

The Thiele House

A Home

Down to Placerville, through town, off the main highway onto a narrow county road, down a long hill, across a creek, then up a short hill to a narrow dirt driveway. Turning right. In deep, deep. We would have a real house.

The area around the house was flat and open on one side and sloped down toward the creek bottom through some trees and bushes on the other. The open side, to the west, led after a large distance to hills covered with oak scrub and manzanita. To the east were the creek bottom and several pear orchards and a few scattered houses. A long way to the southeast, beyond the pear orchard in the low triangle where two paved roads tried to meet, lay the Eldorado County Fair Grounds.

The house was of white shiplap siding with a black shingle roof which rose at several angles. A red brick chimney poked out of one of the angles. The house stood up high, with a space beneath high enough to hide a car behind the lattice curtain of narrow crossed white slats, if it were not full of other things already. It had a wide covered porch around two

sides. Looking down from the porch toward the creek the ground was covered with a thick plush of ivy. In the living room was a red brick fireplace. And in the kitchen was a huge cast iron stove with a big oven below and two little ovens above. And there was a bathroom, with a flush potty. And bedrooms. And we had electricity. Right away I liked it better than the tent, even if Mama still had to heat water on the stove to make a bath.

The house belonged to Mr. Alfred Thiele. He was a short stout man who walked funny because one leg was shorter than the other. His short hair stuck out at funny angles. He was jolly, and I liked him right away. He owned the property all around us, including the wild hills to the west and down into the deep canyon beyond, the pear orchards, and several houses. He and Mrs. Thiele lived in a big white stucco house with a red tile roof high up on the hill across the creek. The stucco had a rough finish, with edges sticking out in wide swirls. The roof tiles were big and roundish like nothing I had ever seen before. There was a long, steep winding driveway up to the house, and there were garages and sheds for the different cars and trucks and tractors. Mrs. Thiele was a stern woman who always tried to act very important.

They had three children. Mimi was about my age—a saucy little girl with bouncy brown curls and fancy dresses. Lawrence was eleven and had a bicycle he said I could ride with him on. And Margie, the older sister, was away at college, so I never saw her much. She was taking a music major, which everyone said was a waste of money because she could never use it for anything.

I had complete freedom of the territory to do whatever I wanted, and I wanted a lot. Within a few weeks I had explored my region and knew it all well. One of my favorite destinations was the big white house on the hill where Mimi and Lawrence were always happy to see me. On the way to Thieles was the creek, and before the creek was a narrow road carved out of the hillside—just two tire tracks in the soft wet

earth following a narrow ledge with huge mounds of blackberry bushes piled up here and there on the steep banks. That was a wonderful region to explore with its many pools and marshy spots along the banks. I liked to find the salamanders—funny shapes, funny smooth skin, and funny colors. And there were frogs, and tadpoles turning into frogs, and water skippers that skated on the surface, and other water bugs, little brown ones with flippers on the sides, that dove up and down from top to bottom and back up again. Sometimes I would not get over to the Thieles at all.

One day I couldn't find anyone in their yard, and I didn't hear any children's voices. I walked around to the side of the house and saw goldfish flopping around in the small bit of water left in the bottom of the white cement fish pool. I ran around to the back and banged on the kitchen door until Mrs. Thiele came. She didn't seem very concerned about the fish. And that bothered me.

Mama got a Maytag wringer washing machine that ran by an electric motor and swished the clothes back and forth. I was proud because Maytag was the very best. It had a squarish tub of cast aluminum and large soft wringers, not like those other round things of enameled sheet metal with noisy, smelly gas engines and tiny hard rollers that broke buttons and ruined the clothes. Daddy hung a wire clothes line from above the washing machine to a tree some distance out in the yard. It was a double wire with a pulley at each end, so Mama could hang the clothes without carrying them down the line. I didn't have many clothes, and Mama would put one of Arlea's dresses on me until the washing was done.

One day while she was washing I decided to go over to the Thieles. There were some other kids there playing, and they took turns picking me up by my ankles and walking me around on my hands like a wheelbarrow, laughing at my bare naked bottom as the dress fell down around my neck. Lawrence and Mimi just stood there and laughed with the

others. I didn't want to go back to the Thieles for some time after that.

The Goat

The blackberries were getting ripe, and we took buckets down to the bushes by the creek for a harvest. Some of the boys brought boards to walk on into the center of the bushes where the berries were bigger and better. I tried one of the boards, but I slipped off the side into the bushes and got all prickled up from the thorns and purple from the berries. One of the boys had to pick me up and carry me out of the scramble. Mama laughed at our purple hands and tongues and my spotted purple clothes and the small amount of berries we had left in our buckets, but she made a berry pie anyhow. We ate it hot out of the oven with fresh cream poured over the top.

Mama liked to have fresh milk, so she got a goat, which she tied up at the corner of the house and fed and watered it there. I felt sorry it couldn't run loose. But there were no fences, and Daddy said, goats being goats, she could cause trouble in the neighborhood. One day I heard her making funny noises, and when I came around to see what was the matter, I saw two little hooves sticking out of her rear end. I ran to tell Mama the terrible news, but she said the goat was OK, and she sent me over to the Thieles to play. After that we had two goats for awhile.

The Cow

Soon the goats were replaced by a brown and white Jersey cow. Daddy said we needed more milk than the goat could give and the Jersey would give milk that was rich and creamy like goat milk. He built a little stall over by the edge

of the wild area, and the cow was free to wander in the brush during the day.

She always came home in the afternoon for Daddy or Mama to milk her. But one afternoon she didn't come home. It was getting late in the year, and the days were shorter. Mama wanted the cow in before dark, and she sent Arlea and me out to look for her. We wandered around in the live oak and manzanita hills for a long time without a sign anywhere of the cow. Then it started getting dark, and we realized we didn't know which direction to get home. Arlea said we should pray to Jesus to help us find our way, and we knelt down by a little Digger Pine tree in the middle of a small clearing.

Just as we stood up from praying a man came walking through the clearing. He was wearing a black suit and white shirt with a necktie and a dress hat, and he had very shiny shoes. He was walking fast. Without breaking his stride, without giving us a chance to say a word, he pointed and said: Children, if you will walk up to the top of that hill and look in that direction, you will see your house. We did, and the lights of our house glimmered below us in the twilight. From that day on I have believed in angels and that God answers prayer, especially the prayers of little children. When we went by the cow's stall, she was already standing there waiting to be milked.

The Turkey

Mama missed seeing her sister Edna, who lived in Keyes, a short distance north of Turlock, next to Highway 99 and the railroad tracks. It was only about a three-hour drive, so we went down there often.

Aunt Edna was a large muscular woman, almost as tall as Daddy, but heavier. She always wore an apron, and she had aprons hanging behind almost every door. She had a round

stomach way out in front that made her apron fall a distance from her knees. She had an angular face with a long straight nose and a wide roundish forehead, and she kept her light brown hair coiled up in a tight bun at the back of her head, which made her ears stick out. Uncle George Bruce was skinny and several inches shorter. He always raised his chin when he talked to her. Even sometimes when he wasn't talking to her he kept his head back and his chin up. He kept bees. I think that's what got Daddy started with beekeeping, which is why we moved to Pollock Pines. Someone told him bees liked the mountain wildflowers.

Aunt Edna had a huge, high house with many rooms and with windows with little pointed roofs sticking out from the steep many-pointed roof every which direction, and there was an attic above the upstairs rooms with boxes and trunks in it. Large boards went at angles to hold the roof up, making nooks and crannies everywhere. A wonderful place to explore. But the house stank awful of coffee. No matter what room I went to, I couldn't get away from the coffee stink. We were Seventh-day Adventists, so we didn't use coffee, but Aunt Edna was a Baptist, and I believed Baptists were required to use coffee in great quantities as part of their religion.

The house wasn't finished on the outside, just a rough grey—it never did get the finish coat of stucco. The front yard had patches of bramble all the way out to the railroad tracks, and it would have been hard to use the front door. Everyone went in and out the back. The back entrance opened into a big workroom with space for canning fruit and for storing things. A narrow passageway went between the stored things into the kitchen. There was a low shelf there with a coffee maker on it that was always hot.

The back side was where everything happened. There was space in front of the barn to park cars and trucks and tractors. The barn was not fixed for animals, but had machinery and beehives and barrels and other things in it. It had no walls or doors; everything was open to the outside. There was

a huge bin at the side filled with peach pits that Uncle George used in place of firewood. It was fun to jump from the rafters into the bin of pits and almost get buried in them.

The main line of the railroad ran by the house just a short distance out front, before the highway. And it was wonderful to hear the steam engines puffing along through the night and blowing their whistles. Later, when they switched to diesel engines, the ugly horns blasting and the engines grinding were a terrible letdown.

There were three children—Gordon, June and Enid, all of them much older, older even than George and Willis. Gordon had reddish-brown hair like his father. He was quiet and built beautiful, brightly polished models of airplanes which he hung from strings all around his room. Later he became an architect and designed buildings in Turlock. June had straight black hair and was quiet, but she smiled a lot. Later she worked for the mission board and spent some time overseas* (book about Ethiopia) and could type more than one hundred words per minute. Enid had curly blondish hair and shouted and laughed and shrieked for any small reason. They liked to play Pit, and Enid would make enough noise as if there were twenty people playing. She had a boyfriend named Arthur, and she kept saying that Art liked art. She seemed to think that was funny.

I enjoyed the science toys around the house. Especially the duck with a long beak, a red hat, a long stick for a neck, and a huge round belly. It tipped back and forth, sticking its beak into a cup of water, then raising its head, then going down again after a few seconds for another drink. And there was a glass ball with vanes inside that were shiny on one side and dark on the other, and they spun around fast when the sun shone on them.

Canning fruit was a large enterprise. Mama and Aunt Edna did many quarts of peaches. They liked the Yellow Clings best because they had a better flavor and didn't fall apart in the cooking. But the pits were a problem. For that

they had a special tool—like a spoon with a sharp point at the end and knife-sharp edges on the sides and a round wooden handle. After running a knife around the whole peach, they slipped the tool in from where the stem had been, twisted it back and forth over the pit, and the halves of the peach would fall apart. Then they tossed the halves into a tub of lye water until the peels were loose enough to just slide off by a twist of the hand.

And Mama wanted to can lots of plums. She said they would be good for making Khrem for Christmas. That was something special she held onto from her Swedish family childhood. I liked the Khrem a lot, especially when it was hot and splashed with cream from our Jersey cow.

Of course, we had to go to Aunt Edna's for Thanksgiving. When we sat down to dinner there was a huge turkey in the middle of the table. It still looked like a turkey even without the feathers. I refused to eat any of it, no matter how Aunt Edna and the others coaxed, and I have been a vegetarian all my life since.

The Moon

Daddy liked to explore new ways of going places, and on one of our trips down to see Aunt Edna he took a detour around some of the foothill country. We passed a new dam with a lake growing behind it. The sun had just sunk, the sky was darkening, and the full moon sat touching the rim of the hill across the lake. It was dark reddish-brown, and huge. Bigger than our car, at least. Daddy stopped the car, and we watched as it climbed into the sky getting smaller and whiter until it was just a normal moon again.

Once driving back from Aunt Edna's, on the winding mountainous section of Highway 49 between Plymouth and Placerville, a new-looking business coupe was pressing hard behind us and finally roared past us on a blind curve. Daddy

said the guy was sure to have an accident driving that way, and just a few miles farther we saw the car piled up against a tree where the road made a sharp bend.

Winter

Daddy was always looking for extra ways to make money. He grew up in timber country in Oregon, so he drove his truck up there and got a load of Christmas trees. He and Mama set up on a lot in Turlock near Aunt Edna's house and put up a sign, trees for a dollar each. A man offered them fifty cents each for the whole lot. They turned him down because they thought they could do better. But Christmas came and went and they still had more than half their trees left. Afterward I heard Daddy and Mama talking about having a bird in the hand or in the bush.

Daddy was home a lot that winter. He fussed with his bee equipment, which he had bought with a loan from the government, but there wasn't very much honey. He said the bees mostly had died from the foul brood. I didn't know what the foul brood was, but I knew it had to be a terrible thing to have a name like that. And even worse because it hurt my daddy's bees and made him look bad to the government. I liked to watch him slice the wax caps off the honey combs with the long flat warm knife and then spin the frames around in the tank to make the honey flow out.

One day driving into Placerville Daddy pulled his truck into a gas station, and the corner of the flat bed clipped the cash stand and broke it off. The more he apologized, the angrier the station man shouted. Finally Daddy had to just stand there quietly and take it until the man calmed down.

In the evenings Daddy held Arlea on his lap and helped her with her reading. She had just turned seven years old in October and was in the first grade. I stood behind them, watching and listening over Daddy's shoulder as he pointed

to the words, and soon the sounds and the letters began making sense. When we rode in the car, I liked to sound out the new words I saw on signs along the way. When we went to church, we drove by the Greyhound Bus Depot, and one morning I stood up on the seat and proudly read, "Dee Pott." Mama laughed as she explained to me that the sounds of the words didn't always follow the letters as they should.

When Daddy went out in the orchard to prune pear trees for Mr. Thiele, I sat on the bottom rung of the ladder and read to him about Dick and Jane, shouting out so he could hear. Which meant that other workers could hear, too. Somebody at The Mountain Democrat newspaper thought it was worth a story that a boy only three and a half years old was reading in public. People told me it was important to have a story in the newspaper, but it didn't change my life any. Dick and Jane soon got boring, and I would sit on a tall stool in the kitchen and read the Bible to Mama while she worked. It didn't seem right to shout the Bible in the orchard. The language in the Bible was very different, and I liked it.

Radio

Mama got a radio to listen to the news when I wasn't reading to her, but she complained about the singing commercials. Every time a commercial started she would shout how bad it was to have to listen to such stuff just to get the news. Soon there was another kind of shouting. News broadcasts began airing a man shouting with an ugly voice in a language I didn't understand. Mama and Daddy acted worried, but they wouldn't tell me what it meant.

Sacramento

Mama liked to go down to Sacramento to the stores there, especially the Book and Bible Store. I always begged to

go by the Sutter's Fort museum to see the tools and things people used a hundred years ago. And there was a department store with two floors—a main floor and a mezzanine that came about half way out from the back to the front. It was a busy place, with hundreds of people milling about looking at things. And there were wires going criss-cross overhead every which way around the store. A bell would ring, and a little carrier would zip along a wire to another part of the store where another bell would ring. Then someone would grab it and put something in or take something out, then send it zip again. And there was a stairway from the main floor up to the mezzanine that moved all by itself. If you just stood on the bottom step, it soon put you at the top. And there was another one that went down again.

I liked to go to the big park to the east of the capitol building and look at the golden dome through the trees. The park was full of men sitting on benches all around. Some of them looked worn out and scraggly with short beards and dirty hair. And there were black men everywhere. I had never seen a black man around Placerville. There was only one Chinese family in town. They had a laundry in the middle of Main Street on the south side, near the bakery.

On one trip to Sacramento Mama bought a walnut colored plaque about three inches wide and a foot long with old fashioned gold letters on it that said: "Prayer Changes Things." Wherever we moved after that, that was the first thing Mama put up on the walls of the new house.

World Fair

In the spring we went to the world fair in San Francisco Bay. Daddy said when they built the Bay Bridge, they made an artificial island in the middle from the left over dirt and the fair was the first big thing to happen on it. He told me they used clothespins to help with the construction of the bridge. I

never could figure out how that worked. Nor could I figure out how that flat piece of dirt covered with ugly buildings could be called a Treasure Island. I had read the book by Robert Louis Stevenson, and I knew what a Treasure Island should look like.

We spent several days walking everywhere, and Mama bought a set of books called *Childcraft*. It had good advice for mothers, but I didn't pay much attention to that. I liked the pictures and descriptions of children around the world—especially the Chinese and Japanese children with their straight black hair and their strange eyes and their brightly colored clothes. And I liked volume three the best because of the stories and poems, especially the poem about Father William: "You are old, Father William, the young man said....."* I thought it was the funniest thing I had ever read, and I memorized it so I could recite it to make people laugh.

I made people laugh a lot with my recitations. Especially they liked to hear me say the alphabet backwards. I could say it backwards faster than most grownups could forwards, and they would ask me to say it and then laugh and laugh.

One day Mama dressed up in her Sabbath dress and took me to a big house in town where the ladies of the church were sitting around in different rooms at fancy little tables drinking out of little white cups. I was the smallest kid there, and soon they had me going from room to room reciting "Montgomery Ward." A lady would call me to her and ask me to say it, then she would laugh and send me to another lady to say it again. I made the circle of the whole house that way several times. I didn't think "Montgomery Ward" was funny at all, not like Father William, and I was saying it perfectly right.

Bedtime

George and Willis lived with a family over in Santa Rosa and went to a Seventh-day Adventist day school there instead of to a boarding school, and they hitchhiked home every few weeks for the weekend, especially when they needed a haircut. Mama was pretty good at cutting hair. She had a shiny hair clippers with a head that was roundish on the top and flat on the bottom except for grooves that ended in points sticking out in front, and it had long skinny curved handles with curved spurs sticking out, and a plate on the bottom with points that slid back and forth sideways when she squeezed—like the sliding teeth on a mower mounted to the side of a tractor, but much smaller. She would start low on the neck and go up the head, tilting the clippers back on the heel to make a nice taper in the hair.

One weekend when George and Willis were home, they followed me out to the porch where I went each night at bedtime to pee into the ivy below. They stood behind me and pinched and pulled and shook my wee-wee as I pee'd. It made my whole body shiver in a strange way, and for years afterwards I would often shiver that way when I pee'd.

Lawrence

By this time Lawrence and I were good friends and spent almost every daylight hour together whenever he wasn't in school. With him I could cover a wider circle than by myself. He knew the countryside and showed me many interesting places. I would sit on the bicycle handlebars while he pedaled. One day we were walking along the bank of an abandoned irrigation ditch when we saw a big rattlesnake trying to climb up the other side. Loose dirt kept falling down as the snake tried to climb out, and it would move up a few inches then slide back. Lawrence began throwing fist-sized rocks at it, and about the fifth one hit the snake squarely in the head and smashed it. I remembered how my family had reacted to the

rattlesnake by the tent at Pollock Pines and didn't tell them about this one. Lawrence could take care of the snakes, and I didn't want my parents to worry about me.

The Long Saws

In the spring Daddy got a job felling trees with Ernie Thiele in the valley that was to become Shasta Lake. They were part of a crew to completely clear the valley, every tree, then someone else would come to clean out the brush. Every week he left on Sunday and got back home Friday night. He bragged how fast he and Ernie could cut the trees because they were both ambidextrous and could trade sides to keep on working. And he liked to show me his big arm muscle. When he pulled up his shirt sleeve and clenched his fist, the muscle would pop up big and round and hard with blue veins, almost like it was separate from the arm. And he showed me how his arm was shaped—short from the shoulder to the elbow, long from the elbow to the wrist. He said that gave him extra leverage. I tried to make my arm muscle look big, too. I would press on the inside of my arm to make the muscle pop up, and sometimes I would blow on my thumb to see if I could make it bigger that way.

Daddy spent a lot of time while he was home taking care of his tools. He had double-bladed axes with long straight handles and with long skinny heads narrow in the middle and spreading out just a little bit toward the ends. He had a round flat stone, about as big as the lid of a jar, that was coarse on one side and fine on the other. He would spit on the stone, rub it around in circles on the axe edge and then test the edge with his thumb.

The saws were longer than he was tall and had huge teeth and a long round wooden handle at each end. He filed the teeth at a sharp angle so there was a narrow point at the tip, and the ends of the teeth had to be exactly even after the

points were filed. He said he and Ernie could fell more trees that way than could the men using those new-fangled motor chain saws. And his saws didn't stink and make that awful noise and break down several times a week. And he could fell a tree to the precise place he wanted by controlling the angle of the saw cut and the axe strokes, so the trees he felled didn't break and were better for the sawmill.

Mama said it would be nice if it rained in the forest every Friday night so that nobody would be expected to work on the Sabbath and it would be comfortable to work the rest of the week.

Sometimes Daddy worked on his toenails. They were thick and a funny color, and he sawed them down with a hack saw, then pulled the pieces off with pliers. He told me they used to be thin like mine until he dropped heavy things on them several times. After the damaged nails fell off, new ones grew in thicker each time.

Music Lessons

Mr. and Mrs. Roy Clint lived in a little orange house on a small flat by the creek. It had a wide screened porch in the front and a broad lawn in the back with a small apple tree in the middle. They were music teachers, and there was a steady stream of students all through every afternoon after school. She was a fine delicate lady with a sharply chiseled face, and her dark brown hair was always done up perfectly into a roll at the back of her head, which gave her face a dramatic profile. She taught piano. He was a big roundish tough fellow with shaggy blond curls and taught violin. He liked to talk about when he used to play second violin in the Chicago symphony orchestra.

One story he liked to tell was about two old women who came regularly to rehearsals and sat and knitted and talked. They would whisper during the soft parts and talk louder

during the loud parts. One time the orchestra worked up to a huge loud climax, then stopped suddenly in complete silence, and one of the women was shouting at the top of her lungs, "I fry mine in grease." The orchestra broke out laughing, and the women never came back again.

Many of the students in our church school took music lessons from them. Mr. Clint said he didn't mind if a student failed to show up for a lesson; he would just go out in his back yard and pan for gold under his apple tree. Said he made about as much money one way or the other.

They had a big vegetable garden in the red dirt sloping up toward our house. One day on my way to the Thieles I took a detour through the garden and enjoyed sinking my bare feet into the deep red mud. It felt so warm and tickly squeezing up between my toes that I stepped and stepped and stepped, looking for the deepest mudpots. But I stepped on a huge red ant, and it bit between my toes, and I ran home in deep pain.

Arlea took piano lessons and was playing the red John Thompson books. She liked best of all the song about Bill Grogan's Goat. I liked the Indian wigwam song and learned to play it without taking piano lessons. But I was taking violin lessons. I wanted to get as good as Wilton Hartwick, who was in the fourth grade and sometimes played special music for church.

Mr. Clint liked to talk about Fritz Kreisler, the greatest violinist who ever lived. Except some people didn't give him credit for his talent and put him down. He tried to show me the difference in style between the way Mr. Kreisler played and others, but I wasn't able to copy the differences on my violin.

The Goat Doctor

Daddy fell off a lumber pile at the lumber yard in town and hurt his back. He was in the hospital for several weeks

lying on his back with straps holding his legs up, but his back wasn't getting any better. Finally he just came home. He said there had to be a better way to handle the injury and the pain, so he started going to a man who lived in a little cabin in the forest north across the American River. People said he had a wonderful gift to feel with his hands what was wrong inside the body and to put things back into place.

The road going there was an adventure. Up the back way almost to the Forestry Institute, then north across the flat to drop off into the American River canyon—to the end of the pavement, then by stages narrower and steeper with ever sharper kick-back corners. In the last few hundred yards to the bridge the dirt road narrowed to a single track carved out of a jagged granite wall. At the bottom a sharp right angle turn onto the hanging bridge above the rocks and raging water.

I always wondered how those little spots of cement could hold the giant bolts in the granite to anchor the the huge cables, and no matter how often we crossed, I always frightened a bit as the bridge swayed and squeaked from the motion of the car. The boards sounded loose and wobbly as the tires rolled across them. And I wondered, if the car stopped in the middle, whether there would be room to get out and around the car without falling off the edge. There were no side railings, and I imagined myself crawling on my hands and knees to safety.

The little front room of his cabin was always packed with people whenever we went there. Some came from far away to be treated. He had lots of goats, so people called him the goat doctor. He was from Europe, I think from Switzerland, and spoke with a funny accent, if he spoke at all. He didn't charge any money for his treatments—just had a coffee can on a table in the living room for people to put money in to the extent they were able.

After Daddy went there several times, he was able to start working again, but he kept on going every few weeks just to keep his back working right.

The goat doctor had to quit giving treatments because someone complained he did not have an American medical license. The story went around that some doctors in the valley said they should be getting money for the treatments the goat doctor was giving for free. Daddy went once or twice to another doctor for his back treatments, but he didn't get the help there that he got from the goat doctor, and the visits were very expensive. Finally he just kept on working with a painful back. I thought it was terrible to take such a wonderful gift away from the community.

Pony Express

On the opposite side from where our driveway met the county road there stood a tall roundish granite rock with a bronze plaque in the front which said that this was the old Pony Express Trail. There was an image of a man galloping a horse and a short description of the Pony Express. I learned from books that the riders could make the forty-five miles from Sacramento to Placerville in about four hours, then a new rider would make the long, dangerous ride over the mountains to Carson City. I was proud that books published in New York had information about our little town. The road went down through Rescue on its way to Folsom and Sacramento. I wondered who got rescued from what in order to give the town that name.

There were banks about as high as my head on both sides of the road where it cut through the top of the rise. One winter day when I was out by the stone monument I saw a deep hole in the bank about as big around as my arm, and I picked up a long stick to poke into it. It went in a distance before hitting against something soft. I pushed harder, and it seemed a bit squishy. So I crouched down to look into the hole. I thought I saw a big frog in there, and I felt sorry I had

hurt it. For years after I had images in my mind of that poor frog getting poked and injured.

Names can tell a lot about a place. In the Gold Rush days Placerville used to be called Old Dry Diggins, then Hangtown, because the local sheriff was serious about keeping the town clean and was very quick to hang anyone who did wrong.

By the time the Pony Express came, the place had got more civilized, so they changed the name to Placerville for the placer mining that was done there. But people around town bragged about its rough past and told lots of stories of the old days. Some of them might actually have been true. One of the places in town had an effigy out front over the Main Street sidewalk of a man being hanged.

Another famous thing in town was the shop where John Studebaker used to make wheelbarrows for the miners before he went back east and started making automobiles. There was a big bronze plaque there, larger than the one by our house for the Pony Express Trail.

The most exciting thing in town for me was the Diamond Match store. They had buckets and wheelbarrows and lumber and nails and hammers and saws. But I never saw any matches there. We bought boxes of matches at the Safeway store that had a big Diamond Match printed on them.

People talked a lot about gold, but no one did much about it. It was just there. The Sutter mill at Coloma, where John Marshall discovered gold and started the great California Gold Rush, was only a few miles away. We used to go over there for picnic lunch on warm summer days. I liked to poke around the ruins of the old stone jail and imagine the kind of people who got put in there and what happened to them—whether they got hanged like those in Placerville.

Pear Harvest

I loved pear harvest time. In summer men would crowd into the orchard with ladders and picking bags and gather the green pears into boxes. Placerville was a great center for Mountain Bartletts, and we bragged that our pears were so much better than the mushy ones they grew down in Lake County.

Al Thiele had a little "D2" caterpillar tractor that he used for pulling a wagon up and down the rows to collect the filled boxes. It was a dirty scratched-up grey, barely taller than I was, and it had a long T-handle for steering. Mr. Thiele would pull one end of the handle way back and step on one of the clutches, and the tractor would spin right around a point. When he wasn't using it, I would climb up and pull on the handles and pretend that I was driving.

The ladders had three legs—two legs curved out to the sides at the bottom and sat firmly on the ground outside the tree and supported the rungs, and the third leg swung out from a hinge at the top and poked down through the tree to hold the top of the ladder into the branches without breaking them. The picking bags had a frame curved in to fit around the body on the inside and a curve out for space to catch the pears. There were straps to go over the shoulders crossways, and a wide canvass tube with clips on the bottom which fastened onto the frame when it was folded up. When the bag was full of pears, the picker would undo the clips, and the pears would tumble down through the canvas tube into the box.

The packing sheds at the east end of Placerville received pears from all the ranches in the area, and they shipped our fruit all around the world. I would touch the pears in a box and imagine them being eaten by children in Japan or China.

In the little triangle orchard below the fair grounds there were several Bosc pear trees scattered among the Bartletts. They were a winter variety that weren't ready to pick until November. There weren't enough trees to make a commercial crop, so we got to pick as many of those as we could use. When

they were very ripe, Mama would slice some in half, stem and core them, then put the halves on a cookie sheet in the oven with a bit of butter and brown sugar in the holes where the cores had been. When they were hot and mellow all the way through, and with a crusty skin over the cut part, they made a most wonderful winter desert.

The Church

When we first moved to the Thiele house, our little church group was meeting in a converted house high above a steep street on a hill near downtown, but there was not enough room for everyone and parking was difficult. The members bought a lot across the street from the funeral home on the north side of town going toward Georgetown and began building a new church there.

All of the work was done by the men in the church when they weren't busy on other jobs, so it took a long time to build. Al Thiele had built many houses, Bud Thiele was a brick mason, and others helped out with what they were good at. Daddy had not done much carpenter work before that, but he enjoyed learning.

They started with the basement, where the children's rooms would be after the church was finished, As soon as the ceiling went on over the basement, we left the little converted house downtown and started meeting in the downstairs part of our new church. Finally the outside walls of the upper part were finished and the roof was up, and as soon as the windows were put in, they could start finishing the inside so we could move the regular church part upstairs.

One Sabbath morning I got curious and ran up the narrow back stairs to explore. I came out behind the baptistry and found my way through into the choir loft. But there was a barrier railing between the choir loft and the pulpit, and I wanted to see the rest of the sanctuary. I found a section in the

barrier that seemed loose, and as I pushed against it, it swung out on hinges, and with a huge crash a package of large colored windows fell over and broke to pieces on the floor.

I stood there astonished at what I had done. A man came running up from downstairs, looked over the situation, and told me to go back down. I never heard anything more about it, and I always wondered how the incident was reported at the next church board meeting and how they paid for the new windows. Apparently no one ever told my parents, else I certainly would have more than just heard about it.

The Rope

The road to Georgetown went north out of town, past the funeral home and the new church building, past the tall yellow house, over the hill, down the dark canyon past the slate rock quarry, and across the American River, several miles downstream from the hanging bridge before twisting in zig-zags up the steep hill towards Kelsey and Georgetown. Near where the road crossed the river there was a widening and deepening that slowed the rush of water and made a place deep enough to swim. Families used to spend a lot of time there during the summer.

Some boys hung a long rope from a limb of a tall oak tree up on the steep hillside, and they would swing out over the river and drop with a big splash. I tried it once, but I fell off the rope before I got to the water.

For awhile we had a 1931 Essex Automobile. I thought it was a wonderful car, but Daddy spent a lot of time fixing the tires. He had a special place over by the milking stall with tire tools all set up. The tires were narrower and harder than on other cars. One day when he was ready to go someplace, Mama ran over to talk to him. The car rolled forward onto her foot. She screamed, and he stopped right on her foot. He

didn't move the car until she stopped screaming and told him what happened.

About that time Daddy got a job building an airplane hanger for a farmer south of town. The man had bought a Piper airplane and made a landing strip in his pasture, and he wanted a simple building to keep his airplane out of the weather and safe from the animals. But Daddy was determined not to build it as cheap and flimsy as the man wanted. He said anything he built would be built to last, and he insisted for the man to spend for better lumber. When he was finished he was proud that he had done a good job. Fifty years later when I drove by there, the airplane and landing strip were long since gone, but the hanger was still standing strong.

Grapes

Mr. Thiele hired Daddy to help him build a house around the other side of the hill from where he lived. Daddy had a whole new set of tools by that time. There were different kinds of saws, mostly about as long as his arm, some with short teeth and some with longer teeth at a different angle. He had small files to file between the teeth and make them sharper. He had a thing like a pliers with a dial on it which he squeezed to bend the teeth out. And he had a little thing with four legs he called a spider to check if the teeth were bent to the right distance. There were big planes and little planes with knives in the bottom. And he had big squares and little squares and one square that had a thumb screw and a slot to change the angle and the length.

The house design had what they called a hip roof. That meant there were complicated angles to cut for the rafters. Daddy would sit up on top of the house and figure with his various squares how to cut the angles to make the rafters fit right. He liked to show me how to make the saw follow the pencil line for a perfectly angled cut.

The path going over to the building site went by a row of grapes called Lady Fingers. They were yellow-green and long and very sweet, and it looked to me like no one was taking care of them. One day on my way to the house to see Daddy working I picked three bunches. Mr. Thiele asked me if I had permission to pick the grapes. Then he gave me a lecture about stealing what didn't belong to me. Daddy sat quietly with his head down, and I was ashamed.

The Bridge

One day Lawrence wanted me to ride with him for something special. I climbed onto his handlebars as usual, and we started down the Rescue road into the canyon. Faster and faster around the sharp corners. The wind was blowing my eyes shut, and he told me to hang on tight because he was riding without hands.

At the bottom of the hill the road made a sharp left turn onto the bridge over the creek. There was a scattering of gravel on the road, and the bicycle skidded into the low concrete abutment before the bridge. I was conscious for a moment of flying through the air.

When I woke up, my left arm was wrapped over the concrete bridge railing halfway across to the other end. My feet were dangling in free air below the bottom. I held on and looked around. About twenty feet below me were sharp jagged pointed rocks—a dark grey-green color mixed with streaks of brownish yellow and dirty red. The bicycle was swinging back and forth in the branches of a small oak tree above where it had hit the bridge abutment. The front wheel was bent inward in a big V on one side. Lawrence was in a shallow pool of water next to the base of the abutment, complaining that his arm hurt.

I climbed up onto the bridge; Lawrence climbed up out of the hole; and we made the long, long walk back up the hill

in the summer heat. When I walked into the house Mama looked at me sharply, and I said, "Mama, the angels really took care of me that time." She hugged me and said she was given a very sharp impression that I was in trouble and to pray for me, and she wanted to know the whole story.

I had a few scratches on my arm from the cement. Lawrence wore a cast on his arm for several weeks and didn't ride his bicycle for a long time after. Many times since I have been back to that bridge and wondered how I could possibly have flown that far in that direction from the impact, landed in that position, gone unconscious, and hung on. I am convinced there was no natural way.

Hauling

Daddy put a dump bed on his honey truck and began hauling chromium ore from a mine near Placerville to a shipping point. People said because of the war in Europe and so many ships being sunk in the Atlantic Ocean, it was hard to import chromium from overseas mines, and poorer local mines became important.

I liked to ride with Daddy on his ore runs. The rocks were beautiful, many bright colors. Some people called it Peacock Ore. It was exciting to watch the big shovels pick up the rocks and drop them into the trucks. Usually there were several lined up waiting for their load. We had one of the smallest trucks. Some of the others were banged up from rocks falling on them. When it came our turn, I had to get out of the truck and stand back a distance.

When we were loaded, and after we got away from the mine out onto the county road, Daddy would let me sit on his knee and steer the truck. Once he pointed to a large pothole in the road ahead, directly in front of the left wheel, and he warned me to steer clear of it. I pulled and pulled the steering wheel and hit the hole with the opposite wheel instead. The

truck bounced so hard I banged my head on the roof. It hurt, and I was afraid I had damaged the truck, but Daddy just laughed. He told me there was a good lesson there—not to overcompensate in the face of danger but to analyze the situation calmly and to hold a careful course.

Daddy loved to sing the old Christian hymns. He fastened a springed clamp to the dashboard of his truck and put a Christ In Song hymnbook in it, and he would sing out loud hymn after hymn, glancing at the book from time to time in order to get all the stanzas. But he didn't sing just religious songs. He enjoyed teaching me lots of different things. One of his favorites was about the pussywillow:

*I know a little pussy,
Her coat is silver grey,
She lives down in the meadow,
Not very far away,
Although she is a pussy,
Shell never be a cat,
For she's a pussywillow.
Now what do you think of that?*

Every line one note higher, then down the octave again:

*Meow, meow, meow, meow,
Meow, meow, meow meow,*

Then a big shout
SCAT!

And he would laugh and laugh.

He also laughed when he recited poems from "The Child's Garden of Verse" by Robert Louis Stevenson. But it was a different kind of laugh, a sort of gentle chuckle. I think he had the entire book memorized. And he liked word games. Sometimes he would say, "I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream." Or he would ask me to add up real fast, "ten, ten, double ten, forty-five, fifteen." Of course, I knew the answer because we had done it many times, but it was always

fun. And he would see how fast I could say, "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers" and other rhymes.

Sometimes when he wasn't singing or reciting poems or playing word games, he would tell me how the war in Europe was fulfilling Bible prophecy. He said when Turkey was pushed out of Europe, Jesus would come very soon.

Sometimes he would discuss other important things with me, such as—how it is not possible to drink out of a glass that is not wide enough to get your nose into.

And he talked about the scientific discussions he and his friends had when he was young, such as—how to figure the pressure water exerts on the bottom of a dam. He said his friends concluded that the pressure depended partly on how deep the water was and partly on how long the lake was behind it, that the pressure would increase according to a diagonal line from the bottom of the dam to the surface of the water. He didn't tell me he believed that. He just reported it as what other people had decided, and he said I should think about it and figure it out for myself.

He talked a lot about driving. Once when he was hauling hay the truck went over the side of the road and rolled over on the hay load and back onto its wheels at the bottom. and he just drove it out a trail and back up to the road again. And he told about one time driving a Chevrolet truck the flywheel disintegrated just as he went over the top of a hill, and the flying pieces of metal tore up everything right in front of his feet, including the clutch and the brake lines, so he couldn't stop. He had to coast down the hill, up the other side, and back and forth across the little valley like a pendulum until the truck came to a rest at the bottom. Since then he would never get into a Chevrolet vehicle of any kind again.

Sometimes he would tell me stories about when he was a little boy. The third finger on his left hand was cut off just below the knuckle, and he told me how he cut it off with an axe when he was seven years old trying to chop wood. And he told me how he got a hole in his skull when he fell from a

rafter in the barn and drove a big nail into his head . It made a hole big enough that after it healed he could press the skin in and hide a marble there under his hair.

Especially he liked to tell over and over about the Halloween tricks he played on his father because of how his father was afraid of the spirits. But when he told one story, he would always lower his voice. That was when his little brother Harry fell in a shallow pool of water and started to drown. No one else was near, so Daddy pulled him out of the water and rolled him around on the grass until he started breathing again. I was sure if I had a little brother I would take good care of him like that.

White Salmon

After many hours cramped in the car we came to the Columbia River Gorge. The little round stone house on top of Rooster Rock was a place to explore sometime. And the narrow highway between the cliffs and the river tucked now and then out of a tunnel of trees into a tunnel of rock, where the car engine roared. The headlights of the cars coming from the other direction looked ominous, and people honked their horns and laughed and waved as they passed. Finally Hood River, across a narrow creaky iron bridge, up a steep hill to a narrow street, to a little blue-grey house at the end behind a forbidding board fence just before the hill tumbled off into the White Salmon River canyon.

Grampa was a huge man, several inches taller than Daddy and big in every direction. He didn't look like someone who should be afraid of spirits. Grandma looked small beside him, though she was bigger than Mama. Behind the house the wide garden sloped down to a shed and a small barn. Time for bed, Arlea and I in a narrow cot in a small room off the living room with just a curtain for a door, we couldn't help hearing our parents and grandparents talking about the

war, how the people in England were suffering so much from the bombs. But night brings sleep, at least eventually, and dreams. Arlea and I both dreamed of bombs falling and airplanes shot down and crashing. We both escaped from the bombing at the same time by tumbling out of the bed onto the floor. She on top of me with a muffled scream.

But the war was still far away, and the night was yet long, and we woke to a beautiful White Salmon morning. Grampa was walking up the garden slope from the barn with a steaming bucket of milk hanging from each hand, while the sun tried to peak through the trees over the rim of the mountain up east. His baggy bib overalls made him even more huge, and his rocking laughter made the trees quake and the sun quiver in echo. Benjamin Tupper. My name, too, and his grandfather also Benjamin Tupper. I was already proud to carry on the wonderful tradition.

Breakfast of warm fresh milk splashed on oatmeal mush. Oatmeal usually didn't taste very good. But this was wonderful—with a dash of honey, a little extra cream, and two fresh eggs from the shed below the garden. How could heaven be better than this?

Cherry Grove

But it couldn't last. Just one more wonderful day, then back down the gorge, through Portland, through Gaston where Daddy was born, to Grandma's house at Cherry Grove. That was the town Grampa Lovegren built, the hills Mama ran on when she was a girl, the famous Lee Falls that she loved so much when she was little.

Aunt Effie ran the general store and Post Office with her husband John Pierson. The site of the sawmill that was Grampa's treasure, the broken dam that broke his business and his heart in the rapid snow melt of a freak winter thaw.

Grandma was a tiny woman, tiny beside Mama. And even Mama was small beside Aunt Effie.

The house was bigger than Grampa's at White Salmon. There was even a room for Arlea and me to sleep upstairs. And a tall fireplace. Just a few days, then home again through the California Redwoods. We stopped at a tree we could drive our car through, and the forest was cool, dark in places almost like night, and with a sour smell of damp needles. Different from our home forests, which were dry and crackly under our feet with the sun shining hot between the trees.

Ice Cream

Since I was five years old, it was time to have my tonsils taken out. Kenton and Deloy McCullough went with with me down to Sacramento to the hospital. I didn't like the rubber sheet over my face. And I didn't like the smell of the ether. Even worse, I didn't like the way my throat hurt when I woke up. But the second day they brought dishes of ice cream and said that was a reward in exchange for the tonsils. I couldn't understand that. I figured if God put them there, they must have some purpose. But Mama said everybody got his tonsils out when he was five years old. Not to discuss.

The McCulloughs lived on a dry hillside closer to town, and one day a group of men got together to help them set up a new toilet. They dug a deep hole with straight sides, then put the new house over it. It was a three-hole toilet. Bigger than most. Most families had only a two-holer. Old men living alone usually had only one hole. Rich families might have as many as five or six holes. They sawed the holes at an angle, pointed in the front and round at the back, and rounded the edges with a rasp to make them comfortable to sit on, then they dumped some white powder in.

The new green wood smelled fresh and sweet. I was happy to be the first one to use it. And especially since there

was a brand new Sears and Roebuck catalog for wiping paper. The green and yellow pages always got used first because they were softer. When only stiff white pages were left, it was hard to crinkle them enough to make for good wiping.

Some more white powder in the old hole, then it got filled and covered over with the dirt from the new hole. After the grass grew on it for a few weeks, you could hardly tell there had ever been a toilet there at all.

One hot summer day I felt even hotter than the day. Mama looked at me and said the words "chicken pox." They sounded terrible. Even worse that I had to stay in bed for several days. And when I finally got up and started walking around, I felt things pop and then water run down my back. Why couldn't the chickens just keep their old pox?

Mosquito

Mama was hired to teach in a one-room school out in the Mosquito District, a little farming community carved out of the national forest way out across the American River some distance beyond the goat doctor's cabin. People said it was once a major settlement of the Miwok Indian people, but they were long since gone.

Because it was so remote and because the road going over there was so difficult, they had trouble finding a teacher in the best of circumstances. And since there was a severe shortage of teachers, the county office was willing to overlook Mama's lack of current teaching credentials and the bad mark on her record from fifteen years before. They were even willing to overlook that she was pregnant and would have a baby before the year was over.

Maybe it helped that the Adams family from the church had a farm out there. They had a house trailer on a flat space bulldozed out of the hillside above the new church, and they split their time between the trailer in town and the farm in

Mosquito. They had a daughter, Aletha, a pretty girl about eighteen years old with blond curls, who liked to wave from the trailer at the boys going by on the street. Their son Cedric was older, dark, and very quiet, and he rode a motorcycle. We didn't see him very often.

Mr. Adams played the organ for church, and sometimes when there was not a regular preacher for the sermon, he would preach instead. I always liked his sermons because he explained words from the Greek Bible and how they should be translated. One day he spent the entire sermon time explaining the verse where Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with him in paradise—all the reasons why the verse was punctuated incorrectly in the English Bible and should be read differently; the verse really didn't say that the thief would go to heaven immediately when he died. And the thief probably didn't die that day anyway. People usually hung on a cross for several days before they finally died.

But I got embarrassed when he explained about circumcision from St. Paul's writings, and I would peek around the congregation, trying not to be noticed while looking to see if the women and girls in the congregation were embarrassed, too.

When school started, Mama took me and Arlea with her, and we would usually stay at the Adams farm in Mosquito through the week and come home on weekends. Since I was only five years old, Mama didn't expect me to do any school work, but I enjoyed reading the books that the upper grade students were working from. Sometimes I would help them when they were having trouble.

There were students from the first through the eighth grade from several different families. A little red-headed girl, just five years old like me, sometimes came with her brothers and sisters. I liked her a lot, and one day when the school was having a picnic I had a chance to sit down in the grass beside her and put my arm around her waist. She put her arm around my waist, too. My sister saw it and teased me so hard about

my girlfriend that I decided I should never let anyone see me with a girl like that again.

Next to the schoolyard was a wild area. Over the years boys had trained wild grape vines to loop down from tree limbs and up again for swings. And there were Indian arrowheads and other relics to be found if one looked carefully. The Adams farm house was not large, but with a flatter roof over the wide screened porch all around, it seemed to spread out a long distance on every side. The wood was natural and unpainted, even a bit green in places from moss or lichen, and the roof had dark wooden shingles, also with a bit of green here and there.

Close around the house and a few small sheds was a dark forest of giant White Oak trees mixed with pine and fir and cedar. People said bears and mountain lions roamed there at night.

A broad swinging gate laced with barbed wire opened through a tough barbed wire fence onto an alley of cleared space leading down a gentle slope to a large meadow encircled by a dense, dark wall of trees. On either side of the alley was a row of barns and sheds and animal pens. I marked them well for future explorations as soon as I could figure a way through the fence or the gate.

Opportunity came soon enough. Someone left the gate unlocked, and with some little bit of shuffling and a good push I was on my way to the meadow. But my explorations were cut short when a Bantam Rooster challenged me. I had encroached, and he would defend, with his life if necessary, his domain and his subjects from the invader. He came squawking up to me with wings extended and shaking. Then he started flying up and trying to scratch my face with his claws. I quickly decided that explorations of the meadow could wait for another day, and I began planning clothes to use as body armor for the next incursion.

War

One Sunday morning news came over the radio that Japanese airplanes had attacked Pearl Harbor and many Americans were killed. A few days later Willis and George came home from Santa Rosa and announced they were going to quit school and join the Army to fight. George stomped around the house shouting he was going to kill lots of Japs. Mama was offended by his attitude and tried to quiet him down, but he kept stomping and shouting. Willis was more thoughtful and quiet. Within a week both of them were gone to the war. We had a sad Christmas without them.

I worried about losing Daddy, too, but Mama said he wouldn't go because he was classified 4F on account of his hearing. He could only hear out of one ear, and we had to shout to make him hear even in that one unless he was wearing his hearing aid. It was a large heavy thing which he carried in his shirt pocket. It had a long double-twisted, skin-colored wire that he put through his shirt, under the collar, to an ear piece, and he clipped a huge battery pack to his belt that carried different sizes and shapes of batteries. He had a round voltage meter, shiny metal back with a glass face, with shiny prongs on round plugs on black twists of wires sticking out, three prongs on one plug, four on the other, to measure when the batteries were getting weak and needed to be replaced.

But in spite of his poor hearing he wanted to help in the war effort, so he went down to Mather Field, an Army Air Force base near Sacramento, and joined a welding class. After a few days he brought home a bragging piece — a squarish peg with rounded corners about an inch long neatly welded to an iron plate about four inches square and a quarter inch thick.

But he had trouble hearing instructions through the noise of the welding shop, and he decided he could be more help closer to home. I took possession of the welded piece and

guarded it carefully as my personal memento of the war effort.

People in town had cards in their windows with stars on them, one star for each son in the war, but we didn't have any because we lived out in the country at the end of a road where no one would see our house.

April Fool

Mama had it all worked out how she would get into town when time came for the baby. She would continue teaching right up to the end, not to leave the children without a teacher any longer than necessary. One of the school mothers would drive her in to Placerville to the hospital. It would only take a little more than an hour to go the thirty miles across the American River canyon into town—plenty of time.

About ten o'clock on the first day of April Mama turned suddenly to one of the girls and said, "It's time." The girl ran to get her mother. Mama grabbed the bag she had prepared and jumped into the car. They made it across the American River canyon and up to the flat near the Forestry Institute when Mama said to the lady driving, "I think we'd better stop here. They knocked on the door of a little house nearby, and when a woman answered, they said, "Could we come in here and have a baby?" By the time the doctor got there, mother and baby were doing fine, and everyone had fun over the April Fools baby.

He fooled everyone. Daddy thought the biggest and best fooling of all was the six fingers and six toes. Everywhere we went, he would carry little Danny around, proudly showing off the little hands and feet. Mama was proud to give him the middle name of August, after her father, August Lovegren. A few days later Mama was back in the school room, Danny was in a crib near the front, and the upper grade girls proudly took

turns watching the little bundle, shushing him when he started to fuss.

Moving

It was time to move again. Colonel Gripper was going to Moscow as a military attache, probably until the war was over, and he needed someone to take care of his pear ranch while he was gone. Daddy was working every day, so Mama and Arlea and I did most of the packing. We were burning in the fireplace things we didn't want to take with us.

I had a big red footstool, stuffed with excelsior, that had a seam torn on one side, not good enough to carry to the new house, so I poked it into the fireplace. Then I walked out to survey my region again before we had to leave. As I was walking back to the house from the county road, I saw flames dancing on the shingle roof. I ran into the house to tell Mama. She didn't believe me at first and went outside to see. Then she got excited, and we ran back into the house and we all started throwing things off the porch into the Ivy. We saved some books, including Daddy's Bible and my precious volume three of the Childcraft set. But we lost all of our furniture except for a few chairs. I saved my violin, but the piano was lost.

I knew it was sparks from my footstool in the fireplace that made the fire on the roof, and I carried the loss of everything in my heart.

Mr. Thiele was generous. He said, "All I lost was a house. The Tupperts lost almost everything."