# *The Sheppler Ranch*

## *The Hillside*

We turned off Highway 50 near Camino and twisted through the Cosumes River gorge on dirt almost to Pleasant Valley. A distance on pavement through Smith's Corners to the River School, then back on dirt again at Sand Ridge Road to a wide board gate on strap iron hinges that opened our way to the ranch, A narrow rocky track down a long hill, a wide horseshoe bend through a flat creek bottom, a grove of oak and yellow pine trees, and out to a sloping pasture like a wide shallow bowl tipped up toward an edge. At the north the bowl narrowed to a spout pouring into pine and oak trees toward the Cosumes River gorge below; across to the west a scattering of long white barns with red tarpaper roofs; and near by the entrance to the bowl a huge spreading pile of stinking chicken manure from the four thousand laying hens in the barns.

The house stood high on the middle of the south rim, up against the oak and pine and manzanita and buckthorn woods. Two stories high, just one room deep, with wide screened porches full length both top and bottom. Downstairs

at the west end was a large kitchen with a big cast iron stove like the one at the Thiele house; at the other end a dank walk-in pantry with all concrete floor and walls and cool water from a spring trickling through a channel in the floor; between, a huge bathroom with a flush potty and a real cast iron and porcelain tub standing on curved legs, long enough to actually lie down in while taking a bath.

Upstairs over the kitchen was the living room, then through a hallway to a large bedroom. The back of the house was dug into the side of the hill, with the lower part of the wall made of thick concrete, so the downstairs back windows were up near the ceiling and there was a short rise from the hill in back up to the hallway between the living room and bedroom. All in all a weird house, but the rent was only thirty-five dollars per month, including a barn and pasture for two cows, and we could stay as long as we wanted. Mama said she had lived in seventeen houses in seventeen years, and she was glad she could plan to stay in one place for a time.

Close up the hill behind the house stood a large shed made of red-colored boards nailed up and down, then up higher the low barn. The barn had the same kind of boards, but it was covered on part of the outside with wide strips of red tarpaper, like on the roofs of the barns across the way, bulging out in places making pockets which were filled with bats. Around sundown the air would be almost black with bats pouring out from their sleeping place. Daddy said that was good because they would keep the mosquitoes and other insects under control.

About the level of the barn, off to the east a few yards, cool water ran out of a boxed spring in a steady flow. A pipe went down to the house, and the overflow ran through the pantry and down to a marshy fenced-in area below the house and to the side. The bathroom and kitchen drains, including the potty, emptied into that same marshy area, so we didn't go down there. The cover to the spring was only loose boards, and on the under side of the boards about three inches thick

of daddy long leg spiders squirming over and around each other. Around the spring was a tiny meadow about six feet across with horse tails and moss and sedge and ferns and columbines.

It was a sharp climb up from the road to the house. At the west side, just out the kitchen window, a shallow dip gave room to park two cars. Above that a steep driveway climbed up to the back of the house. Daddy usually parked his truck there to keep it out of the way. We could drive right up to the wall of the house. That was convenient when we lifted the piano in through the kitchen window.

Mama enjoyed having the piano in the kitchen, close where she spent most of her time. She played the melody and one or two harmonic notes with the right hand and ranging chords all over the keyboard with the left. Or sometimes she would switch and play the melody with the left hand and make the ranging chords with the high notes. One of her favorite things to play was a song she had written herself about being homesick for the Canadian prairie where she and Daddy lived for several years after they were married. She wrote the notes and words on music paper and sent it off to get a copyright on it. When Aunt Elva saw it, she laughed and said Mama had done everything correctly according to the rules of music theory.* (show complete song)

The stove had coils of pipes in the firebox to heat water. Then the pipes ran to a tall galvanized tank in the corner of the bathroom. Every time the stove was lit to cook something, the water in the tank would get warm. Daddy liked that so much that he started bathing and shaving regularly twice a week.

We didn't have electricity. The man who built the house had wired it for 24 volts and put a DC generator in a small shed in the garden area east of the house. The shed was still there on a concrete slab, and some of the light sockets still had 24-volt bulbs in them, but the generator was gone. We used kerosene lanterns. The best one had a tall narrow glass chim-

ney and a silk mantel over the flame that made much brighter light than any of the other lamps. But the mantle would break in pieces if it were touched or if the lamp got shook hard.

## *My Space*

I took possession of the west ends of the porches, both downstairs and up. The screened area ended about eight feet from the end, leaving a closed-in space. There was no inner wall. Rather, heavy 2x6 studs extending inward from the outer stucco wall made convenient anchors for shelves and hooks and other implements. Downstairs I made an inventor's studio and workshop. I had tables and shelves and bench space for experiments and for building model airplanes and other things.

Upstairs I nailed a wire across to hang a blanket from in order to make a little room beyond the wide double french glass doors leading into the living room. The porch was just wide enough to fit the bed springs lengthwise across, and the space was deep enough for a chest of drawers against the wall between the curtain and the bed. I put a table for reading and writing at the other end against the screen so I could look up from my books and papers out over the pasture. I liked my space, liked to listen to the crickets and other night things, and went to bed early as often as I could. Especially I liked when the storms came. Rain and hail pounding on the metal roof made my little room feel even more cozy and secure, and I loved the smell of rain slashing across the screens just a few feet from my pillow.

Arlea slept in the living room on a couch that converted into a bed. From near the kitchen door a long staircase went to the upstairs porch. The stairs and upper floor creaked even if you stepped on them very carefully. One night I heard a very slow and careful stepping up the stairs, then down the long course of the porch to the living room doors, then the

curtain flew open and Arlea jumped and landed on me hard. She was a big girl, and it hurt. Next night same thing. But the third night I was ready. When I heard the slow careful creaking begin, I stood quietly out of the bed and arranged blankets and pillows in a hump to look like I was still in it. Then I crawled underneath. Arlea threw open the curtain and landed as before. Then I heard her tapping on the bed with her hands and muttering, "I think I killed him. I think I killed him." She rolled to the edge and put her feet on the floor. And I reached out and grabbed her ankles. And she screamed. She never tried to do that to me again.

## *School*

Getting to school was a problem. We lived about thirteen miles from Placerville on a narrow winding road that got steep in places, especially through the Cosumes gorge. Daddy was working near Placerville, so he would take us with him mornings and drop us off early at the store across from the Post Office to wait for the school bus from our church school. It was not a big store. Used to be the Safeway before that store moved up town to the larger place where Robert's father was manager. At the very front, close on Main Street and across from the Post Office, was a narrow corner between windows where I could sit inside protected from the weather but with a full view of the street. A floor safe stood there in the corner, built into a cabinet making a ledge just high enough for me to sit on and watch for the bus to come. I would pull on the knob from time to time, but it wouldn't come open, until one day I saw some numbers written with pencil on the wall above the safe. I turned the knob back and forth according to those numbers, and the safe came open in my hand. I thought about telling the store manager, but then I decided he probably knew about the numbers written there and wouldn't like me getting into his safe.

The Post Office was just across the street—small, fiercely white in a vaguely monumental style. It sat back from the street on all sides surrounded by a bright green finely manicured lawn, the only grass in the downtown area, and every few feet were steel signs on steel posts, red white and blue in the shape of a shield shouting "U. S. Government Property Stay off the Grass." Our address was P.O. Box 895

Wilton Hartwick was still playing his violin. He was in the eighth grade, and he liked Rae Hacker, one of my fifth-grade classmates. But he didn't treat her very nice. He would scold her all during the noon recess, or sometimes just glare at her silently while she stood there trembling. I wondered why she didn't come play with us instead. She was a beautiful girl—long silky almost-white hair, bright blue eyes, and a sweet oval face.* [meeting years later at San Jose church] Her younger sister Karen had reddish brown hair and freckles and a funny button nose. (move to Pollock Pines)

The afternoons were longer than the mornings. The school bus would drop us off at the store about three o'clock, and Daddy didn't finish work until after five. We couldn't hang around the store that long, so we walked four or five blocks worth down Main Street, always careful not to step on the cracks, past Mr. Kleingbeil's shoe shop, past the Chinese laundry, past the bakery with a wonderful rotating bread slicer in the window slowly slicing loaves of fresh bread* [describe the breaking up of the dies, etc.] , and across the street to the City Library—except there weren't any blocks or cross streets. That part of town ran through a narrow canyon along the creek, and there wasn't any place to go sideways except up a steep hill, too steep for a car to climb. One day I spotted half a Baby Ruth candy bar on the sidewalk, and I grabbed and stuck it into my mouth. Then I thought what a stupid thing that was to do and hoped no one had seen me.

In the library I found the complete works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and I redd The Song of Hiawatha and Evangeline all the way through. I wept for Evangeline,

how she was banished from her home and had to run to a strange place far away. Later I learned that some of my Tupper relatives had settled long ago on the lands that Evangeline's people had been forced out of* [ref. the "settlers" of Nova Scotia], and Wilton Hartwick's people were from that same area, and he was probably related to me through the Nova Scotia Tuppers, and I was ashamed for the part my family might have played in Evangeline's tragedy.

I loved the rhythms of the Hiawatha poem. I could hear the Indian drums pounding as I read the lines. Sometimes at night, after everyone was asleep, I would stand at the screen and recite for the crickets singing in the darkness:

*By the shores of Gitche Gumee*
*By the shining Big Sea Water*
*Stood the wigwam of Nakomis,*
*Daughter of the Moon, Nakomis,*
*Dark behind it rose the forest,*
*Rose the black and gloomy pine-trees,*
*Rose the firs with cones upon them,*
*Bright before it beat the water,*
*Beat the clear and sunny water,*
*Beat the shining Big-Sea-Water.*
*There the wrinkled old Nakomis*
*Nursed the little Hiawatha,*
*Rocked him in his linden cradle,*
*Bedded soft with moss and rushes,*
*Safely bound with reindeer sinews;*
*......*
*At the door on summer evenings*
*Sat the little Hiawatha;*
*Heard the whispering of the pine-trees,*
*Heard the lapping of the waters,*
*Sounds of music, words of wonder;*
*"Minne-wawa!" said the pine-trees,*
*"Mudway-aushka!" said the water.*

And I would shiver with delight and wonder as the rhythms rolled out under the stars.*[later finding books]

The trip home from Placerville went by a fancy ranch house. It was painted bright colors and had scrolling woodwork in contrasting colors all around the eaves and window frames. It stood back from the road westward across a small valley with a sometime creek at the bottom, and several horses grazed behind the fence of wide white boards. I could tell the people there were very rich because their toilet house, down the hill a spell in front of the house, was decorated with fancy woodwork and bright colored paint like the big house and because it was huge. Must have been at least a five-holer.

The Larsens were as important in Camino as the Thieles were in Placerville, and Laurene Larsen was in my grade. I thought she was a really good girl, and I admired her both for her family and for herself. Word got around the school that her little brother Tom, in the first grade, was trying to organize a "fucking club" with the first grade girls. One day getting on the school bus we had just been talking about Tom and his club, and I made a gesture at Laurene like someone had shown me, poking my index finger back and forth through a slit I made with my fingers in the other hand by pulling the tip of the index finger back with the tip of the middle finger. She said that was naughty and I shouldn't do it any more. I believed her, and I was ashamed and never did it again. And always after that when the kids talked about Tom and his club* [tom grew up and became a foreign missionary], I was embarrassed for Laurene's sake and walked away.

The walls of the school buildings were swirls of white stucco and the roof was red curved tiles, just like Al Thiele's house. I thought he must have built the school. There were actually two buildings—one with three rooms for grades one through eight, and a separate one, taller and a different shape, for grades nine and ten. Our building had large windows with arched tops all along the north side, so we could look

down across the brushy hillside to Highway 50 below. The playground was level and sandy close on the south side of the school buildings with swings and slides and a merry-go-round there. But the rest of the playground, across a little narrows to the east, was a mild slope with sharp rocks poking up through the dirt, and we had to be careful that we didn't fall down.

We played softball up at the top end. I couldn't throw very well, so they put me catching the balls behind the plate. I couldn't bat very well either. I wouldn't have played at all except that Rossi always insisted that I be on his team, or that I had a position next to him when we played workups. My greatest victory was when I hit a pop fly that came down close behind second base. I bragged about it to Daddy on the way home, and he said he was proud of me for it.

One day we made a field trip walking up to the airport, which was on the ridge directly above the school to the south. Along the way I pulled up a Poison Oak plant and swung it around by the roots teasing the girls, bragging how I was immune like my daddy, not like my mama, who could catch a terrible case of the rash just by sitting in the same room with Daddy after he had been walking through the woods. Three days later my face and hands and arms were swollen up as bad as Mama's ever got, and I had to stay home from school for almost a week. Mama cooked up some thick tea from Elderberry leaves. It made me feel sticky and stinky, but the rash went down faster wherever she put it on me.

## *Neighbors*

When school let out in the spring I had more time to get acquainted with the family who owned the chicken ranch. They were from our church in Placerville—Mr. and Mrs. Sheppler, their daughter Anabelle and her husband Leonard Knapp, and a granddaughter Sandra about the age of Danny.

Except Mr. Sheppler didn't go to church with the family. He smoked cigarettes and hung around the ranch on Sabbaths in his work clothes. I enjoyed rambling through the barns with Leonard, gathering eggs from the nests. He showed me the white glass eggs they put in the nests to make the hens lay more. There were wood shavings everywhere, all over the floor and filling the vertical stacks of nests that went from near the floor to as high as Leonard could reach. The hens were free in the barns and fluttered around wherever we walked. Leonard carried a bucket in each hand, and when his buckets got full of eggs, he had to go back and get an empty pair from the stack near the door. Then Anabelle and Mrs. Sheppler cleaned the eggs with sandpaper blocks and put them in boxes. Leonard drove the boxes of eggs into town in his Studebaker pickup truck that had a narrow hood and a narrow high grill. It reminded me of the front of Mr. Weldon's Buick, except that it was a dirty orange color and not pretty at all.

Across the hill behind our house, through the manzanita and buckthorn thickets to Sand Ridge Road, I found another friend. Paul B. Haseltine was about a year older than I, and he was very proud of the "B." His father lived somewhere far away back east, and Paul said he was an important person. His mother went by Peggy Jacobs, but Jacobs was not the name of the man who was living there with her. Paul told me he had married a woman in Africa when he was living over there, and he was trying to get a divorce so he could marry his mother, but it was hard, being in a different country. I got the impression that his African wife was colored, but I was never sure about that. He seemed a nice enough man. He was more educated and spoke more correct English than most people around, and he was a member of the school board. His job was to drive around the county checking all the juke boxes to make sure the proper royalties were being paid to the musicians union headed by Mr. James C. Petrillo.* [Who I thought must be a terrifying man, but years later I met his nephew and

thought better of him.] But one day suddenly he wasn't there any more. No one ever told me why he left or where he went.

After he left, there were often other men around the house who came to help Peggy do things that were hard for her. A group of men showed up one day to dig a well. It was about ten feet square and went down about fifteen feet into the decomposed granite before they began to find water. One of the men said he wanted a cigarette, and a boy about our age who was standing there with us watching took one out of the man's shirt pocket and lit it and smoked it awhile before he dropped it down to the man in the hole, laughing while the man complained and grumbled and scolded.

Peggy was a good looking woman with almost straight black hair down to her shoulders and blue eyes and always a smile on her face and a happy lilt to her voice. She liked to sing the popular songs. Especially she would sing, "Shoo, fly, from my apple dowdy..." and laugh, and then sing it and laugh again. She tried to convince me that each day in Genesis 1 represented a thousand years.

Paul hated the way his mother smoked cigarettes, one after the other all day long. One day when she was gone, he went through her drawers and took out all the packs he could find. We lit the stove and tried to burn them on the propane burners. But mostly the flames only burned the paper off the outside foil and left the cigarettes whole inside.

Paul knew all about all of the World War II movies and all of the actors who played in them. The movies changed a lot after the war, and many of the actors changed with them. In the war movies Veronica Lake was a sweet fresh girl with blond curls, but afterwards she wore her hair reddish dark down over one eye and tried to look seductive.

Paul was very intense about finding the lost Wells Fargo treasure. Everywhere we walked in the brush he was always looking for telltale signs that someone had been digging there. I thought it was unlikely, since we were so far from the Placerville route, across a deep river canyon, that it was

unlikely anyone had ever carried a heavy chest of stolen gold that far. And it was much too long ago anyhow for any signs to remain. But I never challenged him about it out loud.

We liked to run down the gorge to the river to swim in the deep pools between the huge granite boulders. In the summertime the river slowed to a trickle, and there were many quiet pools to swim in. Actually, we did less running than jumping—leaping sideways with bent knees to cushion the landing five or ten feet down the steep slope. It was at least a mile from any road, so we stripped off our clothes to swim, then dried out on the other side on the boulders facing south into the sun. Once while we were lying there sunning, rocks began falling into the water next to us. We tried to cover ourselves while we looked around. Our clothes were across the river, and we couldn't reach them without exposing ourselves more. Finally we heard some noise up the above us, and there was a man walking along a deer trail with several dogs gawking and laughing at us. At least we were glad it was a man. It was a long hard climb back up after the swim, and we always liked to stay until late enough that the sun wasn't so hot.

One day Danny went down to the river with us. Since he was smaller and couldn't run and jump as fast, we took a different way down. And coming back up we decided to climb the face of the Granite roll-off into the Cosumes gorge. Upstream a ways from our swimming place we found the remains of an old fence that ran straight down the face, and we climbed it hand over hand. I thought if it broke loose we would tumble onto the boulders at the bottom of the gorge. About halfway up the wires wrapped around a leaning rotten fence post. But it held on tight, and at the top we found a cool cave, a dampish dirt hole under a giant boulder, to rest in and let the sweat go away.

Once when Paul came to sleep overnight with me, my parents had bought an L.A. lug of tomatoes. Every few minutes throughout the night we ran downstairs to get two more

tomatoes to eat. They were all gone by morning. I was a little bit embarrassed, but Mama just laughed.

## *Star Thistle*

Out beyond and above the parking space a wide thrust of granite stood out from the hill. A bit too steep to climb, it made a wonderful slide. But the surface was rough, even rougher after I wore all the lichens off, and my pants soon wore out in the seat.

Down below, just before our house on the road coming in, a pillar of granite stood close at the roadside. It was rounded at the top and back, but the front side was almost flat. Someone had painted it white and written some black letters on it. The letters were mostly crumbling off, but I could make out enough to see that it was some verses from a Psalm about a rock and salvation.

The pasture was thick with star thistle, a rambly weed with little yellow flowers at the tips of the many stems which had thorns like needles about half an inch long sticking out at every angle from each blossom. They made barefoot walking difficult, but I found that if I ran fast, the thorns didn't hurt so much.

In the middle of the pasture, at the lowest point before it ran off into the gorge, pieces of an old Model T Ford sat by a hole with a little bit of water in it. There were pieces of what used to be a pump attached, and I would climb around pretending I was repairing it so it would run and pump water again. I borrowed the oogah horn motor for my inventor's studio to drive my inventions using an old battery. The battery didn't hold a charge very well, and Daddy would have to hook it up to his truck to recharge it for me every few days.

Sometimes I would just lie on the hillside and watch the logging trains on the mountainside across the Cosumes gorge.

It was a narrow gauge line just for bringing the logs from the national forest to the Caldor sawmill by Diamond Springs. On the way in to Placerville the tracks zig-zagged back and forth across the road many times. The trains were very slow. Watching them wend their way across the face of the mountain was like watching a snail climb a stem. But it was a decent way to spend idle moments lying in the sun. The workers in the sawmill went on strike, and Daddy got a job filling in with many others to keep the mill running. Somehow it was not legal for the mill to hire any temporaries for more than a week, so for the duration of the strike all the temporary workers got fired every Friday afternoon and hired again every Monday morning. Daddy thought that was fun, but still he was glad when the strike was over so he could get back to other work again.

Daddy said I needed shoes. I wasn't used to wearing shoes in the summer time except to church, and my feet were tough on the bottom like the soles of shoes anyway. But Daddy took me to a shoe store in Placerville and said I could have any kind of shoes I wanted. I looked them all over and finally picked out some clunky boots that I thought looked like the ones Daddy wore to work. They were ankle high and had thick soles and fat square toes and long laces, a light tan color. Daddy looked dubious, but he had promised I could have whatever shoes I wanted, so he paid for them and I wore them proudly home. But they came all to pieces in just a few weeks. I saw that they were made of pressed paper, not leather, and I was sorry I had made Daddy pay for something so shoddy. Daddy didn't offer to buy me another pair of shoes, and I was happy to keep on running barefoot, even on the star thistle.

Daddy said I could get around better if I had a bicycle. One day he brought home a huge box of old bicycle parts and handed me some wrenches. There were three different frames, several wheels and tires, handle bars of different shapes and sizes, an assortment of chains with patching links,

and all the other parts a bicycle is made of. I chose a medium frame, a high seat post, and longhorn handle bars that flared out wide and reached back past the horn of the seat almost to the seat post. I had to set them down low to go under the horn of the seat, and I had to twist my leg out of the way when I turned sharply, but they gave me good leverage climbing the hills, especially since I had chosen sprockets sized for a lower ratio. When I stood up on the pedals and pulled hard, I could pedal all the way up the hill to the gate at Sand Ridge Road. From there it was an almost level ride to Paul's place.

Paul liked to play kissy-tire with me, trying to knock each other off our bikes by ramming the rear wheels. The best flat open place anywhere around was in the Sheppler's yard between their house and their cow barn. It was covered with light-colored gravel, which made for hard, slow riding. Paul had the advantage in that his bike could make sharp turns faster and his rear tire was partly covered by a fender and fender straps, where my rear tire was completely exposed. I had the advantage in that my long handlebars and lower sprocket ratio allowed me to make quicker sprint dashes.

The Shepplers' cow barn was high with lots of rafters and supports everywhere that made for wonderful climbing, but when the doors were closed, it got quite dark in there, and the beams were thick with dust and hay powder. One day I missed a footing and fell and hit my head hard on a beam near the floor. I saw lights flashing and was out cold for awhile—I don't know how long. When I woke up I thought about Daddy falling and driving a nail into his head when he was a kid. But I couldn't find any blood or any hole.

## *The Lookout*

Often we heard B36 bombers rumbling overhead. It was a deep throaty, heavy sound like no other airplane. We could identify one immediately without seeing it. Some men in the

community thought we should be doing our part to protect our country. The Cold War had started, and they wanted to help in case of an attack by Communist airplanes. They built a lookout station at the edge of a field up against the woods, looking out to the northeast near the sawmill and the River School, so they could see any hostile airplanes coming and report them to the authorities. It was a nice little structure, rather like the gazebos in the pictures of grand estates, but I never saw anyone there doing a lookout. Paul said the men couldn't agree on a schedule for who should be there when, so people didn't very often go.

One of the problems was that there was no way to let the authorities know if a hostile airplane did appear. To solve that someone got some Army surplus field telephones and strung a wire from the lookout station to all the houses up and down Sand Ridge Road. But they didn't work very well. Each house was assigned its own unique ring pattern, but any time there was any kind of ring, everyone on the line would pick up the handset to listen in, and the voice was so faint no one could hear anything. We were too far away from Sand Ridge Road to participate in the project, but I thought we weren't missing very much.

## *Lights*

The electric company put a string of poles across the hill from Sand Ridge to the ranch. A branch line went to a pole close to our barn. An old man came out to hook the wires up, then a few days later a younger man came to check it, and he complained that the old man didn't know what he was doing, hooked everything up wrong. We were a bit nervous about connecting the 110-volt current into the 24-volt wiring, and we put only a few new light bulbs in at a time until we were sure we wouldn't burn the house down. But soon the kerosene lamps became obsolete—except for the hurricane lan-

terns Daddy carried to the barn. There was no electric wiring up there.

The electricity made for many new inventions. Daddy built a voltage reduction box for me out of pine boards, flat and wide, open on both ends, with bee wire running back and forth on rows of nails, long enough that the resistance in the wire reduced the voltage to where I could run little motors on it so I didn't have to use the old weak batteries any more.

Mother bought me a set of World Book Encyclopedia, and I sat right down and began reading it all the way through, volume after volume, whenever I wasn't busy working in my inventor's studio. I quit talking about the things I read when people started calling me the walking encyclopedia. When I got to the "M" volume, I discovered Marconi and his experiments with radio. The descriptions were fairly explicit, so I made a spark gap transmitter and a key to tap out the Morse Code. I tried to make a receiver out of a glass tube from an eyedropper and some iron filings, but I never could get it to work right.

I did better with regular radio. Somewhere Daddy picked up an old box radio and gave it to me to play with, and I made it work by fixing a wire inside. I strung a long copper-stranded antenna wire up to the limb of an oak tree by the barn, and every night I listened to the music broadcast from San Francisco called The Morris Plan Masters of Melody. The orchestra played short sections from the great classical masterpieces for fifteen minutes every evening, and I would let nothing interfere with that precious time.

When I got the measles and had to stay forever in Mama's and Daddy's bedroom with the curtains down to save my eyes, I lay in the dark and listened to Bobby Benton and the B-Bar-B Riders and the Lone Ranger and Sergeant Preston and other wonderful stories of good people fighting against evil. After I didn't need to stay in the dark room anymore, I kept on listening to my new friends tell their stories as often as I could make the time—which was not as

often as I would have liked, but I always made time to listen to the Morris Plan broadcast regardless of anything else.

After school was out, Mama and Daddy started talking about making a trip to Cherry Grove again. Because of the restrictions on travel due to the shortage of gasoline and tires, we hadn't seen Mama's family there all during the war. Daddy was worried about making the trip in the old Ford car, but he thought if he drove slow and easy we could probably make it. And we did. We spent some good time in Cherry Grove with everyone. I met my cousin Calvin Lovegren there for the first time. He was a few years older than I, and we played chess together. An older guy watched us for awhile, then he started coaching me, showing my how I could harrass Calvin's queen without rushing him to Checkmate. Calvin got really frustrated.

On the way back home we took the long slow way through the redwoods. Somewhere in Oregon we picked up an L.A. lug of apricots, and I had a bag of peanuts. The apricots were mostly still at least half green, and between nibbling on the peanuts and green apricots twisting down through the Redwood Highway, my stomach began to turn inside out. I vomited up everything I ate and drank, and still kept vomiting up.

By the time we stopped at Yuba City to visit someone, I had the dry heaves, constantly trying to throw up, but nothing there to come out except now and then a bit of sour foam. I felt too bad even to read the Burma Shave signs. Mama was in a hurry to get home—less than three more hours from Yuba City—and said I could just hold out until we got there. Maybe she wanted to make sure I never mixed peanuts and green apricots on a winding road again. It took about three days at home for my stomach to begin to settle down. Then Mama let me make the cake for my tenth birthday, maybe as a reward for suffering through the trip. I was still too sick to dare inviting anyone, but the cake and ice cream tasted good

anyway. The ice cream acted like good medicine to make my stomach happy again.

## *The Apple Ranch*

Mr. Weldon bought an apple ranch at Camino next to the highway. They were mostly Gravensteins, and he put some signs out: “Apples: Good for pies, Good for sauce.” But I never saw him selling any apples. The house was low and dark inside. The windows all around were overgrown with different kinds of plants, and big trees close to the eaves made dense shade over everything. I didn’t like to be in there, and I think neither did Rossi. Mrs. Weldon had died, and I think Mr. Weldon liked to be in a dark place as much as possible.

During the summer vacation I missed seeing Rossi, and my parents would let me stay at his house for several days at a time. We tried to make the nights in the dark house as short as possible and escaped to the outdoors all day long.

There was always a crowd of boys around about our age, but Rossi still kept me for his best friend. Don Crandall, who lived a short distance from Rossi’s new house, had a dirty mouth, always cussing with every bad word he could think of. I complained to his mother about it, and she scolded me for being judgmental about her boy. I thought that was a bad attitude on her part, and I tried to avoid him as much as possible after that. When he hung around with Rossi and the gang, I tried to stay as far away as I could without losing the guys.

There was a big squarish cement-lined pond at the edge of the apple trees about ten feet deep with sloping sides that sometimes had irrigation water in it. It got dirty fast with algae and wasn’t very good for swimming, but there was no place else around to get wet. After swimming there, we always felt like we needed to clean up. A shower room was attached to the outside of the house next to the lane coming

in from the highway, about ten or twelve feet square with several shower heads, and we would all troop in there together to shower up after a swim. One day there was a large drain plunger in the corner, and one of the boys grabbed it and smashed it against his groin so the handle stuck way out in front. He said the vacuum felt funny, so we all had to try it. When it got my turn, it made my balls feel tickly and strange. The guys laughed about what a great pecker that was, and soon the talk turned to how great it would be to stick their own peckers into a girl, and they began making jokes about Rossi's sisters. Rossi got offended and said, if he ever did that, he wouldn't do it with his sisters. When I asked him why, he looked at me strangely and didn't say a word.

The boys liked to make a list of book titles. Some of the popular ones were: "The Wildcat's Revenge" by Claude Balls; "The Hole in the Mattress" by Mister Completely; "The Cream of the Russian Youth" by Ivan Yakinov, "The Open Commode" by Seymore Hare, and "The Spots on the Wall" by Jacque Off. And there were riddles, like: "What is the lightest thing in the world? Answer: Your prick. Even a thought lifts it."

## *The Sawmill*

Mrs. Bostrom had a property southwest of Camino, down a long slope from the highway into a low wide valley, with some trees on it that she wanted to cut for lumber. She didn't want to sell the trees to a logger, but to make her own lumber to use some of it herself and sell enough that she would get her lumber for free. She kept talking to Daddy about it until he agreed to put in a small temporary sawmill to do the cutting. Mr. Weldon also got involved in the project. He was going to pay the money for some of the equipment, and he and Daddy would run it together. A small mill like that would only need two or three men working. They would

fell the trees, then limb and buck them, then drag them to the mill and run them through the big saw.

Daddy kept complaining that Mr. Weldon was not able to do heavy physical labor, didn't know anything about logging or sawmills and was making foolish decisions. Since it was mostly his money, he thought Daddy should do whatever he said. One night I heard Daddy telling Mama that the only solution he could see was to buy Mr. Weldon's part out so they could do things in the right way. I mentioned that to Rossi, and he became very angry and defensive. A few days later Daddy and Mama were talking that Mr. Weldon was preparing to take some kind of legal action against them, and they wanted to know just what I had told Rossi and why. I learned that family ties are deeper than friendship, no matter how good the friendship might be. The information I spilled to Rossi made it impossible for Daddy to continue, and he soon quit the project, leaving all his work and some money behind. I think Mrs. Bostrom never did get her lumber made. But Rossi remained my friend. I was just more careful what I told him.

## *The Luthier*

Mr. and Mrs. Dolf Matthews lived in a little house close on the road that wound through the narrow canyon toward the Larsens' apple ranch. Dolf had worked in the Naval shipyards at Mare Island by Vallejo during the war. He was a great story teller and talked for hours about adventures and problems in building the ships that went out to war. The biggest problem was that everyone was always in a hurry, and there was too much noise from the cranes and iron clanking around. He was glad to escape to the back country after the war, he said, for a quieter life.

He had a little shop where he made and repaired violins. He said that allowed for some personal skill and artistry, not

just following orders clanging steel around. He liked to show me how to slit the instruments open along the glue line in order to fix what was wrong inside. And he had blocks of wood that he was using to make new violins from scratch. He told me how people hunted through old churches for pews made from maple planks because that was the best wood for making the violin backs. Some of his blocks of wood looked like they could have come from church pews. He showed me how to measure the thickness of the wood with calipers so that he could carve the parts just right. His violins were much prettier than mine, some with beautiful stripes across the back.

The front of the house was at the level of the road, but the hill fell away from the roadway toward the creek so that the back of the house was more than a full story's height above the ground, and it was open at one end of the downstairs part with a rope swing hanging from the joist. One evening there was a pretty girl my age visiting there, and we walked down to the creek together, and on the way back we stopped and sat in the swing, and I put my arm behind her to hold on to the rope. Then someone started down the stairs, and I thought it could be my sister, and I remembered how she had teased me about the little red headed girl at Mosquito, and I jerked my arm away. No one ever said anything about it. I never saw the girl again.

## *Mexicans*

A new dentist came to our church—Dr. Davidian. It was a large family, with several boys, all of them handsome, with black hair and dark eyes that made their skin look very white by contrast and features just a little different, and all of them quiet, a bit shy, standing straight and tall, with an air of nobility about them. Jan, the oldest, was about a year younger than I. I liked him, but he was too shy and quiet to make into

a friend. Dr. Davidian set up his office in a small building next to the highway by the fruit stand between Placerville and Camino, not far from Rossi's old house, and he invited all the children of the two churches to get our teeth checked before school started. He said if we waited until he wasn't busy, he would give the examination to us for free.

The waiting room was too crowded for me to feel comfortable, and since it looked like I would have to wait for hours before the doctor could see me, I went out to the fruit stand next door to wait. After I hung around for awhile, the fruit stand people said I could have some fruit if I would help out, and I got right to work carrying boxes to the customers' cars and anything else that needed an active hand.

Usually the people would pile out of their cars and swarm around the stand looking at the fruit to make their selection. But one car just sat parked there for a long time. There was a middle aged man driving, a woman in the front who looked like she could be his wife, and three younger women in the back seat who looked like they could be his daughters. Finally the man stepped out and asked for a box of apples. He gave the money to me instead of to the cashier, told me to put the box in the back, and got back in the car. He probably meant to put the fruit in the trunk, but instead I went to the back door and opened it. Right away I saw that all the women in the car were naked below the waist, and they started grabbing for things to cover themselves. One grabbed a baby onto her lap. The others were scrambling for loose diapers or anything else they could find. The man just sat and stared out the windshield with a blank look on his face.

It was late in the day when I went back to Dr. Davidian's office. The waiting room was almost empty, and I thought I would be the next person in for the examination, when a local rancher came in with about a half dozen Mexican men. I heard him tell the receptionist these men worked for him every summer, and he wanted them to have their teeth fixed before he sent them back home to Mexico for the winter. Then he

started talking to the Mexicans in their language, just like he was one of them.

I thought that was a wonderful thing and determined to learn to speak Spanish like the rancher. The problem was how. I begged Mama so hard that she finally wrote to some school people in Tijuana, Mexico, for some books. After several weeks there came a package containing a dictionary, small in length and width but very fat, a book of grammar exercises, and a reading primer called "Poco a Poco." I sat right down with the books and began teaching myself Spanish. I learned quickly enough that "poco a poco" meant "little by little," and the book got easier as I went along. After alI, I was going into the sixth grade reading a first grade book, even if it was in a different language. Unfortunately, the paper and binding were very poor, and the books fell completely apart before I could get very far with my study. But I did get far enough to convince myself that Mexicans were good people and Mexico would be a good place to live.

Aunt Elva came to visit, and she wanted to drive down to Tijuana to shop for Mexican things. I was excited to go. Aunt Elva was lots of fun, and I wanted to try to use some of the Spanish I had learned from my books. She had shiny metal braces on her legs and walked with crutches, and she had to reach down to unlatch something with her hand before she could bend her knee, but she had her car fixed so that she could drive it. She had come all the way down from Oregon, and she said the extra day to Mexico wasn't that much more. She wasn't married, so she had a lot of extra time to do what she wanted.

"Elva" means "eleven" in Swedish. Her next older brother was named "Tion," which means "ten." They were the tenth and eleventh children of the Lovegren family.

When we got to Mexico, I found out that my Spanish didn't work as well as I had hoped. Aunt Elva wanted to buy me a giant sombrero, but I was embarrassed for her to spend so much money on me, and I thought I would feel foolish

wearing it. She coaxed so hard that I finally let her buy me a little miniature sombrero just big enough to fit on my thumb. I enjoyed playing with that when I was all alone. I would put it on my thumb and make it bow and bobble while I made a conversation with it in Spanish.

## *Sixth Grade*

Miss Hemme didn't come back for the new term. Instead we had Mrs. Harness. They were local people. Her son drove one of the school buses, and they were both of them fat and ugly. Other than missing Miss Hemme, sixth grade wasn't much different from fifth—just doing almost the same thing out of similar books.

Except I got the idea that Mrs. Harness didn't like me. She was always looking my way to make sure I wasn't doing anything she disapproved of. One day she caught me passing a note to a girl across the aisle, and she made me stay in from recess, talked to me like a criminal, then slapped the back of my hand with a ruler. I made pretend that it hurt really bad in order to make her stop sooner.

I was glad when the school was over. But I didn't get to keep any of my books. I had made a wonderful drawing of a rocket ship in the back of one of the workbooks. It had long wings swept back along the side so it could land like an airplane after coming back from space. I wanted to go back after school to ask for my book back, but I knew Mrs. Harness would be too mean to give it to me.

I was having trouble with my violin. We were living too far from the Clints to take regular music lessons, and I had never been able to make a decent vibrato. I got discouraged, and practiced less and less. Instead, I got interested in guitar. I ordered a guitar from Sears & Roebuck for eight dollars and picked up a songbook from somewhere to learn the chords. The first song I learned was

*Ridin' down the canyon,*
*To watch the sun go down,*
*A picture that no artist e'er could paint....*

It was pitched in the key of G, and I loved the switch to the $C^7$ chord in places and imagined myself really riding a horse in an isolated place enjoying the private outdoors. I found a Carson J. Robison songbook with more songs. "Cowboy Jack" was easy, but very sad. Franky and Johnny was fun. "Big Rock Candy Mountain" was more complicated and took longer to learn. Many other songs came along in good time.

I started branching out on my own, improvising tunes that could use a lot of thumb action, and I got to be a pretty good thumb picker. But the finger picking never did come right, and I ended up mostly just thumb picking and strumming. One melody I made up was too wide to play well on the guitar. I picked it out on the piano, even though my fingers often wouldn't hit the keys right, but mostly I hummed it over and over, imagining that it was being played by a symphony orchestra.* [show as theme of string quartet]

One of the song books we had was an old paper covered thing, a light brown card cover with some fancy black type, called "One Hundred and One Best Songs." There were no guitar chords, but I had learned to find my own chords to fit the melody. One song I enjoyed singing was "Juanita":

*Soft o'er the fountain*
*Lingering falls the southern moon.*
*Far o'er the mountain*
*Breaks the day too soon.*
*Nita, Juanita,*
*Ask thy soul if we should part.*
*Nita, Juanita,*
*Lean thou on my heart.*

I built pictures in my mind to go with the song. I knew what a stone fountain should look like, and I imagined a slender girl with a narrow face and long black hair and sorrowing eyes as her man was starting to say goodbye. And I cried with her as he was deciding to leave because she couldn't go with him.

"The Spanish Cavalier" was another sad song, another sad goodbye to a sorrowing maiden. I thought everything Spanish must be very sorrowful in love.

The last song in the book was "Aloha Oe," with words both in English and Hawaiian. I liked the Hawaiian version better, even though I could only guess at the meanings of the words. Never mind the meanings, I loved the way the syllables fit the melody and how they slid off my tongue as I sang them. And the English words were a happier goodbye than in the Spanish songs because they were about coming back again.

I had so much music banging around inside my head, and it was a huge frustration to me that my fingers wouldn't let it come out properly.

## *Relatives*

For Thanksgiving that year we went down to Glendale, by Los Angeles, to see Daddy's youngest brother Melvin. It was just beginning to get dusk as we started the climb south out of Bakersfield on Highway 99. The traffic was very heavy going both north and south, cars almost nose to tail, and on the two-lane highway it was impossible to pass. The headlights and taillights of the stream of cars close side by side made a two-colored ribbon winding in gentle curves for miles ahead up into the Grapevine, getting brighter and sharper as the darkness deepened until we were part of the narrow stream of red and white winding through the narrow curves of the Grapevine itself.

We slept in a small hotel. During the night I soaked the bed completely. Daddy said it was OK, and Mama tried to fix it up in the morning, but when we came back in the afternoon, they wouldn't let us in, and we had to find another place to stay. I was ashamed to cause the family such trouble. I hadn't wet the bed for years that I could remember. Why I had to do it in public and cause a public embarrassment for the family was a problem to me.

Uncle Melvin was always building a new house to live in for a short time before he sold it and started another. So almost any house they ever lived in was still being finished. Aunt Helen was a music teacher. Cousin Jack was about my age, a spastic with a very large round head and a stumbling gait, and he talked funny. But his fingers worked right, and Aunt Helen had taught him to play the piano and clarinet. He was really good at both, especially the piano. He could play Mozart pieces with a wonderful touch that made the notes dance lightly through the air like sparkles of light on fresh snow. I envied him for being able to make music like that. Mary was the youngest of all my cousins, about forty all together counting both sides of the family. She was a quiet little girl, a few months older than Danny, with dark eyes and dark reddish black hair.

One day back at school soon after the vacation Bonnie Miller, sitting at the desk just across the aisle from me, leaned over and whispered that her grandfather Tolson was my second cousin and that my Uncle's name was Hiram. I asked Daddy, and he said there were Tolsons living in Gaston, Oregon, where he grew up, and that, yes, we were connected. And, yes, Uncle Melvin used to go by his first name Hiram when he was young. He liked his middle name, Melvin, better. That got me started on family history and genealogy.

My parents told me that Franklin Tupper, who wrote the Tupper family genealogy book, had come from Los Angeles several times to Turlock to get information from them for our part of the family.

Bonnie's grandfather was Wilson LeRoy Tolson, whose grandmother Esther Isabelle Tupper was an older sister of my grandfather Benjamin Homer Tupper. She married George Washington Beal, the nephew of Malinda Beal, who had married Robert Sweet Tupper, brother of my great grandfather Joseph Berris Tupper. So their children were all double cousins, and Bonnie's grandfather and I were both in the tenth generation since the first Tupper immigrant to America in the 1620s, and the Tuppers and Beals and Tolsons were really all one big family. I felt good being related to the Miller Girls—Norma Jean, Yvonne, and Bonnie—because they were all fine people.*

Robert and and his brother Oscar came across on the Oregon Trail in 1847 in the same wagon train as Malinda and her family, and the marriage of Robert and Malinda was the second one recorded in Washington County, Oregon. Robert and Oscar joined the posse that subdued the Cayuse Indians after the Whitman massacre at Walla Walla, and they spent some time in the gold fields during the great California Gold Rush of 1849 and 1850, maybe even spent some time around Placerville, which in those days was called Old Dry Diggins or Hangtown.

I began spending my afternoons at the city library reading Mark Twain and Bret Harte and Jack London and other writers of the western frontier. I especially liked the story by Artemus Ward of how the famous Mr. Greeley came to Placerville. I could imagine my grandfather's uncles taking part in all the wild escapades. And I learned to sing all seventeen verses of "Sweet Betsy From Pike," especially because the ballad ended when they arrived at Placerville.* (copy the song, melody and text)

Mama liked Joaquin Miller, especially his Columbus poem. She would take up a pose and declaim the lines with great dramatic fervor, throwing her arms out in a grand gesture and pitching her voice into high gear every time she came to the refrain, "Sail on, sail on!"* (complete poem in

epilog.) After she finished reciting the poem she would talk about how it was important to keep going forward in spite of difficulties, that a good life consisted of showing courage and persistence in the face of problems. Maybe part of the reason she liked his writings was that he lived for a time near where she grew up in Oregon. I thought his writing style was stiff and pretentious

I was tremendously impressed when one day Daddy took me on a ride near Sonoma and showed me the road to the Valley of the Moon where Jack London had lived. We had just passed the turnoff to the Jack London property and were entering a dip across a gorge when a small grey business coupe, a pre-war type, pulling a trailer full of firewood swooped around to pass us. When he pulled back in, the trailer began to whip back and forth, wider and wider, until it spun clear around and the car and trailer were stopped in our lane ahead of us facing in the wrong direction. The driver smiled and waved to us, turned around and continued on his way. If he had gone just a little bit sideways, he would have tumbled and rolled down a long slope into the canyon, probably been killed.

The rest of the family didn't come over the Trail until 1852. My grandfather's grandfather, Benjamin Sweet Tupper died on the Trail in the great cholera epidemic that summer and was buried between the wagon tracks somewhere in western Nebraska. My grandfather's mother, Sarah (Sowers) Tupper, a stout Pennsylvania Dutch woman, walked the whole distance carrying two-year-old Esther Isabelle in her arms in order, as she said, to spare the extra load on the oxen.

One result of my genealogy studies was a great disappointment. I discovered that General Benjamin Tupper, famous for his part in the battle of Bunker Hill during the Revolution, was not among my Benjamin ancestors after all. None of his descendants carrying the name Tupper survived the Civil War. But I still could claim him as a relative, and I was proud to brag about the part he and Israel Putnam played

in establishing the settlement at Marietta, Ohio—the first American settlement outside the original thirteen colonies.

My ancestor in the Revolution was Charles Tupper, who served as an officer under LaFayette and who later settled on the wild frontier of western New York near Chautauqua. He lived to be more than one hundred years old and had perhaps as many as twenty-four children by perhaps as many as four wives. He was the father of my great great grandfather, Benjamin Sweet Tupper, and his descendants followed the tradition of pushing always westward to the edge of the frontier.* (records not well kept, many disconnected Tuppers in upper midwest probably descended from Charles with no records to prove the relationship.)

## *Deerlick*

As my interest in the genealogy grew, Daddy and Mama began telling me old family stories. Daddy liked especially to tell about the tricks he played on his father at Halloween time, taking advantage of Grampa's fear of the spirits. He had been involved in spiritism when he was young and had seen enough of spirit power to fill him with dread, especially having turned away from spiritism to become a Christian and having witnessed what the spirits had done in vengeance to others who had turned away from the occult and converted as he had.

One Halloween Daddy made a large jack-o-lantern, hung it on the clothesline from the back porch to the shed, then tied a string to it and hid under the porch making "whoo-whoo" sounds. Grampa came out, saw the lantern swinging there, and Daddy gave the string a little jerk, pulling the glaring orange teeth closer. Grampa shouted, "Stop! Stop!" And Daddy gave another 'whoo-whoo" and another little jerk. Another shout "Stop! Stop!" and another little jerk, and Grampa ran inside and grabbed his shotgun. Another

shout to stop, another little jerk, and Grampa blasted the lantern all to pieces. Daddy said he was glad he had not followed his first plan to carry the jack-o-lantern on his head.

In preparation for another Halloween Daddy went under the house and drilled a tiny hole in the floor near the bedpost, then he set one end of a little board under the bedpost with a small block for a lever and to the other end tied a wire which went down through the hole, where he could pull on a handle on the wire to make the corner of the bed go up and down. Come Halloween Grampa didn't want to go to bed alone and kept begging Grandma to leave her sewing machine and come to bed with him. But she said she had to finish her work. When he finally did go to bed, Daddy waited until he was settled, then pulled on the wire. As the bed moved, Grampa jumped out and told Grandma she just had to come to bed with him. But she just kept on sewing. Back to bed, more jerks on the wire, running again to Grandma, no success, back to bed again, more jerks on the wire, and on until he just gave up and sat up to read until Grandma was finally finished and ready to go to bed herself.

Grampa had built a sawmill up on the mountain above Gaston and cut enough trees to clear a space to plant potatoes. He put the big overgrown potatoes, the ones that were hollow in the center, in a separate bin along side the good ones. When people came to buy potatoes, they would demand to know why he was selling them the little potatoes instead of the nice big ones. He would tell them, "I wouldn't advise it." But when they insisted loudly, believing he was tricking them out of a better potato for the same price, he would reluctantly give them the potatoes they wanted, and saved that way the better ones for his friends and family.

Uncle Lloyd, Daddy's older brother, had the job to take the lumber from the mill in a horse-drawn wagon down the hill to the railroad at Gaston. It was a dangerous trip because the hill was steep, and if the wagon got away, it would

probably kill Uncle Lloyd along with the horses. But he was careful and never had an accident.

In the winter, when the days were short and the snow made it impossible to work the land or the forest, Grampa walked seven miles down the hill to Gaston to work in a blacksmith shop where he repaired farmers' tools in preparation for the next farming season. He left the house at four o'clock in the morning in order to arrive at the shop as soon as it became light enough to work, then he worked until dark and walked the seven miles back up the hill again. His big old yellow hound dog liked to lie in wait behind a tree and jump on his back to scare him as he turned into the farmhouse lane. One night he determined to fool the old hound and sneak up on it. He tested the wind, found it in the right direction to leave him undetected by smell, and he stepped carefully not to make a sound. Sure enough, there was that long yellow form lying in the road waiting for him. He snuck up carefully behind, pulled back his foot, and gave a powerful whomp in the rear. But instead of the hound dog, a mountain lion shrieked and jumped up and away. Grampa ran up to the house and found the hound quivering under the back porch. When he came out with his gun, the dog gained some courage and went hunting with him. They treed the lion, Grampa shot it, and it was the biggest lion ever taken in those parts up to that time.

When the territory was still young and sparsely settled, Grampa went one day to help a neighbor some distance away butcher his hogs. They worked until dark, when Grampa received some meat for his labor and started walking the trail through the woods back home. He hadn't gone far when he became aware of an animal tracking through the woods beside him, and soon there was a pair of large yellow eyes directly in the trail ahead. He threw a piece of meat and started back the other direction. Soon the eyes were in front of him in the trail again. Back and forth, chunk of meat by chunk of meat, until finally the meat, his gloves, and his apron

were all gone, and still the eyes appeared in the trail before him. So he said, "Well, kitty, I guess it's either you or me." and he waded in with his butcher knife flashing. When it was over, he had some bites and scratches, but the lion was lying dead in the trail.

Grampa decided it was time for him to have a car. He went to the Ford garage in Forest Grove and laid down cash for a brand new Model T. The salesman asked him if he had driven a car before and if he would like some driving lessons before starting home. Grampa said, Nah, he'd been driving mules all his life, and this machine couldn't be as ornery as a mule. He drove the long way around through Forest Grove, and a couple of circles through Gaston, making sure to wave at everyone he knew, before he started up the hill to Deerlick. When he turned in at his lane, he yelled, "Whoa!" But the car didn't stop. The gate was approaching fast, so he yelled again, "Whoa!, Whoa!" And when the car still wouldn't stop, he jerked on the steering wheel hard, as on a the reins of a horse, until it broke and came off in his hands. And his brand new car crashed into the gate.

When Grandma became a Seventh-day Adventist, Grampa insisted he still had to have his pork sandwiches, regardless of that crazy new religion his wife had taken up. She made the sandwiches for him as he demanded, but kept telling him that God would show him he shouldn't eat that stuff. One day sitting for lunch out in the forest, he took out his pork sandwich and said, "God, if you want me to stop eating this, you'll have to show me," and he took a bite and began to chew. As he chewed it grew bigger and bigger in his mouth until he had to spit it out to keep from choking. Another bite, and it also grew and grew in his mouth until he had to spit that out to keep from choking. Another bite, same thing. So he threw down the sandwich and said, "All right, God, you win." And he was baptized soon after. The entire family became Adventists except the oldest son, Uncle George, who was already grown and out of the house.

## *From Sweden*

Mama's father was born in Nor Parish, near Karlstadt, Sweden. Like many Swedes, they lived from the rye harvest and the lumber industry. The great rye famine struck when he was about eight years old. His mother would send him and his younger brother out into the forest to gather bark from a certain type of tree to grind up and mix with the rye flour. As the supply of rye grew less and less, the bark portion grew greater and greater, until the flour was nearly all bark and almost no rye, with very little nourishment, so that they were starving even with their stomachs full of bread.

By the time he was twelve years old, he was working full time in the lumber mill to help the family financially. When he was seventeen, he joined a lumber camp in the northeast at Ostersund. His name then was Lars Olesson because his father's name was Ole. His sisters were named Olesdotter. Olesson was a very common name because there were many Oles, and there were several other Lars Olessons in the camp. The others were too often getting the letters written by his girl friend, so he told her to address letters to him as August Lofgren.

He had joined a group of "Lesere," or people who read the Bible together. The national Lutheran church was very severe on the Bible readers and tried to suppress them as much as possible. When his father learned that his son had joined with the heretic Bible readers, he disowned August from the family. Things also got tough for the Lesere at the camp, and soon he had to flee to Norway, where he got on a ship for America. He had heard that there was a group of Swedish Lesere in Minnesota, where there was also good work in the lumber industry, and he hoped for a friendlier environment.

When he passed through New York, the immigration people wrote his name Lovegren instead of Lofgren, and that became the legal name of his entire family in America, even his brothers and their children after they came over several years later.

In Minnesota he found not only a group of Lesere, but an established Swedish Baptist church made up largely of people who had left Sweden to escape religious persecution by the national Lutheran church. He joined the church choir and met a girl named Hilma Nelson, otherwise known as Hilma Nilsson. She took an interest in him and helped him get adjusted to American life. She had been born in America, lived in a tight Swedish community, and was thoroughly bilingual and bi-cultural. She was a niece of F.O. Nilsson, who had introduced the Baptist religion to Sweden. Her parents had escaped from Sweden to America with her uncle and other members of the family before she was born because of the religious persecution. Her father's family was involved in all of the early baptisms in Sweden. They had to hold their baptisms at night in winter under overturned boats in the ocean in order to avoid disruption by the authorities. Eventually the government relented in its persecution of the Baptists and even erected a monument to grandma's family at the bay where they had held their first baptisms.

August took his new home very seriously and became a highly patriotic American even before he learned to speak English. He studied English in night classes after work and worked diligently to overcome his Swedish accent and to sound like a born American.* [Arlea, persistence of accent]

Soon after August and Hilma were married, they moved to Seattle, where there was also a Swedish Baptist community. August soon saw a need for fancy shingles for the Victorian-style houses being built. Shingles were being shipped from mills on the east coast around Cape Horn to Seattle at great expense. He went east a few miles and established a shingle mill, later a full sawmill, at Preston. It was very successful,

after a slow and bumpy start, and before many years passed he became known as the richest Swede in America. He was a generous man and, among other things, donated the land for Adelphia College in Seattle and helped financially to get it well established.

Grandma remained modest, even a little bit embarrassed by the family's new wealth. When Grampa built the big new house at Preston, he wanted to buy all new furniture to go in it, but Grandma wanted to use the old furniture from the old house to save money.* [epilog, photos and stories of house] The forest around Preston was being depleted, and Grampa began looking for another venue for his enterprise. After some searching he settled on the upper reaches of the Patton Valley southwest of Portland Oregon, where there seemed to be ample timber within reach for years into the future. He named his new town "Cherry Grove," even though there were no cherry trees, because he thought the name sounded nice and would attract people to live there.

## *Cherry Grove*

Grampa Lovegren needed a better way to get his lumber out to market and hired an Italian crew to build a railroad spur up from the main line down at the mouth of Patton Valley. Uncle Levi did the engineering, and the Italians pulled the grade and laid the iron. When it was finished, he decided that he should use the new line for something more than just lumber, so he made a trip back to New Jersey to buy one of Thomas Edison's newfangled electric cars. After he finished the purchase and made arrangements to have the car shipped around the horn to Portland, the salesman asked him if he would like to meet Mr. Edison. Grampa said, No, he must be a very busy man, and he wouldn't intrude. He talked for the rest of his life how he regretted not taking a few seconds to shake the great man's hand.

When the car arrived, everyone was excited to make the ride down Patton Valley and back up again. When it went fast, it swayed and bucked on the uneven tracks, which had been laid for slow lumber trains, not for passengers, and the car quickly got the nickname of “The Galloping Goose.”

One spring Mama and a girlfriend found a different type of Baby Blue Bells growing on the hillsides, a sort of purple, deeper and richer colored than the common variety. They got excited and picked every one they could find to put in vases back home. They must have been thorough in their picking because they never saw that color again in any of the years following.

The Swedish Baptist Church was the center of community life, and New Years Eve was the high point of the year. The entire community would gather in the evening to sing and pray until midnight, then the bells rang and people shouted for joy, “God Nyt År” The Sunday services were in both Swedish and English. Most of the older people preferred Swedish, but the younger people all spoke English and only used Swedish when speaking with their elders and with the new immigrants. Grampa had insisted already years before that the family speak English in the home, so only the older children were fluent in Swedish.

Grampa had great plans for his sawmill community. He planned to harvest timber from the entire forest over the mountains westward toward Tillamook. For such a quantity of logs he needed a large log pond, so he began building a dam across the river. It was a low dam, to make a pond just deep enough to keep the logs floating, but it had to be long, across the whole mouth of the canyon. It was finished all the way across except for a short section at the north end when a heavy Christmas snow storm stopped all the work, then just a few days later a freak early thaw melted the snow from the mountains all around and poured torrents of water down the canyon. The dam almost held, but a part of the northern section,

not yet completed, gave way, and the mass of water rushing around the corner tore the whole dam out.

Before Grampa could begin rebuilding the dam, President Wilson let the Canadians dump their excess lumber in America at prices lower than he could cut it for. He had invited some families from Sweden to work in his sawmill, and he kept on paying them even after he couldn't sell any of his lumber. After all his money was gone, he shut down his mill and went back to Washington to start all over again with a small shingle mill, taking Mabel, my mother, to keep house for him, but he died from cancer before he could get it running, leaving a large family to struggle their way through life. Grandma's main source of income for the rest of her life was the Cherry Grove Water Company, which she owned and managed.

Grampa's cancer was a result of his snuff habit. He was strongly against alcohol; he would cut all of the liquor advertisements out of the newspaper every day before anyone else in the family could read it, but he didn't put tobacco in the same category, and it killed him.

## *Love Story*

After Grampa died, the family had to scratch for their living. Mabel finished highschool, took a year's Normal course at Linfield College down the road in McMinnville, and at the prime age of eighteen was prepared to begin her career as a school teacher. She was engaged at the Deerlick school across the ridge from her home in Patton Valley and took board and room from the Tupper family there in part payment for her work. It wasn't long before an attraction began to develop between her and one of the seven boys of the family. He was also eighteen years old and just finishing the eighth grade, his schooling having been limited to the winter months when he couldn't work in the sawmill or on the farm.

They both recognized the impossibility under the circumstances of acknowledging publicly their feelings for each other, and they conspired to find ways for secret expression. Sometimes when she walked with the boys, she would balance on a railroad iron or a rail fence—lightly holding the hand of one of the brothers on the one side and squeezing the hand of Walter on the other. One day she found a box of chocolates in her room in a fancy wrapping. There was no note with it, nothing to indicate where or whom it had come from. But when she turned the box over and examined the bottom, she could see there had been written in pencil, "I love you," then erased. The color of the writing was all gone, but the indentation of the letters was still there. She treasured it, and never told him of her discovery.

After the year was over, she left the Deerlick school and got a job teaching in Portland. That way they could be more open with their feelings for each other. But there was a problem. She was a strict Swedish Baptist, and he was a strict Seventh-day Adventist. Neither one would consent to marry out of the faith. Finally he went with his family to homestead a spread of land in Southeast Alberta, Canada, and he wrote letters begging her to join him. After several years of courtship and rejection by mail, six long years from their falling in love at the Deerlick school, he came down to Portland to make one last plea. She steadfastly refused, pledging to be true to her faith. He left her at her school with a final goodlye and went back to the train station, hopelessly defeated in his love. He was gone only a few minutes, when she darted out of the classroom, borrowed a car, drove down to the station and yelled to him already in the train, "Walter, wait; I'm going with you!"

He grabbed his bags and jumped off the train. The next question was how to get married. Walter's brother Lowell was a Seventh-day Adventist minister in Centralia, Washington, so they drove up to his house. It was late when they arrived there and told him they had to get married "right now." He

was forbidden by the rules of his ministry to marry a church member to someone of a different faith, but this was his kid brother. He pronounced the vows, and they started back south in the borrowed car, arriving at her mother's house at Cherry Grove late after midnight. There was no one home, and the house was dark. They let themselves in through a window, undressed by the fireplace, and went to bed.

The next morning Sister Effie came in, saw the clothes hanging on the chair by the fireplace, threw back her head and cried out, "Mabel, you can't fool me. You're married!"

They were back in Cassils as an established married couple in time for the spring planting. Mabel was still a Baptist, but even though Cassils was a community almost exclusively of Adventists, she fit in well. It wasn't long before she felt like an Adventist, going to church on the seventh day, and even selling Adventist books in other communities by horse and wagon for extra money during the winter months. When she made the decision to join the Seventh-day Adventist church, her mother told her, "If you want to keep the Sabbath, you could be a Seventh-day Baptist, but that thing about the soul sleeping is not acceptable." They all made peace eventually, her family accepted her as still a Christian, and I grew up with total respect for two different religions.

The only people ultimately unhappy in the situation were the school board and the administration of the school whose classroom she had abandoned suddenly in the middle of the day without warning. They entered a condemnation of her that stuck hard to her record and prevented her from getting another teaching job for the next fifteen years, until the teacher shortage in the Second World War opened the door for her again.

The years in Cassils were a time of great happiness which Mama looked back on with profound longing as the best years of her life. The wheat harvests were bountiful, the community life was rich and funny, the prairie summer nights were a constant delight with the the late onset of darkness, the

sounds of the wild echoing through the darkness when it finally came, the glow of the northern lights. Willis and George joined the family, and the future looked wonderful.

But Black Tuesday intervened. The 1929 stock market crash far away in New York depressed the wheat prices. The wheat agent told everyone to hang onto their crop, that the prices would begin to rise again in the spring. But the prices kept on going down. By 1931 the selling price for wheat was less than the cost of harvesting it, not counting the labor and other expenses that went into growing it. One day as the family was returning to the farm from town, they found the house and barn on fire. Almost everything they owned, other than the car they were driving and the clothes they were wearing, was lost. Of the furniture only two wooden kitchen chairs were saved which had been outside that day. It was late in the fall, the cold Canadian winter was already on its way, and the only reasonable solution seemed to be to go to sister Edna in California for the winter and return to Cassils in the spring to start over.

But the Central Valley of California was not a happy place in that time. There was almost no paying work to be had anywhere. When summer came, they tramped up and down the valley picking fruit, as in the novel "Grapes of Wrath," trying to gather enough money for gasoline to drive back to Cassils. One man offered Daddy work for a month at a dollar a day—if he could wait until the end of the month to get paid. When the end of the month came, he didn't have any money and offered Daddy a five gallon can of soya butter in lieu of the wages he had promised. The family lived on sparing bits of soya butter and wild greens for the next month. Mama learned that dandelion greens were rich with nourishment, and they could be made to taste good enough when cooked in the soya butter. Mustard greens were said to be nutritious, but they were bitter. Red root looked like a vile weed, but it was tasty and nutritious when young and fresh. It was the law in California that you could eat fruit in an orchard if you

didn't carry any of it out with you. Daddy would eat fruit in the orchards walking home from whatever work he could find so that he wouldn't have to take food from the family table for supper.

Arlea was born during this time—October 17, 1933. She was a tiny baby. Her first crib was a cardboard shoe box. Her real name was Lea Lorine, after Mama's good friend Lea Combe in Canada, but because Daddy had trouble beginning a word with an "L," the family added another syllable to make it easier for him to speak his daughter's name.

Meanwhile, word came that the farm in Cassils was lost due to the abandonment rules for homesteads, so we became Californians to stay, for better or for worse.

## *Visitors*

Men came to stay with us from time to time at the ranch. These were mostly older Christian bachelors who for some reason didn't have a place to stay. I think Daddy and Mama remembered their hard times before the War and wanted to ease the difficulties other people were experiencing. One of the men had converted from being a Free Mason, and he kept telling me about the rites of that group without actually telling me anything. He said he had attained the 32nd grade, and there were many things he had promised never to tell. It made me curious why he was so eager to tell me he couldn't tell me.

We had two cats hanging around our barn. Daddy liked to have them there to keep down the mouse and rat populations, and when he was milking the cows, he would now and then bend the teat to the side and squirt milk in their faces. One cat was gentle and liked to be petted—completely white, and in every batch of kittens she had there was one white, one black and two grey striped. The other was skinny and mean, slate blue-grey all over, and all her kittens looked just like her. Every time I tried to pick up any of the kittens, the mother

would attack me and the kitten would claw and scratch. One bit me all the way through the web of my hand between the thumb and forefinger. About the third batch of mean ugly kittens Daddy got tired of having them around, and he put them all in a gunny sack with some stones, tied the top closed, and went down to the Cosumes bridge about two miles away and dropped sack, stones, cat, and kittens into the river. But three days later they were all back again, even meaner than before.

Rats in the barn were a problem, even with several cats and kittens on the prowl. Daddy set a long board up from the floor to the lip of the grain barrel. Rats would run up the ramp during the night and jump into the barrel to feed on the grain. Then they couldn't climb back out the steel sides of the barrel. Daddy would stun or kill the rats and toss them to the cats.

Daddy said he was looking for another dog for me; it would be an Australian Shepherd because they were good ranch dogs, active and smart and loyal. One day he came home with not quite a puppy, not all Australian Shepherd but mixed with other things, frisky, black and white with small spots of brown. I called him Shep, and he was a good buddy and ran with me everywhere.

Mama planted a garden out by the shed where the DC generator had been. It was a large level area carved out of the hillside with a fence all around it, and she planted vegetables and Dahlias. Lots and lots of Dahlias of all different colors around the rows of vegetables. But the fence wasn't high enough to keep out the deer visitors. Finally Daddy sat by the window in their bedroom with his rifle and shot the first doe he saw coming to feast. He said shooting a doe was better than shooting a buck because if you shot a doe the other deer would be less likely to return. The doe ended up in pieces in quart jars in the refrigerator. I thought they were ugly, and I was glad to be a vegetarian.

I had my own use for the garden. Arlea had started wearing perfume, and she had a bottle of stuff called Blue

Waltz that I thought smelled awful. When she was gone one day I took it out to the garden and buried it. Almost as bad as the perfume was the way she played the piano. She got most of the notes right, but the rhythm was ragged. Especially bad was how she played Beethoven's "Für Elise." She always made the extended E/E-flat figure too short, no matter how I tried to explain it to her. It bothered me so much I had to play the piece myself to settle my ears every time after she finished.

Mama got several boxes of fruit and fixed them for drying. She l laid the fruit out on boards in the garden, then put big tubs over them with sulphur burning underneath. I thought the burning sulphur smelled almost as bad as Arlea's Blue Waltz perfume, but at least the sulphur had a practical use.

I was spending more and more time with Paul at his house. He was not circumcised, so he had to spend a lot of time cleaning himself. He would sit on the hole in the toilet house where I could watch through the open door while he did his job—pulling back the foreskin, then cleaning out the white buildup down in the crevice with a wad of wiping paper. I was glad I was circumcised and didn't have to go through all that bother.

I asked him what girls looked like. I thought about Mary Woods with her pants down at Pollock Pines, but from the angle she was sitting, I couldn't see anything. He said they were a little bit like us, except the balls part wasn't so high and there was a crack down the middle of it instead of a prick sticking out. That didn't seem like a very good description to me. Anabelle Knapp had just had another baby girl, so I found excuses to hang around while she was changing diapers, trying to get a peek without being obvious.

I went back and asked Paul about it. He said there was a hole in the crack but it wasn't easy to see. A few days afterward we went somewhere in the car late at night. It was packed full of people, adults jammed in the front seat, kids piled on top of each other in the back. On my lap there was a

girl four or five years old whom I had never seen before. She went to sleep sitting there with her knees spread wide apart, and I reached under her dress, into her panties to try to figure out how she was made. I found what felt like a crack, but I couldn't find any hole. It made the tip of my finger wet, and it started to smell funny, so I pulled my hand out and hoped no one had noticed. I was glad she didn't wake up.

Byron Longworthy was more than six feet tall already, I think six foot four, taller even than most of the ninth and tenth graders, and he looked grown up like them even though he was only in the sixth grade. He told us when his cousin came to visit, she liked to suck his peter; she told him she liked the taste. I couldn't figure what there was anybody would want to taste about it. I thought about tasting some pee on my finger, but I didn't do it.

## *Communion*

Our church celebrated communion four times a year. On communion Sabbaths, the men and women went to different rooms to wash each other's feet. I loved to go with Daddy to watch. The men were very serious about it. After they finished washing the feet, they would hug each other and pray. When everyone was finished, they would sing a hymn that everyone knew by heart, then they would shake hands all around and wish God's blessings and go back to the sanctuary to join the women for the rest of the service. The preacher redd from the Bible how Jesus washed his disciple's feet and ate with them the Last Supper before his crucifixion. The elders and the preacher broke the unleavened bread into small pieces and the deacons passed it around to the members, then the preacher would say a prayer and everyone would eat and pray silently for a few minutes before it was repeated with the little glasses of wine.

That was only for the people who had been baptized, and normally people didn't get baptized until they were at least twelve years old. I was only ten, so I could only watch and wonder what it tasted like. But my friends and classmates in the sixth grade were mostly twelve years old already, and when the pastor organized a baptismal class for the sixth graders, I wanted to join. Mother talked to the pastor about it, and he agreed that I seemed spiritually mature for my age, so he enrolled me in the baptismal class with my friends. We studied the doctrine of baptism, what it meant, about Jesus' baptism, and all the doctrines of the church, and we discussed what were the important differences between the Christian life and the secular life.

The baptism service was scheduled for the next week after we finished the baptismal lessons. Besides my classmates there were also some grownups who had recently begun coming to church with us. As I stepped into the baptistry, the congregation was singing "Just as I am, without one plea...," and the pastor raised his hand in the air and baptized me in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. It was all very solemn, but joyful at the same time. As the candidates went through the baptistry one by one, the congregation kept singing all the stanzas of the hymn over and over until every one was finished. Then we dried and dressed and returned to the sanctuary, where the preacher spoke about the meaning of our new life in Christ, how the baptism represented washing away the old life and entering into a new and deeper relationship with God.

A communion service was scheduled for the following Sabbath, and I was joyful as Daddy and I washed each other's feet and as I sang the hymn with all the men and felt the full fellowship of the church. I listened closely as the preacher read the part about a curse placed on any who partook of the communion unworthily. When the deacon held the plate of unleavened bread before me, I felt a deep surge of solemnity fill me, and as I took the wafer in my fingers, I prayed in-

tensely that God would put away all my sins and make me worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus.

The unleavened bread was a hard flat wafer that tasted like nothing but whole wheat flour and oil pressed hard and baked, without salt. The “wine” was obviously Welch’s concord grape juice. But it didn’t matter. I understood the meaning of symbols, that we were supposed to think about what the emblems meant, not what they actually were made of.

As a full member of the church I began taking more notice of things happening around me. One of our members was an older Miwok Indian lady, and she came faithfully every week with her middle-aged half-Indian son. He had dark skin and a large round forehead and a big nose like a real Indian, and he always came dressed in work clothes instead of a suit. He loved to sing the hymns. Especially when we sang “Power in the Blood” or “Blessed Assurance,” his voice would ring out the phrases louder than anyone else in the sanctuary. Other than that he was very quiet. I never heard either of them speak a word to anybody.

Often the sermons went over my head, and it was easy to think about other things, but when the preacher talked about St. Paul’s teachings on the law and circumcision, I was embarrassed and wondered what the women and girls were thinking.

There was a boy in the church, I think an eighth-grader, who had one leg shorter than the other and seemed angry most of the time. He said he was lonely and wanted me to sit in the balcony with him. He had a greasy personality, and I had no interest in being his friend, but I wanted to make him feel better. During the sermon he took some post cards out of his pocket to show me. They were drawings and photographs of naked women with huge breasts spreading their legs. I thought they were ugly, and I never sat with him again.

## *Elder Brown*

Danny was starting to talk more, except I was the only one in the family who could understand him more than just a few basic words like Yes and No. Mama tried hard to make him feel better about her, and he didn't seem so frightened of her as before. She gave him some crayons and a stack of large sheets of paper to draw on, and he launched on a series of fantastic animals. When he finished one he would take it to Mama for approval, and she would try to guess what animal it was. If she said, "giraffe" or "elephant" or "dinosaur," he would cry, "No, No, No." But if she said something like, "garumpishon," or "iligashniku," he would smile and nod and say, Yes. Then Mama would write under the drawing the name Danny had approved, and he would be happy. Soon the kitchen walls were covered with drawings of strange animals with strange names.

A new family came to town. Zerita Hagerman was in my grade, and her brother Jim was one grade behind. They were both very tall. Zerita had long black wavy hair falling in curls down her back and dark eyes and white, white skin. I thought she was beautiful and wanted to be her friend, and she seemed to be friendly toward me. She went to the church to practice piano in the basement in the afternoons after school until her parents came for her. I got the idea that I could go there and talk to her instead of sitting in the library reading. But the church door was locked. I found a thin flat piece of metal, about six inches long with a sharp point at one end, just right to pick the latch on the church basement door. But Zerita was not happy to see me come in, and I got in bad trouble at school for breaking into the church and bothering her. We continued in school together from time to time through the twelfth grade, but I never did really get to know her. Every time I tried after that to be friendly to her, she would flash those dark eyes at me and drive me away.

Mrs. Harness took the class on a field trip to the Capitol in Sacramento, where she said we would get to meet and talk with Governor Earl Warren. The inside of the building was in many ways more beautiful than the outside. The chambers of the legislature, the Senate and the Assembly, were rich with polished dark wood all around, but the rotunda area was especially nice, looking up past the large oil paintings on the marble walls, past the upper balcony with its dark wood balustrade into the bright dome. It all had a wonderfully light and spacious feeling to it. We walked around the capitol building until our appointed time to meet the govrnor. Then we stood in line at his office door for a long time. Finally a man came out and told us the Governor would not receive us, but we could walk through his office. I thought looking at the desk with the huge brass nameplate was a poor substitute for actually meeting the governor and talking with him.

Old Elder Brown lived out toward Grizzly Flat. He was tall and skinny and and very old and had a thick shock of white hair, and his daughter lived with him. She had thick honey-brown hair that she combed back in a long swirl that covered her ears and fell down her back almost to her waist. He built a little sawmill, about like the one Daddy tried to put up for Mrs. Bostrom, and he and his daughter cut some trees, made lumber, and built a little church beside the road above their house. He covered the outside with tarpaper that looked like bricks. The pews were just plain rough-sawn boards.

He invited everyone to come hear him preach, and we went there sometimes instead of to Placerville. Or sometimes he would ride into Placerville to church with us. Besides us, the people who came most often to hear Elder Brown were the McCullough family. I was always happy to see Kenton and Deloy. They had a recent baby sister, and they seemed to like to get away from her.

The only thing I ever remembered from any sermon Elder Brown preached was when he was trying to explain the origin of Christ. He said that however far you went back in

time, however you counted eternity, you would eventually come to a time when Christ was not present as the Son of God, only God the father. That was different from how I had always understood it, but I never asked him why he taught that.

A fat middle-aged man came sometimes to hear Elder Brown preach. He wore a bright blue shirt that was too tight around his belly and neck along with a tie that didn't match. We didn't know where he came from, didn't even know his name. He just sat and listened, then at the end of the service got up and went away without saying a word to anybody. One day in the middle of the sermon he started breathing heavily and fell out of the pew onto the floor. Someone ran quickly to loosen his necktie and rub his chest. They said he had a heart attack, but after a few weeks he was back, sitting stone stock quiet just as before.

## *Butter*

With two cows milking, the refrigerator was overflowing with milk. After a day or two the cream would separate to the top. We ate cream on everything. It could almost make Mama's oatmeal mush taste decent. We had thin slimy oatmeal every morning for breakfast, and it wasn't always easy to get down the throat without the cream. Mama made special deserts that could use cream. Especially she liked to make rhubarb pie, and a hot piece of rhubarb pie always tasted better when it was drowning in fresh cream, especially cold just out of the refrigerator. She boasted that she always put enough sugar in the rhubarb to cut the sharpness, and she talked about how she was insulted years before when man lifted up the crust of her pie and threw in a spoonful of sugar before he had even tasted it.

But even as much cream as we could eat on everything, there was always some left over. Then Arlea and I would fill a gallon wide-mouth jar about half full and kick it back and

forth to each other across the kitchen floor until it churned up good. Then to pour it into a bowl and press the clumps with a broad wooden spoon until the butter formed properly. The trick was to press enough water out to make the butter taste right, but not so much that it became hard to spread.

But what to do with all the skim milk left over after the cream and butter? Mama decided the answer would be to make cheese. She got a little book about cheese making and set to work. She put a large tub of milk on the stove with just a little bit of fire and mixed in some rennet from the store and stood over it for hours until it curdled up. Then she cut it into squares with a long knife and let it curdle some more, then strained it through a cloth and wrapped it and put it in a pressing frame Daddy had built according to her directions. The big walk-in pantry down at the end was a good curing place. After several weeks of curing we were ready for a feast. But the cheese ball was so hard the knife couldn't cut it, not even carve slivers off of it. Daddy tried to chop some off with an axe, but it curled the cutting edge of the axe blade. It sat around the kitchen for awhile until finally we just threw it out in the pasture in case some animals might lick something off it. I think it finally just rotted away.

Mama didn't try it again. We had to find other uses for the extra skim milk. We kept one of the calves as long as we could before weaning it, but finally it quit taking milk and wanted grass and hay instead. After a few weeks Daddy took it in to Placerville to sell to a butcher, and he was amazed he got forty dollars for it. All the way home he kept shaking his head about so much money for that little calf—more than we paid for a month rent for our house and pasture.

## *The Plymouth*

Our old Ford car had struggled through the war. I had been many times with Daddy to a junk yard looking for parts

to keep it running, and since the war he had mostly driven his pickup truck. One time when we took Elder Brown into Placerville for church, the car ran out of oil. Daddy was perplexed. It would ruin the engine completely if he tried to drive all the way home without putting in oil, and he didn't want to buy oil on the Sabbath, even for the emergency. He asked Elder Brown what to do, and he raised up his neck and said in a stiff loud voice, "Buy a quart of oil and drive home."

One day Mama was driving down a steep hill on the southwest side of Placerville, Danny on my lap with a sack of groceries on the front seat between us and her. The hill was so steep that the grocery bag started to tip over and Danny started slipping off my lap. Mama reached over to save him and the groceries, and the car ran forward into the back of a dump truck ahead of us. The lip of the dump bed caught us at the upper part of the grill. Daddy tried to fix it, but it still looked ugly. He said it was finally time to get another car.

Uncle Levi was going back to China to continue his missionary service, and he sold us his 1936 Plymouth. I thought it was the finest car we had ever owned. It was a bluish grey and had four doors and fancy dark velour covering on the seats. But the best part was the wide round front fenders with headlamps sticking up on pylons on the low place betwen the fenders and the hood. I could wrap my legs around a headlamp pylon, hang on to the top of the headlamp, and ride safe and secure while the wind shut my eyes and blew my hair back and whistled in my ears.

One winter night Daddy walked in the door late and said the fog was too thick for him to see to stay on the road coming into the ranch. He wanted Arlea and me to come be his eyes for him. We walked back to the car, Daddy got behind the wheel, I sat at the left headlamp, Arlea sat at the right. But the fog was too thick for me to see the road clearly even sitting out on the fender, and I let Daddy drift off until the left front wheel hit a low stump. We limped the rest of the way home with the wheel bent way back and crooked. The next morning

Daddy tied a chain around the axle, hooked it to a small oak tree on the steep slope west of the house, and hammered on the axle with a sledge hammer against the weight of the car until it was straight enough to drive again.

Daddy had a funny driving habit. No matter what kind of car he was driving, when he parked on any kind of a hill, he would set the hand brake and put the gear shift lever into the lowest gear, then hold his foot on the brake pedal while he stepped carefully out of the car. When he had the other foot securely on the ground, he would pull his foot off the brake pedal and jump away.

Daddy had a job building a cabin near the Pinecrest summer camp and took me with him. I got bored one afternoon and began hunting for adventure in the forest surrounding the area. I found a huge fallen snag that had sliced a canyon through a thicket of young trees, climbed up onto it, and onto the root structure reaching up high into the air. I climbed up on the highest roots and jumped out to catch a small fir tree where I figured I could shimmy down to the ground, holding the soft branches as I slid down. But as I was in the air between the roots and the small tree, I saw that I was headed directly for a big round paper wasp nest. It was too late to turn around and go back, nor could I change the direction of my flight. The only thing was to hit the ground and run as fast as I could. But the wasps could fly faster than I could run, and by the time I got back to the cabin, my face had been stung dozens of times. Daddy took one look at me, packed up his tools and started home. But before we got back to Placerville, the pain was mostly gone already, and I was sorry Daddy had to interrupt his work just on account of my temporary discomfort. I tried to get him to go back to finish working, but he said it was too late in the day already.

## *Gold*

It was illegal, ever since President Franklin Roosevelt came to power, for a person to hold any gold except a small amount of raw placer. But gold was everywhere around Placerville, and most everybody had some in water in glass bottles sitting around the house. The problem was if you had a lot of it. Over a certain amount you had to show you had a mining claim, and you had to sell it to a jeweler, who would turn it in to the government. If you tried to sell any without proof of a mining claim, you could get into trouble. Most people just didn't bother.

A gold mining company came and made a proposition to the town people. They would completely rebuild the town, with nice modern buildings, in exchange for the rights to mine the gold under the streets. The town people turned them down. They liked the town the way it was, and the gold could just stay there.

In the spring a man was arrested for stealing gold. He was selling to jewelers over in Auburn, telling them it was from his mining claim at Georgetown. But the jewelers recognized that it was not Georgetown gold, which meant he was telling a lie and proably stealing it. They tipped the police, who put a tail on him. He was a bookkeeper, and every afternoon when he closed his office, he would walk up Hangtown Creek and disappear for a few minutes into a hole under the Chevrolet garage in the middle of downtown near the library. When they searched, they found more than eighty ounces of gold in bottles lined up on the dirt shelf above where he had been working.

The middle part of town ran through a narrow canyon, but it widened out at both ends. Up east from the Post Office the canyon widened out enough for the old historic John Studebaker wheelbarrow shop, the Ford Garage, the new Safeway store, and the Diamond Match store, along with a few parking lots. And up by the Ford Garage, where the street made a wide left turn toward the pear packing sheds, there began to be streets reaching sideways up the hills. Going

down west the canyon widened a bit at the siren tower, enough for three stores side by side. The street split into a "Y" there. The main route took the south branch; the north branch was too narrow for more than just one lane of traffic. It didn't matter because mostly it just went by the back doors of the stores facing the main street. One day a man came to paint the street with a sign for people not to enter, but he got it backwards and painted,

Enter
Do Not
Stop

Everyone knew what it meant and had a good laugh over it.

Another sign we laughed over was when men were working on the roads, they put up square orange signs that said

Slow
Men and Equipment
Working

We laughed that, yes, those men surely were working slow. The road workers didn't like that and tried to get the signs changed.

## *Strings*

The campmeeting at Lake Tahoe was discontinued, and it was held in Lodi on the Academy campus instead. Daddy's brother Lowell was by this time a minister in the Northern California Conference, and they made him camp meeting superintendent in charge of getting the tents set up along with all the other physical arrangements. The adults and little kids had their meetings in big brown tents like at Lake Tahoe, but the youth had their meetings in the chapel upstairs in the administration building.

Someone told someone that I played the violin, and someone asked me to play special music for one of the meetings. I think Mama had something to do with it. She had urged me to take my violin to the campmeeting. When I got up front to play, I bumped the scroll on the corner of the piano, the strings came all loose, I had a hard time to get it tuned again, and when I finally got started playing, I thought I sounded terrible. I vowed never to play my violin in public again.* [kept the promise for more than sixty years—Valley Center Christmas}. I kept the violin, and played it sometimes just for memories' sake, but if I thought anyone was listening, I would stop and put it away.

The neck on my Sears Roebuck guitar was narrow, which made the strings too close together for me to play the more complex chords easily. I bought a Hawaiian guitar method book and a Hawaiian steel set to convert the instrument and began studying a whole new style. One of the songs was "Little Brown Jug." Mama got upset at me singing a raw drinking song around the house. I told her it was in the book I was studying from, so she said I could practice it for lessons, but please not to sing it otherwise.

I had the same problem with the Hawaiian guitar that I had with other instruments. My fingers just wouldn't move right to make the notes. I could handle the bar slider just fine, and I could still strum the chords, but the long steel finger picks were clumsy on my hand and the picked notes got all tangled.

With all the music banging around inside my head, it was a huge disappointment to me that I could not make the notes come out right on any instrument I tried to play. Listening to good music was a solution, a poor solution, but it seemed the only thing I could do.

We got an Edison No. 9 phonograph, a nice square cabinet about as high as my nose with two drawers full of records at the bottom. Most of the songs were rather junky, but three I really liked were two instrumentals: "Columbia,

the Gem of the Ocean" and "The Stars and Stripes Forever"; and a vocal,

> *On the telephone I can hear you,*
> *And it seems to me that I am near you...."*

It had a catchy tune, and I loved to sing it, with or without the phonograph.

One evening Mama came into the living room where Daddy and I were reading and started talking that Arlea was bleeding heavily. Daddy got a very serious look on his face, like the world was coming to an end, and Mama said, no it wasn't what he was thinking, it was just normal, only more than usual.

One day there was a bloody wad of cloth on the floor beside the toilet bowl. I called Mama. She grabbed it up in a towel without saying a word and walked out with it.

That winter we didn't get a Christmas tree. Instead, we cut some Insense Cedar boughs from trees on the hill behind our house and wove them into the chandelier in the living room. The chandelier was a metal structure with a tube hanging from a fixture in the ceiling and with four curved limbs reaching out sideways about a foot down. At the end of each limb was a socket for a light bulb with a decorative glass thing etched with flowers enclosing the socket and the bulb. When we wove the cedar boughs around the limbs, they made a nice saucer shape to hold Christmas decorations and presents, except anything heavy had to go on the floor underneath. It was a pretty arrangement, and the cedar made a nice smell in the room.

## *Airplanes*

When I was little, Daddy taught me to make kites, and I made many different shapes and sizes, except Mama didn't

like me tearing up sheets and pillow cases and dish towels for the kite tails. Airplanes didn't cause that problem, and it was a lot more fun making them because there were so many small parts to fit together. A kite was nothing but some long sticks, a large sheet of paper or light cloth, and a lot of string. Soon I had a space cleared on my inventor's table and a good supply of balsa wood and glue and tissue paper and dope in different colors. Everywhere I looked around my space, the name "Testors" looked back at me.

I started with small and simple gliders, but soon graduated to soaring free flight models driven by a twisted rubber band. We had a good launching area beyond the granite slope west of the house. The problem was that, as the airplanes climbed into the wind, they would get carried off into the forest and get stuck in the trees and suffer damage—if I could retrieve them at all. I spent many hours rebuilding the models, and usually they flew worse after every retrieval and rebuild.

The obvious solution was a control line model. I found a nice plan and began collecting parts: a stout piece of laminate for a backbone, stretching from the motor mount in the front all the way to the tail surfaces; a yoke and stiff rods for the control linkage, lots of fine stranded wire, a control handle, a hardwood propeller, and hunks of balsa to shape for the top and bottom of the fuselage.

It was a nice looking ship. Time for the engine.

Looking through the model airplane magazines, I dreamed of owing the hot new McCoy 29 Red Head. They were beautiful, and all the reviews told how well they worked. But they were beyond my budget. Finally I settled on a generic glow plug model for only eight dollars—less than half the cost of the McCoy.

Excited, I set it up on a test mount, but I never could get it to run for more than a few seconds at a time, not even worth mounting it in my nice new airplane. The airplane never did fly. Sadly I learned that cheap does not necessarily save

money. I could have owned the McCoy Red Head if I had only been patient a few more weeks and saved up for it.

## *Seventh Grade*

Mama got a job teaching at the Pleasant Valley school, which was just a few miles away on a pretty good paved road. The community had been rather in the backwaters of the Gold Rush and didn't have much to show for its history other than a few old stone buildings, mostly just shells. One such shell was on the main road across from the schoolhouse which used to be a bar. The roof was off, and nothing was left but a few old liquor bottles with jelled liquor of some sort in the bottoms. The alcohol had somehow evaporated out, even though the bottles were still tightly closed. Maybe in a hundred years the alcohol vapors could leak through almost anything.

Up in the Newtown saddle going toward Placerville was an old Gold Rush era stone building that was occupied by a friendly fellow and his family. He knew a lot of the history of the area and loved to talk to strangers about it. Gary Figor and I liked to climb the butte up behind his house, and whenever we were going or coming, the man was always eager to tell us more about the old house he lived in. He could tell us the thickness of the stone walls in every part, the size of all the window openings, who had lived in it for the past 60 years, but he couldn't tell us when it was built or by whom.

The school was one room, similar to Rescue, but in the middle of a large grassy field. There was a garage in the back, and I organized a "Hidden High Club" with the upper grade boys that met privately in a corner of its attic. We made paddle boats out of roofing shingles and rubber bands like Daddy taught me, and we talked about important boy things. But the three fifth-grade girls were jealous and wanted in. We took several votes over a period of weeks, and finally there was a bare majority for letting the girls join us. But that was the end

of the club. It disintegrated into nonsense gossip and foolishness and soon disbanded. I guess the girls thought that was some kind of victory.

We played field hockey with a soccer ball and big sticks, whatever we could find lying around. Kenneth Leighton, in the eighth grade, had the biggest stick, bigger than a 2x4, and when he hit the ball everybody had to run. Sometimes a stick would hit someone's leg; then he would have to sit down for awhile. After a few weeks of play, we all had purple spots on our shins.

The schoolground had a maypole with eight chains hanging down from a rotating disk at the top. Each chain had a handle at the end to hang from. But it got boring after awhile just hanging from the chains going around the circle. We figured out that we could give someone a wild ride high in the air by by bringing one of the chains over the others and then everyone else pulling around the circle as fast as they could. Once when it was my turn, the chain broke, and I flew out away from the sandy maypole circle into the gravel beyond and landed on my face. My teeth went through my lower lip and made a hole I could stick my tongue through. Mama said she would have to take me in to Placerville to the doctor to get it stitched up, but she couldn't do it until after school was out for the day. I sat and nursed it all afternoon with a wet towel. By the time we got to Dr. Jean Babcock's office, she said it was already starting to heal, but she stitched it anyway. I thought the scars from the stitches were bigger than the scar from the cut, and several years later when I started growing a beard, the suture scars left an uneven hairless line all across my lower lip.

In the middle of the year we had a new student, a third grader named Cornelius, from Louisiana. He was a short fat jolly kid who liked to be called "Corny." We could scarcely understand his accent. One day he was trying to tell us about a fahrrr. We had no idea what he was talking about until he said, "Ya know, laak wen the graass is on fahrrr."

Kenneth Leighton was a serious quiet guy. We were sure he was going to grow up to be important. I stood in distant awe of him. My best friend in the school was Gary Figor, in the seventh grade with me. We spent most of the long afternoons together after school was out for the day before Mama was ready to go home. He had serious ideas about how he wanted to be buried when he died. He said he would prepare a hole ahead of time, then tie a cord to the controls of a bulldozer, and when he dropped dead into the hole, the cord would jerk, and the bulldozer would start forward and cover him. And he was proud of how his dog would obey him no matter what he told it to do. He could even make it eat raw onions. There was a sixth grade boy (I don't remember his name) who was a very serious Mormon. Sometimes he would walk with me in the afternoons after school and quote long sections from the book Doctrines and Covenants and tell me what they meant.

The County had a music teacher who made the rounds of all the one-room schools. Once every few weeks he would spend some hours with us teaching us songs to sing. He was a funny guy, and sometimes he would play the song really fast on the piano, then laugh at the end, "I beat you." We had a song book with lots of old funny songs. One was Barnacle Bill the Sailor, who had to be taught by the Fair Young Maiden the difference between using "me" and "I" in a sentence.* [complete song] Another was Ivan Skivitsky Skvar. He and Abdul a Bul-Bul Ameer got into a fight and killed each other and their women mourned after them.* [complete song]

In January a new girl came to the school. She was in the eighth grade, tall, and rather pretty with a broad forehead, bright blue eyes, and short blond curly hair, but on the coldest days, when there was ice on the ground, she came to school wearing sandals, short shorts and a thin blouse that showed her bra. She almost never talked to anybody—just sat quietly at her desk until it was time to go home. She didn't stay long, and we never heard what happened to her.

One of the young men in the Pleasant Valley community had a reputation for getting drunk and making trouble. People worried about him a lot for his future the way he was going. One night he went to a revival meeting and got saved, and he was so happy to be saved he went out afterwards and got drunk and got into a fight and got put in jail.

Some distance from the school a small creek ran under the road, and there was enough of a rocky dip under the bridge to make a pool deep enough to almost swim in. We could skinny-dip there because the people in the cars going over couldn't see anything and there was nothing but cow pasture on either side. One day Gary brought an older friend with him, a high school guy, and he lay on his back near the edge of the pool and stuck his peter up out of the water. It was long and stiff, and he kept saying how we needed to bring some girls to come swim with us.

I was starting to drive more and more. Often when we went somewhere as a family, Daddy would ask me to drive, then he would sit in the right seat and smooch with Mama while I did the driving. It got rather embarrassing. When they smooched at home, I could go to another room and leave them alone, but driving the car I could do nothing but just sit there and pretend I didn't see them. Sometimes they had loud arguments about stupid little things, but they always smooched afterwards like nothing was wrong.

Mostly the arguments were funny and good-natured. But one time Mama made a drawing of how she would like to fix the yard. There were spaces for the cars, some flower beds, a fence, and circles behind the fence. Daddy asked what that was, and Mama said that was his junk. He was quiet for a long time until Mama apologized and tore up the drawing.

One day Mama needed something from across the valley during the middle of the day, and she didn't want to leave the class unattended. So she gave me the keys to the Plymouth and sent me after it. I had never driven a car before with no one else in it, and I tried to make it go fast. But no matter how

hard I pushed on the gas pedal, I couldn't make it go faster than thirty-five. That seemed strange to me because I often had driven faster than that otherwise.

One Sunday I was riding with Mama near Camino when we met Daddy driving his pickup. After they talked for awhile, they decided to go somewhere together, and they asked me to take the car home. That was exciting, around the steep sharp curves on the narrow dirt trail across the Cosumes gorge, but I was careful and got home just fine.

All the way down the canyon I kept thinking about once when I was riding through there with Daddy a man came toward us riding a horse and driving some cows. The horse reared against the car and broke the door handle and got a cut in its side. The man shouted angry things about Daddy killing his horse, and I thought he was going to attack us, but finally he just rode away.

Far back in a narrow dark canyon off the road from Pleasant Valley to Placerville there lived a man who fixed machinery. He had a reputation for always doing a good job, and he kept busy with important work. Daddy would take some of his machines there sometimes for fixing. But he always was wary about the long narrow drive in from the paved road. He stopped one time to show me a crack in the road. He said it was growing wider and the road could break loose and tumble into the creek at any time, along with any car driving on it. He talked to the man about it, but he didn't seem concerned at all. The walls of his house were covered with clocks with different shapes of moons on the faces, and instead of responding about the condition of his road and the danger it presented, he wanted to talk about his clocks, how they kept track of the phases of the moon so he could tell when was the proper day and time of day to keep the Sabbath. Daddy didn't say anything, but I could tell he was not impressed.

In the spring time the County office sent out some standardized tests to see how well we were learning. I went off the

top in the language section with the highest score possible for a seventh grader—eleventh grade level. My arithmetic and other subjects were not as high, and that bothered me. I wanted to be classed as high in other subjects as in reading.

## *Parties*

I wasn't seeing Rossi so much any more. We still got together sometimes on weekends and holidays. But we were in different schools; he was still going to church at Camino, and we were going either to Placerville or to Elder Brown's little church out toward Grizzly Flat. When I did see him, it was plain that we were growing apart. He told me he had a new friend, Howard Miller. At first I felt a little bit jealous, but then I thought about my times with Paul Hazeltine and Lloyd Clouse, and I was happy for him that he had someone close home to be friends with.

Lloyd's father was a bounty hunter for the County. He trapped and shot coyotes and clipped their ears to turn in for getting paid. Lloyd was in my grade and was tall and skinny with black hair. His sister Barbara was one year younger and had freckles and dark strawberry hair and wore big round glasses. She was roundish plump but not bad looking. They lived in a little grey house with a high chain link fence close by the side of the road on the way to the Middle Fork of the Cosumes.

The Middle Fork ran a better stream during the summer than the North Fork. Upstream from where it crossed the road, it ran through a flat valley about a half mile square. Someone had dredged out a deep hole in a sandy place and fastened a heavy plank to a stump for a diving board. There were lots of people there every weekend when the weather was warm, and every day during the summer. Especially a crowd of high school kids whom we otherwise never saw. One day a guy started making a big fuss with an inner tube,

wrestling with it swimming across the river. About half way he stopped, turned around, and said, “This is the hardest thing to handle I ever had between my legs.” Everybody laughed, and I thought if he was talking about a girl, he should be between her legs instead.

I spent most of my swimming time there as deep under water as I could. It was about nine feet at the deepest place, and my ears would pop and sting when I got down to the bottom. The swimming hole was about six miles from our house. I would walk down, pick up Lloyd at his place, and go to the swimming hole with him. Sometimes he would walk home with me or to Paul’s place.

One day there was a fancy rich girl at the swimming hole with her mother. They drove a new fancy car, and the mother was fussing around trying to get her daughter to make friends with all the local kids. She had a picnic lunch fixed to feed all of us. But we mostly stuck together and ignored the girl, like it seemed she was trying to ignore us. That was the only time we ever saw her. Maybe we were too country for her. Or maybe Lloyd and Betty had something to do with it. We were all sitting on a log, Lloyd next to Betty, an eighth grader, when she pulled out the top of her swimming briefs to brush some sand away. Lloyd looked down and said, “I saw it.” But Betty said in shrill loud voice, “No, you didn’t. It’s too far down. You couldn’t see that far under.”

A couple weeks later, when Lloyd was walking to Paul’s house with me, he wanted to stop at Betty’s house on the way. She lived with her family in a little unpainted cabin, part of a group up the hill from the road a short distance in from the River School and sawmill. There was no one home but Betty and her fifth-grade sister Carol. We were playing silly games around the table when Lloyd stuck out his tongue, curled it like a spout, and began dribbling his chocolate drink out into the cup in spurts. Then he went over and whispered something in Betty’s ear. She got really angry and said, looking at her little sister, “No, she’s too young, and besides, Benny isn’t

that kind of boy." I figured out that Lloyd had propositioned Betty for himself and Carol for me and she turned him down, just using Carol's age as an excuse to shove him off.

Some of the kids were getting together now and then for parties, usually on Friday night, which was the beginning of the Sabbath, and I was tired of being left out. One party in particular Paul was excited about, and I wanted to go, too. I knew I couldn't ask Mama. She would scold me for even thinking to ask. So I went out where Daddy was working on his truck to ask him. He stood up straight, laid down his tools, looked at me for a long time in complete silence, then said softly, "Benny, if that's the kind of place you want to go on the Sabbath, then I guess you should do it." Suddenly I was very ashamed for asking, and I never wanted to go to such a party again, no matter what night it was on.

Toward the end of the year Paul started talking about another party—this one mainly for sex, being organized by the River School eighth graders for the first weekend after school let out. They wanted to invite everyone in the community from the sixth to tenth grades, all paired off ahead of time so everybody knew whom he or she would have. They had me paired with Barbara Clouse. I was glad I had already decided against any parties with that crowd, but I felt sorry for Barbara. I thought she was much too nice a girl to get herself tangled up in such a mess. I was glad, especially for Barbara's sake, when Paul told me the plans for the party were falling apart. I never asked him why.

## *Ominous*

Daddy started having spells. He would wiggle his jaw and rattle his false teeth in a funny way and sway on his feet and say funny things for a few seconds, then he would straighten up and be normal again—usually without any recognition that anything had happened in the meantime.

After Mama talked to him about it, he went to see a brain specialist in San Francisco, who told him a section of his brain was atrophied around where the nail had gone into his skull when he was young, and the spells would keep getting worse as long as he lived unless he took medicine to control them. He gave Daddy some medicine to make the spells go away. One evening a few days later Daddy sat at the kitchen table looking at the bottle of pills in his hand and said, "These things make me sleepy. I want to live out my life like a man, not drugged and drowsy and useless." He put the bottle away, and we began planning for the time when we would not have him any more. In the meantime, Mama was very plain, we would live our lives in a normal way and take life as it came. And we did, except that a new kind of seriousness seemed to settle over the family.

Soon life's routines picked up again almost to normal. Whenever Daddy entered a spell, we would all just stop what we were doing and wait until he got over it. If he had a spell while driving, he would steer funny, jerking the steering wheel back and forth. Sometimes I thought he recognized afterwards that he was farther along on the road, but I was never sure. Usually it wasn't very serious. He could stay pretty much in his lane the whole time. But one day driving home from Placerville, just he and I, he had a spell going down the steep hill into the Cosumes gorge just before the sharp turn at the cliff. I was frightened we would go off the road into the canyon, and I wondered if anyone would ever find us. But he made the turn just fine, and he came to a few seconds later.

Daddy got a job as edger in the sawmill by the River School. It was a rather protected place in the middle of all the machinery. When the slabs dropped off the log at the main saw, they came on rollers to his position, then he would slide handles to set the spaces between the saws to take off the bark and leave clean boards of standard widths. He was good at that, and he could keep ahead of the sawyer no matter how

hard he pushed the carriage past the big saw. But when Daddy had a spell, the whole mill would stop working for a few moments until he became normal again.

Besides working at the edger, he made repairs to the mill evenings and on Sundays. He built a welder out of wires wrapped around a frame. It looked funny, but it worked well enough to fix things that broke. The mill ran on a big diesel engine, but it had lots of trouble. Every time it had to be fixed a man would come out from Sacramento to work on it, which was terribly expensive. One time when the engine wasn't working right, Daddy took me to the mill with him on a Sunday to see what he could do with it instead of calling the mechanic out again. He cranked it over a couple of times, listening closely, then he sat down and just looked at it for a long time. Then he jumped up, grabbed some wrenches and turned some fittings, cranked it a couple more times until some fuel squirted out, sat down and looked at it some more, then he got up and took some things apart and put them together again, and the engine ran just fine. I asked Daddy how he could do that, and he said he had wheels in his head and could see the inside of machines by looking at them. I think they never had to call the mechanic out from Sacramento again. I had a suspicion that he was doing some things wrong on purpose in order to make more money on the long trips out there.

The logging trucks dumped their loads of logs on the hill above the mill, then men would run and put hooks in the ends while the jerry man tightened the cables with a power winch and lifted the logs into the place where they could roll down toward the saw carriage. Everyone said he was very good at that job, the best in the county. He was a tiny man with one leg so much shorter than the other that he could scarcely walk at all. The family lived in a tent out by Grizzly Flat like the one we had lived in at Pollock Pines when I was three years old. The wife was a big stout woman who always had a serious look on her face, like in a constant state of sighing, and there

were seventeen kids from about one year to eighteen years old. Mama said the kids were all very fine people considering the way they had to live.

Daddy got excited about a new invention. When the big logs were put on the carriage to go through the saw, the middle part stuck up so high that the saw could not reach all the way to the top for the main cuts, and men had to spin the log with pevees after the first cuts to make the top come nown low enough for the saw to cut all the way through for the wider boards. His solution was a carriage that could be lowered or raised according the size of the log. He made a nice little model about a foot long from wood pieces and metal screws. When the bed was lowered, it also retracted away from the saw position at an angle, so that as the log was cut to a smaller size, the carriage could lift the log upward and forward to meet the saw at the best position for efficient cutting. Everyone at the mill thought it was a wonderful idea, so he took the model to a patent attorny in San Francisco and paid several months worth of rent money for a patent search. It came back that someone had patented almost exactly the same thing way back in 1856. The model disappeared after awhile, and I never knew what happened to it.

Daddy started spending more time reading his Bible and more time with me. He would take me on long walks around the ranch, showing me where to look for licorice roots in the damp stream banks, how to tell the difference between kinds of trees, how to tell what kinds of animals had been walking the trails, how to distinguish between the droppings of different wild animals. He had huge rough hands, and they felt good when he held mine as we walked. One day we came to the top of the granite cliff that rounded off into the Cosumes gorge near where Danny and Paul and I had climbed the fence wire to the cave. There was a round boulder about seven feet in diameter sitting in the dirt at the edge of the granite roll-off, and we got sticks and began scratching away the dirt from the downhill side until it broke loose and crashed down the cliff

into the gorge. It made a huge roar bouncing down several hundred feet, and I thought of the times Paul and I hiked and swam down there, and the time Danny had climbed up along the fence with us, and what we would think if a rock like that came down toward us. But there was little chance anyone would be down there, and Daddy thought we had done a fine thing.

He taught me it was important to use both hands when I was working, not to waste time and effort carrying and handling things with only one hand at a time. If I was doing something that only required one hand, I should find something the other hand could do at the same time.

As soon as we got home from church on Sabbath, Daddy would change out of his suit into regular clothes. Mama said he had had that suit more than ten years and it was still just like new because he took such good care of it. After dinner he would sit down on the couch in the upstairs living room and read the Bible or the church papers for some time before taking me out for a walk. He was farsighted, so he held the things out at full arms length to read them, but he never would wear glasses. Mama was already fixed up with bi-focals and couldn't see anything clearly without them.

One day my dog Shep didn't show up to run with me. Finally I heard some funny scratching noises in a corner of the barn, and there he was on his side, shaking in jerky spasms with his legs stretched out stiff and hard. I panicked and called Daddy. He came and took a look, then told me to go away, and I never saw my dog again. That was the last dog I had while I was growing up.

## *Enterprise*

Daddy and Mama got interested in doing an enterprise where they could be more independent. They made an offer to a company in San Francisco to cut carloads of laths for

plaster. Daddy bought a V-12 Lincoln engine mounted on a trailer with a gang of saws, but the boards kept jamming up and burning between the saws. A man came out from the city to see our progress, and he didn't look very happy. Daddy and Mama were afraid they were going to lose the contract, and Daddy set up a smaller saw with just one blade for testing, to see how to set the saw teeth so they wouldn't jam and burn.

One day I tried to cut a board on it, but my curved left index finger went over the top of the saw and cut a deep groove just above the first knuckle. I didn't feel a thing, but when I saw bits of bone floating out in the blood, I wrapped my right hand around it and went into the house to ask Arlea for a bandage. She walked back and forth with me between the kitchen and bathroom looking for something. Then she saw the spots of blood on the floor and screamed. I wrapped it up tight and wouldn't let anyone see it until it was healed. When Mama finally saw it several weeks later, she got excited because the cut was full of what she called proud flesh, and she bought a tube of Ichthamol, a black smelly ointment, for me to dress it with. The nerves on the top of my finger tip were numb for years after, and finally it left a huge bumpy scar from side to side. That made me curious to count up all the scars on my fingers from model airplane cuts and other incidents. I counted sixty-seven distinct scars on that one finger.

With the little mill for cutting laths they had to think about things like insurance and shipping arrangements and such. One day a man came in a nice car and a suit and tie, and Mama met him by the front of the house to talk with him. She started scratching down from her shoulder, and suddenly a breast popped out of her dress. She pushed it back down, and they both just kept on talking like nothing had happened.

Daddy still had the old flatbed truck he got before the war for his bees, but it wasn't running very well, and he spent a lot of time trying to fix it. One day when Paul was over we got bored and decided to drive it into town. We got it started and drove as far as the front gate to the ranch, but I cut the

corner too close and clipped the fence post with the corner of the flatbed, like Daddy had broken off the cash box at the gas station in Placerville when I was four years old. We propped the post back up again so it almost stood upright and drove back to the house and parked the truck back where it had been. Three days later Mama asked me if we had driven it. I said, Yes, and that was the last I ever heard anything about it.

I liked to hang around with Daddy fixing his vehicles, and sometimes I tried to help, but often it seemed my help was worse than nothing. I could stand between the engine and the fender and tried to take bolts off and put them back on again. One day Daddy told me that my talents were with words, not with machines, and I should think about things I could accomplish with words. He said I could even grow up to be president of the United States.

That got me started on a more serious reading program. If I were going to make my life with words, I needed to understand words very well. I read that one of the best stylists of the English language was Thomas Carlyle, so I got some of his books from the library and began reading them intensely. I was fascinated by the long convoluted sentences with tangled punctuation. Mama was concerned because Carlyle was a famous atheist, but I assured her that I was reading him just for his way with words, not for his atheistic ideas.

I saw an advertisement in a magazine for Kristi Products to sell, and I thought I could make some money that way and do a favor for my friends in the community. I talked Mama into placing the order for me on my promise that I would be diligent in my sales work and pay her back. I ordered a variety of things that looked useful, but when the package came, the items were all so shoddy and cheap looking that there was no way I could even give them away, much less sell them to people I cared about. So they sat around the house. We used some of them. Some just disappeared. Mama scolded me for not holding my end of the bargain and held it against me for

years until I finally explained to her my reason for abandoning the project.

## *Blister Rust*

Fred Thompson had contracted with the U.S. Forest Service to clear the ribes plants from a plot of forest out near Grizzly Flat. They said the gooseberry and currant plants carried a disease called blister rust that killed the Sugar Pine trees, which were the most valuable trees in the forest for lumber. But he had one leg shorter than the other, and it was hard for him to walk the hills through the thick brush, and his family didn't give him much help, so he asked us to do the plot for him. Mama agreed to take over the contract, and we got some camping gear together and went out to work and sleep in the woods to finish the plot. One night there was a huge noise down the creek from our camp. The next morning I walked down there for a look and found a wide flat muddy place about a half mile down, just across the fence from Leoni Meadows, where it looked from the tracks like a bear and a mountain lion had been in a fight.

We finished the contract in a few weeks, made some good money, and the blister rust business became a major source of income for me all the way through high school and college—and for Danny after me.

## *Health*

News came that Grandma Lovegren had stomach cancer and that the doctor gave her only six more months to live. The daughters all made arrangements between themselves to take turns helping Grandma through her final days. When it came Aunt Edna's turn, she drove up to Cherry Grove, found Grandma in the back yard chopping wood, stayed a few days, then decided her family needed her more than her mother

did, and she went back home to Keyes. It turned out that Grandma had gone on a strict carrot juice diet, which cured her cancer completely. She lived another twelve years and died peacefully in her sleep when she was past ninety-five years old.

That, and Daddy's experience with the Goat Doctor, got Mama serious about ways of keeping well and curing disease without going to doctors. She subscribed to health magazines and bought books and read about all kinds of pills to be healthy. I bore the brunt of much of her enthusiasm and had to learn to swallow handfuls of pills at a time without choking. Mama got really serious about what an evil man Morris Fishbein was, the head of the A.M.A, that he was letting thousands of people die just so doctors could make more money with useless treatments. I think part of her attitude came because her next younger sister Myrtle had died from a smallpox vaccination when she was seventeen years old.

## *The Robin*

One day when Paul and I got to his house earlier than usual after a rambling, there were two men lounging in the living room. I thought they had funny looks on their faces when we came in, but they didn't say anything. Then Paul's mother came out of the bedroom wearing a thin pink nightgown. It was tight around her chest, and one of her breasts was lifted up round with the nipple poking out against the cloth. She gave us a bucket and told us to go get some eggs from a ranch a long distance away.

Paul's mother gave him a pair of guns for his birthday—a .22 rifle and a .410 shotgun. Target practice was only fun for a little while, then you had to shoot at something. Paul enjoyed making the dust fly up around the feet of the chickens running around the yard. He tried to aim carefully to make

the dust fly between the feet without hitting the chicken. Mostly he was able to do it pretty well.

One day I took the .410 down into the brush below the road to see what I could hunt. The only thing I could find to shoot at was a robin looking out at me from a buckthorn bush. It was only about twenty feet away, and I made a good shot. The bird fell into the branches below, and I ran over to pick it up. It was warm and limp in my hand, and I thought the dark eye was looking up to ask me why. I thought of my calf Billy, and I determined never to shoot any living creature ever again.

## *River School*

Mama decided it was time for Danny to have some serious speech therapy so he could learn to talk well enough for people to understand him before he started the first grade. She made arrangements for a therapist at the College of the Pacific in Stockton to work with him, but that meant that he would have to be there several days each week. So Mama got a job teaching first grade in the Stockton pubic schools and rented a place to live there with Danny and Arlea. I was to stay home with Daddy and begin the eighth grade at the River School, and Mama and Arlea and Danny would come home every weekend.

The teacher at the River School that year was an older woman who was nearly legally blind. She could see things well enough up close, but anything that happened from the middle of the room to the back was completely out of her vision. The kids caught on pretty quick to that, and some of them would go to the back of the room and smooch, laughing at what they could get away with.

The school was outfitted with double desks—a bench wide enough for two people and an iron lacework desk frame the width of the bench with separate lids that raised up

individually for each person. Each lid opened into a separate compartment to keep each student's things separate from the other's.

Beverly Briggs sat in the desk across the aisle from me. She was in the fifth grade, rather pretty, slender build with a squarish oval face, long straight brown hair, and bright blue eyes. Her mother was a pretty woman with short blondish curls. I never heard what had happened to her father. Beside her sat a rascal seventh grade guy who was always going to the back the room to smooch with any girl he could get to go with him. One day he started grabbing at Beverly's crotch, and she started laughing and grabbing his in return. I thought it was crude. When I told Paul about it, he acted really upset that she was "playing squirrel" with that guy.

Fat Richard was in the seventh-grade. He had a wide chubby face, blue eyes, and very blond wavy hair with strands that were thin and silky. One day after school he cornered me in the schoolyard and started saying over and over again, "Corn hole the teacher. Corn hole the teacher." I had no idea what he was talking about and asked him to explain. He began making circular motions with his right hand around his left index finger while saying, "First you screw it on, then you screw it off." Again I had to ask him what he was talking about. I guess he thought I was rather doof, especially when I turned away and didn't want to hear any more.

A few days later I was riding my bike past the sawmill toward home when I saw him and Beverly Briggs duck down behind a log up by the lumber piles. They popped their heads up, looked around, tugged on their clothes, and ducked down again. I knew what they were doing and didn't like it. The worst thing was that they had the children of the mill foreman with them, a three-year-old boy and his two-year-old sister, sweet cherubic round-faced kids, and I was sure they were trying to show the little ones how to do it. I just sat there on

my bike until they got nervous and got up and straightened their clothes and walked away.

Daddy came home a few evenings later all angry about Paul's mother. He said over and over, "That woman is a flatterer." I didn't know what he meant by that, or what had caused his anger, but it was plain that Peggy had said or done something to upset him very much.

A few days later he told me in deep confidence that if anything happened to Mama, he would be interested in getting together with Beverly Briggs' mother, that he thought she was a nice person. That distressed me a lot. I didn't want a girl like Beverly Briggs for my sister. But I didn't want to say anything to Daddy about it.

## *Alcohol*

The weeks stretched out into winter, and Daddy and I continued to have good times together. Every weekday night we played checkers from after supper until bedtime. At first he chased me off the board quickly in every game, but gradually I learned the moves and positions well enough that I even beat him once in awhile. Usually he would have several spells during the course of an evening, but I got used to it, and I would just wait until he came back to continue the moves.

One morning before school while Daddy was up milking the cows, I caught a little brown bird flying against the kitchen window and brought it inside. It flew around and around the kitchen and landed several times on the hot stove. The legs immediately burned to stumps so it couldn't stand up. I felt sorry I had destroyed the little creature and turned it loose outside so I wouldn't have to watch it suffer any more.

Both Daddy and Mama were very severe about alcohol. They would not buy food in a store that sold any kind of alcoholic beverages. Mama would never vote for a Democrat, regardless, because the Democrats reintroduced drinking

places after prohibition. One day I was with Daddy at Smith's Corners when he needed to make a phone call, and he kept looking around outside for a telephone because he would not go inside where people were drinking at the bar. Finally he just left without making the call. Shortly after that Mr. Smith sold the store, and the "town" of three or four buildings reverted back to the old traditional name of Somerset.

And it was not just the drinking places Mama objected to about Democrats. She blamed President Roosevelt and his New Deal for making things so hard for them during the Great Depression. She said things would have got better much faster if Roosevelt hadn't done so much foolish meddling. Especially she was angry over the dumping of food that our family and others could have eaten. And the attitude ran in the family. Her brother Wilfred wrote long doggerel verses making fun of Roosevelt and his economic policies.* [example poem]

Daddy confided to me in deep secret one day that he had voted for Harry Truman for president. I could tell he didn't want me to tell Mama. He said he had been planning to vote for Dewey, but when he got to the voting booth, he just stood there thinking and suddenly decided to vote for Truman instead.

One Sabbath a new man came to Elder Brown's church. He told us he was serious about changing his life. He lived alone and had been a heavy drinker, but he wanted to quit alcohol and straighten up. He invited us to visit him at his home. It was a small cabin of several small rooms a few miles out on the Grizzly Flat road. The outside was freshly painted and clean and rather plain, but inside it was a wonder. There were little decorative wood carvings all over the walls and things that popped out of holes like cuckoo clocks, and here and there were reeds from old pump organs, and he had a machine rigged up so he could play songs on his "organ" without touching anything. It made a wonderful sound, fill-

ing the entire house with music. We went back several times to visit him, but he started drinking again and disappeared.

The Cannon family were among the best placed and best regarded in the Somerset area. They lived in a large, tall white house with high porch pillars just a short distance up the hill from the Somerset store on the Grizzly Flat road, and the house and yard and vehicles were impeccably kept. Their oldest child was Doris, in the fifth grade, a cute and bright little girl, round and tubby like girls that age often are, and friendly to everyone. One day Paul told me he had been accused of raping her. He said if he had raped her, he would have scratches, wouldn't he? How could he be accused of rape if there were no scratches? And he laughed.

Mama and Daddy agreed that the River School and the Somerset community were not the best environment for me, and they started making plans for me to go down to Stockton with Mama and Arlea and Danny. I didn't want to leave Daddy alone, but they said it wouldn't be so bad because I would be home with him every weekend. My biggest worry was that he would have a serious spell while we were gone and get hurt and we wouldn't know anything about it. But Mama reminded me we had promised that life would go on, regardless, so I made ready to go to the valley.