

Pollock Pines

The Sawmill

The only reason I could see for the town was the big sawmill down at the end of the street. It wasn't very much of a town—just a row of houses along one side of the street with open space yawning several hundred yards down a gentle slope into a scatter of Ponderosa pines. There were other houses scattered around in no particular order, and there was a store, a Chevron gas station and a Post Office over the hill. Buying gas at the Chevron station was a treat. They had large colored pictures of beautiful places all over America, and if you bought gas there often enough, you could get a complete set. Every few months they started a whole new set. I think the idea behind the pictures was to give everybody an appetite to travel and buy more gasoline, always, of course, at Chevron gas stations, to get more pictures.

Our house was sort of in the middle of our street—white board siding, black shingle roof, up on stilts with a space beneath where I could play. At least our house was painted. Some other houses were just plain boards up and down. Right away I started with some civil engineering projects,

building roads and bridges in the dirt banks between the pillars holding the house up. Some of the places were hidden from the street, and I could build and play in complete privacy. I could see out, but when I ducked down, no one could see me.

The sawmill was a big operation and made lots of noise day and night. A conveyor poured the sawdust onto the top of a giant pile—a yellow cone with fire inside that made wisps of smoke during the day and glowed orange and red at night. I thought that would be a wonderful place to climb and play, but Daddy said there was no way to tell where the fire had made a cave inside, and I could fall through into a burning hole at any point.

Not all of the people living there had any connection with the sawmill. Some families, like us, were just looking for a place to live. There were several children about my age to play with. Right away I made friends with Betty Woods and her little sister Mary. Betty was my age with long brown hair that fell almost straight below her shoulders. Mary was about a year older than Danny with short reddish-blond hair in bouncing curls. Robert was my age. His father was manager of the Safeway store in Placerville. We didn't do much except just walk around together. While we were walking, he would say over and over, "I wish something drastic would happen." Finally I asked him what he meant. He said it would be fun if there was a big explosion or if the sawmill burned down.

Down three houses from us a man was building an icebox out of scrap boards he got from a pile by the sawmill. It was in two layers with a space in between which he filled with sawdust from the mill pile. When he was finished, he invited all the neighbors to admire his creation. It looked primitive, but he bragged that it held the ice cold for a long time and kept the food from spoiling real good. One of the younger women who came to admire it said she would like to have one like it, and the man began singing to her. At the end of every stanza was a one-line refrain: "And he tickled her

under the chin," while he reached over and really tickled her under her chin. She acted embarrassed, blushing and swirling her hips so her dress swished back and forth around her knees, but she didn't run away.

The Big Cat

Daddy started working at another sawmill being built way far south from us. It was a new development by Mr. Wilcox from Oregon, who was related to us somehow.* [identify relationship] It was far enough away that Daddy couldn't come home except at the end of the week. I went sometimes to stay with him down there. We were the only ones on the site. We slept in a little cabin like several others there—just two small rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom. The kitchen didn't have running water. We had to carry water from a pipe sticking up out of the hillside. And the bedroom was scarcely big enough to hold a single bed. The cabin was built out of rough boards up and down. There was no inside wall, and we could see out through the cracks between the boards. I liked it because the wood was fresh and smelled sweet.

Daddy's job there was to push dirt around to fix the ground around the sawmill so trucks could come in and out to dump logs and pick up the sawed lumber. He drove a "D8" Caterpillar tractor that had a big blade in front. There was a framework overhead with cables and pulleys. When Daddy pulled on a handle, some set of pulleys and cables would snap tight, and something would move up or down. Sometimes they would make a wonderful clanging noise when the blade dropped suddenly to the ground. I enjoyed sitting beside Daddy and trying to figure out which handle would make which set of pulleys and cables move. And I loved the sense of great power in the machine. When the tractor hit some resistance, the engine would change to a deeper, stronger tone, like grunting to get the job done, and the whole machine

would shudder under the load as the dirt gave way and began to move.

Once Mama and Arlea and Danny came to stay with us for a few days, and the little house felt suddenly very tiny. But the job didn't last very long, and soon we were back at Pollock Pines all the time.

Silver

We went to church at Camino because that was closer than Placerville. I liked it because that was the church Rossi and his family went to. He and I would sit together in the very front pew. I was always very careful to keep my eyes shut during the prayers. One time I put my hand up to Rossi's face to see if he had his eyes shut, too. He slapped my hand away and was angry with me, but he didn't stop sitting with me in church. I never tried to check his eyes during prayer again.

When we got home from church, we would have a simple dinner, then Mama would let me change my clothes and go out to play with my friends. But I tried to play quieter games because it was still the Sabbath.

I was gathering a nice collection of old silver coins. Especially I was proud of a silver dollar from 1888 that looked almost new. Altogether I had about thirty dollars in silver coins, dating about from 1880 through 1920. I kept them in the top drawer of the dresser in my room, and looked at them and sorted them almost every day. One day I showed them to one of my friends. When we came back from church the next Sabbath, I went to the drawer to look, and they were all gone.

A short walk over the hill was the lake called Four Bays. One day Robert and I decided to go fishing. I got a safety pin from Mama's sewing machine and a piece of cotton string. Over at the lake I found a stick and tied the string to it with the pin on the end. Robert's line was only a little bit better.

We scratched under the trees until we found some earthworms for bait. We sat there for a long time but never even saw a fish ripple, much less felt a nibble. It was OK because I didn't know what I would do with the fish if I caught one.

One day I couldn't find any of my friends. After hunting for them around all the houses, I finally heard some talking way down below in the edge of the forest. When I got down there, I found about fifteen kids, some of whom I had never seen before, standing around in a circle watching Mary Woods and a little boy about three years old sitting on the pine needles with their pants down. She was trying to get him to put his thing into her. Finally he gave a couple of little jerks, and Mary shouted, "See! He knows how to do it!" I didn't stay to watch any more.

A few days later when I was working on my roads and bridges under the house, I saw Betty Woods walking by on the street outside. I called her in to see my project, and she asked if I wanted her to take off her dress. I told her, No, I didn't want that, and she went away acting diappointed and mad.

Sharon

George had a new car. It was a silver-grey Pontiac coupe with red leather seats and a broad chrome stripe down the back. I thought it was an exciting car. It was almost new, but he said he got it cheap because someone had painted "Just Married" on the back and ruined the paint. When they tried to take off the words, it took the paint off clear down to the metal, and they weren't able to match the colors to make it look right. I didn't mind the mismatched paint, and George was proud of his good deal. I wanted to ride with him in his fancy car, but he liked a girl named Sharon and spent his time riding around with her instead. Whenever I did get to ride with him he liked to sing his favorite song:

*Oh, give me land, lots of land
Under starry skies above,
Don't fence me in.*

*....
Let me wander over yonder
Till I see the mountains rise.
I want to ride to the ridge
Where the west commences,
Gaze at the moon till I lose my senses,
Can't look at hobbles and I can't stand fences,
Don't fence me in.*

His voice wasn't as pretty as Roy Rogers', but I thought he put more feeling into it.

Sometimes Sharon would walk over to our place to talk with Mama. She was quiet and hardly ever said a word to me, only talked with Mama and Arlea. I wasn't surprised when George married her. I wondered if he would still sing the song about fences.

George was able to get military surplus things really cheap. One of the things he got was a truck. It looked like brand new, and I think he paid only fifty dollars for it. He took the bed off and put log racks on instead and began hauling logs to the sawmills. He talked about all the bridges he was driving over marked "Load Limit 8 tons." He said he was hauling at least twice that much every load and hoped the bridges wouldn't collapse under him. At least I was glad he wasn't in any danger of getting shrapnel in his belly from Jap artillery.

Picnic

Down the hill south from Pollock Pines was a little valley with a creek running through. Mostly it was just raw forest,

but in one place the valley flattened and widened out into a sort of meadow called Sly Park, and there were shaded grassy places to lie down and relax. Mama and Daddy liked to go down there on a hot Sabbath afternoon to read and relax. Mama would make a picnic lunch, and we children could poke around the quiet pools at the edges of grassy islands after we ate, looking for frogs and salamanders. It was a prettier place than the little creek by the Thiele house. Bright flowers were everywhere—Columbines and Johnny Jump Ups and Shooting Stars and Indian Paint Brushes and, here and there, a Tiger Lily. But most of all I liked the plants with the huge wide leaves I called Elephant Ears.

School

Summer was over too soon, and time to go back to school. Mama wasn't teaching that year, and they decided to enroll Arlea and me in the church school—Camino Placerville Junior Academy. It was about halfway between Camino and Placerville and served both churches.

The school had four rooms for up to grade ten. I was in the room for grades four, five and six. Our teacher was Miss Hemme. She was an albino with white hair, pale blue eyes, and almost transparent skin. She was tall and skinny, and kind and pleasant, and I liked her right away. Since there were three grades in the one room, she had some option about where to place me. My reading was advanced, but I was still a little bit slow with arithmetic, and because I was about the age of most of the third graders, she decided to put me in the fourth grade. But I had already done the fourth grade at Rescue, and Rossi was in the fifth grade, and I had to be in the same grade with him. So every day I would hurry through my fourth grade work then borrow a fifth grade book and do those assignments, too. After a few days Miss Hemme laughed and said if I were that serious about being in the fifth

grade, it was alright with her. She took my fourth grade books away and gave me all fifth grade books to work from.

The school bus didn't go all the way to Pollock Pines, so Daddy would drop us off at the bus stop in in the morning, then in the afternoon we would ride to the end of the line and walk the rest of the way home along Highway 50. It was a hard walk, mostly a little bit uphill, and in many places there wasn't much room between the pavement and the ditch at the side. Sometimes the big trucks would come close and make a swirling wind like the trains at the farmers market in San Francisco. I liked that. Sometimes George would come by and pick us up in his fancy Pontiac coupe. That was even better. I liked to watch him steer using a round yellow knob he had fastened to the steering wheel. He could spin the steering wheel around and around with just one hand.

One day passing an open field beside the road we saw a pair of dogs mating. When we got closer, they tried to run away, but they were stuck together, and they were yowling and tumbling sideways. I thought about Caroline's niece and about Mary and Betty Woods, and I was embarrassed to be watching with my sister.

The weather started getting colder, the walk up the hill to Pollock Pines was getting every day longer, and I was glad when my parents said we were moving again.