw the place where the schoolhouse was burned down. There was nothing but ashes left.

## **WIND**

My mother was driving down the road and a big tornado was coming right down the road at us. Mom drove the car off the road into a deep ditch and went under a bridge. The storm passed over us and made a noise that really scared me. We had to get help to get the car back up on the road. A farmer with a team of horses pulled the car out of the ditch and up on the road. We all got very dirty and it was great fun.

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## **THE POOR FARM**

The depression was talked about all the time and it seemed to me that most people were out of work. There was a "Poor Farm" somewhere close to where we lived and my mother went there to visit someone she knew. They ran a regular farm with all the farm animals you would expect and a great many ducks and geese. I learned a lesson on that farm. If bunch geese want you gone its best to go.

The house had a big screen porch and I talked with an old woman there, she sat in a rocking chair and talked to me like I was someone she knew. Most of the time I had no idea what or who she was talking about so I just said, "Uh Huh" once in a while.

There was a storm cellar (spring house) and they had many crocks of cabbage setting. They were making sour kraut. The smell was really strong, and I still don't like sour kraut very well. The old people that lived on the poor farm felt they were very lucky to be there. There were a great many people that had no place to live and only what they could beg or get in a soup kitchen to eat.

## **THE CURE?**

**1932**

My Father left and I was told that he was sick and was in Lincoln in the hospital. After some time my mother took us to see him, He was in the Veterans Hospital, and he didn't seem sick to me. I talked to a veteran while my mother talked to my Dad. The man had a comic book that had only a few pages left. He read it over and over. When I got to talk to my Dad he told me the man had been shot in the head, and his memory was gone, for he lived only in the present. There were many men without a leg or an arm or crippled up in some way. I learned that was what war did to people. Until then I thought that war was a big thrill and everyone came back with a bunch of metals and was a big hero. All men would like to go to war. The only Veterans I had seen before then were in parades marching down main street waving flags on the forth of July.

## SELF- DEFENCE

Dad came home and left again to try to find work. There was nothing being built so he had to try to sell something. After a while he sent for us to come to Lincoln, Nebraska. We moved into a house on the west side of town, and I went to my fifth school. By this time I had become a bit of a fighter. In those days when you went to a new school the tough kids made sure you understood the pecking order on the play ground and on the way home. It was different then though, it was always a fair fight and no one would dream of ganging up on you. All the kids watching the action chanted, "Fair Fight, Fair Fight, Fair Fight".

It seemed to me the new kid (me) that I was always the one the teacher blamed for starting the fights. About that time I began to not want to get to know the kids in school. I didn't want to know their names or get close to them in any way because I expected to be leaving any time, besides I had my brother and sister, and we had our own thing going. We tended to be very close.

## STRATEGY

Dad told me many times to never start a fight but never to run from one. It always seemed to me that if at all possible the best bet was to avoid fighting and if running would take care of the problem that was the way to go. One day I was using my run away strategy and was cutting across a vacant lot across the street from our house. I was well ahead of my antagonist and about half way across the lot when I looked up and there stood my Dad. I stopped dead in my tracks, turned around, stuck out my fist and the boy ran into it. The fight was over and Dad never said any thing about my running away. I learned a valuable lesson. Surprise is very good strategy.

## THE BULLY



Across the alley from us was an empty house and I went through the yard on my way to school. A big kid, at least bigger than I was caught me by the empty house about three times a week and bloodied my nose or gave me

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a black eye and dirtied my clothes. Quite often that made me late for school and that got me in more trouble. I complained to my Dad expecting him or at least my big brother to interfere. All he had to say was "There is no one that can't be knocked down, clubbed down, cut down or shot down" However cut down or shot down was forbidden.

After thinking that over I came up with a plan. I put a two by four at the corner of the house and enticed my antagonist into coming around the corner to get me. When he came around the corner I swung. I left him lying there with his teeth scattered around on the ground. I worried all day that maybe I had killed him. I knew I would spend the rest of my life in prison or be hung. I ran all the way back as soon as school was out, but he was gone. I never saw him again.

## GRAVE DIGGER

My Dad sold Electric Light Plants to the local farmers and was good at his job. Someone said he could sell an icebox to an Eskimo. Later he sold cemetery lots. Once he took me with him to the cemetery, and we met a colored man digging a new grave. My Dad asked him, "John aren't you afraid of all these dead people in this cemetery". The answer "No sir it's the live sons a bitches I's afraid off". My Dad left me to hang around with John while he went to do something else. The first thing he said to me was, "You ever knowed a black man befo" I told him no but I heard that there were lots of them down South. He told me to rub his arm to see if his black would come off. I never heard of such a thing, but I rubbed his arm. He laughed when I looked at my hand. John told me wonderful stories the rest of the day and shared his lunch with me. I thought he was a wonderful man. I never saw him again.

## NEW CLOTHES

My Dad must have made a big sale because he came home with a pocket bulging with money. As was usual with him when he had some money he wanted to share it with all of us and anyone else in need. It was getting close to the time when we all would be going back to school so the next day we went shopping for new clothes. Not new to us "Salvation Army Store" clothes but brand new out of a "Retail Store".

The store we went to was right down town where all the high-class stores were. We are talking big time here. We were to get new from the skin out. Some things like socks we could get two or maybe even three pair. We were walking in tall corn.

The store had some incentives to buy certain things. For instance they had an aviator type hat and if you bought it they threw in a pair of goggles. They had lace up high top boots that had buckles across the top. The boots had a pocket for a pocketknife on the right boot on the outside. A knife to fit the pocket was yours free if you bought the boots.

I can't remember what they offered for girls apparel, but I think it was a selection of Jewelry. If you decided not to buy any of the things that came with an incentive you could pick one thing out of a whole table of goodies if you spent the required amount. Hard decisions when everything looks so good. We went home loaded with new things to wear to school and that is the only place we wore them unless we went to church. It was a long time before I got any more new clothes.

## **ENTREPRENEURS**

### **1932**

For a while I sold newspapers in front of the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. A good location in front of the largest hotel in town had some problems. First you had to be tough enough and ready to fight the other kids for the spot. Most of the time a good bluff was enough. Second there was a curfew law and you had to keep a sharp lookout for the cops. The thing that kept you out after curfew was the fact that you had paid for the papers when you picked them up and there was no way to get your money back for papers you didn't sell. It was possible to work all afternoon and lose money. The best thing that could happen to you was the paper coming out with an "EXTRA". They didn't deliver the extras so you had a hot thing going for a while. They always came out with the extras in the late afternoon so the street sellers would be available. The paper had the word "EXTRA" printed across the top of the paper about four inches high. There was a couple of ways a paperboy could sell their papers as "EXTRAS" that were just the daily paper.

One of the things I became aware of while selling papers in front of the hotel was they bought squabs for their fancy restaurant. It

## Growing up in the Thirties

seemed I could make a lot more money-selling squabs than newspapers because I knew where lots of pigeons had their nests. The churches all over town had bell towers and lots of pigeons. There were also a great many in a large granary close to where we lived.

My brother Frank, a neighbor kid (the son of a cop) and I went into business. We did a lot better than the newspaper business but soon ran out of places to raid. There was one large church that was about two stories high up to the eaves and the only access to the bell tower was a downspout from the rain gutter. I climbed the downspout with no trouble and filled my gunny sack with squabs and started down. The extra weight of the squabs and the strain I had put on the fasteners on the way up proved to be too much. The pipe came loose and fell straight down for about six inches. The pipe held together and I was like a pole-vaulter in reverse, going from the top down. I landed in the street flat on my back with the sack of squabs under my head and back, still hanging onto the pipe. I wasn't hurt but it took some time to get my breath. Not many of the squabs survived.

The commotion attracted too much attention and we all rode home in a police car. The cop told me I ought to pick my friends with greater care (Big deal, my friend was a cops son). Frank Jr. and I were confined to our own yard for some time.

After the squab season ran out we had to look for some other way to make money so Frank and I tried to become caddies at the local golf course. The competition was too much. You had to have some kind of pull to get in, and we didn't know rich golfers. While looking into the possibilities we noticed that many golf balls went into the little lakes. It was easy, all we had to do was sneak out after everyone had gone to sleep, go to the golf course, climb the fence and wade around in the lakes till we stepped on a ball. The darker the night the better we liked it. The next weekend we would hang around outside the fence where the golfers walked by and sell the balls. We did pretty well but our source soon dried up and about the best we could do was two or three balls a night. About half of them were too old and discolored to sell.

We needed a business that wouldn't run out of products so I tried selling Samans Salve. Our house had a supply of Samans Salve that lasted several years. Samans salve turned out to be good for any thing you wanted to lubricate like Bicycle or wagon wheels. After that I sold the Saturday Evening Post. I had a neat little canvas bag I carried the magazine in everywhere I went. I could have sold a million of them on credit. I also still had many dummy license plates that said,



"REPEAL HOVER" that I had attempted to sell. I found out real quick that about one out of three people were not good prospects. I also found out that we had two kinds of people. There were Democrats and Republicans. It was always best to ask which party the prospect belonged to before showing them what I had to sell. Most of the people that wanted the sign (Democrats) didn't have the money to buy them. Some people acted like whatever was wrong was my fault.

## THE SUBURBS

We moved to a house out in a suburb called Bethany. Our house was one block to open fields and about fifteen blocks to my sixth school. I only remember that it was a long way to walk in the wintertime. My daily job was to see that Roy came home with me. I was in charge, a real important guy. One cold day he wasn't in the hall by the front door where we were supposed to meet and after waiting around I went home. When I got there he wasn't there. My folks were not home so the only thing to do was go look for him. I went back to the school and went to his room where someone told me that he had been kept after school but then went on home. On the way home again I found him sitting under a tree in the snow. I tried to get him to come with me, but he only looked at me. The worst threats I could make wouldn't budge him. I pushed, dragged and carried and we made it fine but both of us lost parts of our winter clothing. We both got some pretty cold ears, mine still hurt if I let them get cold.

Things must have been hard for my folks because Dad put a still in the back room of that house. There were not any houses very close, the nearest about half a block away. One day the Police came and my Dad took the still apart, and they took him and the still away. He had a little ford truck, and he drove it with a policeman beside him. Dad came home later that day and there was a lot of whispering between my folks. Very soon after that we moved into a house on the south side of Lincoln on a hill just a little distance from the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

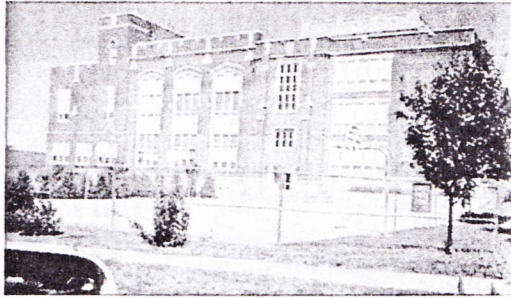
I went to my seventh school. That is the first school I remember the name of Irving Jr. High School. I liked that school. They let me work in the cafeteria for my lunch. They had the best nut rolls I ever tasted till then and now. I took mechanical drawing and really liked it because I was good at it, and the teacher was a good teacher. I got an "A" in the class. I think it was the first time I ever got an "A".

## Growing up in the Thirties

Actually I think it was the first time I put in a whole year in the same school and received a final grade.

Before I got the job in the cafeteria I took my lunch and most of the time it was made with *home made bread*. I was embarrassed about that and went to a park to eat my lunch by myself. Now I think home made bread is the best.

Every day for a time I put a new piece of cardboard in my shoes to cover the holes, and that works pretty well unless it rains, also it is hard to keep your feet in a position so people can't see the holes.



## DUKE

The people who lived in the house before us had a beautiful English Shepherd and he returned to the house whenever he got loose from them at their new place. The people came and got him three or four times then made a deal with us to keep him for them. They lived in a small apartment and thought the dog would be better off with us. I don't know what their relationship with the dog was, but after he lived with us for a couple of weeks he wouldn't allow them to touch him when they came to see him. Duke had a lot of teeth and when he showed them and growled most people left him alone. We had Duke for keeps.

The house had a basement and one day I went down and Duke would not come down with me. I called, begged and threatened, but he would not come down. I carried him downstairs and turned him loose. He was out of there in two jumps. The next time I went downstairs he almost knocked me down getting down the stairs before me. I think the people who owned him must have kept him locked in the basement.

## KIDNAPPING

1932

The big news that everyone was talking about was Lindberg's baby being kidnapped. No matter who was talking they new someone that had seen the baby with a man or woman or even a gang of people. Lindy was my number one hero, and I couldn't understand why anyone would do such a horrible thing to him.

## THE THIEVES

The Penitentiary had large fields where they farmed just three blocks from our house. My brother and I along with a couple of neighbor kids got caught stealing watermelons. We were taken to the Penitentiary in some kind of paddy wagon. I knew that was it, they were going to put us in a cell, and we would be there the rest of our lives. The official that we were taken to sat behind a huge desk and looked at us like we were the lowest things on earth. It wasn't what that man said that scared us; it was the things he didn't say. After scaring us they told us that we didn't have to steal the melons. Take all we could eat. They didn't taste nearly as good after that.

There was a pump house in the middle of one of the penitentiary fields, and I got acquainted with a man that stayed there. He was a trustee from the prison, and he always had something real good to eat hanging on a long rope down in the well. I don't know what he was serving time for, but he was a friend to me. I went by the pump house every time I went anywhere near there. Quite often he gave me food to take home.

## PIONEER ZEPHR

1933

Dad took Frank and me to see a new type of train. It was called the Pioneer Zephyr and was made from stainless steel. The engine was a great big diesel engine and was the biggest "motor" I had ever seen.

The train had sleeping cars that were really something. The beds unfolded from the walls, one on the bottom and one on top. To me it

## Growing up in the Thirties

seemed that a bunch of strangers were going to be sleeping in one room. Somehow that just didn't seem to be right. Every thing about that train was first class. They had a dining car where they served meals at unbelievable high prices. Some meals cost as much as a dollar and twenty-five cents.

## DEPRESSION

There was more talk of the depression. The government was paying the farmers to kill their pigs and bury them and other senseless things like pouring their milk out on the ground. I couldn't understand why anyone would do such a thing and still don't. Why didn't they give the meat to the poor people, not us you understand, to poor people?

## CATTLE DRIVE IN WYO.

In the fall the local ranchers got together and made up a shipment of cattle to send to market. The ranchers brought their cattle to the loading pens near Node. Each ranch also brought in a load of hay to feed the cattle and some straw to put on the floors of the cattle cars. If the cattle had been sold to a buyer in Denver they didn't need much straw because they only stopped the train once to give the cattle water and rest. Enough people went along to unload, feed and water the cattle, then load them again then finally unload them in Denver. We got our cattle to Node in short order as it was only about five miles then rode out to help the other drives. They came in from places like Jay Elm, Van Tassel, Hat Creek, Lance Creek and Redbird. The longest drive was about thirty miles.

I picked the drive coming in from the Lance Creek area because they would probably have a chuck wagon with them and the food would be plentiful and the best. They also had two teen-age girls that I had met at square dances. Both of the girls were a little older than I was and were good riders, and I was hard pressed to keep up because they had very good cow ponies. When all the cattle were in they were rested and given plenty of hay and water.

Everyone knew everyone and the young boys hung around campfires the first night and listened to tall tales till late. I think cowboys tell better stories than anyone else. I don't remember any story that was off color. No doubt they told sexy stories but never in front of the kids.

Many of the wives with their small children drove in the second day and brought all kinds of good things to eat with them. After eating supper almost everyone went over to the schoolhouse and had music and some dancing. I don't remember much about the dance but it must have been outside because the school building wasn't big enough to hold the musicians and dancers.

The next morning the cattle were loaded and when the train was ready to go they called out the names of the people who were to go on the trip. The first called out was "Frank Poston and his two Cowboys" It took a little while for my brother and me to realize that the two cowboys were us. Never in our wildest dreams did we think we would be picked to make such a trip. That was about the best surprise I had as a kid. Dad never gave us a hint that we (Bud and I) would get to go. I thought just working the cattle drive was great but to get to go on the train, (WOW!)

The train had two cabooses, and we rode in the end one. Our caboose had the brakeman, my Dad, and old friend of my Dads named Stammie. Bud and I made up the rest in our car. There were four men in the other caboose. I rode in the other caboose for a while, but after they told a few stories they started a poker game and that left me out so I got back in our caboose.

We unloaded the cattle someplace past Cheyenne and watered them and let them rest till morning. Everyone was pleased that we hadn't lost any of them. Some times a steer would fall down and get trampled to death. That night we worked very late cleaning out the cattle cars and spread fresh straw. In the morning we loaded them up again but this time a lot of them were reluctant to get on the train. It turned out to be quite a job, but we got them all loaded and on the way by just after sun up. That was the only time I ever needed to rope a steer, and I got him on the first try. (I used to practice on the milk cows at the ranch when no one was around because I thought you had to rope cattle all the time if you were a cowboy). We cooked eggs and ham for breakfast on a little coal-burning stove on the way.

We arrived in Denver in early afternoon and after unloading we went to bed in the caboose. In the morning we walked around Denver and looked at all the grand houses. We checked into the Cattleman's hotel, the first hotel I had ever stayed in and I thought it was great. Dad took Bud and me to the hotel restaurant and ordered supper for us then he joined the other men in a card game. With all the excitement Bud and I were worn down to a nub and went to our room and went right to sleep.

## Growing up in the Thirties

The next morning Dad, Stammie, Bud and I went to breakfast together. We didn't order, the waitress just brought the food. First she brought bowls of oatmeal. Stammie didn't eat his and when the rest of us finished the waitress took the bowls away, including Sammie's full one. Stammie said, loud enough for everyone to hear. "The lady, she took my oatmeal and I always eat my oatmeal last" The waitress brought the oatmeal back. Dad was embarrassed but other than that we had a real cattleman's breakfast, Oatmeal, steak and eggs, hotcakes, bacon, toast and jelly, coffee and milk.

We rode home with our horses and tack on another freight train. It was no fun because all the men were drinking and either played cards or slept.

## **NEW BABY 1934**

August 12.1934. I don't remember it being any big deal when my Mom went to the hospital and came home with a new baby. They named the baby Donald Charles Poston. Blanche, and I just started to take care of him. It just seemed like the natural thing to do. Our brother Frank Jr. more or less stayed out of anything that had to do with diapers etc.

## **THE INTERROGATORS**

The Police came and took my Dad away. They didn't say anything they just grabbed him and put handcuffs on him and dragged him to their car. He was yelling and kicking all the way. He was trying to tell them to call someone he knew on the Police department. It seemed like no matter where we lived he always had a bunch of Irish Friends on the Police force that he played cards with. I think they drank a little, but I don't ever remember seeing him drunk after he came home from the veteran's hospital. (When I was little) He came home the next morning all beat up. Mom told me they accused him of stealing a truckload of chickens and took him out in the country to get a confession out of him. The next morning one of his friends ran into him at the jail and brought him home.

## RELUCTANT FARMERS

We moved into a house that had some land to do some "Truck Farming". I think Dad figured he had a lot of free labor and it was time we did something to earn our keep. I hated ever minute that I spent in the field and was in trouble a lot because I wasn't where I was supposed to be. It was a lot more fun to go down the road to Salt Creek and go skinny-dipping. I remember going down that dusty road in my bare feet. The road was hot and we ran from shady spot to shady spot. There was a mudslide at the swimming hole that was great fun until some one put razor blades in the mud. There were a lot of water snakes in Salt Creek and I was afraid of them.

## SHOPLIFTER

Blanche and I went down town to buy something at the 5 and 10-cent store. We got what we came for and I found they had the neatest cap pistols. The problem was I didn't have any money. My first and last attempt at shoplifting was a complete failure. They caught me at the door. They tried to get me to give them my name, but I gave them a phony one. I thought it would be better to go to jail as somebody else than explain my transgression to my Dad. After holding me in an office a couple of hours the store people put me in a little storeroom in the basement. There was a little window that let out into the alley and as soon as they left me alone I piled some boxes up and was out the window. I ran all the way home and when I got there my Dad was waiting for me. I expected at least a belt across my backside, but he never touched me. He told me some things about how he felt about anyone who would bring shame on our name and said I should give a lot of thought about how I could redeem myself. A good beating would have been easier to take. The only thing I could think of was to go back to the store and turn myself in.

The store people were very stern and let me make up for my misdeed by cleaning up the alley in back of the store then letting me come back and work to pay for the cap pistol. Blanche swore she never told, but I know she told the store people who I was, otherwise how come they set me up to escape and how come my Dad was waiting for me. In any case I never tried shoplifting again.

## Growing up in the Thirties

### **SMALL WORLD**

On Saturday nights in 1934 we walked to a park in a suburb of Lincoln called Collage View where they showed free silent movies. Most of the people living there were Seventh Day Adventist and they were the only people in town that had stores open on Sunday. If my Mom needed something on Sunday we walked over and shopped.

In 1986 my neighbor in San Diego was telling me about the free movies she went to as a kid in Lincoln, Nebraska. We sat on the grass within feet of each other and watched the movies, but I never met her again until fifty-two years later in San Diego. It is a small world.

### **FOOD**

There was a dairy about six blocks from where we lived that had an outside tap, and you could get all the skimmed milk you wanted for nothing. . Regular milk with cream was ten cents a quart. We took large cans over and filled them and fed it to the chickens. We didn't drink any of it. My wife now pays for no fat milk (Skimmed milk) by the quart. Next door to the dairy was a bakery that sold large loafs of day old bread, two for a nickel.

There seemed to be jobs working for the government if you were lucky. The jobs were with the W P A. For years afterward when we saw someone leaning on a shovel we said, "He must be working for the W P A".

### **CAREER DECISION**

There was a man out at the airport my Father knew and, when I saw him and his airplanes as far as I was concerned my life was changed. I was going to be an airplane mechanic. I figured if you got to be a mechanic you would make more money than a pilot and also get to fly. My Dad's friend had three surplus Jennies, and I spent as much time as I could out at the airport doing anything I could to help. I got to fly with him a couple of times. When we came down I didn't think I would have anything to do with the common kids. One day the pilot buzzed our house and when he gave it the gas the engine died. He landed in a Penitentiary field down the hill from us but didn't quite



make it over the railroad track. The tracks were on ground a little higher than the rest of the field. The wheels were knocked off and the bottom wing came apart along with most of the fuselage. Our friend wasn't hurt but a crowd gathered right away and the only thing they left of the airplane was the wicker seat. He was still setting in that. They even hauled the engine away.

## **THE DUST BOWL 1933-35**

The air was filled with dust. We stood on the street in front of the capital building in Lincoln, Nebraska and could not see the dome. My Dad said the dust came all the way from Oklahoma and was going to the Atlantic Ocean. That night I looked at a map and for the first time I thought, "My Dad is Wrong". The dust came on and off and got in everything, even in our beds on a real windy day. Some days there was so much dust in the air that it blocked out the sun. Some nights you could not see the stars.

My Dad was out of work again and there was talk between him and Mom about going on relief or maybe get a job with the W P A. That seemed to be something of a disgrace. Dad went away again and Mom and the rest of us headed for the ranch. He kissed us all goodbye and I felt his whiskers. I had never thought about him having whiskers before. I wondered if the rest of the family felt them, but I never said anything.

## **SHOTGUN On the ranch in 1935**

In early fall many geese flew over the ranch on their way South. My Dad told me we were under the central flyway. If they came close you could hear them honking. And sometimes they flew low enough for Dad to shoot one or two with his shotgun. Uncle Henry had an old muzzle-loading shotgun, and he sometimes used that.

One day Bud and I were the only ones home and a lot of birds were coming and eating the chicken feed that we put out. We decided to get Dad's shotgun and shoot a few of them. We got the gun but

## Growing up in the Thirties

couldn't find any ammunition so we decided to use Henry's muzzle-loader. We had no idea how much powder or shot to use so we just poured in a handful of powder, put in a piece of rag for a patch and tamped in down. We found only a small amount of shot so we decided to put in some small pebbles and another rag and tamped the whole thing down. After getting all set we were afraid to shoot so we put the gun away.

Some time later geese were flying over and Uncle Henry told me to get Dad's shotgun but there were no shells. Henry said to get his gun so I got it and he said to bring the powder and shot. I told him it was already loaded and he aimed and fired. He was standing on the edge of the porch. I knew I was in trouble by the sound of the shot. When the white smoke from the black powder cleared it took a while to figure out what happened. Henry was lying flat on his back in the kitchen and the screen was torn out of the screen door. Part of the gun was on the porch and half of the barrel and the forearm was out in the yard. The other half of the barrel from the center to the hammer just came unraveled. Henry had several places on his hand and forearm that were torn and bleeding but by some miracle his hand was not blown off and his face was not hurt. Henry was still kind of dazed when my Dad came from the barn to see what was going on and when he got the story he said it would be best if I went to the neighbors to stay a few days, I stayed until my parents moved to Plattsmouth, Nebraska.

## **PLATTMOUTH, NEBRASKA** **1935**

The house we lived in was very special. It was an old house that must have been built by someone with a lot of money. Of course it wasn't in top shape when we moved in because the rent must have been low in order for my Dad to afford it.

The house was part way up a hill on a natural point. The level part of the lot was just big enough to hold the house and a small barn and a place to park a couple of cars in the back yard. The barn had two small rooms in the hayloft.

The front yard was flat for about twenty feet then fell off sharply downhill for about one city block. The north side yard was only about ten feet wide a then went steeply downhill. The south side yard was a little wider and as it went to the back of the lot it curved

into the rest of the hill. The driveway came up the hill from the south side and ended in the back yard between the barn and the house.

The house had three floors including the two attic bedrooms. The basement was just big enough to hold a large boiler for heat and hot water for the house. The boiler was not usable so a small water heater had been installed to provide hot water to the kitchen and the three bathrooms. The water heater was a small boiler that burned coal so we had to build a fire in it any time we needed hot water.

The first floor was about four feet above the ground in the front and level at the back. There was a front and back porch. The front porch had two levels. The back porch was enclosed on three sides and had screen wire on the open side. The front porch was the entire width of the house with a fancy rail. There were four steps about ten feet wide. A sidewalk went around the south side of the house and ended at the back door. Starting on the porch the entryway was an oversized door with a big oval stained glass window made from some kind of hardwood. I never did like that door because of an experience with a lady with a butcher knife in North Platte. The door opened to a large entryway with double sliding doors to the left. The room was a large sitting room and was the largest room in the house. The sitting room had a large fireplace of marble.

Straight in from the front door was a wide hardwood stairway that went up in curve to a landing on the second floor. To the right of the stairway another sliding door led to another room that was a library. That room also had a large fireplace and was finished with tiles with flower designs. The next room straight back through an arched doorway was the dining room. To the left of the dining room was a hall that led to a tiny bathroom and the front sitting room. Also to the left was a room that most likely was for a maid or cook. Right in the back of the dining room was the kitchen and to the left of the kitchen a pantry almost as big as the kitchen.

The second floor had a large landing at the top of the stairs with doors to six rooms and a stairway to the two attic bedrooms. One room had a fireplace that most likely was the master bedroom. Next to that room was a large bathroom that had an oversized tub, a commode with the tank high on the wall made from oak and a dressing table. The window was stained glass. Both front bedrooms opened out to a balcony that was the second story of the front porch. However the outlets to the upper porch were not regular doors, the windows were tall and when opened all the way you had to step over the wall. A normal sized adult had to bend down to get through.

## Growing up in the Thirties

The entire house had filigree all around the porches and the eaves. It was painted light yellow with brown trim. It was truly an impressive house.

After living in the house for a short while my folks rented rooms to people.

### **FLOOD**

Plattsmouth is located where the Platte and the Missouri rivers come together, and it flooded while we were there. The down town section was under about four feet of water and all the houses on the lower lands were flooded. The house we were living in was up on the hill and a lot of people were all around the house. There was no food or drinking water until it was brought in from somewhere away from the flooded area. The whole thing was great fun as far as I was concerned. Right down the hill from our place was a tennis court and it had about three inches of water on it. There were big catfish swimming around about half out of the water. We had a ball catching them. The water went down in about three days and the fun was over.

### **TENNIS PLAYER**

There was a girl about my age living across the street from the tennis court. She was always looking for someone to play tennis with, and she had an extra racket so I decided to give the game a whirl. After lobbing the ball back and forth for a while we started a game. I suppose I shouldn't call it a game because it was something or whatever to LOVE (nothing) every time we played.

To be beat by a girl was more than I could take so I borrowed a racket and a ball and spent as much time as possible in the barn hitting the ball against the wall were I had a line to represent the top of a net. I also went to the park and watched the good players to see what they did.

The next time we played I could hit the ball hard and make it go where I wanted it. I didn't beat her every time, but at least I could hold my head up after a game even if I lost.

## **DON IS SICK**

### **1935**

My Father was away and Donald, my baby brother was sick. He had a high fever, and my mother didn't know what the problem was so she called a doctor. The Doctor came, but he didn't seem to have any ideas either. He said to give Don some aspirin to bring the fever down and call him if he didn't get better. After some time Don seemed to feel better and stopped fussing and went to sleep.

Frank Jr. and I were sleeping in an attic room right at the top of the stairs just above the bedroom where Mom and the baby were sleeping. My sister was in a bedroom on the first floor. Sometime during the night there was a lot of commotion downstairs, and I could hear my mother and my sister talking. Frank got up and went down to see what was going on.

I lay still and listened and heard my Mom say, "Oh my God he's having convulsions," I could tell by the tone of her voice that it was very bad. Every one else in the family was up, but I lay awake and was afraid and just listened. I heard my Mom give orders to run cold water in the tub. From the things I heard she must have put him in the water to bring his fever down. She also gave orders to prepare a hot water bottle with cold water for an enema and that helped because things quieted down and after a while Frank Jr. came back upstairs and went to bed.

I was afraid Don was going to die, and I couldn't face seeing that so I never went down to help. I never told any one that I was awake.

## **RUNAWAYS**

I decided the time had come to leave home and was able to talk a couple of neighbor kids into going with me. We planned very carefully and spent days gathering all the things we would need to go on our own. My Dad helped out as much as he could without me knowing it. He left a suitcase out in the shed where we were stashing our gear. He made sure it was big enough to be very tough to carry.

The day came for our departure, and we started to where for I didn't know. About noon we finished the sandwiches we had and spent most of the time in the shade of a tree telling each other how great it was to not have someone telling us what to do. Supper time came and

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we had no food left so we decided to go home and eat and start out again in the morning. Right after we started toward home my Dad and the neighbor just happened to come by in the car and offered us a ride. Nothing was said about the incident and if the other kids met the next morning they were one kid short.

### **TEXAS BOUND 1935**

Dad was selling appliances and got in a fight with the man he was working for. The man didn't pay him a commission on a sale. Dad won the fight, and we started on the trip to El Paso Texas the next day. I think we were just hours ahead of the local cops.

We had a beautiful collie dog named Duke that rode on the fender. He jumped off when he saw a rabbit. He was bruised up pretty bad but never jumped off again while the car was moving. It took us about five weeks to get to El Paso because we stopped to visit folks my parents new along the way. Most of them were in Missouri.

One place where we visited the people came out and the only thing I remember them saying was they had not seen my Dad for about ten years. That seemed like an awfully long time to me. They also said they would hide my Dad because they thought he had escaped from the state prison. Someone by the name of Poston had escaped, but it wasn't my Dad. It was a great mystery because Frank Poston was not that common a name. We also stayed about a week with my aunt Blanche and her family.

We only saw my Uncle Jeff once because he had to work. He sold clothing to stores over about three states and was on the road most of the time. They lived in the most wonderful house I had ever seen in Kansas City, Missouri. The house wasn't as big as the house in Plattsmouth, but it was new and modern. It seemed big because we lived in only a small part of the house in Plattsmouth. It had an attic that had model trains that ran all over. I was really impressed with my cousins. They were older and the boy, Jeff seemed to have everything and Helen with her blond hair was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. We walked to a theater and men turned and stared at her. I was so proud that I was related to her.

We camped along the road on the way to El Paso, mostly by streams so we could bathe and Mom could wash some things.

## **EL PASO**

When we got to El Paso we moved into a nice house in a nice section of town called Five Points. I can't imagine how my Dad did that. He couldn't have had any money to rent a nice house like that but then he was a pretty slick talker. I don't know what kind of a job Dad found but things started going good. The school was big and aside from having a couple of fights to find out where I stood in the pecking order things were good. They set me back one year because they said the school I had been going to where behind. I'm sure glad I didn't move there from California. The main thing I remember about the school was getting hit in the head with a swing and bleeding all over the place. A teacher took me right into the girl's toilet. Girls screamed and ran out. I was so embarrassed to be in a girl's toilet.

## **STONE MAN**

My brother and I had a paper route together, and there is only one costumer that I remember. He sat on his front porch all the time and always said thank you when I delivered his paper. I put the paper in his lap because he couldn't walk. Sometimes I went back after all the papers were delivered and talked with him. He had something terrible wrong with him. He was turning to stone. I felt his feet and legs and sure enough they were very hard. He told me stories about himself and most of them had a way of ending with instructions for me to be honest or to work hard and never lie. I liked his stories but can't remember any of them. They were like the stories my Dad told me. It was always some tale where the hero always did the right thing in order to not bring shame to his name. We quit the paper route because the people didn't pay. It was always "Come back Friday or something".

## **EL PASO**

West of our house there was a mountain called Ranger Mountain. The highest part of the mountain had a big light on it. I was told it was beacon for airplanes. My brother and I climbed the mountain to look at the light. We met up with a couple of rattlesnakes on the way. The mountain didn't look all that high the last time I went through El Paso.

## Growing up in the Thirties

### **EDUCATION**

I don't know what happened, but we moved to little house back of the city park where they had a zoo and about three blocks from the Rio Grand River. I started to another school but didn't last long. I was the only white kid in my class and maybe the whole school. I found out one thing real quick. The idea of a fair fight like in Nebraska was different. Those kids idea of a fair fight was to tell you that the only one that was going to fight you was the smallest one of the gang then about ten of them started on you. The best thing I had going was it was too crowded for all of them to hit me with my fast feet. Most of the time that I was outside of there I spent running. I went back to that school that I went to when we lived in Five Points and lied about were I lived. I finished eighth grade there.

One day on the way home I met a bunch of the kids from the other school. They had me surrounded and I thought my best bet was attack. I didn't do too badly because I got a knife about six inches long away from one of them. I carried it home sticking out of my left leg about six inches above my knee. When I got home my pants leg was red and blood sloshed out of my shoe with every step. Those shoes were the first ones I'd had in a long time that would hold liquid. My Dad pulled the knife out and took me to the hospital and they gave me a shot that hurt more than the knife. I watched them sew up the cut, and I thought they were pretty clumsy.

### **FIRE**

I was down town with my Dad and a fire truck passed us. Dad followed the fire truck to see the fire, and it led us home. The fire was only a pile of lumber in the back yard that someone set on fire. My Dad was told to haul what was left away.

### **STATUS SYMBOL**

There was a drug store on my way to school that had a watch in the window. It was hooked up to a loud speaker outside and you could hear it tick. I had to have one. It seemed that life would be complete if I had one of those watches. Everyone would ask me what time it was. I could see myself taking the watch out, letting the gold chain



dangle and after a time telling them the time. I made a deal with the storeowner. I bought a watch on time. I can't remember how much down or how much a week. The price of the watch was one dollar.

## **MONKEYING AROUND**

I got a job in a roller rink in the park. They were open three days a week. I have trouble remembering names but I'll always remember him. He was "Mr. Wilson". He was fat and owned the rink and was very rich. I put skates on the customers and swept the floors and repaired the skates after they closed at night. I got twenty-five cents a day and tips. Most of the customers were soldiers from Fort Bliss and they didn't have money for tips unless they wanted to impress the girl they were with. I also got a job in a local church sweeping out the gym and the church, but it didn't last because I couldn't go to church on Sunday because of my job in the roller rink. After that I got a part time job helping clean the cages at the zoo. At first all the animals were locked in another cage while we cleaned. Later we went in the monkey's cage with them. They just climbed to the highest place they could and chattered at us. One day a spider monkey dropped down on my shoulder and wrapped her long tail around my neck. I thought she was going to choke me to death. The zookeeper tried to get the monkey off but got a pretty good bite for his trouble. Some one hosed both of us down with water but that made her hang on tighter. I went into the closed part of the cage and sat down. After a while she left of her own accord. Everyone said she was in love with me. I got teased about that for a long time.

I started Jr. high, and went all of two weeks, well so much for formal education in Texas.

## **TRUE LOVE**

There was a girl my age living across the street from us, and I fell madly in love with her. That was the first time I thought about girls being good for something besides someone to tease. For a while she was all I thought about. I never got within ten feet of her even though she was in our house daily.

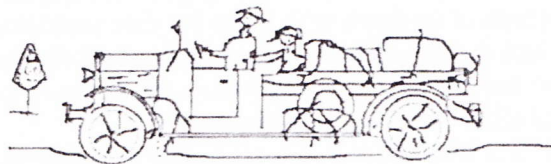
## Growing up in the Thirties

### OUR DOG KILLED

We got up one morning and found our dog dead in the front yard. He had been shot in the head. That was a real traumatic experience. All the kids were crying and my Dad was so mad that he got out a shotgun he had and went around telling people that he knew who killed Duke and they were going to be found floating in the canal pretty soon. A Mexican couple that lived three houses from us moved away that night.

### SHOPPING

My mother did a lot of our grocery shopping in Juarez, Mexico. She walked up the river and crossed the bridge. Most of the time she took at least one of the kids with her to help carry the groceries back. Bananas must have been real cheap because I remember carrying as many as I could. I was with her one time and the officials at the bridge wouldn't let her through. They kept saying she was not an American citizen. After several hours they decided they were wrong and let us go.



### WESTERN TOUR IN A MODEL A FORD 1935

Dad was out of a job again, and he had a plan to drive some people across country to make a little money. He left with three men passengers. I don't know what happened but sometime later Mom told us kids that Dad was in a hospital some place a long way away and that when he was able he would meet us at the ranch. For the first and only time we went on relief. Once each week Mom took one of us and walked to the place that gave out the food. We got such things as flour, rice, potatoes and bread. (The flour was buggy and had to be sifted before we could use it.)

By saving all the money that my brother Frank and I were making at the skating rink and my extra job at the zoo we were able to

buy a 1927 model T pickup that didn't have a top. Mom paid ten dollars for the truck and some spare parts. We packed all the truck would hold and gave the rest away.

## GULL WING STENSON

One of the things we took along was my prize possession, a model of a Gull wing Stenson. It was a balsa wood and tissue paper model powered by a rubber band with a wingspan of about fifteen inches. I had many hours invested in putting it together and was very proud of it.

My brother also had a flying model of a biplane but I think he knew something I didn't because he cranked the prop up, launched it and when it landed about fifty feet away he ran over and jumped on it with both feet. It was gone and I don't think he gave it much thought after that. He was older and probable understood what was ahead of us.

I found a cardboard box just big enough to hold the airplane with wing removed. Normally the wing was held on the fuselage with a rubber band. The box didn't add much weight to our load but it certainly took up a lot of space. I started out with it on my lap but soon found a place for it. About two days into the trip the wing broke into in the middle and I reduced the size of the box. By the time we finished the trip I had the airplane in a cigar box with room left over for some of my other valuable property.

It doesn't rain much in El Paso but it did the day we left. We got about fifty miles up the road and blew a tire. Frank (Bud) and I put the spare on and away we went. Within the hour the car threw a rod. We had some spare rods that came with the truck. Frank took off the head, and I removed the pan. We both had worked on all of my folk's cars with my Dad so we knew what to do. We knew a lot better before that trip was over. The motor had a flat crankshaft and about the best it would make if Mom drove very slowly was about a hundred miles. We made bets on which would go first, a rod or a tire. We were flat broke before we got very far out of Texas so we had to make do.

## Growing up in the Thirties

### **THE HELPERS**

Times were tough and almost every town had some organization that would help you along the way, a little food and enough gas to get you going. One thing sure most places only wanted you out of their town. That worked out good for people like us because we didn't want to stay in their town. The Salvation Army will always have a spot in my heart. They gave and gave and the only thing they asked in return was if you ever were able to help in the future to remember them.

### **PARTS AND SUPPLIES**

We stopped at all city dumps and looked behind all garages that we found. We were looking for two things, used oil and spare parts for the truck. We needed lots of oil because we didn't have a gasket for the oil pan. We left a trail of oil where ever we went. We found a block with a crankshaft in it some place in Arizona. Bud and I put that block in the truck without a hoist. We hung the engine from a tree on a rope and pushed the truck under it. It ran great and we didn't change any more rods.

No one told us how bad things were so we just went on having fun.

### **BLOOD BROTHERS**

#### **Thirteen years old**

I wish I could talk to my folks about the trip from El Paso to the ranch in Wyoming. Maybe Mom was stalling for time because we wandered all over the West. I don't know where my Father was, but my mother kept telling us he would meet us at our Uncle's ranch in Wyoming. We must have gone about three times as far as we needed to because some of the places we went through were a long way out of the way. We went through Williams, Arizona headed east on highway 66. The road between Williams, Flagstaff and Winslow was gravel and was a washboard road. That road just about shook the model T Ford apart.

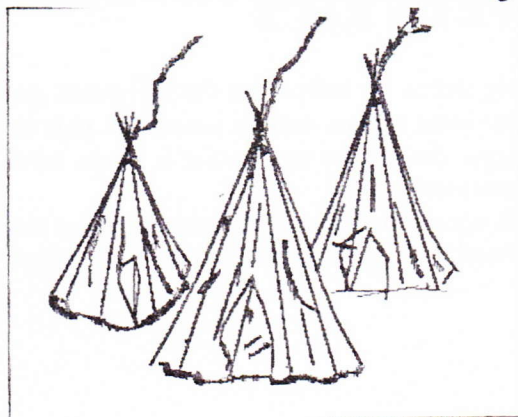
We met many people coming the other way with everything they owned piled on their car or truck. Most of them had a bunch of kids with them. We camped outside of Flagstaff by a little stream and

there was several families camped close by. We talked to them and they told us they came from farms in Oklahoma. The dust was drifting like snow and there was nothing growing and all their animals had nothing to eat so they killed them all and canned the meat that was good. They said most of the animals were so skinny by the time they killed them that there wasn't anything left to eat.

There was nothing left for them to do but pack up and try to get to California where they expected to find lots of farm work. There were posters with pictures of an orange tree heavy with fruit on telephone poles all over the dust bowl saying, "Come to California, the land of milk and honey, and make big money working on the California ranches". So they started the longest trip of there lives with vehicles that should never be more than a walk away from home. Most of them were broke by the time they got as far as the next state and were trying to trade anything they had for a little food and gas or maybe a second hand tire.

There were no government agencies to help the people from the dustbowl that were truly America's second group of refugees. It was only the giving spirit of the people all along the road from Oklahoma through Arizona that prevented highway 66 from becoming the longest cemetery in the world. One strange thing I saw was a man running a filling station talked like he hated every Okie that came down the road but when a family drove up in a overloaded old truck and offered to trade some tools for gas he gave them the gas and some canned food and took nothing from them except their promise not to tell anyone. That man is my idea of an American hero and there were a great many like him on route 66.

We went north out of Winslow and camped near an Indian trading post. There were Indians living there in little round houses called Hogans. The Indian kids pretended we weren't there. They would walk right past just as close as they could without touching you and never blink an eyelash. I never knew what that game meant to the Indians but to me it was like our modern game some fools play called



"Chicken".

Mom had some sea-shells she had collected that she gave to the Indians. They used them in their jewelry making but also seemed to put

## Growing up in the Thirties

some sort of spiritual value on the shells that we didn't understand. The man in the trading post was angry about that and tried to run us off. The Indians came to our defense and we stayed. All of a sudden we were part of the tribe, "Blood brothers". They insisted we use one of the empty hogans to sleep in.

The Indians were having a big get together and my brother and I were invited to play a game with them. After watching some of the Indian kids practice we decided to be spectators. Anyway if there were any rules we couldn't understand them. The Indians had a hole dug out of the ground almost as big as a football field about four feet deep. The dirt that had been removed was piled up on the sides and used like a grandstand by the spectators. About thirty-five or so Indians, all ages, each one with a club about five feet long, went (down) onto the playing field. Someone tossed a leather ball into the center of the field. Everything went wild. In about five minutes there were Indians bleeding all over the place. Some were unconscious but no one seemed concerned. You wouldn't have dared go on the field to help them. After a while the ball came out one end of the playing field. Everyone rested for about five minutes and they started again.

When the game was over they patched up the wounded and had a big dance. The dancers all had on fancy costumes and all kinds of masks. They beat drums and went jumping around in a big circle. For three or four days they had all kinds of contests, mostly horse racing, trick riding and foot races. We were invited to compete but we were outclassed and won nothing. After about four days all the visiting Indians left in wagons or on horseback.

Two or three days after the visiting Indians left we packed up to leave. We got a great send off. The Medicine man had a regular ritual for us imploring the gods to protect us on our travels. The man in the trading post swore at us as we pulled out. He used words like Whore, Bitch and Bastards. He was the only white man there. We headed south.

## DRIVE ON RAGS

One day we had a big storm. It hailed and the hailstones got as big as golf balls with some even bigger, and so we all put pots or pans over our heads. The bigger the pot the more noise it made. Like someone beating drums in your ears.

By that time the truck wasn't loaded so bad. Everything but the bare necessities had been tossed out. We needed the room for things

like spare tires and parts. The bed of a model T is about half the size of a modern pickup and won't carry all that much. We kept every old tire we got our hands on because they were needed to make boots, for these boots for the tires, not our feet. Our speed was pretty slow because if you go too fast with boots in the tires it is like being on a washboard road.

Once we couldn't patch an inner tube because it had patches on patches and we couldn't get it to hold air. We stuffed the tire with rags, put it on the car and made it into the next town.

## UP HILL BACKWARDS

We were camping outside Thermopolis, Wyoming, and we spent a lot of time hanging around the hot springs. That was before the springs were turned into a tourist trap. About the only thing there to pay for were the Mineral water baths. Some people believed the water had some kind of magic powers. The Indians that sold the springs to the white men surely thought so because the deal was made that the springs were for all people to use. (Just another treaty for the white man to ignore.) We took the hot baths but not in the fancy bathhouses. I don't remember feeling any better after a long dip in the hot water, I just felt weak.

While we were camped Mom and my sister Blanche made flowers from crepe paper and we sold them from door to door. As I remember we did pretty good. At least we made enough to eat on and had some money for gas.

For some reason Mom delayed going to the ranch. The message to go came in the mail. We made trips to the Post Office every day and asked if there was any mail for us in general delivery and finally a letter came from Dad.

The hill out of Thermopolis was so steep that we had to back the ford up with all but the driver pushing. To explain to you youngsters that don't know 1927 model T Fords, The fuel system is gravity feed system and on a steep hill the gas doesn't get to the carburetor when the tank is low because the level of the gas is lower than the carburetor. Our tank was always low. It took almost three days to get to the ranch and when we got there my Dad was there. He Dad been working on a truck or something and was all greasy but we all jumped on him. There was a lot of yelling, hugging and hopping around. That ten-dollar Ford served us well.

## Growing up in the Thirties

### **DIGGERS** **1935**

One day my Dad and Uncle Henry were talking about the whiskey they had hidden out in the pasture, but they couldn't remember how many steps and which way it was from the barn. I was questioned at length but couldn't help them. They figured out about where it ought to be and started digging, all the time telling each other how good the five year old whiskey was going to be when they found it. They dug a lot of holes but never found the whiskey. Some day some archaeologist will find that lumpy spot on the prairie and start a dig of his own. I hope they find the whiskey. It will be a fine reward for their efforts.

### **THE SOAP MAKER**

I think my Mom had some kind of a thing about soap. As long as I can remember, and until I graduated from high school she made soap. She made soap even when we were traveling. Wherever we were camped she got out her big iron pot to boil the mixture and a big flat pan to form the bars, started a fire and made more soap. Some of it she sold and some we used but one thing sure, we were never out of soap. There must have been something special about it because I'm sure she got a little extra money from it even when we were traveling. She made soap for washing cloths and some for our hand and face.

### **RABBIT HUNTING** **1935**

Any time we were in Wyoming most of our fresh meat was rabbit. No jack rabbits, Cotton Tails. Cotton Tails taste about like chicken and provide about the same amount of meat. Cottontails were not found out on the prairie like jackrabbits. They lived mostly around abandoned ranch buildings and in some rocky areas.

There was an abandoned ranch house, barns and other sheds about four miles south of our house that seemed to have more cotton-



tails than any other place around. We called the place the "Rabbit Ranch". There were more than we needed for the pot at any one time so we shot only what we needed. In order to assure ourselves of a good supply of delicious rabbit meat we took a bag of fresh hay or some ears of corn that we left after we had our meat supply. We also helped the rabbits by using some of the lumber from the buildings to make hiding places so the cottontails could get away from the coyotes. I suppose we were raising our meat supply.

Whenever we were on our way home and came by an abandoned building we stopped and got a few Cotton Tails. That way we didn't take too many from the "Rabbit Ranch."

### **JACK RABBIT HUNTING THE GREAT WHITE HUNTERS, WHITE LIGHT, WHITE SNOW**

The fox farms north of Lusk paid between two and five cents for jackrabbits in the fall and wintertime. We paid twenty cents for 22 shorts (50 rounds) and gas for the car was fifteen cents a gallon at the refinery outside of Lusk. We figured we would use about two gallons of gas going to Lusk and back and another gallon to hunt.

In the late fall the jackrabbits all gang up in bunches. All we had to do is drive around the prairie at night till we ran into a bunch. The lights from the car on all that white snow confused them and they would just set up and stare into the lights. Generally we would shoot over the front fender so we could see our sights. A miss and the profit on the last rabbit was gone. The break-even point was twenty rabbits, and if our shooting was one hundred percent we could make ninety cents on a box of shells. A little more if someone was going into town anyway (mostly everyone went to town on Saturday) and would bring us back a box of shells. Once in a while the little store at Node had some at the same price we could get them in Lusk.

Some times we could maneuver around a little and get two rabbits lined up and we could get them both at once. You could double the profits on those shots or make up for misses. Getting two at a time wasn't as hard as you might think. When you had a bunch in the headlights they would sit up on their hind legs like a statue. It didn't take long to learn that a headshot was not the thing. The skull could deflect the bullet, and you missed the second one. The chest cavity was the way to go.

## Growing up in the Thirties

Any rancher would feed you and give you place to sleep if they could get you to hunt rabbits on their ranches. Sometimes we hunted on another ranch for fun if the rancher furnished the ammunition and he kept the rabbits we got. (They were used for chicken feed) There was no problem keeping what we got on any given night. They were frozen as hard as rocks before we got them back to the ranch. The next trick was to get someone that was going into town to go a little farther and deliver them to the fox farm. My uncles didn't like hauling about fifty frozen rabbits into town. We didn't make much but by saving I was able to buy the ultimate for a thirteen-year-old cowboy, a pair of "Justin" boots. The other thing that I would have just about died for was a Stetson hat. I never got one. Looking back it seems to me that someone else was feeding the can I was using for a bank. One of these days I might buy a Stetson and go back to the ranch wear it there.

### RABBIT drives

After real cold weather set in the local ranchers held rabbit drives all around the country. All the people from Lusk who wanted to join in were welcome. The rules of the drive were that only shotguns with buckshot could be used and no shooting toward the center after the circle had closed. Only experienced men were allowed to shoot rabbits that broke through the line and started away. About one in ten used shotguns. All the rest had to use clubs. Most of the participants preferred clubs because they didn't have to buy shells.

The word was spread letting everyone know when the first drive was to take place and where they were to meet, usually at some ranch. Everyone hung around and talked about such things as the weather and the corn or hay crops till about noon. People came from as far away as thirty miles and most of the time there was over a hundred people there. The drive started from the ranch yard or from a county road.

Everyone formed a line with each person about one hundred yards apart making the line two to three miles long. The people on the end of the line rode out to their positions on trucks, and at a signal everyone started forward making nose beating on a can or yelling. The ends of the line went a little faster than the center and gradually swung inward so the line would become a huge circle with the rabbits trapped inside. The people with shotguns started shooting as soon as the rab-

bits began to bunch up. They were able to get as many as three or four at once.

When the circle formed and started to close and the people were too close to continue shooting a few kids ran to the center and killed the rabbits with clubs. As the circle tightened more and more people went to the center and clubbed rabbits. When the circle was tight enough that the people were standing shoulder to shoulder and some of the rabbits began to escape the shotgun shooters turned around and shot as the rabbits tried to run away. Thousands of rabbits were eliminated in a successful drive.

All the drives after the first one started early in the morning and if you got there a little late you just went to one end of the line and joined in. Most of the time they could get in two drives a day, sometimes three if not enough people showed up for a big drive. Sometimes you could get hit with a club when there were lots of rabbits and some of the kids got a little excited and weren't careful what they were hitting. I don't remember any one getting any broken bones though. A rabbit drive was something that everyone looked forward to, not only to get rid of the overpopulation of rabbits that were destroying the prairie but for the social thing.

The coyotes and crows all got fat after a few rabbit drives. The dead rabbits froze and provided food for them for a couple of months. During that time we had no problem with the coyotes bothering sheep or the chickens.

The rabbit drives always put an end to our hunting for the fox farms because they always were there for the drives and left with trucks full of frozen rabbits.

I don't remember anyone out on the prairie protesting or seeing any signs that said "Save the rabbits" or "Adopt a rabbit". Considering the many ranchers out there with shotguns it would have been a foolhardy to do.

Sometimes in the summer they had rattlesnake drives if an area got overpopulated with snakes. The snake drives were generally not as big as the rabbit drives but people came from back east to catch the snakes alive and took them with them, and to me that seemed like a crazy thing to do. My Dad said they milked them for their poison. That took some explaining because I had seen a lot of snakes but not one of them had tits. I guess that's what they did because the one thing I was sure of in those days was whatever my Dad was right.

## Growing up in the Thirties



### WINTER SWIM

When I was almost fourteen years old one of my jobs on the ranch was ride out to the East pasture to a windmill and break and remove the ice from the tank so the horses could get water. I dressed as warm as I could for the trip.

Starting from the inside out I had on long underwear, heavy socks, pants, a heavy wool shirt, jacket, Overcoat, boots, overshoes, a scarf, a pair of angora chaps, gloves, mittens and a hat. I rode my horse bareback to take advantage of body heat from the horse.

All the ice had to be piled on one side so the horses could get to the tank. The tank froze about four inches of ice every night so we kept an ax and a pitchfork in a shed that was just a windbreak for the horses, and the shed had three sides, the fourth side was open.

After about three weeks there was a lot of ice piled up on one side of the tank. I stood on the side with no ice to swing the ax but had to stand on the ice to throw the ice chunks out of the tank with the pitchfork. I slipped and went head first into the tank. If you think I fell in that tank fast you should have seen me get out.

I knew there was no way I was going to get out of this one if I didn't get on my horse real quick and get to the house. With all my clothes soaked I was quite heavy but made it up on the horse by climbing the corral fence. I started for the house as fast as the horse would go, and when I got to the ranch yard I intended to go directly to the house, but the horse wanted to go to the barn.

I knew if that horse found a barn door open I was going to get my head knocked off because the doors weren't high enough for the horse and me to get through, and I couldn't bend down. I was in trouble because my clothes were frozen stiff and I couldn't even move my arms to rein the horse, I was lucky, for the barn doors were closed.

I was doing a lot of yelling and my Uncle Charley came out of the barn to see what was going on. I couldn't get off the horse because all my outer clothes were frozen solid, and I was attached to the horse

with ice. Uncle Charley told me to shut up and led the horse to the house and by that time everyone was out to see what was going on. They tried to take the horse and me right into the house, but I couldn't bend so they settled for next to the porch. Everyone started pouring warm water from the kitchen stove tanks on me where I was attached to the horse. The horse didn't take kindly to having warm water poured on him and Uncle Henry had to ear him down. When all the hot water was gone they were able to pull me off the horse. They took me inside and propped me up in a kitchen chair by the stove. The only place I felt cold was around my eyes. I was sure most of me must be frozen, and I was going to lose some important body parts.

My brother Bud thought the whole thing was very funny and my Dad had his hand over his face a lot. My sister wanted to chip the ice off me with an ice pick, and I could see that I was going to have a lot of little holes in me if they let that happen. I didn't suffer any damage probably because I had on many layers of clothes. I was called "Ice Man Dick" for a while, but like the ice, it didn't last.

## BLIZZARDS

Eddie Wiles from the Klopfer ranch (next door, about three miles) and I went to the Rawhides to gather firewood and some posts for the fences for both ranches. The weather was mild and there was very little snow on the ground. We used the team of horses to drag the wood to camp before we cut it up and had a little corral to keep them in at night. When we let them loose in the daytime to graze we hobbled them so they wouldn't wonder far.

On the third day the weather suddenly turned cold and a wind came up. Eddie, an old hand at Wyoming weather said it was too late to try to get off the mountain and the only thing to do was hole up till the storm was over. We dragged as much firewood as possible into an old mine opening. We took all our food with us and tied the horses in the mine entrance.

The storm lasted that night and all the next day. We could look out of the mine tunnel and all you could see was white. In fog you can at least see your hand at arms length. In a real blizzard you can't see that far so you can be within three feet of a house and you wouldn't see it. We heard stories of people freezing to death between the barn and the house.

Once the storm was over the weather turned nice again (about 15 below zero) so we started home. Although there wasn't much snow

## Growing up in the Thirties

the drifts were deep where we had to go. We dug snowdrifts for two days to get out to the highway to Lusk. When we got back to the ranch they were just getting a search party together to come look for us (or our bodies)

### CARNIVAL 1935

In the spring of 1935 we left my grandmothers ranch and traveled with a carnival. My older brother Frank Jr. stayed with our grandmother and uncles. My Dad and Mom ran a booth that had a big wheel that you supposedly could win a big prize (or cash if we were some where the law looked the other way while the carnival was in town). Most of the time the carnies had a deal with the local law. They would give back any loses if the sucker squawked to the law, that way the local cop looked like a hero when he was actually on the take. Any chance of winning at a carnival was and still is zero. The name of the carnival was "Paul Towels Shows". The only town I remember any thing about is Prescott, Arizona. My sister Blanche and I got up real early every day and walked all around the town. Prescott was different from all the other towns we had been in and Blanche and I decided we would live there when we grew up.

Blanche and I had a barrel of fun while we traveled with the carnival. We didn't have to go to school although there were classes held for a couple of hours about four days a week for the carnie kids. The classes were more of a training class in cheating than the three R's. The Carnies really believe that taking the local suckers was perfectly O K. I always had a gut feeling that what we were learning was wrong. We learned carnie talk (kind of like pig Latin) and thought we were awfully smart when we could talk in front of the local towns people, and they couldn't understand us.

The Carnival had a thrill act to attract the people in the towns. The act that was with us was a "HIGH DIVE ACT". A couple climbed to the top of a tower about fifty feet above the ground. There was a little platform at the top they dived from. The lady went off and landed feet first in a tank of water about twelve feet in diameter and seven feet deep. The tank was very small and if there was a wind they couldn't dive. The man stood on the platform with his back to the crowd and backed up until he was standing on his toes. He poured gasoline on his

back, lit it with a torch and went off. He did a full turn in the air and landed feet first in the tank.

There was talk around the lot about trouble between the couple because of his drinking and some said the man was drinking too much to be doing the act. One day I was watching them from afar, and I saw him pour the gasoline on himself and light it. He slipped and went straight down feet first and on fire. He landed between the tank and the ladder and his wife put a blanket over him to put out the fire. Just as I got there someone removed the blanket. He was just half as tall as he used to be. His legs had been driven up into his body. I was very sorry I saw that and had bad dreams the rest of the summer.

My Father had some kind of a deal with the owner of the show. He was buying the booth he ran at so much a week. By late summer the carnival was getting ready to close for the winter and the owner raised the price of the weekly spot and foreclosed when Dad couldn't pay. It was just another carnival scam. I was surprised that Dad didn't jump on the whole bunch, but I guess he realized the odds were too great. We headed back to the ranch with nothing but the car.

## HORSE BUYING TRIP

Uncle Henry, and my Dad made plans to go to an Indian reservation to buy horses, and I was going along to help. One of the things about doing your work on horse back is a fourteen year old can do as much as an adult if he has a good horse. Most of the time all you have to do is let the horse know what you want, then just stay on the horse. The plan was for us to be away from the ranch for about a week. The round trip was about one hundred and sixty miles and that would take almost three days each way.

I don't know what reservation it was, but it was in South Dakota near the Nebraska state line. The horse I was riding had an easy gate, and I could take naps even when the horses were trotting.

We headed northeast from the ranch and most of the time we went cross-country. Almost all the fences we came to had a gate we could go through without going too far out our way, if there wasn't a gate my uncle carried the tools he needed to take the wires down and put them back after we went through.

We came to the Niobrara River before noon on the first day. The widest part of the river was about three feet and it was just a few inches deep except where there was a beaver pond. There were ducks around the ponds, and we made plans to get a few on the way back.

## Growing up in the Thirties

Getting the ducks was going to be my job because Dad had a pistol and Henry had a 30-30 Winchester. I had my old 22 rifle, not as good as a shotgun, but at least it wouldn't blow the ducks apart.

At noon we planned to stop at ranches, get feed and water for our horses and have something to eat with the people who lived there. At the first place we stopped there were two kids about my age, but they just nodded when we were introduced and disappeared. They didn't even show up for supper. I think they were not quite right because everyone else in the country seemed eager to visit with anyone that came along.

We stayed at two ranches at night on the way. We fed the horses hay and some oats then rubbed them down with a brush and gunnysack material. We ate supper and breakfast at those ranches. At the second place we stayed they were having trouble with the well. That evening we sat on their front porch and talked till late, probably till about eight o'clock. The talk was mostly about the hard times and the price they were getting for their beef.

I remember the rancher told one story that I remember that. One of his neighbors was working on his windmill and even though he had the brake on a gust of wind turned it. His left hand was caught in the gears and as it pulled his hand into the gears he passed out. When he came to he was hanging over the side of the little platform by his hand. He had dropped the wrench he was using and the only thing he had was a pair of pliers and his pocketknife in his pants pocket. He tried but couldn't turn the wheel backwards to get his hand loose. He couldn't reach the bolts that held the gears together so he did the only thing he could, as it was unlikely anyone would come along to help him. He put part of his shirt around his arm as close to his wrist as he could and with the pliers tied bailing wire he got off the windmill as a tourniquet, then cut his hand off at the wrist with the pocketknife. He climbed down and drove his truck about twenty miles to town to see the Doctor. He said the only pain was when his hand went into the gears.

We stayed long enough the next morning to help pull the pipe out of the well so we didn't get on our way till after dinner. We didn't make it to the reservation that day as planned. That night we stayed out in the open and had jerky for supper and breakfast.

When we got to the place the Indians were living they were breaking horses, and I am convinced they were a lot smarter than we were when it comes to horses. They used a rope bridle without a bit and rode bareback. The difference was they had three ropes on the



horse and held it in the middle of a pond about four feet deep. The rider got on by riding up on another horse then changed over. They had an easy ride and the horse was not hurt in any way. After about four rides the horse never bucked again. I never saw one Indian thrown. We didn't buy any horses so all we got was a long ride and some education. We stayed with the Indians two days then started for home.

On the way we stopped at the ranch where the well was broken, but there wasn't anyone home so we went in and fixed our supper. I washed the dishes while Dad and Henry took care of the horses. We slept in the barn on fresh hay. Some time during the night the people came home. The next morning they told us they had gone to town to get parts for the well. Dad and Henry helped put the pump together and got the pipe back in the well. We stayed for dinner and started for home.

We stayed at another ranch the second night. It was a big ranch, and we stayed in the bunkhouse with three cowboys that had been on the cattle drive the year before so we knew them. Two of the cowboys had a fiddle and banjo and they played for us. We had good music until it was time to go to bed.

When we got close to the Niobrara river I raced ahead to get some ducks, but when I got there not one duck was at the ponds. We made it home after dark and everyone wanted to know why we were gone so long.

## **HIRED HAND**

(No pay)  
Shepherd

I played a dumb joke on Uncle Henry that he didn't think was funny so I went to stay on a sheep ranch next door. A family by the name of Klopfers owned the ranch. (Two women and their brother, Bertha, Ellen and Fred.) They came from Switzerland, and they had three sections of land so they kept about two to three hundred sheep. Some one had to be with the sheep every day so I was trained as a shepherd. They had another young man working on the ranch, and his name was Eddy Wiles. Eddie stayed with me for about half a day and that was then end of my training. I thought Eddie must have been rich because he owned an Essex sedan.

I liked it on the Klopfer ranch. We ate real well, and I had a great feather tick to sleep in. Unless it was real cold or storming every

## Growing up in the Thirties

one but one went to Lusk every Saturday. If they had the money from eggs they brought in they gave me a dime, and I went to the picture show.

Lambing season began shortly after I went to stay on the Klopfer ranch. Sheep are the only animal on earth that have to have men (or women) take care of them. If someone wasn't around to help them give birth about half the lambs and many of the ewes would die. After a few days helping ewes have their lambs you know all about breech births, umbilical cords around necks, and you get to know which ewes have a small pelvic or is having trouble with a large lamb. Lambing season is truly an educational time. It is also exhausting, as you have to work around the clock. If I had my way all doctors that are going to deliver babies would be required to spend one lambing season on a sheep ranch.

Some ewes won't have anything to do with their lambs and they have to be cleaned up and fed just like a human baby. You smell pretty strong for the next couple of weeks after lambing is over no matter how many baths you take. It was best to sleep outside for a while and stay out of town. You would think that herding sheep would be easy, but it's not.

Sheep are dumb, dumb, and dumb. If there is any way for sheep to get into trouble, they will. If there is a cliff they will fall off, a hole and they will fall in. Sheep won't drink from running water so you have to make a lot of little dams so they will have still water if you are watering them from a stream. Any deep water and they will fall in and drown. Their wool will soak up too much water for them to stay afloat. They don't seem to be able to learn that they should keep their nose out of cactus and then they can't eat until you remove the spines. A fence is a challenge even if they get all cut up getting to the other side. Sheep have no defense against any kind of predator and there were lots of coyotes on the prairie. If a coyote tries to cut out a lamb the sheep makes it easy for him. They run at the coyote to try to butt it leaving their lamb behind and the coyote has another meal. In real cold weather they will bunch up and then keep pushing to the center until the start piling up. The sheep on the bottom will suffocate. It goes on and on and you spend most of your time keeping yourself and your dog between the sheep and any kind of danger. I didn't have a dog so I spent a lot of time running. The Bible says we are all like sheep and have gone astray. The writer knew sheep.

At first one of the things I couldn't understand about shepherding was why we counted them every morning when we let them out

and then again at night when we put them in. I found out the hard way how important the count is one morning when we came up one short. I did the count the night before so unless we found one more in the shed that was sick or dead I was the responsible person. We didn't find one in the shed, but I found wool out on the prairie later in the day. No one said any thing to me, but I knew what it meant to lose a healthy sheep. About the worse thing a shepherd can do is allow one of his charges to be hurt or killed and that's what I did.

Once we were short two lambs in the morning, and we knew we had a thief working because Fred did the count the night before and there was no way he would be off two lambs. Our plan to catch the thief was simple. Each end of the sheep shed had a hay loft just inside the door and Eddie and I would fix one door so it could not be opened and sleep in other end with our rifles. Eddie had a 30-30, and I had my old 22. Everything went fine for several nights until my older brother Frank (Bud) heard what was going on and sneaked into the shed in the middle of the night and stole Eddie's rifle. Eddie didn't say a word about the missing rifle. Bud asked to borrow it and Eddie made all kinds of feeble excuses about why he couldn't loan the rifle to Frank. After breakfast Frank got the rifle and handed it to Eddie with the comment, "You guys are some guards, some one could take half the sheep and you guys wouldn't wake up".

About four nights later there was a ruckus in the shed and it was obvious that some one or something had disturbed the sheep. Eddie and I went outside and someone ran right past us. It was so dark out that all we could see was like shadows. We both started shooting in the direction that the thief went but apparently didn't hit anyone. I was very glad when we didn't find a body out on the prairie the next morning. The thief had removed two boards from the side on the shed to get in and took two lambs.

Fred Klopfer had to go into Lusk several days later to see the Doctor about something and he asked Fred how his neighbor to the east was getting along. Fred asked what was wrong with him and the Doc said his son had accidentally shot him in the leg when he was cleaning his Winchester. For some reason we did not miss any more sheep.

About once a month some relatives of the Klopfers named Germann came to visit and have supper. They had a son named Pete who was about three or four years older than I was. He was the best fiddle player I had ever heard. He played for us, and I was always disappointed when it got late, and they had to go home.

## Growing up in the Thirties

The Klopfers were truly the salt of the earth and they meant a great deal to me.

### BIG GAME HUNTERS

The Klopfers had hunters come to the ranch from back east to hunt antelope. The hunters paid so much per day for their board and room and someone from the ranch, in this case me, went with them as a guide. I think most of the time the guides shot the antelope for them. You could hardly miss; there were antelope all over the prairie. In the wintertime we shot them with a 22 rifle for fresh meat when they came to eat from the haystacks. One man came and I was assigned to get the horses ready and go with him. He insisted that he didn't need me so I made him promise that he wouldn't cross a fence or go through a gate.

The country is hilly and everything disappears when you go over the first rise. Being out on the prairie is almost like being at sea when there are big swells. When on top you see for miles, the rest of the time, nothing. Your best bet if you are in a strange area is "Stick to the high ground". In about two hours the horse came home without a rider so I had to go get him. It took the rest of the day to find him because he had gone through a gate. The next day I was told to go with him and stay with him no matter what.

For a couple of days we rode around and saw lots of game but always too far away to shoot at. When the hunter began to get discouraged I took him where he could get his antelope. We rode out to where we could leave the horses and walked and then crawled up a little hill so he would have a good shot into the valley. The hunter had a brand new 300 Savage rifle and when we got in position to shoot I said to pick out a nice buck and shoot. He jumped to his feet and pumped all his ammunition out without pulling the trigger. We went back to the house and I had more money in my pocket than I had ever had before. I promised not to mention what had happened. I went out with him the next day and got an antelope with nice horns for him. I probably have a trophy hanging on some office wall in Chicago.

The next hunter came and we were castrating and ear marking the sheep. Eddie took him hunting a couple days. As usual for a few days he took the hunter where they would only see the antelope from a distance. (The Klopfers got paid by the day).

For supper we had "Rocky Mountain Oysters" The hunter thought they were real good and insisted on knowing what they were. We kept telling him, "Rocky Mountain Oysters" but then Eddie told

him in a rather crude way what they were. He was out the door in about two jumps with his hand over his mouth. Earlier in the day he stood out by the fence for about a half hour and watched us put them in a bucket. I suppose if I was a city boy and watched some sheepherder cut a little slice in the skin of a sheep's testicles and pull them out with his teeth I might prefer something else for supper. The thing is "Don't ask questions at the supper table".

## STUCK

Eddie's Essex had a flat tire and it was very cold out. I took the tire off and pumped up the tube. I couldn't find the leak so I put the tube in the water tank used to water the horses. I found the leak and my hands were wet and cold. I ran to the back porch of the house and without thinking grabbed the brass doorknob. My hand was instantly attached to the knob with ice. After some yelling Bertha Klopfer came out to see what was going on. Everyone came to see and there was a big debate about how I was going to get loose. Fred Klopfer suggested that things would thaw out in the spring, and I would be free. They finally decided to wrap the knob and my hand with a towel then pour warm water on it. (Warm water on an ice-cold hand is rather painful). My advice is to avoid getting your hand frozen to a doorknob. I already knew better than put my tongue on ice skate blades.

## LOVE

Eddie and I went to the Rawhide Mountains to get fence posts and took a team of horses and a rubber-tired wagon we borrowed from my Uncle Charley. We had to go through about four ranch yards to get where we were going. At the last place there were some new people and we stopped to get acquainted. There was a young girl and very pretty. She had a blouse that was pretty thin and nothing underneath. Eddie fell in love in an instant and it took some urging to get him to leave. After we got camp set up Eddie had to take one of the horses and ride back because we forgot something or other. I stayed and cut posts and Eddie went back and forth for one reason or another till I had a full load of posts. When we got back to the ranch Eddie made a big mistake. He told my older brother, Frank Jr. about the girl. The next thing we knew Frank was working for the girl's Father and taking her to every barn dance in the country.

## Growing up in the Thirties

### **POST PAY**

Whenever we had a day or so with nothing else that had to be done we worked on a fence. We put a fence across the ranch from north to south using the posts and wire from a fence that we removed that ran from east to west. When the fence was finished a government inspector came out and inspected it. The program was some kind of land management and they paid fifty cents a post. Fences were put up all over the country that no one needed. I will bet that program is still in operation somewhere in the good old USA.

Putting up a fence could be a dangerous job if you got careless when the wire was stretched. We used a wire stretcher that was like block and tackle. If you pulled too much and the wire broke you could find yourself wrapped up in barbed wire and blood leaking out in many places. It was also difficult and painful to get the wire off.

A fence was very important to the ranchers in that part of the country. It wasn't just a fence; it was a statement that told everyone something about the owner. A fence with nice straight post and tight wires was one thing. If any old posts were used and the wire sagged everyone figured the owner had no pride and it was doubtful if he could be trusted.

### **CALIFORNIA HERE WE COME**

My folks decided that California was the place to be and plans were made. My older brother Frank was to stay on the ranch with my grandma and uncles in Wyoming and I stayed on with the Klopfers. When they got settled in California Frank Jr. and I were to go there. Dad, Mom, Blanche Roy and Don left in a 28 Chevy.

### **THE TRAIN RIDE 1937**

I worked on the sheep ranch all that winter and by the time spring came I had decided that I would rather starve to death in California were it was warm rather than freeze to death in Wyoming with a full stomach.

My Dad came to get us, and I was more than ready to go but Frank Jr. decided he wanted to stay right where he was. Dad and I started to California on the train, freight train that is. Actually when we started out we had a private car, as we were the only ones on it. The big problem we had was trying to keep away from the railroad bulls (railroad police). They could get pretty mean and there were always at least two of them.

There was a conflict between the local cops and the railroad bulls. The cops wanted you out of town on the next train and of course the bulls didn't want you on the trains. It seemed like both of them wanted to beat you up. I never was hit by either one but saw men get knocked off train by the bulls with a big club.

Generally the hobos were left alone by the local cops if they didn't cause trouble. The cops almost never went to the hobo jungles (camp) because they were greatly outnumbered. About the only time the hobos were arrested was when some local outfit needed some cheap labor.

We were tossed off a train in a little town (one block long) in New Mexico, and I went to a house and asked a lady if I could do some work for something to eat. She put me to work putting wallpaper up. That lady must have had a thing about wallpaper. There must have been thirty or more layers on the walls and ceiling. The light switches were in a hole in the paper and the ceiling light was all but covered. There were great blisters in the paper on the ceiling and it looked to me like the whole ceiling was going to fall on me if I put another layer on it. The best thing I can say about that job was that the lady wasn't at all picky, and I left with a full stomach and about all the food I could carry.

There was a pretty nice hobo jungle in Flagstaff, Arizona. There was a little stream running right through it and there was lots of firewood close. I got an introduction to the problems with dope in that camp. There was a man that was trying to get someone to go to the drug store to get him a bottle of a certain kind of cough medicine. No one would go, and my Dad told me to keep back and just watch.

After a while the man was begging someone to get him the medicine. He was crying and rolling on the ground. Next he was throwing up and rolling in it. Every once in a while someone threw a bucket of water on him. I didn't sleep much that night and the lesson stuck. I've never had any desire to try any kind of dope. I think all kids

## Growing up in the Thirties

should spend a little time where people are going through withdrawals cold turkey.

We had trouble getting on a train out of Ashfork. The bulls would ride the train out of town. The train would stop and the Bulls would throw every one off then send the train on its way. The hobos figured out a kind of relay to fool the bulls. A bunch would hide on the south side of the tracks but let themselves be seen, and another bunch would hide on the north side. The third bunch got on the front few cars of the train in the yards. The Bulls didn't make much effort to throw them off because they would get them when the train stopped out of town.

When the train stopped the bulls went to work running every one off the train. The hobos all got off on the north side. When everyone was off the hobos on the south side of the tracks all headed for the back few car of the train. While the bulls were trying to prevent them from getting aboard the hobos on the north side of the tracks got aboard on the front part of the train and away they went. Everyone rotated and did it again with the next train. After about three times they switched sides to keep the bulls confused. The trains were about a hundred cars long and the bulls got lots of exercise running from one end to the other. There were some pretty clever men on the road.

We were riding on a tanker car when the train pulled into Riverside, California and they stopped the train on a long bridge. They had us all trapped and the Police rounded us all up and took us to jail. My Dad told me to not tell them I was with him, and if he didn't get out to go to McFarland where the rest of the family was. He said he would be along later. The cops talked to me, and I gave them my sad story about how I was trying to get home so I could go to school. They figured out who I belonged to and put me with my Dad, fed us and took up a little collection and drove us to the north side of San Bernardino where we could get on a slow moving freight going up Cajon Pass. There are lots of good cops around.

The ride down Tehachapi pass was one to remember. There are several tunnels, and we were in the first one rather suddenly. In those days they were using steam engines and they put out a lot of smoke. The only thing we could do is hold our breath as long as possible and look out for the next tunnel. We arrived in the valley covered with soot.

We got off that train in Bakersfield and found a whole lot of people camping in a riverbed (dry) under a highway and railroad bridge. There were hundreds of them in every kind of old car or truck



you could think of. Kids were running all over the place. The people there were mostly from Oklahoma.

Everyone in that camp was friendly and seemed interested in helping us in any way they could. A man and his wife invited us to eat with them and we ate about everything they had. Dad gave them the money the cops in Riverside gave us and we stayed with them for several days. They had two children and one on the way.

Everyone was looking for work in the fields but only a few got jobs. The generous California "ranchers" cut the wages to a bare minimum because there were so many people looking for work they had to take whatever they could get. Most of the cotton was not ready to pick so that made things tougher. The ones that did get a little work in the cotton fields shared with the rest of the people.

I didn't know it at the time but all the California snobs and the ones that didn't know any better called them all "Okies" even though they came from about ten states. They didn't mean "Okie" as a compliment and you could hear the contempt they felt in their voices. As far as I'm concerned those "Okies" were a cut above the California "Ranchers". I never had one of them invite me in for something to eat. (I have a hard time calling a place that grows cotton or grapes a "Ranch"). Some of the "Okies" are now millionaire farmers and they are the ones that provide a decent place for the migrant workers to live.

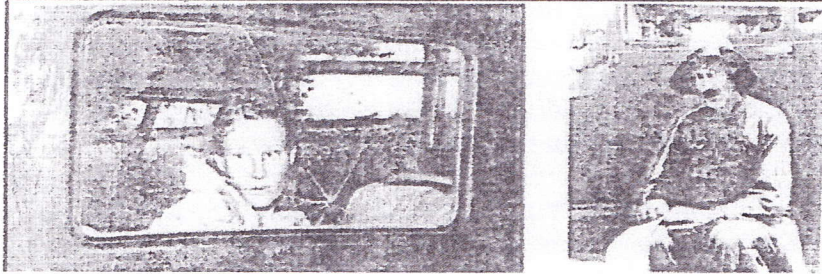
My Dad managed to get a couple of days work someplace other than the cotton fields. I have no idea what he did, but I think it was important for him to arrive at McFarland and greet the family with a little money jingling in his pocket. We got on freight in Bakersfield, but it didn't stop in McFarland. We got off in Delano and walked back. (It was about 8 miles). The reunion was great. The neighbors must have thought we had all gone crazy. To say the least the reunion was enthusiastic.

## OKIES 1937

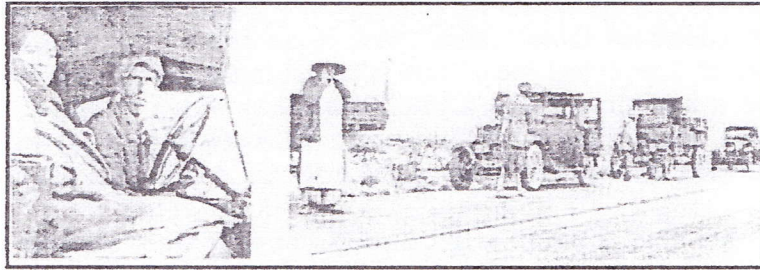
In his book, *The Grapes of Wrath* John Steinbeck tells of an incident where an old man was starving to death and a woman who had a very young nursing baby kept the old man alive with her milk. I

## Growing up in the Thirties

know that is hard to believe, but I believe it, for those were really tough times for the "Okies".



The little girl in the picture was about my age. I can't help but wonder where she might be now. I can relate to the fellow patching the tire, for we had patches on top of patches. All our tires had boots in them made out of even older tires.



These people stuck together in adversity. Each one was willing to help another in anyway they could. These cars were in better shape than our Ford. At least they had roofs.

The Okies got spread out, and it was better for all. There wasn't so much competition and almost everyone got at least some work in the cotton fields. Everyone made just about enough to get up the road to the next crop. If you were a migrant worker the best place to start was south of Bakersfield and work your way north. When you run out of crops to work you had it real tough till next season. The government wasn't handing out food stamps to everyone with a low income. McFarland was a nice little town in the San Joaquin valley and when we got there my mother had rented a little place off an alley, and we were very lucky to get that. The house had one bedroom and there were six of us (There was a girl about 20 living with us. I don't know

why). Any way I don't remember any problem. We were a close family (at least in that house.) We were in a palace compared with what most of the Okies had to live in. There just wasn't any place to rent in town. The cotton was ready for harvest, and we all worked. If there were any laws about child labor it didn't count in the cotton fields or in the fruit. Whole families were in the fields and the little ones took care of the babies. All those "Okie" families seemed to have a baby and another on the way. It is true that some babies were born in cotton fields.

## A CALIFORNIA TOWN



The little house behind the car in the drive way is where we lived in McFarland, and I went to school in McFarland. I promoted myself when I started there because I had been put back a year in Texas and had missed about a year. I told them I came from some town in Texas I had never been in. If they sent for my records I never heard any-

heard anything about it. Anyway I was gone before the term was over. At first I picked cotton before and after school, until my Dad got a job selling appliances.



To the left is a picture of the main street taken in the 90's

The only classes I remember were the English and Wood shop, in shop everyone had a project. The favorite seemed to be a checkerboard or book ends.

The catch was you had to pay for the material. There was no way I was going to spend money on

## Growing up in the Thirties

a dumb woodworking project that I didn't want. I just told the teacher that I didn't have the money. I was talking to him about what I could do to get a grade, and he noticed my watch. He looked at it and said he had one just like it, and if I could make it run he would give me an "A" in the class. I got an "A" in wood shop for that quarter.

Most of the kids that went to the school were kids from the local "Ranches" and all seemed to have whatever they wanted. One thing they didn't seem to want and that was having anything to do with me. I had one friend in that school and that was the shop teacher, and I can't remember his name. One kid who thought he was pretty tough challenged me to a fight. I told him I didn't want to fight, hung my head in submission and let him have it right on the nose. The fight was over and no one bothered me after that.

One day on the way home from a lady stopped me and gave me a sweatshirt. She said she had been noticing me on the way home from school and thought I must be cold without even a jacket. I wasn't cold and the last thing I wanted was for someone to feel sorry for me. The woman insisted that I take the sweatshirt. I took it and thanked her but never wore it. I changed the way I came home from school after that.

One of the things I learned from those times was that most help for poor people came from other poor people. There were exceptions of course, like the lady that wanted to be helpful and gave me the sweatshirt (Perhaps she was poor too). For the most part it was the poor helping the poor. Some rich gave a lot, but they were (and still are) the exception.

I was assigned a poem to learn for school, "The Village Smithy". I was really having a hard time with it so I asked Dad to help me. I made a discovery I never knew before. He knew that poem by heart and many more. You could give him the first line of almost any popular poem and he would know the rest of it. One line from any part of the bible and he would go on from there till you said "Stop" All that came from his childhood because I never knew him to read anything other than the newspaper. If I had that talent I would have been rich before I was twenty.

## **A STEP UP**

### **1937**

Dad got a job in a store in Delano selling appliances and that temporarily ended any work in the fruit. Delano was only about eight miles up the road so we didn't move. Dad must have done pretty good because we all got new clothes, and he bought a model B ford. We were living pretty high off the hog. I guess Dad ran out of customers because we moved to Fresno were he got a better job. He worked in sales for a while and as always got to know some Irish cops. Four or five of them came to our house and played poker and drank a little "Irish Whiskey" on Friday nights. One or two of them always stayed the night on the back porch. I never heard any of his Irish friends or him to tell a dirty Joke or use bad language.

We lived in a part of Fresno called "German Town" and the people there were very friendly and treated us like we had been there always. There was a playground a block and a half from where we lived and one day my little brother Donald came home all covered with grease. We asked what happened, and he said a truck ran over him. He didn't have a scratch or a bruise on him, and he wouldn't change his story no matter what he was threatened with. Later that day the playground teacher asked me if Don was all right. She said a huge truck ran over him, but he just got up and went on his way. I started the ninth grade in Fresno.

## **DISASTER**

It was the first of August 1937 and things were going real good for us. I had a part time job fixing fruit boxes and bought a bicycle on time to go to work on. My Father had a good paying job with a company that he had worked for in Wyoming. The company was Western Pipe and Steel. He had worked there about two months and on the third of August two of his policemen friends came to the house and told Mom and me that there had been an accident and Dad was in the hospital. The policemen took us to the hospital.

When we talked to the doctors they said Dad was unconscious and they didn't know if he would live or not. We stayed at the hospital a long time and there was no change so the doctors said we should go

## Growing up in the Thirties

home and they would call if there was any change. He died two hours later. He was forty-seven years old.

The policeman that took us home and stayed with us till the news came and they told us that Dad had been murdered. The job he was hired to do was to investigate the men that he was working with. The men were stealing supplies from the company, and they got wise to him and fixed the scaffold so he would fall inside a big tank they were building. The damage to his head did not seem to be what he would have gotten from a ten-foot fall and they took a long time getting him out of the tank. The cops said they would get evidence on them and arrest them. Nothing happened and the friends said the DA wouldn't do any thing because they did not have enough proof. Western Pipe and Steel fired the four men, and they all met with fatal accidents within a year. A train hit one, another accidentally drove into a canal, the third fell into a saw in a sawmill, and the fourth was accidentally shot in the head while deer hunting in the Sierras. The Irish clans stick together.

Frank Jr. (Bud) came to Fresno the day after my Dad died. He had decided to come home a few days earlier and had taken the bus from Wyoming, and we were unable to get in touch with him. He really had a rough homecoming. When Bud was told what had happened he and I made plans of our own, but the police friends talked us out of doing anything foolish.

Dad had insurance from the job; the policy was for ten thousand dollars and paid about four hundred a month for three years. He also was a veteran so Mom got a small pension. Mom thought she had all the money in the world and decided on a trip back to the ranch.

I can't write about how I felt when one morning Dad was there and not there that afternoon, except to say I was stunned and was angry with him for leaving us. I knew it was true, but I couldn't let myself think about it, and I shed no tears. For years I had dreams that he was found someplace alive but in very poor health and not expected to live. Now I cry.

## ANOTHER TRAIN RIDE



Roy, Blanche, Don and Mom would drive the ford and Frank, and I were to take the bus. After Bud and I were left off at the bus station he suggested that we ride freight trains and save the bus fare for better things. He said I new all about how to catch freight trains so away we went. Our first ride was to Sacramento where we got on train headed for Reno. We were very lucky we didn't freeze to death on

That trip. We were on top of the train and the higher it climbed up the mountains the colder it got. We finally were able to break open a reefer and get inside. It was much warmer inside sitting on straw. For those who don't know what a reefer is, it a railroad car that is used to haul fresh fruit. There was an ice compartment on each end that was packed with ice; a layer of ice, then a layer of straw and so forth till the compartment was full. We were lucky the one we got into had the last layer of straw. It was above freezing because the fruit had a lot of heat in it when it is loaded. We got off that trail in Reno a couple of tired and dirty kids.

We rented a motel and cleaned up and washed our clothes. We ate in a cafe. The next day we got on another fruit train and that was another mistake. The only time those "Red Ball" trains stopped was to take on water or if they had a hot journal. We finally got off in Salt Lake City and were two hungry kids. We decided there is more nothing between Reno and Salt Lake City than there is any place else in the whole United States. We hung around trying to get a train out of Salt Lake, but it took us two days to figure out where to hook onto the train. We spent more of our bus fare money eating. We finally got on our way to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and when we got there we were so dirty we decided to rent a cheap motel and clean up. Our plans were to hitch hike the rest of the way, and we needed to be presentable.

We expected to get to Lusk the next day. We bought some fixings in a grocery store and made sandwiches and ate in a little park. We walked out of town and found a cabin camp (motel) where we stayed.

After cleaning up and washing our clothes we were sitting on the steps and someone let out a blood-curdling scream in the cabin

## Growing up in the Thirties

next to us. A man came running out of the cabin with two kids behind him. He saw us and said. "My wife is going to have a baby, and I have to go find a doctor would you stay with her till I get back. He flooded his car and couldn't get it started. Frank tried to give him some advice, but he wasn't paying attention. The woman let out another scream, and he decided to run to town for the doctor.

We went into the cabin and Frank said he would see if he could get the car started. After a couple of more screams there was a crowd gathering outside the cabin, but no one was doing anything to help. The baby came and it was a lot easier than a lot of sheep I helped. About all there was to do was put my hand under the baby's head, slip two of my fingers in its armpit and give a little tug. I tied the umbilical cord and washed it and the mother. Frank got their car running and started to town to get the man and doctor. The worse thing about the whole thing was the yelling children under foot. Frank came back with the doctor and the man. The doctor put something in the baby's eyes, looked at the umbilical cord and the mother and left, No charge. The man was very grateful and wanted to do something for us. What could he do? He had two little kids, a baby and wife. We ended up giving them the things we had left from our supper.

We spent the rest of the money the next day for something to eat. We weren't doing so well with hitch hiking, and we only got to Torrington that day. It was getting cold at night, and we couldn't find a good warm place to sleep so we went to the jail and gave them our sad tale. The police fed us and let us sleep in a cell. They locked us in and that worried us some, but they said it was the rules. They turned us loose the next morning, fed us and gave us a little money to eat on till we got home. I've often wondered how much of their own money a cop like that gave away during the depression. We made it the next day because Uncle Charley who had come to Torrington to sell a load of iron picked us up. Mom and the kids came in the next day. We said nothing about riding the trains instead of the bus.

## HOME ON THE PRAIRIE

There was a little house in the middle of a section of land east of the main ranch. The house had been a railroad depot that my Dad and Henry had moved from Node. There were no outbuildings and no water. We got some lumber from an abandoned ranch house and made an out house and moved in. Frank decided he would stay and work



with Uncle Henry. Mom made a rule that any one that came by a windmill on the way home would bring water. That plan didn't work like it was supposed to, and we were always going after water. We stayed that winter, and we had a tough time keeping warm. We burned cow chips most of the time with some wood we got by tearing down an abandoned ranch barn. Saturday night baths were something. The tub was right next to a big pot belled stove and once when it was very cold I backed up to the stove and got a little too close. I had two big blisters and didn't set down for about a week. We thought nothing of all of us using the same bath water. Why it was necessary to take a bath once a week no matter how cold it was or how short on water we were I never understood.

## **BACK TO THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY 1938**

Mom decided that California was the place to live, and she thought the money coming in each month would be enough to live good but for some reason my mother could start the first of the month with plenty of money and be broke by the second week, most of the time sooner.

We found enough parts on the ranch to make a trailer. With all that money we had accumulated a lot of good junk. Going south from the ranch we were on prairie roads for the first thirty miles and every thing went fine. We got on the oiled road at Jay Elm and got the speed up to about twenty miles an hour and the trailer started to go from side to side. There was no way to control the car and we finely got stopped in the ditch. On the way back to the ranch that trailer wouldn't track even on a prairie road (two ruts with high centers everywhere) We fixed the trailer and this time took it over to the oiled road and tested it. The trailer seemed fine so we loaded up and started out again. As soon as we hit the oiled road at Jay Elm it went wild again. We decided that this time it was the way it was loaded. We rearranged the load and it was much better but any speed above thirty and it went wild. We made it to Torrington and gave up on the trailer.

Mom sold all the stuff she could to a second hand store. We kept the tires from the trailer and gave the rest to a guy in a garage. Our car was in pretty good shape and made the trip with no trouble. As

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we had plenty of money when we started we lived pretty high. We stayed in cabins most of the time and fixed our meals along the road. We arrived in Fresno broke with about a week to go till the checks came in.

Mom knew some people in Fresno that ran a little store and was able to get food on credit. We drove up in the mountains and found a little cabin. We found the owner and rented the place. The owner trusted us till the first of the month.

## MILK COW

One of the first things Mom did when we got settled was buy a milk cow. The cow was a good producer, but she also had the wanderlust. We were always out looking for her and it was amazing how far she could get in a very short time. There wasn't any way we could make the fence strong enough to hold that cow until we hit upon the idea of an electric wire all the way around the place. With the copper wire from a discarded electric motor, a model T ford coil and a car battery we contained her. That cow touched the wire about three times and after that we didn't even need to hook it up and she never wandered again.

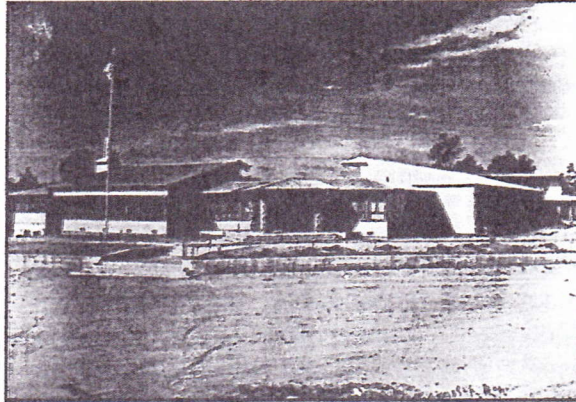
## MORE EDUCATION

The high school in the mountains was about four miles up the road so I went to see about going to school. I figured I had gone to school at least half the time during the last nine years, and I always liked to read any thing I could get my hands on so I should be able to cut it in high school.

Frank P. Schroeder, the principle of the school talked to me, and I told him I was in the tenth grade. I gave him a line about having gone to school in Texas in some town I just passed through. Mr. Schroeder said I could start the tenth grade, but he would assign my curriculum and I had to get better than just a passing grade in all subjects, other wise I would have go back to the ninth grade. I was convinced that I really put something over on him. As it turned out he was the one that put something over on me.

1990 In 1990 Frank P. Schroeder, 90 years young was living in Sacramento California. I went to see him and his wife who was also

one of my teachers. "Prof" was sharp as ever and I told him that I had come to make a confession concerning the lies I had told him when I came to Sierra High so I could skip a grade or two. Mr. Schroeder said "Wait, let me tell you a story first."



This is his story.

"My Father was living in Germany before World War 1 and he could see war coming. He did not want his boys to die in any war fighting for the ruling class so he packed up his family and came to the United States. We

settled in the San Joaquin valley. I was a teen-age boy and the first thing I had to do was learn English.

After learning enough English to get by I went to the local high school and made a deal with the principal to let me go through as fast as I could. I finished high school in less than three years and started collage. I had to work to support myself but got my degree in three years and was hired as superintendent of Sierra High School. When you walked in my office a couple of years later I thought about the breaks I had received".

I didn't have the usual problem of the pecking order at Sierra High. There wasn't a pecking order and only a couple of kids thought they were something special and no one paid much attention to them. I didn't have a single fight, and I can't remember any one else having trouble at school".

## CLIQUEs

The class I was in tended to form groups that hung out together. The groups formed were based on geography and interests, rather than likes or dislikes. Whenever anything was going on that we all went to the groups just melted together. One group that hung out together was several boys that formed a dance band. The main man in

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that group was Homer Aldred. The thing I remember about the band was Homer always had a good-looking sports jacket. I figured he had at least three jackets and anyone that had more than one dress up jacket had to have parents that were well off. Homer told me in 1992 that he didn't remember them, but thought he had two jackets and they probably came from the Salvation Army store. The bunch I hung out with was Floyd Workman, Ivan Hallock, Joe Gividen, Louis Garland and Howard Recek (Whenever he could sneak out). I think Howard's mother had the idea that we weren't a good influence on Howard.)

## MENTOR

Mr. Schroeder probably influenced my life for the good more than any other individual outside of the family. He never lectured, but was always there with words of encouragement. Any time anyone was in trouble around he would call me in and talk to me about it. When I would protest that I had nothing to do with whatever was going on he would tell me "I know, but you are one of the leaders and you should keep the kids out of trouble" He convinced me I was a leader and I acted accordingly. I didn't know it then, but he was telling some of the other kids the same thing. There wasn't much trouble in the school and he did us a lot of good. Mr. Schroeder married Miss Chenny, the English teacher in 1941. They had twin boys.  
Frank P. (Prof) Schroeder passed away Oct. 8, 1990.

## MOUNTAIN LIVING



Whenever we ran into a king snake we would catch it and bring it home and turn it loose in our yard, for Kingsnakes kill rattlesnakes. One day Don came in the house with a rattlesnake about twenty inches long. He had a good grip on it right behind the head and was in no danger as long

as he held on. Frank and I told him what a nice snake he had but be

sure and hold him tight. We had quite a time with Don as he didn't want to give up his snake and any attempt to use force most likely would have ended up with someone being bit. We sat and waited till Don got tired holding the snake. Roy was able to get the snake with his thumb and forefinger behind its head and Don let go. The mystery is how did Don catch the snake without getting hit. All he would say is "I caught him by the gate".

Mom, Blanche and Don left the mountains to go traveling to where I don't know, but Roy and I refused to leave. Frank was off working somewhere. We wanted to finish school so we stayed and batched for almost a year. I was working for the N.Y.A. (National Youth Authority) at the school for twenty-five cents an hour. The limit you could make was six dollars a month but and that was a great help. The main job for the boys that worked was leveling a spot for our football field. I still had most of the two hundred that Louis Garland and I conned the carnival for so we got along just fine. The family came back about ten months later.

I liked Sierra High school, for it was the best school I ever went to. Most of the kids acted like I was one of them. There was one boy, Floyd Workman that I got along well with, and he is still a true friend. We were more like brothers than friends. We were together most of the time. We went to dances at places like Squaw Leap, Shaver lake, Big Creek and Tollhouse. Squaw Leap was a typical one-room school with outside plumbing. Most of the dances that we went to except those at the High school were square dances with local country music talent playing (Country music was different from what they call Country now.)

The teachers were all relaxed and friendly. I passed all subjects and made the honor roll as required by the Principle except one time. That was because of my big mouth. The English teacher was acting as director of the class play. She tended towards being a little plump and she had a dress on that was a little tight and very revealing. (She was very friendly with some of the older boys) I told her "I liked her dress" then after an short pause, continued with, "Its too bad they didn't have in your size". I got a "D" in English the next quarter. She laughed about that a year later and told me the official grade was a "B".

We had one teacher, Miss Moore who was a city girl and was afraid of about anything wild that moved. One of the boys put a harmless snake in the top center drawer of her desk. She opened the drawer

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and the snake moved, she looked down and turned white. She didn't move for a little while and the boys didn't breathe. Miss Moore reached in the drawer, picked up the snake, walked to the door and turned the snake loose. She came back in and sat down at her desk about the time the bell rang to dismiss the class. About three of us went back in the room to apologize and she was on the floor unconscious. Later she told us that was the worst moment in her life, but she was not going to let a bunch of hillbilly high school boys get the best of her, and she was sure we wouldn't do anything to harm her. She said that after that experience she wasn't as afraid of wild things as she had been.

Mr. Thall taught math and science and could do anything with numbers. Sometime he would start to explain something to the class and start working on the blackboard. He would forget we were there and fill up the board with numbers. When the blackboard was filled he would get paper and continue with the problem. He kept right on even after the bell rang and the class was gone. Math seemed to be his complete life. At lunchtime in good weather he would lie on the lawn, flat on his back just outside his room. He quite often forgot to eat his lunch and someone would have to remind him that lunchtime was over.

When it came to anything mechanical Mr. Thrall was a complete dud. Several times we jacked up his car and put blocks under it. When he came out to go home naturally the car wouldn't go. He would try the gear shift a couple of times, race the engine, turn it off and go get on the bus to get home. The next day we would take the blocks out and Mr. Thall would get in the car and try it. When it went O K he would just shake his head and drive off.

Once it was raining and the roof leaked and the water was running out of a light fixture in the hall. Several of my pals and I got Mr. Thall and showed him what was happening and told him that the juice was running out of the bulb. He tried to explain that it was water, but we were having no part of that. He got very frustrated when we talked about juice getting out of wires and bulbs for the next few days. Mr. Thall married Miss Le Fever and a lot of the students went to the reception at the hotel in Auberry. Right afterward my buddies Floyd Workman Ivan "Weed" Hallock, Joe Gividen, Louis Garland and I kidnapped Mr. Thall and took him to a movie in Fresno. After the show we drove to Fowler and fooled around till daylight then took him back to his bride. He spent most of his time begging us to take him back. The road from Fowler was an up and down thing. Just think of it as a series of dips, about a hundred of them. If you put your brakes on

just a little at the top of each dip it just like being on the ocean. We gave Mr. Thall a fine ride on the way back to Auberry and his Bride. Miss Moore was reading a poem to the class and was standing beside her desk. She hesitated just a little in the middle of a verse but then went on. Shortly after the hesitation her panties fell and covered her shoes. Two dainty little steps, a flick of her foot and the panties were out of sight under the desk. Only about half the students in the front row even noticed what happened. That's what comes of not paying attention.

My shop teacher was Mr. Lencioni, and he married Miss Layne in 1941. We worked on any car that we could but ran into a little resistance from the local garages in Tollhouse and Auberry. Mr. Lencioni was careful to not take work from the garage owners. One day we almost blew up the shop. One of the students was going to bend a piece of metal and another student drained all the gas out of his car inside the shop, which was against the rules. About that time student number one set an open five gallon pail more than half full of gas just inside the big garage door student number two had his piece of metal bent. The metal was red hot so he dropped in what he thought was a can of water. The building was empty in about five seconds and stayed that way the rest of the day. The next few days were devoted to safety.

Mr. Lencioni gave me my first job after graduation. We worked overhauling the busses at Frait in his shop, He also introduced Floyd and me to Mr. Thompson who owned a tire store in Fresno, and we both got jobs installing tires.

Mon, Frank, Blanche and I decided to buy a new car so we really concentrated on saving every penny that we could and bought our first new car. The car was a 1940 Chevrolet four door sedan and the price was \$765.00 out the door. We were in hog heaven with that car, the only new car we ever had and the only new one in the mountains. The only problem was my older brother Frank had some rather violent disagreements on whose turn it was to have the car. I was very popular with the girls when I drove it to school. The only problem was there was always about four of them that wanted a ride home with me instead of riding the busses. Gas was hard to come by and some of the girls lived as far away as 20 miles. (Gas was five gallons for a dollar and some times they gave you a glass).

Sierra High had everything you would expect from a large city school, and I enjoyed every minute I spent there. It was the first school

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were I felt I was a part of things. I played football and basketball and was on the track team. We beat much larger schools in all sports. They also had many students that went on to higher education and were successful in their professions. The school was the best because of the leadership of Frank P. Schroeder.

Louis Garland and I worked together as a team to write the scripts for all the shows while we were in school and got out of classes to work on them. Most of the time we acted as dual Masters of Ceremonies. After about the first introduction of an act we tossed out the script and ad libbed the rest of the show. We all had a ball at the shows and they were good entertainment for the local people.

I learned figure skating in El Paso and Fresno while working in the skating rinks and put on a skating act at a show with Roberta Ressel. Roberta didn't know how to skate, and we didn't have time for her to learn. She didn't really need to know how to skate because all she had to do is be my partner in the spins. We solved the problem by tightening the wheels on her skates so they wouldn't turn. We practiced every time we could and after a while we didn't fall in every spin. Poor Roberta was bruised from head to foot, but she stuck with it till it worked. Roberta was a very pretty girl in a pretty costume and our act was a big success.

## THE STING

One day Louis Garland and I were hanging around Tollhouse, and I told him about traveling with a carnival. He said I was making the whole thing up, and that I didn't know anything about a carnival. I demonstrated carnie talk, but he couldn't understand it, and claimed I was just talking gibberish. After some discussion he said there was a carnival in Clovis, and we should go and I could prove that I was telling the truth so off we went to Clovis.

When we got to the carnival lot in Clovis the first thing I saw was the name of the show. "Paul Towels Shows". Proving something to Louis was no longer the important thing. I found the booth with the big wheel and talked to the operator in carnie talk and convinced him I was a carnie, and I would make a good shill as most of the people around there new I was a local boy and trusted me. Knowing how to speak "carnie talk" cinched the deal. I placed my bet and naturally won. After winning a few times Louis was so excited that he was yelling "bet again, bet again". There was a lot of excitement and people



started to play. Like the good shill that I was when things slowed down I would win big again. When I got a pocket full of money I told the operator that I had to go to the bathroom and that I would be right back. I grabbed Louis and we headed for my car. We drove like demons to get out of there because I understood what would happen if we got caught by the Carnies, we would both have some broken bones at the very least. We both were relieved when the carnival moved on. Louis and I split almost four hundred dollars. The most money either of us ever had before, and we swore not to tell anyone. Louis told the story at our class reunion fifty years later. Some people just can't be trusted to keep their mouth shut.

## **BOXING**

### **(Ten bucks the hard way)**

Another dark secret that Gordon Vance and I were in on. We found out that we could make ten dollars boxing at smokers in Fresno. We boxed each other and some of the other Fresno kids. It was pretty much agreed that we would put on a good show but not hurt each other. The reason for the secret was we were sure if it became known that we were being paid for boxing that we would be considered professional athletes and couldn't play on the high school teams. My boxing career came to an abrupt end one night when the kid I was supposed to box was sick. The promoter said that was all right, that he knew a kid that I could box. What I didn't know was the kid was a real professional from Los Angeles that was on the road making a record for himself. I was so outclassed that he hit me about ten times for every time I hit him. He never hit me hard enough to knock me out, just down and I didn't have sense enough to stay down. I don't remember how many times I was on the canvas, but my corner finally threw in the towel. The next morning I looked at myself in the mirror and decided boxing was not a good way to make money.

## **MORE EDUCATION**

*Gone With The Wind* was playing at Frait and there was a big flap over whether young people should be allowed to see it. It was supposed to be pretty bad and had bad language in it. I don't know who planned the trip, but three carloads of us went to see the show. Schroeder loaned one of the gang his car to drive, and I took our

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Chevy. The other car belonged to one of the other kids Father. The show was very good but pretty tame. We expected to see something really shameful. The necking on the way home was far more exiting than the show. (I had to drive, darn it)

Ivan Hallock's Father bought a new Nash and Ivan brought it to school on a Friday. After Ivan, Floyd, Bill Armstrong, and I headed for Fresno and Ivan took a turn too fast on Pittman hill and spun out. The car went off the road with the front wheels hung out in space. We got out of the car very carefully and three of us stood on the back bumper to hold it down so the wheels would get traction. We got the car back on the road. There was very little damage but Ivan was very worried about what his Dad was going to do. We took the car to the auto shop on Monday and all of us worked on it. I don't think Ivan's Dad noticed the underneath damage. I thought most of the kids in school were well off and most of them though my mother was loaded because of the new car. They didn't know that the car was the only thing we had. I didn't learn till fifty years later that most of the kid's families were as poor or poorer than we were. As it turned out only three kids in our class had more than just a bare living.

Sports were a big thing at and the games always had a big crowd. The local people were at least as enthusiastic as the students if not more so. Our Coach, Paul Star didn't believe that winning was everything but it was very high up on the list. The school was small, one hundred and forty two students and seven teachers counting the Principle but almost everyone went out for sports and were very competitive. In 1941 we lost only two football games and in the last game we were behind. On the last play Gordon Vance made a spectacular run to win the game.

## CHICKEN SOUP

1940

The insurance money we were getting ran out in 1940 so things got a little tight again. Mom tried her hand at raising chickens for eggs. After building chicken houses and pens, buying the chicks and paying for the feed we were flat broke again. Just when the chickens started laying the price of eggs went to the lowest in history.

We ate chicken every way any one could think of. We had chicken soup, fried chicken. Boiled chicken, roasted chicken, chicken pie,

canned chicken, chicken and dumplings and several others ways that I don't want to think about. We also ate lots of eggs fixed many different ways, but I still like chicken.

## **A STEP DOWN**

During the summer Floyd Workman, and I got jobs working in the valley in the fig harvest. I was allergic to the acid in the figs and after about four days all my fingers were bleeding, I was so sore under my arms I couldn't let my arms hang down and I was also walking funny. I went to the owner to quit, but he gave me a job driving a truck. I drove the truck for about a month.

I was talking to the owner, and he offered me a year round job. I was going to be an assistant foreman. (That means someone to do all the heavy work for very low pay, and it also meant I would not finish school.) The owner's son about my age came tearing into the yard in his red convertible and slid to a stop by us. Without any further ado he demanded ten bucks from his Dad. Mr. funk asked what he had done with the ten he was given yesterday and was told, "Oh hell, I spent that last night." The boy was handed the ten, and he spun the wheels of his fancy car getting out of the driveway, throwing gravel over his Dad and me. It took me five days to earn ten dollars, and I decided before that kid got out of the driveway that there was no way I was going to work to help support a kid that did nothing for himself and even worse would insult his Father. I quit that job on the spot.

## **PET KILLERS**

Some one in the family was always bringing home a cat or dog for a pet and one of the dogs that belonged to Don started getting the eggs. A ranch dog that sucks eggs or kills chickens has a very short life expectancy. Frank took the dog and his rifle over the hill and came back without the dog. How Don found his dog under a pile of rocks I will never know but a very small boy raised a lot of hell around our place for days.

Dons next pet was a little kitten, nothing special, just a nice friendly kitten. Roy came home from deer hunting and emptied his rifle on the porch as we always did and came in the house. Don's kitten was asleep in a rocking chair. Roy said, "I am going to shoot your cat." He aimed and pulled the trigger. Bang! And there was cat all over the

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place. Everyone jumped on Roy and after the dog incident Don was sure his cat was killed on purpose. Roy left and went up the hill and stayed with a family named Jordon. He helped them build a new house and stayed away for about a month.

## DISCOUNT STORE

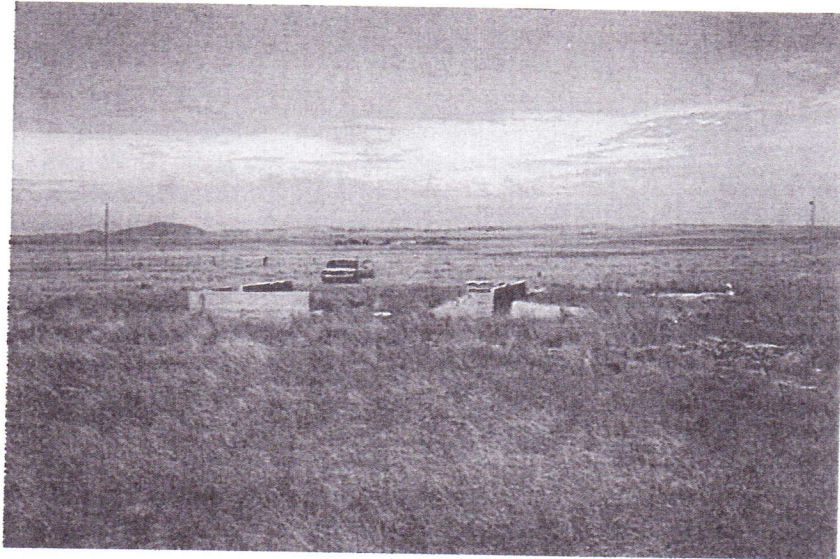
Wherever we lived we shopped at the Salvation Army store for our clothes and most of the household goods like pots and pans. I went to a few of their Sunday services, but the only thing I remember is that we had prayers and singing. As for as my religious education, I went to public schools before the civil rights groups, our courts and the anti Christian fanatics decided it was a wrong to tell a poor kid like me about Christ or the difference between right and wrong. We had all kinds of Christmas plays and actually sang the great religious songs that told the good news. It was through that media that I came to know Christ, and I thank God for having had the opportunity to go to school when it was possible. I don't remember any particular time that I accepted Christ. It seems like I just always believed. Its like I know the sun will come up tomorrow, its just a fact.

I graduated in 1941 and went out to make my fortune.

I suppose some people would say I had a miserable life, but that is not so. It was a lot of fun, and it was never dull. I did things that most kids don't even dream about and none of them ever hurt anyone except maybe for a bloody nose or a black eye, and I got my share of those. It was all crammed into nineteen years, and I guess it's just a matter of perspective.

In my later years (1995)I went back to were the ranch was, and there is not a lot left anymore. There is not even a building, nor is there a windmill. Just a cement foundation where Henry's house stood. Look at these pictures, and you will see how lonely the country is. The first picture looks west from about where the chickens roamed.

The second is a bunch of junk and parts of the old windmill. But I can say one thing about it it saved our bacon more than once.



That mountain on the horizon on the left is part of the *Rawhide's*.



## Growing up in the Thirties



Here I am graduating in 1941, third row from the bottom, second from the right. P. S. I worked in Naval aviation for thirty-one years, with some time off in the Air Force during

WW 2. After retirement I started my own shop in aircraft exhaust repair and manufacturing. I was right, for I could run a shop much better if I didn't have all those rules to go by.



Dick Poston