

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF A
YANKEE-NEVADAN

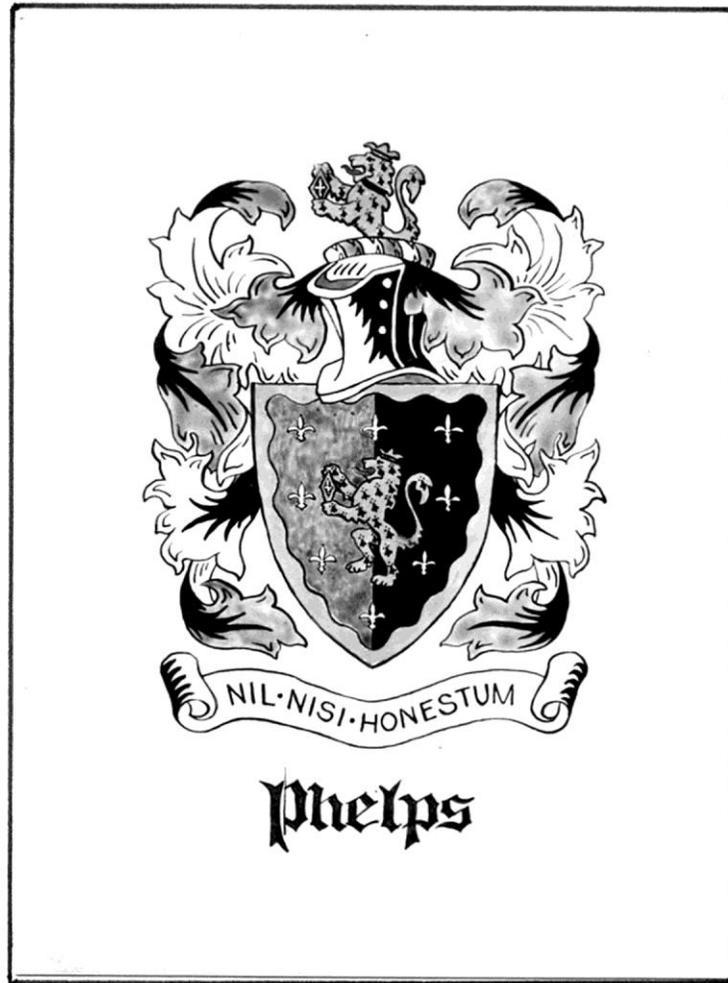
George Alfred Phelps

VOLUME II

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF A
YANKEE-NEVADAN

George Alfred Phelps

VOLUME II - PART 1



John E. Phelps

YANKEE-NEVADAN

**Autobiography of a
YANKEE-NEVADAN
George Alfred Phelps**

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PART II

**CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR
JOURNEY WEST**

Fresh budding maples alongside the Mohawk Trail signaled new life, reminding me that I, too, was off to a new beginning.

It was Monday, March 15, 1948.

Over the summit I drove, my thirty-eight Ford fairly coasting down the west side of the Berkshire Hills, around the famous hairpin turn, through the narrow, brick-paved streets of North Adams and across the line into New York State. The factories and buildings wedged into the cities of North Adams and Troy bespoke an earlier era, when the entire Northeast basked in the industrial age. They were still busy, judging by the streets jam-packed with cars, but in decline.

My thoughts, triggered by my surroundings, flitted from one fond memory to another: summer music camp at Cummington; a party at a friend's home in Shelburne Falls; visiting warships at the pier in Albany; a tour of Howe Caverns.

I thought of Mother, and the lump in my throat persisted. I would carry that lump for miles. I thought of Doris, wished that she were with me and wondered if my decision to leave her behind was the right one.

Then I came to the open, rolling hills of upper New York State and tried to put those thoughts behind me. I envisioned the plains states beyond the Mississippi, and Nevada beyond the Rockies. That reminded me of Father. How would I react on meeting him after so many years? Would I still hold him in awe, as I had as a child? Or had my entry into the working world and a tour in the Navy put me on a more equal footing with him? Best not to think that far ahead, I decided, and concentrated instead on the passing scenery. Soon everything in sight would be new to me.

I began to refine my plan for the long journey. In order to conserve fuel, and avoid wear and tear on my car, I would drive no faster than 55-mph. I'd spend ten hours a day at the wheel, more or less depending on conditions, stop at a restaurant or cafe for breakfast, eat a roadside lunch from provisions I had brought or would purchase along the way, and have supper at a restaurant. I would sleep

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in the car as much as possible, wash and shave daily in gas stations, obtain a room when I really needed a clean overhaul.

Before nightfall of the first day, I reached the shore of Lake Erie, midway between the cities of Buffalo and Erie, drove off the highway through the weeds to a secluded area and parked. Stretched out as best I could on the front seat, with two Navy blankets for comfort, I slept until dawn, admittedly a bit fretfully in the cold, damp air.

I shook myself awake and drove on down the highway, a little put out because a thick fog prevented my seeing the big lake, and passed through the corner of Pennsylvania into Ohio. In Cleveland, to avoid getting lost, I stuck to the main, marked highway. That was probably a mistake. I was more than an hour crossing the city, it being rush hour for the natives going to work. I made it without incident, however, and located the highway south to Columbus, where I intended to pick up US-40 and follow it all the way to Elko, Nevada.

A heavy haze hung over Ohio, which eventually turned into a drizzling rain. But the traffic on US-40 was light, even by the standard of those days. I slept soundly that night, tired after driving steadily all day, parked at the edge of a farmer's field somewhere in Indiana.

And so it went, my routine becoming well established: stop for gas, stop to eat, stop to sleep and drive.

On the third day out I entered south-central Illinois. The weather grew worse. A driving rainstorm resulted in poor visibility, and I figured it was time to take a room. My how good it was, to soak under a hot shower and bed down between clean white sheets that evening.

Dawn broke to clear blue skies and warm sunshine, the first I'd seen on the trip. It was a magnificent day for crossing the Mississippi, the mighty river that for many years marked the edge of the frontier. I couldn't help being impressed when I bridged that grandiose waterway. It was much wider even than I had imagined, wider than most lakes I'd ever seen. Smug-looking tugboats nudged long trains of barges loaded with ore and coal into the downstream flow; others belched clouds of thick, black smoke as they struggled to move materials upstream against the current.

In the city of St. Louis, I was mindful of its importance to the development of the west. But on seeing the filthy streets and grimy buildings my impulse was to hurry on. However, since one of my buddies from Guantanamo Bay, Earl Thompson, lived somewhere nearby, I thought it a good idea to pop in to see him. He'd been discharged the previous fall, and was now living with his folks.

I located a coin booth, stopped, telephoned, found that Earl was at home, then made a slight detour from my course to visit him before starting across the Great Plains.

If the Mississippi was the frontier boundary in early times, then the wide Missouri was the highway to America's westward expansion. That river, fraught though it was with hardships, provided a convenient course for the many explorers, fur traders and, just a hundred years before me, gold seekers. How infinitely more comfortable was I, traveling the same path in a modern vehicle on velvet smooth

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pavement. At sundown I pulled off by the side of the road, and was quickly dead to the world, past and present.

Kansas. The state with no visible horizon. A patchwork-quilt of fields and farmlands stitched together with roads and highways. Luckily the farms were giant-sized, but still it was a nuisance having to slow to fifteen-mph every few miles for a sudden right-angle turn: Right...straight...left...straight...right...mile after mile after mile.

By the time the sun reached its zenith, dark clouds had grown overhead and the wind buffeted my steel-and-glass conveyance in a disconcerting manner. It wasn't raining, at least not on my trail, but the change provided a welcome diversion from an otherwise monotonous time.

Cruising along at my planned pace, I listened to big-band music from whatever radio station happened to be within range. And then, about dusk, the gale suddenly increased until I was compelled to seek a sheltered place to park for the night. I knew there would be no sleeping with the car rocking in the wind, so I looked for a hedgerow or abandoned barn for protection. However, such a site was hard to find in that flat land and I drove a long ways before coming to a likely spot. It was far from any city of size (judging by the fact that my radio produced nothing but static) and was not the best of havens, but I pulled over anyway and parked.

For some reason, nature had fashioned a slight rise on the otherwise non-contoured plain. Stranger still, some engineer had deemed it necessary to maintain a perfectly level grade across the state of Kansas. So the highway was actually cut through this rise, the top of which was barely higher than the roof of my Ford. At least the cut should deflect some of the wind, so I switched off the ignition, laid down and went directly to sleep.

"Wake up in there!" The words, accompanied by a pounding on the metal roof over my head, were loud and clear. My heart began to thump. I came to a bolt-upright position and peered in the direction of the voice, right into the brilliant end of a flashlight.

Was it a highway robber? Was I about to be burgled? Or worse yet injured in some way? I had no weapon at hand, even if I'd had the courage to use one. So I just sat there, immobile, while trying to collect my wits.

"Open up! Police!" the voice continued. Still I demurred. The light blinded my sleepy eyes and it was impossible to identify the figure outside.

Finally, apparently sensing my reluctance, the big man shone his light on a shiny, engraved badge over the breast pocket of his leather jacket. Well, that was a relief, though I wondered what I had done to deserve his attention. To find out I cranked down the window and awaited his next overture.

"Wha' d'ya think yore doin' heah?" he asked, somewhat more gruffly than necessary, I thought.

"Sleeping," was my answer.

"Why heah?" he shouted. "Th'only narrah spot in fif-ty miles an' y'have t'stop heah?"

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So I explained how I'd gotten too sleepy to drive and chose the cut to get out of the wind. While studying my driver's license and vehicle registration, the officer listened to my feeble story. But by now he had calmed down some. It was a dumb thing, he said, to park so close to the highway, and I was lucky a passing truck didn't sideswipe the car. And then, shaking his head in wonder at this poor representative of the younger generation, he advised me to move along.

You bet I did. I was no longer the least bit tired.

All of that occurred around ten o'clock in the evening. It was midnight before I found a farm road where I could pull off and finish my night's sleep in peace, free from the winds which had diminished by then, and undisturbed by the local constabulary.

The sun was an hour old and bright in a clear blue sky, and all was quiet and serene when I set out the next morning. I found a broadcast station on my radio, one that came through just louder than the static, and listened to the news which turned out to be especially interesting. A tornado had touched down in west-central Kansas the previous evening, had demolished half-dozen small buildings, uprooted trees and raised other kinds of Cain. I immediately stopped the car, studied my map, located the town mentioned, calculated my position at the time of the twister and learned that I had missed the tornado by only seven miles. It passed by just before I stopped in the highway cut.

"Close enough!" I exclaimed, and shoved off again toward the Rockies.

After driving over a thousand miles of flat land, I was truly eager to see that great North American mountain range. And from a distance of fifty miles, maybe more, long before I reached the mile-high city of Denver, its shining white peaks rose to my sight. More like puffy clouds than mountains, I thought, but there it was, the first great barrier of snow-clad granite and basalt to be conquered on the way to the Pacific Ocean (the second being the Sierra Nevada Range), an obstacle that nearly un-did Fremont's party a century earlier. Soon I would traverse in a matter of hours that which had taken days, even weeks, to cover in the 1800s. My spirits soared.

The city of Denver was most attractive, remarkably clean for its size. I took a few minutes to drive through the downtown area. The streets were wide and accommodating, the buildings neat and respectable. At the southwest outskirts of the city I stopped at a small restaurant, right on US-40, and had one of the best meals of my trip.

Reminiscing about the past few days' travel, it struck me as unique that any of the early pioneers, after crossing the vast plains, would wish to go farther west than this paradise in the shadow of the mountains. I really wanted to spend more time in the vicinity, but time was in short supply and the challenge of the mountain crossing beckoned (as it had beckoned my predecessors).

I had barely left the restaurant when the road began to rise in the greening foothills, and soon I was on the very mountain itself. For the first time since leaving home, the Ford complained. Because of the steepness and elevation, the engine "pinged" alarmingly. She was

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attuned to sea level, you see, and this new environment was almost too much for her.

The grade curved back and forth, steadily upward, following the canyon contours through groves of aspens (not yet green) and forests of evergreens the likes of which I had never before seen. Off to the sides, swollen by melting snows above, glistening white-water streams crashed down over rocky precipices.

And then I, too, noticed the effects of high altitude. My ears plugged-up and I had trouble hearing.

The V-8 under the hood commenced to get hot, causing me to worry that something was radically wrong. But it was from hard work that it suffered not from any chronic ailment. So I parked on a wide shoulder to let it cool, and to revel in the view back over the prairies to the east.

A little farther on, snow banks appeared beside the highway. The ambient temperature dropped perceptibly and the engine quit sweating. I breathed easier. We were going to make it.

Two miles above sea level and still climbing. What a thrill. What a place. Better than one could dream of. At last the highway leveled off and widened. A big wooden sign on my right proclaimed:

BERTHOUD PASS El. 11,315 ft

I parked the Ford alongside a ten-foot snow bank, donned my pea-jacket and went for a stroll in the cold, rarefied atmosphere. Berthoud Pass was not only a wonder to me; it was also the gateway through which I would step, both physically and spiritually, into a new world. I stood there for a long time reflecting on that fact, until the lengthening shadows suggested it was high time to go on.

I passed through pristine valleys, the upper reaches of the Colorado River drainage, climbed over Rabbit Ears Pass, at 9,680' elevation, and dropped down again on the west side of the mountain. Suddenly I was tired and hungry. It had been a full day, filled with all sorts of new and wonderful scenes. Time to look for a room with a warm bed, I judged, and referred to my map for the nearest likely place to find one.

Steamboat Springs - named by early travelers for the chugging sound of the hot geysers there - was the obvious choice for a stop; practically the only choice. It wasn't much of a town, as I recall, a handful of residential houses and fewer business establishments all perched on the bottom sides of a canyon. It appeared to be the remnant of a mining community, whose survival depended on its strategic location as a way station for travelers. I spotted a hotel, or lodge, which, if not the only one was probably the most accommodating place in town.

One reason for Steamboat's small population was apparent. Monstrous heaps of snow occupied virtually every inch of space around the buildings and under the trees. The memory of my recent snow shoveling activities in Northfield paled at the sight. Ankle deep water ran alongside the highway, which doubled as the main street, making it extremely difficult to find a place to park.

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I eventually succumbed to the conditions, parked right over the running water and made my way through the slush to the lodge. There I secured a room, took a long, hot shower, then repaired to the pine-paneled dining room for a meal of ham-and-eggs served on a heavy plate set on a red-and-white, checkered, table cloth. Everyone in the place was friendly, the service was exceptionally good. I felt more like a resident than the weary traveler I was.

The bed, located beside a multi-paned sash window that leaked volumes of frigid air, while plain and hard provided me with a much needed night of rest. For breakfast, being still full from the meal of the previous evening, I limited myself to a glass of juice, a piece of toast and a mug of coffee.

The cost of food and lodging had been fairly reasonable. But I found, after filling the gas tank, that the cost of fuel was quite the opposite. "Odd," I remarked to no one in particular, "the farther west I travel, the closer I get to the source of oil the more it costs."

Day seven. Sunday, the 21st of March.

It was wide open country where I entered the state of Utah and crossed the Green River, but was extremely steep and rugged in the Wasatch Range, from which I dropped rapidly into the Great Salt Lake Basin.

It then occurred to me that if I hurried along I could make it all the way to Elko that day. So I drove straight through the city of Mormons, Salt Lake City, and skirted the south shore of the lake itself. I did take time to stop and test the water. Yep, it was salty. Saltier than that in the ocean.

The West was certainly filled with grand and unique things. First the wide Mississippi; next the inconceivably broad prairie; the towering Rocky Mountains; then the Great Salt Lake, so immense it resembled a sea. And now before me lay a valley so flat I could observe the curvature of the earth, delineated by a black ribbon (US-40) stretching in a straight line to Wendover, 40-miles or more away. What a country.

The Great Salt Desert, because of the salts accumulated there since old Lake Bonneville began to evaporate thousands of years before, was as white as snow. Off to my right in the distance I saw an outstanding mountain peak, its snowcapped top shining like a beacon. I would learn that it was Pilot Peak, so named by Fremont, so used by the captains of early wagon trains.

My crossing was lethargic. Nothing to do. No steering, no changing of speed, no nothing. A water-mirage, always ahead of me, tried to convince me that I was making no headway.

While I drove in lazy comfort - a bottle of apple cider at my side and plenty of gasoline in the tank - I sensed the frustration of those early travelers who suffered the heat and thirsted for water and found no grass for their animals. I marveled at their courage.

Wendover, an oasis at the very edge of the salt desert, marked the border between Utah and Nevada. It was an assemblage of structures on the barren face of the earth, totally devoid of trees or grass, and hardly fit the image one generally conjures up for an oasis. Yet, by definition, it was indeed a "watering place."

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The town's only claim to fame came from the recent war, when the Wendover Air Force Base was home to a bombing group preparing for the atom-bomb drops on Japan. The citizenry didn't know what was going on at the time, only that there were plenty of military people contributing to the war effort, and not incidentally to the town's economy. In 1948 the base was in a state of quiescence, though it was still listed as an active military airfield.

Lingering at the state line just long enough to eat, and to buy some more expensive gas, I pressed on toward the setting sun; whose slanting rays reflected off a low-growing variety of gray-green sagebrush (white sage) on the slowly rising landscape. The brush soon gave way to cedar and pinyon-pine trees, as the road climbed through Silver Zone Pass.

In spite of the fact that it was a transcontinental highway, the traffic was almost nonexistent that evening. So, too, was evidence of habitation in that part of Nevada. On the whole stretch between Wendover and Elko, 110 miles, there was one "city" (Wells, smaller than the town of Northfield), one village (Deeth, a railroad settlement of two-dozen houses); and three remote gas stations (Oasis, Welcome and Halleck, the middle one boasting of six overnight cabins). Otherwise, except for some widely-scattered ranches, the land was unpopulated.

It was totally dark when I approached Elko, which suddenly appeared over the brow of a hill like a shining jewel, its lights sparkling in the cool night air. I'm not sure what I expected but I recall being shocked by both the brightness and size of the city.

Elko, Nevada! I had arrived. Tired yet satisfied after a most successful journey. I uttered a short prayer of thanks, spoke a few kind words to my trusty Ford and rolled on into town.

It was after nine. Too late to look for Father's place, so I searched for a suitable hotel. I drove past the Ranch Inn, the Commercial and the Stockmen's, considering them probably too expensive for my budget, and stopped around the corner from the last under a small sign that read, in simple block letters, "ELKO HOTEL."

(The Elko Hotel stood on the location later occupied by the lounge and dining area of the new Stockmen's Hotel.)

Too weary to even consider eating I checked in at the desk, climbed a long, narrow, dark stairway, found my assigned room and hit the sack. Sleep came quickly and soundly, despite the strange surroundings and numerous trains rumbling beneath my window.

My first day in Elko coincided, according to the calendar, with the first day of spring. The sun rose in a clear sky that morning, but, as far as I was concerned, in the wrong place.

The streets in a majority of cities and towns in the United States run east-west and north-south. So I had assumed, in the dark of the night before, that Elko was thus laid out. In fact the railroad came first and the streets were aligned parallel and perpendicular to *it*. Since the tracks lay on a northeast-southwest line, the whole city was catty-wampus to the compass.

(In the future, many new streets would be aligned in the conventional way but it would only add to the confusion.)

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I walked around the corner to the Stockmen's Hotel for breakfast. There, in the large coffee shop, at its "U"-shaped counter lined with fixed stools, I was served coffee and a stack of hot-cakes (the western term for pancakes or griddle cakes). Of the dozen or more other patrons in the place, most appeared to be hung-over cowboys or gamblers gone broke in the casino.

What made the biggest impression on me that morning, though, was the unique sound from the adjacent hotel lobby. Not since my trip from Philadelphia to Norfolk on the ferry in 1947 had I seen or heard a slot machine, and then only a half-dozen or so. Here were dozens of them, lined up in rows and producing a cacophony of sound not unlike that in a factory.

When I paid the bill, the nice lady at the cash register gave me directions to upper Fifth Street, where Father lived, and I walked back to the hotel for my car. I must admit that I felt a degree of trepidation at the thought of meeting him, for his stern countenance still dominated my memory.

I waited at the tracks while a mile-long freight train passed, then drove on across the main street (Idaho Street) and up a short, steep hill onto a bench. I noticed that the intersecting streets bore the names of trees, most of them alien to the high desert. At last I came to Father's address, 1146 Fifth Street.

It was a tiny place, by New England standards, a stuccoed bungalow under a Chinese elm behind a low picket fence. Black smoke curled upward from its chimney (the acrid smell of burning coal was strong throughout the city), an indication that Father was up and about. I walked through a narrow gate to an enclosed porch and knocked at the door.

Within seconds my father appeared, dressed in gray trousers held up by suspenders over a long-sleeved undershirt. Except that his face seemed fuller and the fringe of hair encircling his shiny bald head was whiter, he looked exactly as I remembered him.

(An early photograph of my father depicts a handsome young man with a full head of hair, but he had been bald since before I was born; from the time when he was in his early twenties, I'd been told, so I never saw him without a smooth pate.)

Grabbing his extended hand I shook it heartily, and then, initial rhetoric aside, we moved into the kitchen and sat down at a small table; me to a cup of fresh coffee, he to a breakfast of hot oatmeal. I was glad that I had already eaten, I was never fond of lumpy oatmeal.

We talked for more than an hour: of my cross-country journey, of my activities in the Navy and afterward, about each and every member of the family (except my mother) and how they were getting along. It was a good reunion after all.

When the subject of my lodging came up, Father pointed out that his place was too small to accommodate me, and suggested that I might obtain a room with his minister and wife, the Reverend and Mrs. Walter Critchfield. That very afternoon we went to their home at 216 Oak Street, where I was introduced to the young couple and made arrangements to rent a small room just off the hall in the front.

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The room was just big enough for a bed and dresser, ample space for me and all of my worldly goods, and the deal included laundry service. But not board. I would take my meals downtown.

The Critchfields were a friendly couple. He was the pastor of the Baptist Church, which was located on the brow of the hill on Seventh Street, and she was his helpmate. They were childless.

Father gave a lot of his time and effort to the church, I was told. In addition to sometimes teaching Sunday school, he contributed to the building maintenance and repair; a factor that may have influenced the Critchfields to rent me the room. That and their need for cash. Preachers always needed cash.

After I'd been around a while, Mrs. Critchfield invited me to dine with them. And not long after that - despite the fact that I never attended his church - Walter offered to take me fishing. It would be my first fishing experience in the West.

It was early in May, just after the season opened. I bought a non-resident license (six months of residency was required to obtain a license to hunt or fish in Nevada; six weeks for a divorce) and helped Walter dig angleworms from the still dormant garden behind the house. Meanwhile, Mrs. Critchfield fixed a lunch for two. With a coffee can full of worms, a basket of lunch and some rods and reels, we jumped into my Ford and headed out of town toward a place called Secret Pass.

Twenty miles east of Elko, we left the highway for a graveled road to the south. Within a mile we came to several buildings, the most prominent one a hotel-saloon, and some corrals astraddle the railroad. According to a signpost this was Halleck. Walter said that the town - a cattle shipping point for the big ranches in the area - was named for its "proximity" to old Fort Halleck, twenty miles away to the south.

My impression of Halleck, formed in the time it took to cross over the rails, was of a ghost town; a handful of dilapidated, dust covered structures frozen in time. That it was uninhabited would no doubt be an unfair assessment, for I did see two beaten-up pickups and a saddle horse parked at the rail in front of the bar. Not a bad representation of the town's industry, I supposed, at that time of the morning.

A narrow wooden bridge provided a crossing over the Humboldt River, a river that begins near the city of Wells, meanders west and southwestward for 300-miles and never leaves the Great Basin except through evaporation. Ironically it was named, by Fremont, to honor a famous German explorer who never came anywhere near it. Other rivers are born, live and die within the basin, but the Humboldt is the longest. And when one considers the actual length of it, through its ox-bow wanderings, it is nearly 900-miles long.

On that day, though, I did not recognize it as a river at all. If Walter hadn't mentioned it I would have thought we were passing over a slough, for I was not yet accustomed to some of the language of the west. A stream the size of a brook in New England qualifies as a river in Nevada, especially if it drains a large watershed.

Beyond the willow shrouded river bottom we came to an assemblage of buildings, corrals and machinery. A ranch. Farther on, rust colored, white faced cattle grazed on rolling hills of sagebrush and

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sparse grass. Walter explained that although the grass appeared to be short and scarce (almost nonexistent, I thought) it was in fact very nutritious. However, to avoid over-grazing the number of cattle-per-acre was carefully controlled, a practice learned the hard way by overzealous ranchers in the 1800s.

Our nice graveled road led to the mouth of Secret Canyon, then it narrowed and wound uphill between a creek in the bottom and a ridge above. The whole countryside was suddenly different. A variety of trees grew in the canyon, aspen, cottonwood, willow and wild cherry, and on the hills above a scattering of cedars thrived. A red-tailed hawk circled overhead, in search of a meal, and then another, probably its mate, made a long swift dive toward some unseen (by us) morsel under the sagebrush. A couple of miles into the canyon, our road leveled off a bit and Walter announced, "This is the place." I drove onto the shoulder and parked the car.

I was eager to experience the sport of fishing in this totally new country, and with gear in hand headed off down the canyon side with Walter. The gray-green sagebrush gave off a distinctive aroma, I found, an aroma that was amplified when I brushed against its tiny leaves. In the space between the bushes, fresh green shoots pushed up through clumps of dried bunch grass, and wildflowers bloomed in vivid contrast to the soft dark soil.

The creek fell in cataracts of white water interspersed with quiet pools. Quakies and thickets lined the banks, providing shade for the fish and oath-provoking hazards to the angler. The water was just right for fishing, Walter assured me, murky enough to hide us from the trout yet not too swift and muddy.

The art of directing a dangling worm on a hook suspended on a short line from the wobbly tip of a slender fish pole between a myriad of twigs and branches over a likely looking aquatic habitat was, I soon found, an acquired skill. One that I had a hard time acquiring. The ability to curse roundly, however, came easy when the paraphernalia became hopelessly entangled; though at such times I was careful to keep a watchful eye out for the preacher.

There is nothing like success, the old adage goes, to breed satisfaction. I pulled a feisty, colorful, ten-inch rainbow trout from the third hole I dropped my hook into, and I beamed with pride as I carried the wildly flopping creature over to Walter. He seemed pleased, too, that my first catch was such a beauty.

For the next four hours I was in ecstasy. It was as if this particular situation had been created especially for my personal benefit. Granted that was an egotistical viewpoint, but there was no other way to put it: Clear blue sky overhead, fresh brown earth under my feet, the smell of sage and wildflowers in my nostrils, the musical lilt of running water in my ears, all contributed to my mood.

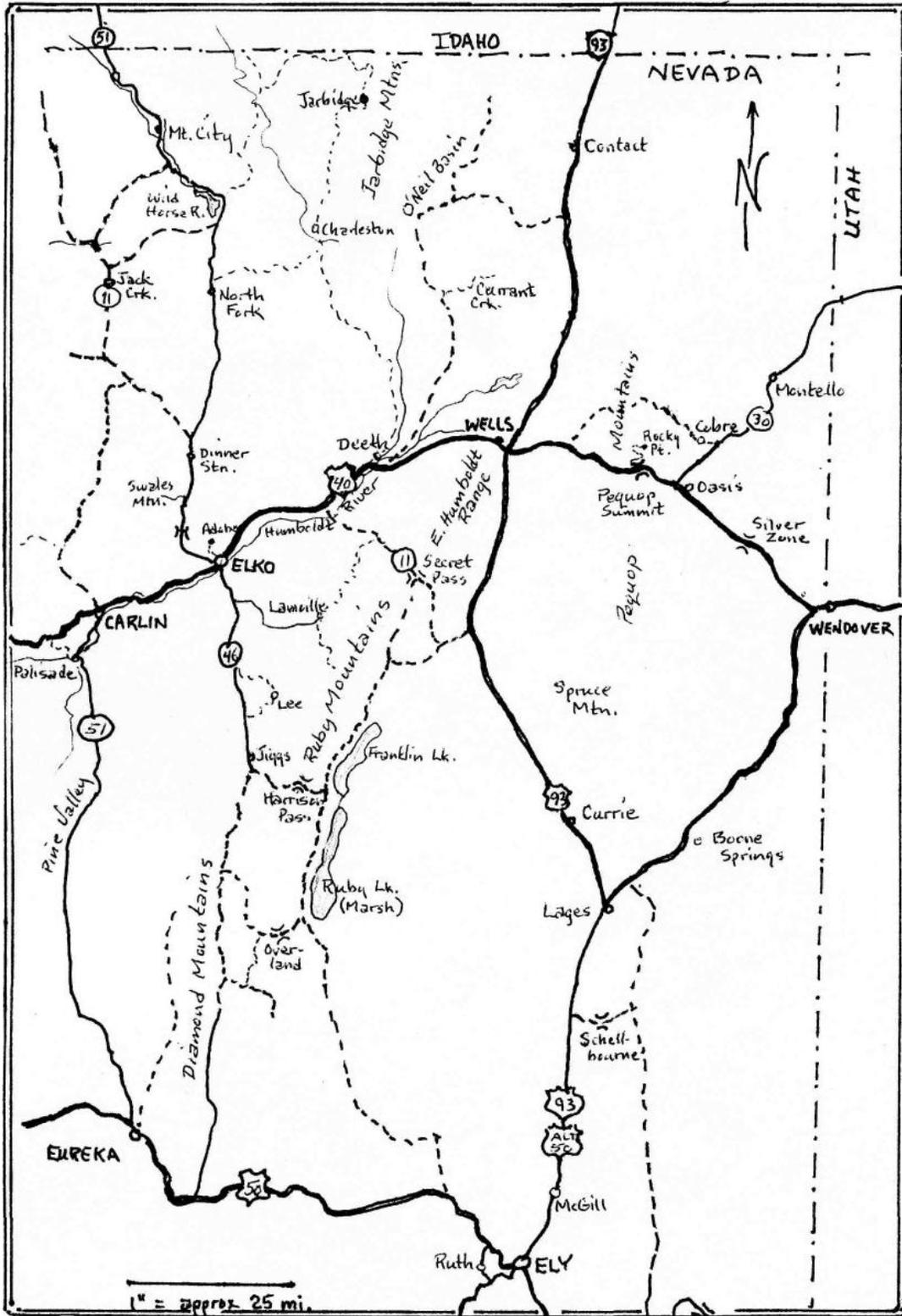
When we repaired to the shade of a quaking aspen for lunch, after four hours of intensive fishing, even the flavor of the food was enhanced by our surroundings. Seated on a patch of grass, I plied my host with a barrage of questions; about the mountains, the rocks, the flora, and the fauna around us. (I had been surprised by a deer while intently fishing.) Although not a native of Nevada, Walter did his best to satisfy my appetite for knowledge.

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The contrast between this high country and New England was enormous. And while I would always maintain a special affinity for the land of my youth, I was already infected by the powerful attraction of this place. I had been exposed to the real Nevada, the Nevada apart from the highways and appurtenances of man. I had already spent a couple of months around Elko, had become somewhat acquainted with the folks and their lifestyle (much relaxed compared to that of an easterner), but until now I had not begun to really appreciate the land.

Then it was time to clean the six trout we'd caught, that ranged in size from ten- to fourteen-inches, and leave the canyon. But I was thoroughly hooked (if you'll pardon the pun) on fishing in Nevada.

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Map of Northeastern Nevada

**CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE
GETTING ACQUAINTED**

But back to my initial days in Elko. The main reason for my being there, of course, was to apply for a job with the U.S. Weather Bureau. So a first order of business on arrival was to visit that establishment.

The Elko airport was situated just west of the city (and still is), in the angle formed by the junction of US-40 and the Mountain City highway (present SR-51). The main, paved runway ran parallel to the U.S. highway, a short dirt strip ran uphill adjacent to the latter. Two hangars (the larger one belonging to United Airlines) and three or four other buildings were located near the intersection of the two runways.

Across the driveway from the United Airlines operations hangar was a neat, two story brick building. CAA tower operators occupied the glass-enclosed top floor, Weather Bureau meteorologists the lower one. It was there that I went to seek employment, and it was there that I would learn that the job vacancy had already been filled.

I was welcomed by the chief, Ward Lampkin, who listened with interest as I told of my Navy experience in aerology. He seemed genuinely sorry that there was no position open to me, but that was it. Once again Fate had found a way to thwart my desire to work as a meteorologist.

For the next week or so I helped my father, painting, and at the same time got somewhat acquainted with the city. No matter where you go, you find the natives eager to brag about their particular country, and the people of Elko were no exception to the rule. Father's friends, even casual acquaintances at the coffee shops were happy to fill me in with facts and pseudo-facts about the area. In time I was able to glean the truth from the fiction, but all of it was extraordinarily interesting to a greenhorn Easterner like me.

One of my first questions was how the city derived its name. I got a variety of responses: "It was named for the elk that used to roam here." and "It's an Indian word meaning 'white woman,' so called when the first English-speaking woman was seen at the site." And yet another version: "An Indian Chief's sick boy was tenderly cared for by

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an emigrant party. When the boy died the Chief supposedly chanted 'Elko, Elko,' meaning 'beautiful'."

The most logical story went as follows: "The Central Pacific railroad official charged with the responsibility for designating the dozens of new towns along the line, decided to name it for one of his favorite animals, the elk, simply adding an 'o' to distinguish it from the many already-existing towns called "Elk."

I learned that Elko County was one of the largest in area in the United States; at 1,700 square miles, bigger than the combined states of Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, with the District of Columbia thrown in.

Long before the West became a part of the United States, the first white men entered what is now northern Nevada, in search of beaver. In 1826, Peter Skene Ogden, of the famous Hudson's Bay Fur Company, led a brigade of Snake River trappers south and travelled the length of the (now) Humboldt River. Next came Joseph R. Walker, in 1833, heading a party of fur trappers from the Great Salt Lake area. After trapping the Barren River (as they called it) and dealing with troublesome Indians along the way, they continued southwest beyond its sink, crossed the Sierra Nevada and entered the San Joaquin Valley in present California.

In just a few years, the beaver were virtually eradicated from the Humboldt River (then known as Ogden's River) and it was not until the 1850s gold rush, after Fremont had blazed the trail, that hundreds of wagon trains travelled the route to California.

If someone were to set out to find the best place to start a town in northeastern Nevada, he'd not likely pick the spot where Elko now stands. Geography was the controlling factor, not some natural feature of value. It was first a campsite, where emigrants paused for refreshment by the river and adjacent hot springs, and then a staging point for travelers and ore-hauling wagons. It met the requirements for a construction camp during the race to span the continent with an iron road, in the 1860s, and once established for that purpose it evolved into a rail head and transfer point for the freight wagons and stages that connected with mining towns to the north and south. It was the completion of the railroad in 1869 that put Elko on the map, quite naturally astraddle the tracks.

The city lay on two levels; the flat alongside the river and a bench that sloped gently upward to the northwest. A couple of hundred feet lower in elevation than the city of Denver, Elko was subjected to the same extremes of weather. Typically the mountains received most of the precipitation while the valleys were dry. I heard stories that the temperature could drop to forty below in winter and rise to above one-hundred in summer, that gale-force winds were not uncommon, nor were gully-washing thunderstorms. I would wait and see.

The most desirable feature of the whole area, to me, was its remoteness. It was a long way from a busy seacoast or industrial complex. Furthermore, I could think of no reason why the city and county should grow appreciably beyond its existing population. A definite asset, I concluded, when evaluating my surroundings.

The city of Elko boasted of a fine county courthouse, good schools, several churches, two banks, a gas station on almost every

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corner, numerous hotels and motels, countless bars and four houses of prostitution. The highway, railroads and air terminal were all of major transcontinental importance. Gambling and tourism were prime revenue-producing industries. Mining was on the wane.

But ranching (cattle and sheep) was the county's dominant industry. I liked that, even though I was not cut out to be a part of it. Of the nearly 11,000,000 acres in the county, 25 percent were privately owned lands. The rest were in the public domain, managed by the federal government. And guess what. There were about thirty times as many cattle and sheep, almost equally divided, as people in Elko County.

The proliferation of open (legal) gambling and prostitution was new to me. I rationalized that, while those activities were probably not in the best interest of a society, since they had always flourished they doubtless always would. And perhaps the pursuance of such vices legally was no worse than indulging in them outside the law, as was common in other parts of the country.

I still believe that mankind would be much better off without drinking, gambling and prostitution, but have concluded that there has never been, nor will there ever be, a society or government that could successfully eliminate such activities. So be it.

My first impression of Elko was that it was sort of "junky." Then it occurred to me that the desert, unlike my native land where the rapid growth of grass, weeds, brush and trees hides man's cast-offs, provides no such cover. Abandoned cars, machines and appliances were everywhere in evidence.

In contrast to the way I was brought up in the East, I noticed that Westerners were lax about taking care of things; that is, they seldom put their machines and tools under cover when not in use.

And the dust was something else again. It was in constant supply; in the air, on streets and sidewalks, on automobiles, even indoors. But it stands to reason that a climate with only seven inches of rainfall a year (in the valleys) must produce a lot of dust. The fact was graphically illustrated for my benefit, when a thunderstorm of giant proportions appeared on the near horizon.

It was late afternoon in June, Saturday, and I was driving toward home when the great, black, boiling cloud filled the valley of the Humboldt southwest of the city. The whole sky became prematurely dark, the air soon filled with fine, gritty sand and the trees bowed under the force of the wind, which I judged to be 35 to 45 miles-per-hour in velocity. I parked my car at the curb in front of my Oak Street residence, but stayed in it for protection as I watched a big cottonwood down the street tip over and expose its roots.

The storm increased in ferocity. Visibility was reduced to zero. I could see nothing outside my vehicle, not even the door of the house a few feet away.

A few more minutes and the wind doubled in force. Now the inside of my Ford filled with dust and sand, seeping through cracks that I didn't know existed. The stuff got in my hair, eyes, ears and mouth. The car rocked till I thought it was going to roll away down the hill. Lightning flashed and thunder rolled, but even they were largely obscured by the swirling dust and roaring winds.

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Finally, out of desperation, I made a run for refuge in the house, where I found the air relatively clear and easier to breath. What a relief.

Quite naturally I was reminded of the 1938 hurricane in New England. But this was the desert, far from the ocean where hurricanes are spawned. It was not a real hurricane, not by definition, but the wind sure seemed to be blowing at hurricane force. I sat-it-out, alone in my room, staring out the window and wondering how long it might last. Within an hour the storm was over, ending almost as suddenly as it had appeared.

"HURRICANE RIPS THRU CITY OF ELKO," the Daily Free Press headlined on Monday the 14th, along with an account of the damages. The Weather Bureau - having recorded average winds of 80-mph during one ten-minute period and gusts up to 102-mph, the strongest in its history - properly described it as a "violent thunderstorm."

Numerous trees had been uprooted, several of them nearby on Oak Street. A small home was blown over on Sage Street and many roofs, including a hangar roof at the airport, were lifted off. Surprising, at least to me, was the fact that only one-hundredth of an inch of rainfall was measured at the airport (although more had fallen on the city center).

By contrast another thunderstorm, one that struck the city ten days earlier, had produced a tremendous down pouring of rain, nearly a half-inch in 40 minutes. Homes in the vicinity of Fifth and Elm Streets were inundated and the flash-floodwaters rushed all the way to the city park.

Those two storms, in addition to several other varietal incidents of nature, led me to wonder why anyone would care to live in Elko. The temperature often swung from the 20s to the 70s in a 24-hour period. Grass and shrubs turned green, tree leaves budded and matured, fruit trees bloomed, only to be snowed upon and frozen when winter returned after the first warm days of the season.

My first Nevada spring was, without doubt, the least predictable, the wildest, the most miserable one I'd ever been subjected to, and I thought seriously of packing my gear and heading east to New England. But I suppose the mystery of it all, wondering what was next to come, influenced my decision to stay a while longer.

By working with my father in the painting occupation, I not only earned a modest living but also got to meet some intriguing people in what, to me, were not-so-common places. He had a job going in Carlin, the railroad town about twenty miles west of Elko, where the work consisted of stripping and refinishing a bar in a popular saloon. We were three days at it, time enough for me to learn that cleaning several years' accumulation of spilled booze and tobacco juice from the top and front of a long mahogany piece was nothing if not a filthy job.

But it was not all tedium. The bartender and his patrons, the latter mostly off-duty railroaders, enjoyed watching us work, and between them and Father there was a constant flow of idle chatter. He was good at talking while he worked. He never let conversation interfere with production.

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Quite truthfully, I was awed by the fact that he - the son of a revered deacon of the Baptist church and raised in the old puritan ethic - was so well at ease among those folks at the bar. I noted then (and later incidents would substantiate my observation) that most Westerners seemed to regard as unimportant an individual's personal religion, beliefs, ethnic background or morals. But it still struck me as inconsistent of Father to work in a saloon.

My reaction to his next job, the following week, transcended awe. When we went to work at the Classy Inn. Houses of prostitution legally operated in many of Nevada's counties (Washoe and Clark being notable exceptions) and the Classy Inn was one of four bordellos in Elko. It was located, appropriately, "across the tracks" in the vicinity of Third and Douglas Streets.

Our job was to repaint the girls' bedrooms. An interesting work location if I ever saw one. The ladies enjoyed kidding around with Father. I enjoyed the scenery. But I'd be less than candid if I didn't admit to being embarrassed by such close proximity to so many scantily-clad females.

The madam was medium-good-looking, perhaps in her forties, and very congenial. She provided us with lunch and coffee at noontime. The girls were courteous, friendly and well behaved. Swearing and filthy language were taboo. My father was paid well for his work, in cash, and I made a few bucks too. It was a much better job than that in the Carlin bar.

And so it went. I was young and single and could afford to live from day-to-day. The cost of a room and food was not much, and I spent very little money on entertainment. Without any specific plan for the future it seemed prudent - after having driven 2,500 miles to get there - to spend some time in the West. I would stick around through the summer and see what might develop.

Anyway, tucked away in my wallet was "return trip money." If I were to remain in Nevada, I vowed, it would be because I wished to stay and not because I was broke and couldn't afford to leave.

Of the three major hotels in Elko - the Stockmen's (formerly the Mayer), the Commercial and the Ranch Inn - the first was probably the largest at that time. Red Ellis owned the Stockmen's; Newt Crumley owned the Commercial and Ranch Inn.

Father often worked for Red Ellis, at his residence, and had gotten to know him quite well. So when he heard of a job opening at the hotel for a desk clerk, he suggested that I might check into it. I had had some hotel experience, so I figured why not? I went to see the head clerk, a Mr. Larry Keating.

A man of medium height and graying hair, probably in his late fifties, Mr. Keating was nattily dressed in a gray suit and subdued tie. But the interview was rather informal, conducted over coffee in the restaurant. I was favorably impressed by his manner, and had the feeling that he was so inclined toward me. And I felt that I was probably the best, if not the only applicant for the job. However, he seemed hesitant to hire me and I wondered why. Then I learned the reason.

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"If you didn't have a mustache," he said, "I'd hire you right now. People are suspicious of a young man with a mustache, and we don't want the hotel to have a bad image."

I wasn't aware that a mustache constituted a bad image; I had worn mine for several years. But I believed (and still do) that an employer should have the right to hire, to not hire, or to fire anyone he chooses, and the right to expect every employee to conform to his rules of appearance and dress. If a guy didn't like the conditions, he should look elsewhere for a job.

I shrugged. "That's no problem, I'll shave it off." Then, to be sure of where I stood, I asked, "If I shave it off do I get the job?"

"Yes indeed," he answered. "Report to the desk tomorrow night at ten." Then he grinned and added, "Without the mustache."

The atmosphere at the Stockmen's was some different from that of The Northfield. It was a veritable beehive of activity both day and night. Nevada casinos never closed. The opportunity for losing your money at a game of chance was an around-the-clock affair. The bar was always open too, in case you got thirsty or wanted to get drunk, and so too was the coffee shop, in the event that you had money left over for food.

Some of the patrons, the drunks, took a bit of getting used to, especially on the night shift. By midnight, the majority of "social" drinkers had left the hotel or gone to their rooms, but the serious drinkers were just getting started. Some of them would remain all night long. I recall seeing one inebriate play a slot machine in the lobby from the time I arrived at work until seven in the morning. He then hit a jackpot that dropped thirty-eight silver dollars into the tray. Why he was so elated I could not fathom, for it had cost him well over a hundred dollars to win. But such is the temperament of a true gambler.

The main casino was off to the left of the lobby, past the entrance to the show room. There were the usual games: twenty-one, keno, roulette, craps and poker. In the rear half of the room was a large, horseshoe-shaped bar, behind it three or four friendly bartenders held court. To the left of the bar were the restrooms.

I initially failed to see the significance of two doors marked "MEN" but only one marked "WOMEN." I learned the hard way, when I opened the first clearly marked door and started in.

Imagine my surprise when I saw a woman seated on the crapper, her dress hiked up above her knees, staring at me with a look of astonishment on her face. In shock I paused, blushed, and tried to think of something to say by way of apology. To make matters worse, a chorus of voices erupted behind me:

"Hey! Get outta there! That's the ladies' room!"

I said nothing and backed away, letting the door close between me and the woman. I looked again at the sign. It still read "MEN." Turning, I grinned sheepishly and headed for the second men's room (the legitimate one). Everyone in the area laughed and jeered at my expense. Once again the house joke had worked.

From that day on I got to play the game with "those in the know," joining the chorus whenever a stranger ventured into the first, naturally the handiest, men's room with the mannequin on the pot.

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While never a gambler - being too conservative by nature and too poor in resources - I did "invest" a few dollars in the sport. After dabbling at it for a year or so (I have not played a casino game in over two-score years, and only rarely a slot machine) I would wind up about or slightly less than even. I never did like twenty-one, it required too much concentration; craps took my money too fast; roulette didn't pay off as often as I thought it should. Keno seemed to offer the best odds, so, like any get-rich-quick sucker, I played that, occasionally marking a ticket when I got off shift in the morning. Sometimes I'd hang around and visit with the dealer while waiting for him to pull the winning numbers.

In this way I got acquainted with a guy named George "Tuffy" Morse. He was a friendly fellow, about my height but really lean and wiry. Though he was not much older than me his face was already leathery, doubtless from having worked so much in the out-of-doors as a miner and cowboy.

One time we got to talking about fishing. I told of my experience at Secret Creek and he offered to take me where there were really big fish, up near Wildhorse Reservoir. Tuffy had lived in that particular area as a boy, and knew the country intimately.

That very morning, after a hearty breakfast, we travelled in my Ford to his brother's ranch. It was not a very prosperous looking place, the house was very small, the several outbuildings un-painted and extremely dilapidated. But then, a spread's worth was measured in land and livestock, not in structures.

It was in good-looking country, though, a sloping sagebrush hill at the mouth of a canyon from which a small creek (Deep Creek) flowed toward the south end of Wildhorse Reservoir.

Tuffy's nephew met us at the broken-down picket gate. He was seven or eight years old and a really tough-looking kid, obviously wise to the way of life out there on the ranch.

"I got some nice ones above the ranch," he said, referring to the fishing.

So we tried up there first. It was a steep, rugged canyon and the creek was flowing full. We had no luck and headed downstream, below the house.

"There," Tuffy asserted, "is where the big old rainbows come up from the reservoir to spawn.

Sure enough we found them, lying in quiet pools a mile above the lake. But our luck was still poor. The big lunkers just lay about, ignoring every kind of bait from worms to grasshoppers. It drove us crazy to see them and not get a bite.

Tuffy's nephew came up with a solution. "I know how t'git 'em," he said emphatically, "with a twenty-two!"

Tuffy agreed there was merit in the idea, and sent the kid back to the house for the artillery. He returned with a pair of twenty-two rifles, one a single shot, the other a repeater.

Contrary to what one might think, it is not easy to "fish" with a rifle. But after some practice, I learned to allow for the refraction of the fish's image under water and was able to stun several trout, all of them about fifteen inches in length. The kid got the most, an indication that he'd had a lot of practice.

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It was a nice mess of trout that we took home with us. But for good reason - our method of obtaining them being unorthodox, un-sportsmanlike and unlawful, though not foreign to old-timers - we were sworn to secrecy.

That was the first and last time I knowingly took fish in an illegal manner, but I'd have to admit it was fun.

The fact that I was acquainted with Tuffy proved beneficial in another way. In those days you could write a keno ticket, leave the area, and return at a later time to check on the success of your race by comparing your ticket to the house's master. I would often write a ticket in the morning, when I got off work, and check that evening to see if I'd won.

Once, after writing a ticket in the morning, I forgot to check on it when I went back to work. As a matter of fact, I forgot about it altogether, until Tuffy mentioned it a week later.

"I see you won a good one last week," he said.

"Oh yeah? What do you mean?" I asked.

Well, Tuffy had been off duty for a few days, and when he returned he casually went through the old race-masters to see who'd been winning. He noted that my ticket had been posted as a winner. Of course there were no names on keno tickets; he was just familiar with the pattern I always played.

"Damn!" I exclaimed. "I don't know what I did with my copy."

Without further conversation I left the casino, hurried up the hill to my room and tore through the pockets of my dirty shirts and pants, fervently hoping the ticket had not wound up in the wash.

Luck was a lady that day. That scrap of paper, worth \$110 to me, was still folded neatly in one of my shirt-pockets. I rushed back to the Stockmen's, redeemed the ticket, gave Tuffy a fiver for being so perceptive, then gloried in my windfall.

As a matter of record, that was the largest amount I ever won at gambling, before or since, my other winnings amounting to less than fifty dollars each.

In 1948, the city of Elko had but one taxi company. It was the Veteran's, owned and operated by the Taelour brothers, Ted and Dan. Two other brothers, John and Bob, were drivers. The Taelours were native Nevadans, born and raised in railroad towns from Montello to Deeth. Ted and Dan had served in the Navy in World War II, in the Pacific theater, and afterward returned to settle down in Elko. They now had a good business going with two, sometimes three cabs on the streets. A phone at one end of the registration desk at the Stockmen's Hotel served as their dispatch center.

Dan usually worked the night shift. When he was away on a run I covered the taxi phone. There weren't a lot of calls at night, even in the twenty-four hour city of Elko, so we had ample time to visit; at the desk, over cups of coffee, or at breakfast in the coffee shop. We quickly became acquainted with one another.

Dan (Francis Daniel) was a couple of years older than me and taller. He was dark-haired, lean, handsome, hard working and hard playing, confident and personable with a good sense of humor. Both he and Ted had recently earned pilot's licenses, a fact that would prove

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beneficial to me, having taken instruction from Ralph Scott at the El Aero Flying Service.

Through conversations with Dan I added to my knowledge of Elko and its people, and of western life in general. He often came back from a "fare" with an amusing tale. He loved to tell stories on people, embellished, of course, with his own brand of humor. Even when he told on me, the neophyte from the East, it sounded so good I seldom bothered to correct him.

One night, not long after I'd gone to work at the hotel, I found myself in a rather embarrassing situation. The bar in the casino was doing a good job of filling its patrons with liquor; the tables and slots were equally successful in relieving them of their money. I rented-out the last vacant rooms and leaned back to observe the night-time activities. Most everyone in the lobby was either plain happy or happy drunk; except one, who stumbled around panhandling the customers, and who eventually became so obnoxious I put in a call for Murph, the bouncer, to put him out.

Murphy was, appropriately, a retired boxer and highly skilled in his job. He sidled up to the drunk, took him by the upper-arms, ushered him through the crowd and out the big, glass, swinging doors without the benefit of their being opened. I was extremely impressed.

But that was early after midnight. My own discomfort came later, at about three in the morning, when another obvious drunk staggered through the lobby from the casino area to my desk. He was a derelict if I'd ever seen one, dressed in faded bib-overalls and wrinkled shirt, unshaven and unkempt in every way. In a mumbling, half coherent tone he said he wanted a room; didn't ask for one, just matter-of-factly expected one.

Even if there had been a vacancy I doubt if I'd have rented it to the likes of him.

"Sorry, we have no more rooms," I asserted, thinking that was the end of it.

"Whatta y'mean?" he slurred, "You gotta room f'me!"

We repeated the exchange, both in louder tones, and then he wobbled away through the lobby. I relaxed. He was gone. But my relief was only temporary. Within minutes I received a phone call, and the man on the line was definitely in a bad mood. Considering the time of day (night) and the subject at hand, it was no wonder.

It was the big boss, Red Ellis himself.

"What's the idea telling Pete you don't have a room?" Then, before I had a chance to compose a response he went on, "We've always got a room for Pete. If you can't find an empty one, put a rollaway at the end of the hall upstairs for him. Take care of it now!" Click! He hung up the phone.

Needless to say, with instructions so plain his wishes were quickly carried out. Pete was escorted to his "room" at the end of the hall, where he rolled into bed, clothes and all, and promptly fell asleep, oblivious to his surroundings.

My friend Dan, who had witnessed the whole thing, was now delighted to tell me about Pete. Who he really was. Why hadn't he warned me before? Not Dan. He wouldn't stoop to spoiling the fun for those around who knew what was going to happen.

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Pete's was a rags-to-riches story. Only it appeared to me he'd never shed his rags. Like many another Basque, Pete Itcaina (pronounced It-chi-na) came to this country from the Pyrenees Mountains in Europe, to herd sheep. And like many of them he took his pay, or part of it, in lambs. In time he built up a sizeable flock of his own, and eventually obtained ranch property and assets worth millions of dollars. He had a wife, who was rarely seen in town, and, I think, a couple of children.

Pete made regular trips to the city: to attend to business, to get drunk, to gamble and to visit the girlies, generally in that order and always, according to my sources, dressed in bib-overalls.

That night's experience, while embarrassing enough to me, was tame compared to what had happened to a bartender at the Silver Dollar Bar, just up the street. It seemed that Pete overindulged during a bacchanalian evening in that establishment, and the man behind the bar, no doubt through ignorance such as mine, refused to serve him another drink. An argument ensued, ending when Pete demanded to know the name of the tavern owner and where he could be reached. Armed with that information Pete sought out the proprietor, bought the business, returned to the premises and fired the annoying bartender. That episode was legend. Mine, thankfully, would soon be forgotten. By everyone but me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX
MORE ACQUAINTANCES - FLYING

Sometime before I arrived in Elko, presumably after they had gotten their pilot's licenses, Dan and Ted purchased a war surplus airplane, a Volte Valiant, BT-13 Basic Trainer. It was a single engine, low-wing monoplane with a Plexiglas canopy over two seats in tandem, similar to the SN-J (AT-6) in which I had flown in Cuba, but with less horsepower and with non-retractable landing gear. It was a plenty hot airplane, though, especially when compared to other private planes flying out of the Elko airport.

Both Dan and Ted loved to fly, and they were always looking for someone to go along in the BT-13, to help pay for the gas and oil (both of which were consumed in great quantity). So whenever I had a few bucks in my pocket I was their pigeon.

Since both Dan and I worked nights, we had a lot of daytime to ourselves. So it was only natural that I should most often fly with him. (Besides, Ted was a married man.) The thought that we might not come down alive was incidental to the thrills involved.

On my first time out, noting that Dan strapped on a parachute, I asked, "Where's mine?"

"Oh that," he said, patting his chute-pack. "It's just for a seat cushion...so I can see out of the cockpit."

I bought his explanation, if only because I'd be averse to jumping with a chute anyway. He promised to fly straight and level and I climbed aboard, to sit on a bare-metal, bucket seat "sans chute or cushion." But you can bet I cinched the seat belt tight.

It was quite a job getting the BT to run that morning (as it would be on subsequent occasions). Before climbing in, Dan took a crank out of the cockpit, inserted it into a hole behind the engine nacelle and "wound" it up. I didn't know why. Then he got into the driver's seat and pushed the starter-button. The propeller turned slowly and hesitantly, the engine coughed, sputtered and rattled, and black smoke belched from the exhaust pipes. I was not inspired to confidence.

Dan then worked a lever at his left side (the wobble-pump), moving it back and forth rapidly with his left hand and at the same time flipping switches and turning knobs with his right hand.

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After what seemed an eternity, when I figured he'd have to call the whole thing off and I could forego the trip without appearing timid, there came a roar and more smoke and the blade melted into a blur in front of us and the airframe shook and quivered spasmodically. Grinning, Dan pushed hard on the brakes, to overcome the machine's eagerness to go, and allowed the engine to warm up. In a few minutes, after rotating the stick and pumping the pedals to exercise the ailerons and elevators, he allowed her to move toward the runway. We were going to fly after all.

True to his word he gave me a calm ride, not unlike those I had taken with old Chief Wells in Cuba. He circled the city to allow me a new perspective on its layout, gained altitude, flew partway up the river valley then returned to the airport and made a smooth landing. What a sport!

In the weeks that followed I took many a ride in the old BT. Though with the price of gas and oil we could ill afford to stay in the air more than twenty or thirty minutes at a time.

As they gained experience, Dan and Ted learned to execute most of the basic aerobatic maneuvers: chandelles, snap rolls and slow rolls, spins, and one called a "split-S" whereby you come out of the inverted part of a roll by looping toward the ground and back to the horizontal, upright position. One needed a margin of altitude to do that last one, since the BT was not a truly aerobatic aircraft and the engine tended to quit when upside down. When it came right-side up again it would restart, with luck, always with a cloud of smoke.

I watched from the hangar apron one day, with Ted and some others, while Dan practiced aerobatics. He flew out southwest of the airport, climbed to about 3,000 feet (above ground-level) then executed six consecutive slow rolls; each punctuated by a puff of smoke from the restarting engine. At the top of the last roll he started a split-S but wound up in a vertical spin headed straight for the valley floor!

We were dumbfounded. Speechless. Thinking the unthinkable. I sensed a terrible helplessness, no doubt shared by my companions, sure that I was about to witness a fatal crash and unable to do a thing about it.

Down...down went the BT, its engine screaming, faster and ever faster until I just knew it was impossible for Dan to pull out in the space remaining. I choked down a lump in my throat. This could not be happening.

And then, miraculously, at the very last possible moment the BT wobbled out of its spin, nosed up at treetop level and climbed straight toward the zenith. My sense of relief was indescribable.

Back on the ground, Dan gave this account:

"I wanted t'see how many rolls I could do without losing altitude. I think I did five, didn't I? Then she stalled and 'whop'...I was in a power-on dive and headin' for the river."

(An aircraft is in a stalled condition, I might explain, when its control surfaces do not react normally or at all.)

"I knew I had to shove the stick forward," Dan went on. "It took all I had t'do it but it worked...she straightened out. But the ground was comin' up fast so I jerked it right back to my belly and hoped for

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the best. I was really smokin' there, wasn't I?" Dan chuckled, making light of his close call. He did admit, though, that for a while up there he was sure he was going to auger-in.

So it was that Dan learned how to recover a BT from an uncontrolled vertical dive, but the knowledge came only a fraction of a moment before it was too late.

There were those who questioned my judgment to fly with Dan after that, but I figured he was now a more experienced flyer than before. Besides, my time on earth was not yet up.

Dan and Ted took a lot of flak about their BT. The more they flew the old trainer, the looser it got and the more it rattled and vibrated. The more the oil squeezed by the piston rings, the more it smoked. As the consumption of oil increased we began buying it by the gallon rather than the quart, a factor that substantially increased our cost of flying.

It got to the point that whenever Dan or Ted made ready to take off in the BT, with or without a passenger, the air was filled with wisecracks from the hangar hangers-on:

"Ten dollars you won't make it back."

"Who's your beneficiary?"

"You want us to notify Burns?" (Robley Burns, the local undertaker.)

"How d'you want your epitaph to read?"

Those and similar remarks, coming from other pilots, airport employees and mechanics, should have had a sobering effect on me. But flying was so much fun I stuck with it, with a faith that was surely blind.

Only once, while flying with Dan, was I really concerned for my life. He was at that time courting an attractive young girl named Pat Johns, who worked at Wagner's Drive-in on the (then) east edge of town across from the city park. In order to impress her, he decided to do a low "fly over" the restaurant.

"Come on, Chico," he invited. ("Chico" was the nickname Dan had tagged me with, the result of a catch phrase greeting, "Que paso, Chico?" that I had brought with me from Cuba.) I naturally agreed to go with him, and to buy half the gas and oil for the privilege.

It was early morning of a crisp, calm day right after we got off shift. We put some gas and oil in the BT (enough for a short flight) climbed aboard and Dan took off to the east, flying just above the roof tops toward the drive-in. He made a low pass over the establishment - one that should guarantee, I thought, his either getting everyone's attention or a stiff fine from the CAA - then pulled up in a chandelle and flew back, low, to see if Pat was yet outside and watching.

Not seeing her but plenty of other spectators, my eager friend flew out to the northwest, made a climbing turn and pointed the nose of the airplane once more toward the drive-in, this time with "power on." As we approached the city park he began a slow-roll. I took a firm grip on my seat, as I was wont to do whenever we rolled, and watched the top of "E" Hill rotate until it was overhead and the sky, I presumed, was beneath us. Normally the rotation would continue, putting the sky above once more, but this time, when totally inverted

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I "fell" toward the earth and was brought up short by my seat belt, just as my head bumped the plastic canopy. I wished I had cinched the buckle tighter.

My thoughts raced. Why had Dan not completed the roll? He wouldn't try to split-S out we were too low. At least as far as I was concerned. Furthermore, it seemed to me that we were dropping dangerously close to the trees in the park.

The picture of Dan's recent dive toward the ground flashed vividly to mind. The engine screamed. I forced my head forward so I could read the altimeter. Its indicator needle was rapidly unwinding. We were doomed for sure.

At last, after what seemed an eternity but was probably only a matter of seconds, the BT rolled upright and, screaming, passed over the roof of the drive-in. I looked down, in time to glimpse the faces of a dozen startled onlookers running for cover.

Dan got plenty of attention but Pat was not in the crowd.

Back at the airport a few minutes later we crawled out of the plane. Dan's eyes were alight with excitement. "Did you see that air-speed indicator?" he asked

"Hell no!" I shot back, still not completely re-composed, "I had my eyes glued to the altimeter."

It was all in good fun, that escapade, but we were extremely fortunate; not only to have lived through it but also in avoiding a fine or censure from the CAA and/or other officials. We would not have fared so well in today's world.

As for Pat, for whom the show was intended, she said she heard the commotion, figured it was some nut and was too busy to go outside. She no doubt guessed it was Dan. Who else, except maybe Ted, would pull such a stunt?

During the late forties and early fifties, even though it had a population of but five thousand, Elko held a position of considerable importance in the state. It was stable yet industrious, informal yet cultured. It boasted of some amenities not found in larger cities. As in the beginning, a primary reason for the city's success was its location, approximately halfway between Salt Lake City and Reno on one of the most important transcontinental highways in the country.

The Victory Highway, US-40, literally grew from the ruts of the pioneers' wagons, and was little improved when the first high-wheeled automobiles came along. The drivers of those primitive vehicles looked forward to arriving in Elko, where they could buy new tires, gasoline, whiskey and a bath.

In the pioneering days of air transportation, location was once again a controlling factor. Elko was ideally situated for a refueling stop, an oasis to the intrepid mail-contract flyers and pilots of the first fledgling airline.

In post-war 1948, cross country trains, automobiles and airplanes were still dependent on Elko as a natural stopping place. Few passengers got on or off the trains anymore, but most of the supplies necessary to sustain the city were brought in by rail, augmented by the growing trucking industry. Tourists traveling by car found the hotels, motels and restaurants most accommodating, with good,

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inexpensive rooms and food, excellent entertainment, and gambling for those inclined to wager a few bucks. The flying public was well served by United Airlines, the descendent of the original transcontinental airline.

In an effort to provide a much needed source of revenue, the sport of gambling (usually referred to by its more genteel moniker, "gaming") was legalized by the Nevada State Legislature in 1932. When I arrived in 1948 the only city in northeastern Nevada to offer big-time gaming was Elko, but it was the predominant industry downtown.

Carlin and Wells had a share in the business, but on a much smaller scale. Theirs was as portrayed in movies set in the last century: a few tables in a darkened saloon, each with a light bulb and a cigar-chomping dealer hovering over it, both wearing green shades.

The entertainment business in Elko really benefited by the "critical distance" rule. In those days, big-name bands travelled across the country in buses. Many of them stayed overnight in Elko. Newton (Newt) Crumley, a native of Tonopah, Nevada, whose father then owned the Commercial Hotel, was truly inspired when he thought of taking advantage of that fact. Since the bands stopped anyway, why not book them into the hotel's tiny lounge? In so doing he started, in Elko, what was later to be one of Nevada's greatest attractions: big-name entertainment with no cover and no minimum charges. (Drinks were 25-cents a glass.)

Ted Lewis led the parade of such entertainers to Elko in early 1941. The list of those who followed reads like a Who's-Who of the music world: Sophie Tucker, Eddie Peabody, Paul Whiteman, Spike Jones and Chico Marx. Then, after the war, when the Stockmen's Hotel and the Ranch Inn joined the plan, came Margaret Whiting, Burl Ives, Henry Busse, Tex Ritter, Tennessee Ernie Ford and others. [Angela Aguirre, *Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Fall 1982.]

Such top-flight shows would continue in Elko until the mid-fifties, when large traveling bands became too costly to support. After that, Las Vegas and Reno emerged as the entertainment centers of the U.S.

In addition to the main showrooms, there were lounges and back-bars. Here small groups performed, often to totally disinterested crowds. They were great training grounds, though, and many unknowns would go on to bigger and better engagements. Such were the Andrini Brothers, possibly the two greatest mandolin players in the world; and the Aristocrats, who performed at The Stockmen's Hotel when I was still working there as a desk clerk.

(From the latter I received an autographed, 8" X 10" glossy with the inscription, "To the ___ desk clerk yet!" [sic])

I should make note of the fact that not all of those back-bar acts were (in my opinion) great. Two young less-than-mediocre singers, the Newton Brothers, appeared behind the bar at the Commercial Hotel. One of the brothers, Wayne, was to overcome a lack of talent and go on to become a "rich and famous" Nevada citizen.

I think someone once said, "Murder knows no bounds." Certainly Elko County was not out of bounds for two homicides in the spring of

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1948, both of them bizarre. The stories, according to newspaper and word of mouth reports, follow:

A Mildred (Millie) Minton and several friends were engaged in a drinking party in Elko, a party that lasted the whole night. That was not so unusual; a lot of drinking was done in Elko. But as time wore on an argument developed, wherein Millie bad-mouthed one of the "painted ladies" from across the tracks, allegedly for monopolizing the services of her husband.

It must have been quite a scene. Millie, a friend, Bubbles, and another friend (it was uncertain just who was whose friend), all wobbly drunk, half sitting on their bar stools, glaring at one another under drooping eyelids, occasionally someone jerking to attention at the sound of a new insult. The cotton-mouthed words rose in pitch, pushing and shoving ensued, and the bartender eventually convinced them that they'd better shove off. Which they did. But not before a series of dire threats were exchanged.

Millie and her friend went home to the Minton ranch, some three miles west of the city. Bubbles should have gone back to the "house" but that was not the case. She was determined to make Millie eat her slanderous words (though whatever Millie said could well have been true) and hired a cab to drive her to the ranch. Once there she attacked Millie and made a valiant attempt to beat her senseless. But Millie turned the tables and beat the life out of Bubbles, literally, with a hammer that happened to be lying within reach.

The trial, which began right after I got to Elko, dominated the news in the paper, coffee shops and bars for two weeks. John Taelour, the cabbie who had driven Bubbles to the ranch, was a witness for the defense (and my best source of information after the trial).

While the Minton trial was still in progress, a second murder was reported from Wells, fifty miles east of Elko.

In this case a man stopped at a preacher's home, apparently to take advantage of their free-food policy, and took a life instead; that of the minister's 22-year-old wife, whom he sexually assaulted before killing her. The killer, Lazzlo Varga, was captured three days later somewhere in California.

Millie Minton was convicted of "involuntary manslaughter" and sentenced to "one-to-five" in the state penitentiary at Carson City. (If it had been the other way around, if Bubbles had killed Millie, would she have been convicted of voluntary manslaughter? I wonder.)

Varga, after acting the part of a crazy-man in the Elko jail and in the courtroom, finally admitted to his guilt. I do not recall how he repaid society for his crime but no other degree of punishment than death would have been justified.

With the tourist season, business picked up at the Stockmen's and my job was going well. I worked all night, fooled around all day and somehow managed to get a few hours of sleep in the evening.

Sometime in the early summer, I suppose after school was out in June, a new girl came to work as a cashier in the coffee shop. She arrived on the job each day just as Dan and I were leaving, and we took to teasing the pretty young thing.

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The head cashier, Mrs. Mary Vice, an attractive middle-aged woman, took the newcomer under her protective wing. It was a good thing that she did so for our remarks, while never harmful, were sometimes tactless.

Marilyn Massie, who had just graduated from Elko High School, didn't deserve to be picked on by us "older" men (I was twenty at the time). But she quickly learned to cope with us, by either ignoring our humor or responding in kind. One morning, when I thought that all was forgiven, I offered to buy her breakfast. She adamantly refused, explaining that she didn't wish to be indebted to the likes of me.

What a comeuppance!

As a desk clerk I was earning \$6.70 a day and breakfast. The pay was okay, the breakfasts nutritional and entertaining.

One of the waitresses, Flo, had a repartee that added an interesting dimension to her job, and no doubt resulted in better-than-ordinary tips. She had years of experience and had developed a knack for handling difficult customers; whether they be drunks, bums or wise guys.

Some of Elko's best-known "rounders" frequented the Stockmen's coffee shop in those early morning hours, such as Yancey, Haskins, Bob Gregory, and the Zunino boys Stan and Jim. And Flo knew them well.

I first got to know the Zuninos when I chanced to sit next to them at the counter one morning. Flo came over to take their orders, and the exchange that followed rivaled an Abbott and Costello routine. Flo handled the straight lines, Jim the punch lines.

"What'll you have?" she started it off.

"Eggs" was the reply.

"How do you like your eggs?" A logical question.

"I like 'em fine. That's why I ordered 'em."

"Well," with a tinge of sarcasm, "How do you like them cooked?"

"I like 'em better that way," Jim responded.

"Good. 'Cuz that's the way you're going to get them." Flo was emphatic. Then, as an afterthought, "Do you want something with them?"

"How about some ham and a smile?"

"The ham we've got. We're all out of smiles this time of the morning."

Testily, Flo then turned and headed for the kitchen. But on her way by she flashed a knowing wink at me.

Well, Jim got his order and didn't even complain that the eggs were "over hard." I guess he figured the world needed humor more than he needed his eggs over easy.

When through with the meal, Jim got the check and a smile from Flo. That said it all. I could tell that she was used to waiting on him.

Both Jim and Stan were short in stature, short in the legs, but when it came to wit and congeniality they were a cut above the average and fun to be around. I looked forward to seeing them in the coffee shop.

A short time after getting acquainted with Stan and Jim I was introduced, under rather unique circumstances, to the prettiest member of the Zunino family. The events that led to the meeting were somewhat as follows:

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I offered Marilyn and her girl friend a ride home from the hotel. I must have been on better terms with Marilyn by then, for she accepted my hospitality. She introduced her friend as Rita Zunino, explaining that she was a sister of the two noisy Zuninos who came to the coffee shop in the early morning hours.

I discreetly sized up this new acquaintance, noting that she was short (shorter, even, than my mother), had blue eyes, wavy, light brown hair, and a wonderful smile on her pretty face. She was wearing a skirt and blouse. I liked that. Nothing enhances a girl's beauty like a skirt and blouse or a dress. I also found, before we'd gone very far up the road, that she was vivacious and talkative.

Rita directed me to her home at Fourth and Fir Streets where I stopped the car at the curb, made a rhetorical remark, let the two of them out and prepared to leave. But I could not. My faithful Ford refused to start. There was no alternative but to ask the girls for a push. How embarrassing!

They were good sports about it, apparently finding some humor in the situation, and leaned their lithe forms against the front of my car and shoved it backward through the dip on Fourth Street so that I could coast it down the alley for a "start."

As I drove on home I wondered what they thought of me. I was thinking that maybe, just maybe, I had finally broken the ice with Marilyn and could get to know her better. But her friend was interesting too. Perhaps I should make an attempt to learn more about her. And then my mind switched to more important things, like the apparent need to buy a new battery.

(Although I didn't know it at the time, that inauspicious occasion marked the beginning of a growing relationship with she who would one day become my wife, for life.)

There were so many new and interesting things to see and do that summer - fishing, hunting, picnics, a rodeo, and of course flying - the time literally flew by. Everything I did and saw impressed me. Almost everything was different from what I had known in New England, or had experienced during my tour in the Navy.

One day, while Dan and I were seated at breakfast with Tuffy Morse, the conversation inevitably turned to fishing. So, right then and there we decided to go to Wildhorse Canyon (70 miles north of Elko) to catch some "big ones." In no time at all we had filled the tank of my Ford with gas, tossed in an assortment of fishing gear and bait, and headed for the canyon and the Owyhee River.

The Owyhee was originally called the Sandwich Island River, by the early trappers, after some natives from those islands were killed by Indians at its mouth. And when the Sandwich Islands became known as Owyhee (later Hawaii), the name of the river was changed accordingly. For some reason it retained the original spelling.

It was a good day for fishing. We scrambled through the brush and over slippery rocks, got wet up to our thighs in the shallow holes, and caught several nice trout in the bargain. Angling is an intense sport, and three or four hours passed before we decided it was time to hunt for a place to eat. We cleaned our catch-of-the-day by the stream

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at Wildhorse Crossing, climbed into my car and went to Mountain City, four or five miles farther north.

Mountain City was just another old mining town on the decline, but it still had a gas station or two, a store, and ubiquitous saloons lined up on either side of the main street. My companions suggested that we should first stop for a drink; we could buy food and gas later. So I pulled up in front of the nearest beer sign and parked.

We clambered over a loose-board porch into the dark saloon and slid onto broken-down, leather-topped stools in front of a grimy bar from behind which a grizzled old man looked up as if annoyed by our presence. I glanced on down the length of the room. Except for four of America's "early native inhabitants" in an advanced state of inebriation, the place was empty

"Give us a beer," Dan ordered. "It's hot out there." When the barkeep summoned the necessary energy to rise from his stool and pour three dirty mugs full of beer, I added, "We could use some grub, too, if you've got some."

The beer tasted pretty good (I still hadn't really acquired a taste for it) but unfortunately, for me, the only solid food in the place consisted of pickles, salami and potato chips. I ate as many of the latter as I could and left the other stuff to Dan and Tuffy.

Meanwhile, we quaffed our drinks (one was enough for me) recounted the experiences of the day and argued over who had caught the biggest trout. At last I suggested that we'd better head for Elko and get some sleep before going back to work. My companions agreed with me, then ordered the usual "one more for the road" and a pack to take with us. We left the bar pretty much the way we'd found it, occupied by its contingency of drunken Indians in the care of one lethargic bartender.

The unpaved highway between Mountain City and Wildhorse Dam followed the sharp contours of the river along the narrow bottom of Owyhee Canyon. I drove slowly on the loose gravel, ever watchful for a thundering Idaho-bound truck on the blind curves. But at the top of the hill, where the highway was paved and level, I speeded up even though the road curved dangerously around the cliffs above the reservoir.

And then it happened. An incident that very nearly resulted in our meeting our makers. Just when we were alongside the deepest waters of the reservoir, Dan "inadvertently" dropped his half-empty beer can on the floor of the car, where it bounced off the hump and rolled partway under my seat. With absolutely no aforethought I reached down to retrieve it, missed, glanced down to see where it was and reached for it again. While that activity consumed but a few seconds at most, it was time out from my attention to driving. And during that interval the highway took a mild turn to the left but my Ford, without orders to do otherwise, kept to a straight course; a course that if continued would result in an airborne trajectory directly into the lake. It was when I heard the familiar sound of tires-on-gravel that I snapped to attention, and only in the nick of time.

I quickly reviewed the frightening scene before me, a scene of dizzying space and black water, and instinctively steered to the left.

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The car careened at the very edge of doom then returned safely to the hard black pavement.

It was a narrow escape from what would have been certain death and a cold damp grave, the kind that had haunted me ever since, as a youth, I'd travelled alongside those ominous looking rivers in New England. Shaking off the chill that ran up my spine, I parked the car on a wide shoulder (In those days there was no guard-rail) and retrieved the now-empty beer can from under the seat.

That was a sobering experience, even for me who had had but one beer. And it was yet another important lesson learned; that is, "Never take leave of your attention to driving, not even for one tiny second, for there is no time limit in a race between life and death."

I was always interested in geography and topography. Perhaps that explained why I loved to fly, to get an aerial view of the lay of the land. Dan often flew charters for El Aero Services. Sometimes, if he had no passengers or a client who didn't mind company and there was room, I went along for the ride.

One morning he got a call to take a man to Twin Falls, Idaho. It looked like a good day for it and I had nothing else planned, so I accepted Dan's invitation to accompany them. The man was in a hurry to leave and I had to go without breakfast, something that I seldom did. Both he and the plane were ready by the time Dan and I got to the airport.

We climbed aboard the Stinson and took off on what promised to be a routine flight, Dan following a northeasterly vector over the O'Neil country and the flatlands of southern Idaho. I spent virtually the whole time with my forehead pressed against the Plexiglas window, like a kid at a candy counter, scanning the earth below.

We followed the Mary's River for a while, and then crossed a low divide into O'Neil Basin. There was little sign of civilization there, a meager network of dirt roads, an occasional ranch complex at the mouth of a canyon, a scattering of cattle and sheep grazing on the meadows and in the foothills. I observed only two or three vehicles in that back country, made visible by rooster-tail clouds of dust that trailed behind them and hung in the air for miles. Streams in the foothills and valleys were marked by narrow bands of bright green willows and cottonwoods. Higher up, the mountains were host to alternating patches of quakies, mahoganies, junipers and buck brush.

The scenery changed appreciably when we crossed from Nevada into Idaho, as if to delineate the boundary between the two states. Now the terrain flattened out and stretched toward the great Snake River, itself beyond our capacity to see.

We descended gradually, following the slope of the land all the way to the airport at the outskirts of Twin Falls, where Dan made one of his smoothest landings ever. We were just in time for breakfast.

A car-and-driver stood waiting for Dan's passenger, and the fellow took off with scarcely a word. I supposed he had some important business to attend to. Who but a businessman could afford to charter an airplane?

At a nearby restaurant, Dan and I ordered hotcakes and coffee. The hotcakes came out soggy (I never understood why restaurant

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hotcakes are invariably thick and spongy), the coffee black and bitter. But I was tired and hungry after a long night's work and little sleep the day before, so I downed a hearty portion of the cakes and several cups of coffee. We were soon back in the plane and taking off.

Instead of returning the way we had come, Dan steered due south and followed two thin, more-or-less parallel lines (US-93 and a short-line railroad) toward Wells, 110-miles away. There was more evidence of civilization along this route, several ranches, a town, even a few automobiles.

We gained altitude and were somewhere in the vicinity of the old town of Contact when I caught the sun's reflection from an object on the side of a mountain to our right. I tapped Dan on the shoulder to get his attention, and simultaneously gestured toward the glinting thing below. With a toss of his head in that direction he shouted, "Let's go down and take a look." Without further ado he shoved the wheel forward and kicked the plane into a steep, spiraling dive.

The dizzying ride reminded me of the down-elevator in the Empire State building. It seemed as if all of me except my stomach was hurtling toward the center of the earth - just like the recurring dream I'd experienced as a kid - and I wondered if that had been a portent of this moment, forecasting the end. But then I regained my sensibilities and relaxed, even enjoyed the experience.

We descended about 2,000 feet in that fashion before Dan leveled off alongside the shiny object, which turned out to be an old wrecked aircraft.

(One of the men in the CAA tower later confirmed Dan's assessment, that it was the wreckage of an Army Air Force plane that had crashed on a training mission during the war.)

But I suddenly lost all interest in the downed plane. My concern was for my breakfast. I was definitely getting airsick. Trying not to show signs of it I searched for a "burp cup." (Standard equipment in most small planes for occasions such as this.) There was none to be found, and I had no hat to serve as a substitute.

I held on. We were now back to cruising altitude and flying straight-and-level, but the damage to my equilibrium was done. My stomach would not return to normal. Finally, much to my chagrin, I up-chucked my whole breakfast of hotcakes and coffee. God, how I hated to do that. The terrible embarrassment. The horrible mess. But at least I felt better afterward, physically if not mentally.

(In all of my flying experiences, in both large and small aircraft, that was the first and last time that I actually got sick and vomited. I like to think that my airsickness was brought on by prior events, such as the lack of rest and a late breakfast of soggy hotcakes.)

When finally back on terra firma the task of cleaning up the mess in the cabin was mine. It was enough to make me sick all over again. And I got no sympathy from Dan. Even if he were sorry he was not the kind to show it. Furthermore, he would never let me forget the experience, telling and retelling the tale to anyone who'd listen; as usual, with exaggeration.

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To digress for a moment: I always dreaded the act of vomiting, and would go to great lengths to avoid doing anything that might cause me to throw-up; which, I expect, was one reason why I'd not eat certain foods and why I would learn (too slowly I admit) to limit myself to no more than three cocktails in an evening period. At first it bothered me, not being able to "hold my liquor," but then I was thankful for the weakness. I would get sick before becoming inebriated. Anyway, I was never comfortable around drunks and the thought of becoming one of them was abhorrent to me.

A short time after the Twin Falls trip, Dan asked me to join him on another charter flight. This time, he promised, he'd make no fast circling dives. Thus assured I met him at the airport. We quickly loaded the cargo, a Siamese cat, in a cage then climbed aboard and took off into the clear blue sky headed for Ely.

Dan didn't seem at all surprised, but the delivery of a cat, any kind of cat, by air seemed damned unusual to me. This fellow had come from the east coast via United Airlines and was now on the last leg of his long journey to Ely.

The flight, my first to that part of the state, promised to be a good one and I immediately took up my usual position; staring out of the window. Our feline passenger was comfortably ensconced in a fancy cage on the rear seat, secured by a safety-belt. Dan flew out along the South Fork of the Humboldt River, over the tiny village of Jiggs, all the while climbing toward Harrison Pass.

Jiggs was an odd designation for a town, I thought, and it was some time before I learned how it came by that name. The community had gone through a long list of names in its early history - Cottonwood, Dry Creek, Mound Valley, Skelton, Hylton - until, in 1918, it settled on Jiggs.

It seemed that the "big wheel" at that time, Albert Hankins, didn't care to live with the name Hylton anymore. So he asked his kids to come up with a new name. The leading character in a popular comic strip, Bringing up Father, was "Jiggs." And that's the name they suggested. [*Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Summer 1988]

It was probably a blessing that the Post Office Department accepted their suggestion and named the place Jiggs rather than Hankins. The trend of periodic changes had long been a thorn in the side of the townspeople, and to their letter-writing friends and relatives as well.

As we cleared the summit of the pass at over 8,000-feet, my reverie was shattered by a loud moan coming from the rear of the cabin; loud even above the droning of the airplane's engine. It rose in pitch to a banshee wail, literally raising the hair on the nape of my neck.

I had never before heard the howl of a Siamese cat, and found it hard to believe that such a cute little animal could evoke so terrorizing an intonation. I turned and tried to console the creature with kindly words but it was no use, the poor devil was apparently suffering great pain in his ears because of the low air pressure.

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The wailing was really obnoxious and impossible to ignore. In desperation I tossed my jacket over the cage, hoping to reduce the loudness, but we had to live with the distraction throughout the remainder of the flight, which had by now gotten a bit bumpy.

We broke out of the pass and looked down on sun-warmed Ruby Valley. What a sight! It was the biggest valley I'd seen in Nevada, up to that time, stretching fifty miles lengthwise and ten to twenty across. Off to our right lay the Ruby Marsh. Patches of blue water interspersed with dark green tules. It was actually an immense lake, ten or twelve miles long but less than ten feet deep, most of it obscured by almost-black reeds that gave an appearance of shadows even though there were no clouds in the sky.

On our left, separated from the marsh by a narrow isthmus, lay Franklin Lake, itself over five miles long. There were relatively few tules associated with that lake, evidence that its water level varied appreciably. (It would dry up completely every few years then partially refill again.)

South of the marsh we crossed the old Pony Express Trail (I was unaware of it at the time), then two low mountain ranges and intervening valleys, one containing a large, alkali dry lake. Near the southern tip of the Egan Range, we made a rough descent and landed at Ely's Yelland Field, whose runway, about a thousand feet higher than Elko's airport, made landings and takeoffs especially difficult in the heat of summer.

The Stinson touched down, bounced, and then settled onto the tarmac. Dan taxied to the terminal. The cat was off-loaded, none too soon to suit me. Its mournful cry continued unabated until we were well out of earshot. Relieved, we took off for Elko on what was, by contrast, a nice quiet trip.

Another flying experience, again with Dan, took place during the "big winter of '48-'49" when whole herds of cattle were caught belly-deep in snow and hard-pressed to survive.

The valley floors in northeastern Nevada generally remain clear of snow. The sun melts it away within a few days of its falling, allowing ranchers to get about and feed their wintering herds. But that year the white stuff was so deep that, in many places, ranch hands couldn't even get to the haystacks. And then it turned bitterly cold. The temperature dropped to 30-degrees or more below zero. Hundreds of cattle, unable to move, froze to death "in situ."

Dan was asked to fly to Independence Valley, to drop off mail and medicines to an isolated ranch family. I jumped at the chance to go along, anxious to see firsthand the work of Old Man Winter. We pushed the small, ski-equipped Piper Cub onto the taxi-strip and climbed into the tandem seats. We would take off from there, because it was covered with smooth, deep snow while the main runway was icy and rutted and uneven.

Dan got the engine started and warmed up, but when he shoved the throttle forward to begin his take-off roll, the little plane shivered and shook and would not budge. The tail wheel, which was not equipped with a ski, had broken through the snow's crust and effectively anchored our craft.

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It was a short-lived problem, though, as Dan instructed me to get out, run back to the tail and lift it out of the snow. Which I did, and held it up while he revved the engine and got the Piper moving ahead. When it looked like he had enough forward speed to keep the tail up, I ran as fast as I could through the crusty snow, leaped for the open doorway and pulled myself into the cabin. With a wide-open throttle and our fingers crossed we became airborne.

Sure enough I got a great view of the countryside that day, a contrasting world of shimmering white beauty and hardship. In the valley we flew over several bunches of cattle, huddled together in dark brown clumps against the expanse of bright snow, an attempt to keep warm. Ethereal clouds, condensed from the steam emanating from their bodies, hung over them. A "herd" of rabbits, jacks and snowshoes, were rallied around a haystack eating, carving a niche at its base and forming eaves of thatch above their reach. Coyotes struggled over the snow, breaking through the crust at every other step, intent on nabbing a rabbit or two for dinner. Eagles, hawks and ravens circled, awaiting their turn at nature's table. They would clean up the leftovers. They, the scavengers, were the true beneficiaries of the storm.

Closer to the ranch house we saw the cowboys, who had traded their lassoes for shovels and were working in an almost futile attempt to reach the nearest haystacks and cattle. All hands - cowboys, foreman, wives and children - took time out as we approached, to wave and to wait for the drop.

Dan flew low over the yard; I shoved the canvas bags through my open door; the sacks landed among them; we turned and flew away, leaving those hardy people to their peculiar isolation.

They were in no danger of starving to death, of course, not with all that beef around, it was their future well-being that was in jeopardy. A substantial part of the herd, their livelihood, was dying off before their very eyes and there was little, beyond what they were doing, that could change the outcome.

I really felt sorry for those people, but that's the way it is with ranching. You either live with the land or cope with the vagaries of nature, taking the bad with the good, or you pull up stakes, move into town and live an ordinary life.

Form W-2 U. S. Treasury Department Internal Revenue Service		WITHHOLDING STATEMENT — 1948 Wages Paid and Income Tax Withheld			
Total Wages (before pay-roll deductions) paid in 1948	Federal Income Tax withheld, if any	O. A. S. I. Tax withheld	Single	Married	To EMPLOYEE: This is your copy. Do not file if you use Employee's Copy of the original Form W-2 as your return below: 1. Write total of wages shown on your other 1948 W-2s. 2. Write total of all other wages received. 3. Add lines 1 and 2. 4. If line 3 includes incomes of income \$..... 4d. Did your wife (or husband) 1948 support from a parent List of dependents claimed: (Name) (Name) (Name) (Name)
\$ 1,054.10	\$ 112.30	\$ 10.56	X		
EMPLOYEE TO WHOM PAID (Print name, address, and Social Security No.)					
George Alfred Phelps 016-20-Elko, Nevada					
(To EMPLOYEE: Change name and address, if not correctly shown)					
EMPLOYER BY WHOM PAID (Name, address, and S. S. identification No.)					
STOCKMEN'S HOTEL 322 COMMERCIAL STREET ELKO, NEVADA					
88-0050645					
APP. B. I. R. (10-28-47)					

Form W-2 (Revised July 1948) U. S. Treasury Department Internal Revenue Service		WITHHOLDING STATEMENT—1948 Wages Paid and Income Tax Withheld					
Total wages (before pay-roll deductions) paid in 1948	Federal income tax withheld, if any						
\$ 99.94	\$ 10.60						
EMPLOYEE TO WHOM PAID (Print name, full address, and Social Security Number)							
George A. Phelps 216 Oak St., Elko, Nevada							
S.S. Deleted							
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Married</td> <td>Single</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>8</td> </tr> </table>				Married	Single		8
Married	Single						
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EMPLOYER BY WHOM PAID (Name, address, and Social Security Identification Number)							
BELL TELEPHONE COMPANY OF NEVADA 140 NEW MONTGOMERY STREET SAN FRANCISCO 5, CALIFORNIA 94-0315445							

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN
CULTURAL ADAPTATION

A few miles north of Elko, east of the old Adobe Summit road, lays a pretty little canyon headed by small springs and clear running water. Named for C.B. Kittredge, who located the canyon in 1871, it was uninhabited in 1948. The watershed belonged to the city of Elko.

A little-used dirt road still provided wheeled vehicle access, however, to a derelict cabin and broken down corrals in a grove of young aspens. Joe Bell - a neophyte barber whom I had recently come to know and patronize - and I cooked up a plan to take two of Elko's fair young ladies to that site for a picnic.

The two girls, Marilyn Massie and Shirley Huntsman (daughter of Jesse Huntsman, sportsman and store owner) put together a fine lunch of sandwiches, watermelon and cold drinks. We put the stuff in the back of my car, climbed aboard and headed out over the short but very rough road.

On the way up we encountered a few washouts and the sagebrush scraped the sides of my Ford, but we had no real problems getting to the cabin. There, after briefly investigating the rat-infested structures and surrounding grounds, we spread a blanket and relaxed in the shade of the quaking leaves of early summer. It was a romantic setting, with an ambiance bound to soften the heart of any true American girl. Even Marilyn's, I hoped.

But the best-laid plans do not always work out as desired. Our picnic lunch was set out, the drinks were opened, Shirley carved the melon and we enjoyed a leisurely repast. But the girls seemed more interested in conversation than amour and we were thus occupied in idle talk when our party was shattered by a deafening roar. Passing directly over our heads, at tree-top level, the source of the racket disappeared down the canyon as quickly as it had come. But not so quickly that I didn't recognize it for what it was, the Taelours' BT. A few short minutes passed and back up the canyon it came, flying even lower than before. Then it flew overhead a third time before leaving the area.

If the girls were frustrated by the intrusion, Joe and I were indignant. And disappointed. We abandoned any thought of romance (that

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we may have harbored), packed everything back in the Ford and headed for home.

Dan had somehow learned that we'd be out there (but not from me) and decided to give us a thrill, or something. To this day I can see Dan's face grinning from the open canopy of that screaming airplane as it banked away. He was still chuckling over the incident that evening, at the Stockmen's.

By now I knew that I had a lot to learn about Western girls, about their manners and their ways. Although I couldn't define it, they appeared somehow different from those I'd known in the East. For one thing they were more argumentative. But perhaps that was too much of a generalization. Anyway, I would never really get to know Marilyn.

When I first arrived in Elko, first visited my father after all those years, I saw no evidence that he had taken a new wife. (Others of my family may have known of it but I did not.) Nor did he mention the fact. He may have been waiting for just the right circumstance to broach the subject.

It was sometime in April, I think, when I was invited to his house on Fifth Street and introduced to my stepmother. I immediately recognized her; she was the former Mrs. Ruth Marston of Northfield, the lady to whom I had delivered papers when she lived in the big house south of Morgan's Garage. She was out of town when I had arrived in Elko, apparently on a trip back East, and had just returned.

Ruth was a large woman, pleasant in manner and fastidious by habit. She greeted me warmly, asked about my tour in the Navy, about my trip west, even how my mother was getting along.

Not long after that meeting, Father and Ruth moved to 1107½ Court Street, a small house on the back of a lot owned by a Mr. Bowman, a church friend. Their world evolved around the Baptist Church. Ruth was vice-president (to President Mrs. Homer Frailey) of the Baptist Mission Society, and would later be president.

The Fraileys, along with the Giustis, were probably their closest friends. Homer Frailey was the agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He and his wife lived in a fine home (provided by the government) adjacent to the Indian colony north of the city. At their invitation I attended, along with Father and Ruth, a wonderful dinner there one evening. It was an event that turned out to be most enlightening. Throughout the meal, and afterward over coffee, the conversation was almost entirely devoted to the Shoshone and Paiute Indians; those on the reservations at Owyhee and Lee, those non-reservation Indians who owned and worked their ranches, and those who "existed" at the colony. Homer showed me his small collection of real Indian arrowheads, an introduction to the artifacts of which I would become a collector in the future.

I learned a great deal from Homer Frailey, who had first-hand knowledge of Indian affairs. I concluded that dealing with Indians, whatever else it might be, was an extremely difficult job; fraught with problems and subject to constant criticism by the government, the public, and the Indians themselves. In my opinion, Mr. Frailey was integritous, practical and compassionate, a man well qualified for the position.

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Mrs. Frailey and Ruth coaxed me back into the music world. But briefly. I tuned up my violin and, with Dr. Moren's wife as accompanist, performed in the tiny Twentieth Century Club building behind the library. Sometimes I shared the stage with the diminutive Mrs. Tellaishia, a talented violin teacher.

But Mrs. Moren, while a competent pianist, was not as accomplished as my sister Betty. And playing for the ladies of society was not the same as it had been when I was a kid. I was, to put it bluntly, out of my world and more than a little embarrassed, being the only man in the place. I managed to weasel out of the business after only a few appearances.

I was thinking of Betty when I bought a copy of the Elko Daily Free Press on the twenty-third of June, her birthday. I did not normally pay much attention to the paper, much less buy one, but this was a special edition, a whole issue, twice the usual volume printed in green ink and with an inordinate number of advertisements by local merchants. The real purpose of the production was to tout the upcoming rodeo, due that week, the first to be held in Elko in thirteen years. It was called a "Stampede," I suppose to distinguish it from an ordinary, run-of-the-mill rodeo.

Western garb was the order of the day. Violators were subject to being "arrested," tried by a Kangaroo Court and incarcerated in a portable jail, a Black Maria. The eager young men in town, present and future businessmen, were especially active in the capacity of lawmen, and took pleasure in grabbing guys and girls wearing plain clothes and locking them up for all to see.

I decided "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," and invested in a genuine cowboy hat and shirt. I couldn't bring myself to wear a pair of tight-fitting Levis, though, and stuck with my comfortable navy dungarees. The hat was made of good felt, wide-brimmed and light tan in color. A "good guys" hat. The shirt was two-toned, long-sleeved, with mother-of-pearl buttons down the front, on the cuffs and pockets. Thus attired I successfully avoided the embarrassment of being locked up in the hoosegow, but at the expense of garnering numerous "greenhorn" comments from my friends.

As a result of the Stampede, business boomed in Elko. The Veterans Cab had so many calls the Taelours asked me to help out as a driver. I obtained a chauffeur's license and did just that, filling in during the daytime while one or another of them slept.

There was stage entertainment galore in town. The Stockmen's Hotel featured the Andrini Brothers, the Aristocrats (referred to above), and the Rocky Mountain Playboys; the Commercial Hotel hosted the Five Spaces, Professor Lamberti and his Xylophone, and Pinky Lee; the Eastman Trio appeared at the Ranch Inn.

Another performer, one of if not the world's best, a fellow named Bing Crosby, was also seen in town that summer. Of course a guy like Bing could never be ignored, but in Elko he was known as a rancher first, a performer second. As far as I know he never sang on an Elko stage.

By then Bing had put his "+B" brand on seven or eight ranches in northern Elko county. "A good place to raise the boys," he said. One of his holdings, the Chester Laing ranch on the upper North Fork, was

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an old spread with water rights that dated back to 1869. It was also one of the most beautiful ranches in existence, flanking the east side of the Independence Range (or North Fork Range). The home complex was ideally situated on the buck-brush covered alluvial slope at the base of the mountain.

I think Bing was basically shy. I know he thoroughly enjoyed life in the big, clean out-of-doors. He was quoted as saying that his favorite pastime was fishing, his favorite fishing was for trout in a fast, cool, mountain stream, and he'd rather tie into an eighteen-inch rainbow than a deep-sea fish any day.

I had read about rodeos of course, had seen movie versions of them, and so I was pretty excited about attending a real live one. I was prepared to take in the whole affair, and began by stationing myself at the corner of Fifth and Idaho Streets to watch the parade. At the blast of the noon fire whistle, cordoned-off Idaho Street filled with, appropriately, scores of horses and riders and stages and wagons, all in colorful trappings and led by the high school band. Both onlookers and entrants were exuberant but well behaved, despite the fact that a lot of them had already been "hitting the sauce."

When the last entry in the parade (the all-important cleanup crew) had passed, the crowd made a dash for the rodeo grounds. The stands quickly filled with an assortment of genuine and would-be cowboys and girls. I found that rodeo spectators seldom sat still. About a fourth of them were always in motion, milling around, going for beer and sandwiches, visiting with old friends, moving just to be moving.

At last the dignitaries climbed into the judges' stand and somebody, probably Mayor Dotta, took the microphone in hand. Most of us were unable to understand a word he said but guessed that he was introducing the honored guest, Bing Crosby, who then officially opened the "1948 Elko Stampede" with the simple but significant phrase, "Let 'er buck!"

And buck they did. For the next three hours I watched in fascination as they went through their classic rodeo maneuvers: saddle bronc riding, wild bull riding, calf roping, steer wrestling and so on. All of the necessary elements of a successful rodeo were brought together in the arena that day; lean, leathery cowboys, wild, fire-eyed saddle broncs, mean bulls and agile steers.

Dirt, pulverized by beating hooves, squirted into the air, mingled with the smell of horseflesh and drifted over the grandstand. Bright sun-rays sought out and found exposed white skin and turned shoulders, necks and noses the color of boiled lobsters. Buxom cowgirls paraded back and forth in front of the stands, or clung to their favorite bronc busters over by the chutes. Gallons of cold "suds" washed dust-parched throats and loosened the brains of countless men and women; popcorn by the bags-full drove kids thirsty and back to the concession stands for more soda pop.

In spite of the entertainment aspect of the activities, an air of authenticity pervaded the rodeo and I found it easy to grasp the purpose behind each event; which, in its unvarnished form, was essential to the handling of horses and cattle on a ranch.

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There is one possible exception to that conclusion, the part of the rodeo clown. While I'd guess that every cow outfit has its unofficial clown - it being a law of nature that in every small group of people there's at least one wit - the fellow in a rodeo has a particularly important job. He's the guy who deliberately places himself in harm's way, in front of the bull when that fellow unloads the nuisance on his back. I've observed that whether the bull rids himself of the rider before or after "time" is called, he always has it in mind to "get" the cowboy; that is, plaster him against a fence, plant his hooves in his belly or gore him. It is up to the clown to divert the beast from those objectives by becoming an attractive nuisance and allowing the cowboy to escape over a fence. But the clown is not totally vulnerable; he has an open-ended steel barrel for refuge, and nowadays a partner to help maneuver the barrel into place and act as a backup if necessary. I am always fascinated by the performance of those unsung heroes.

The festivities lasted three-and-a-half days. Animal action at the fairgrounds every afternoon, drinking, gambling and carousing at night, hangovers in the morning, all in the spirit of the Old West.

Toward the end of the final day, on Sunday, 4,000 spectators were assembled when the competitors with the best combinations of skill, stamina and luck-of-the-draw received their meager rewards. A sinewy young man named Frank Finley racked up the most points that year, to win the "Best All-Around Cowboy" trophy.

Now that I'd been initiated in the taxi business I continued to drive, on a part-time basis, the rest of the summer. It was not a particularly glamorous job but far from mundane. I memorized the name and orientation of every street, the house numbering scheme, and the locations of principal businesses, especially saloons. It was a good way to get acquainted with the city. I also learned that there was more to the job than geography. I was afforded an insight into many aspects of life that I would otherwise have missed.

There were basically two classes of people who regularly used a taxi for transportation; the affluent and the poor. The first because they didn't have to bother with their own car, the latter because they couldn't afford the ongoing expense of an automobile. As in cities throughout the country and the world, traveling salesmen and businessmen were big users. And not unique to Elko, but perhaps more prevalent than in some cities, were those who used a cab to preserve a degree of anonymity. Married men, prominent citizens and public officials typically parked their personal car on the street or in a hotel lot and discretely phoned for a cab.

A lot of calls came from the "houses," to pick up a patron or to run an errand for a madam or one of the girls. Prostitutes were not allowed uptown in the daytime, except to visit the doctor's office, to shop, or to attend to personal business. Occasionally one of them would hire a cab on her day off, to get away somewhere and relax. Those were good fares. A trip to Carlin or Wells, the closest towns outside of Elko, usually resulted in a liberal tip. Following is an example of such a fare:

Just as I was finishing my breakfast after a night shift on the desk, Sue (not her real name) called from the Classy Inn for a cab.

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Ted gave me the call. I took the Packard (a 1947 sedan with a straight-eight engine), picked her up at about 8:00am and headed out of town toward Wells. It was a beautifully clear summer day. An ideal day for a drive. At her command I drove through Starr Valley on the old highway, past poplar-shaded ranches and hayfields and meadows along the base of the East Humboldt Range. Sue was a good conversationalist, and we covered a variety of subjects while the countryside slipped by.

In Wells she directed me to the Bullshead Bar, situated on the old main thoroughfare parallel to the railroad, where I parked the cab and escorted her inside. The place was new to me, but was in fact one of the oldest saloons in that part of the state. The room was fairly large, equipped with austere furnishings and very dim lights. The classic mahogany bar was similar to the one I'd worked on in Carlin, including the back-bar with its large beveled mirrors behind rows of sparkling glasses and dissimilar bottles of liquor.

Surprisingly, for that time of day, there were five or six patrons at the bar, all seated on tall stools, characteristically cradling glasses of cold beer in their hands. I guessed them to be drifters; cowboys between jobs.

Slack-jawed and wide-eyed they stared at us when we entered. None were so tight as to overlook a beautiful woman, and look her over they did. Sue smiled and eased lithely past them, hiked herself up onto a leather covered stool at the corner and motioned me to the one next to it.

I was new at this sort of work. I'd had no coaching or previous training as a consort, but I'd manage. Affecting an air of confidence I parked my left buttocks on the stool, my left foot on the rail, my left elbow on the edge of the bar, my right foot on the floor and my right hand on my hip.

In retrospect, it is difficult for me to understand how three hours on a barstool, in Wells, would constitute an appealing form of relaxation to anyone; much less to a good looking, expensively dressed, sensuous young woman. But that's the way it was. That's the way Sue spent the morning; sipping Scotch-and-sodas, trading stories and banter with the barkeep and the drifters.

I downed three or four Cokes before getting waterlogged, and heard at least a dozen new jokes in addition to the old ones while waiting for my fare to call "time." (Meanwhile the taxi meter was running.)

Finally, around noon, she excused herself, slid off the stool and visited the ladies' room. A few minutes later she returned, paid the bar bill - leaving an eye-widening tip for the bartender - waved a cheery goodbye to everyone and we left.

My main concern now was to stay awake long enough to drive her safely home. She must have sensed my predicament and maintained a continual chatter, with questions that required answers, the whole fifty miles to Elko. Her tab was enormous: 100 miles round trip plus three hours of standby time. I do not recall the total amount, but I'll never forget the crisp, new, twenty-dollar bill she placed in my hand for a tip.

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The Taelours had two cabs at that time. The Packard mentioned above and a big Nash. The latter, although a post-war vehicle, was really worn out and subject to frequent breakdowns, so it was seldom driven out of town. But the Packard was a real machine, the kind any devotee of automobiles would admire.

One day I got a call to Carlin, to pick up a man and bring him to Elko. I took the Packard and covered the twenty-four miles out in sixteen minutes. Not a bad time for a young driver on a two-lane, pre-freeway highway, including the winding portion through the Humboldt Canyon,

But the Packard was more important for its size than its speed, and most particularly for its wide rear doors and seating capacity, which were well suited to transporting one of Elko's greatest (largest) women, the madam of one of the brothels, whose bulk must have equaled that of a small tank, her weight that of a two-year-old steer. With some very clever maneuvering, and little help on her part, she could be squeezed into the back seat of the Packard on those rare occasions when she had to go to town to transact some business or other. Only once did the operation result in near disaster. Thank God it was Ted, not me, who took the call that day.

Ted had parked the car too far from the curb, and when he tried to get her aboard she fell between it and the door sill. For a time, according to Ted, it appeared that the services of a crane might be required to extricate her massive body from the gutter. But just in time two strong men came by, and the three of them managed to roll all of her through the doorway and onto the seat. Only a Packard could handle that kind of cargo.

Every four or five weeks, like clockwork, a well dressed, well mannered businessman arrived at the Stockmen's Hotel. He would stay three or four days, sometimes a week at a time. That was not so unusual. What set this man apart was the fact that he was totally blind. His business was selling pencils. Not by the carton or the carload, but one-at-a-time on the streets of San Francisco. It must have been a lucrative occupation for he seemed to have plenty of money to spend. He gambled extensively, dined expensively, attended all of the floor shows in town, and hired a cab to take him across the tracks almost every night of his stay.

When Ted and Dan, who were quite familiar with the man and his habits, told me about his visits to the brothels I reacted with disbelief.

"Okay," Dan offered, "next time you take the fare and see for yourself."

It was mid-week and late evening, my night off from the desk job, and I was hanging around the hotel lobby when Dan motioned to me to come over. He handed me the keys to the Packard, nodded toward the blind man and said, "He's waiting for a cab."

I helped the man outside and into the vehicle (he actually got around amazingly well on his own) and drove at his direction to the D-and-D Club. There I assisted him to the door and rang the bell for service. The madam greeted him knowingly and ushered him into the parlor. I raised an eyebrow and glanced inside, and was invited in for

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a drink. I made myself comfortable at one end of the bar, accepted a Coke and prepared myself for the show.

The blind man politely refused a drink, calling instead for the girls. Whereupon they were trotted out, seven of them, for his inspection. Clad in sexy working clothes it was (if I might be permitted the observation) a very fine stable indeed. They lined up in front of the bar and eagerly awaited the gentleman's attentions, for he was no stranger to them.

Without benefit of sight, he relied on the "Braille" method (a method to be envied in this instance) to evaluate their charms preparatory to selecting a companion. Each girl in turn introduced herself, whereupon the blind man sensitively touched her - like a sculptor with a newly-created statue - on the cheek, lips and body. At the conclusion of the session, which included some questions and answers and not a few giggles, he spoke the name of his choice. The lucky one took his arm and led him from the parlor.

While I could not admire the blind man's style of living (I never again had much sympathy for blind street-peddlers) I was duly impressed by the fact that he was at least self reliant.

It is said, "It takes all kinds of people to make a world." At my jobs as desk clerk and cab-driver I met a variety of new and different kinds.

The Taelour boys' father, Old Tom, whom I met but once or twice, was a tall, rawboned, rugged individual. Their mother, who had died some time before, was a large, plain, red-haired woman. So I was told. Tom, now retired, was a railroad worker. I think he had run a repair gang of predominantly Mexican "gandy-dancers," the men who replaced worn-out ties and rails.

The boys, then, had been raised in a railroad environment, in various camps and towns in Elko County; Cobre, Valley Pass, Montello, Deeth and Wells. I gathered, on listening to their stories, that school decorum in that part of the country was poles-apart from ours back home.

Of the four, Ted was the most visionary. His mind was filled with schemes and he could talk people into doing almost anything, including spending their money. He was a big-spender himself, especially when entertaining friends and acquaintances.

Dan had the best head for business, though. While generous, he was the most fiscally responsible of the bunch.

John, the eldest, and Bobby, the youngest, were in the cab business only as drivers.

With less spending and more business discipline, the Taelours might have made a success out of the Veterans' Cab Company. But that was not to be. In just a few years, unable to pay the lender, they were out of business.

In addition to his involvement in the cab company, Ted held a steady job as a tower operator with the CAA. He would one day leave that organization, but flying was in his blood and he'd become a very proficient pilot, eventually an instructor. I had the utmost confidence in Ted's flying abilities.

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It was through Ted that I met Vernal Jones, another CAA tower operator. Vernal was a native of Elko and had also served in the Navy during the war. He was a man of medium build and height, and possessed an outgoing personality with an extraordinary sense of humor.

Both Ted and Vernal had recently married - Ted to Katie Zunino, Rita's sister, and Vernal to Mary Howard - when they began working for the CAA at Lucin, Utah, across the northeastern Nevada border. It was one of the most remote locations in the country but it was a place to start. Now Ted worked in the Elko tower and Vernal at the Battle Mountain airport, seventy-five miles to the west.

Ultimately, Vernal's job would take him away from Nevada to far-flung locations throughout the Western United States. But we would share many an adventure in the years before he left, and a few more afterward.

Dan occupied a room on the closed-in back porch of Ted and Katie's small house in northwest Elko. It was there, when I went to visit Dan one summer afternoon, that I saw Rita for the second time. She was visiting with Katie. Another member of the Zunino tribe attracted my attention that day, five-year-old Jeanne, the daughter of Rita's sister Violet and Woody Wise.

I joined Dan, Katie and Rita in the shade on the porch, to sip thirst-quenching Cokes and lemonade and to watch the little girl and Katie's dog amuse themselves by running through the spray of a lawn sprinkler. Before long the sight of cool water proved too much to resist, and the rest of us got involved. A water fight ensued and everyone got soaked to the skin. I admit to turning the hose on Rita, but only after she'd given me a dreadful dowsing. The result was most gratifying, however, as she was especially attractive in her body-hugging wet clothes.

On another occasion at Ted and Katie's (the purpose of which escapes me) we got soaked in a different way. The center of attention was a giant bowl of punch. And not an ordinary punch at that. The more we consumed the more ingredients were added. Every available kind of alcohol and mixer went into the bowl, until all of the bottles were emptied. At length, when the supply of fruit ran out and someone tossed a dish-rag into the sauce, I concluded that I no longer had a taste for punch.

We got together at the Taelours' many times that summer, on almost any pretext, to sit and smoke and sip a cool drink (not always alcoholic) while discussing the trivia of the times.

Every automobile ever manufactured requires a certain amount of maintenance. Even my '38 Ford. After a while the brakes, the old mechanical type, got so bad I had to down-shift from high to second to low gear in order to stop, a procedure that was embarrassing if not dangerous, especially at city intersections. Furthermore, I believed, every car owner should have a reliable mechanic, like I had found in the person of Jimmy Neigh in East Northfield.

I didn't have far to go to find one, for another member of the Zunino family, John, was an expert. (By coincidence his birthday is the same as my brother John's, Columbus Day.)

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John had served with the Army in North Africa, was wounded, and while on a troop-ship had it sunk from under him off the coast of Italy. It was some time before he got back to the United States, to the West Coast and Nevada, where he completed his tour of duty at the Stead Army Air Base near Reno.

Except for those war years, John had been working on cars since, as a kid in Palisade, he first tinkered with an old Model-T Ford. He was now employed at Harris Motors, the Packard agency located in an old corrugated-tin building on the corner of Idaho and Seventh Streets. It was there that I took my ailing car.

I had no trouble recognizing John. He was short and husky and had a great resemblance to Jim and Stan. I introduced myself, mentioned that I knew some of his brothers and sisters, explained the problem with the brakes and left the car in his care.

That was the first of scores of times when John would work on my car.

Sometime in early September of 1948, when the tourist season began to wind down as it did each year in Elko, Red Ellis decided to tighten-up on expenses at the Stockmen's Hotel. One effect of his actions extended to me. I was informed by Mr. Keating that I would no longer be allowed a "free meal" in the morning.

"Well," I said to him, a little annoyed by the news, "I never considered the meals were free. I thought they were a part of my pay." Then I boldly added, "You mean you are going to cut my pay. Haven't I done a good job?"

"Oh no," he hastened to say, "It's not that. You're doing a fine job. We're just cutting expenses."

With that my independent nature took control of my emotions and I blurted out, "Well, I've never had to take a cut in pay before...I quit!"

In hindsight, I thought that was what he wanted all along, for my position was left unfilled and my duties (admittedly minimal) were merely added to those of the nighttime cafe-cashier.

As a matter of interest, one of those who inherited the work was a kindly lady named Sylvia Emerick. She and her husband, George Delos, were the parents of Lois Zunino, wife of Bernard, or Ben, Rita's eldest brother.

Ben, too, had served his country in the war, in the U.S. Navy. He had wound up on an island somewhere in the South Pacific, as a technician working on radar and overseas radio transmission equipment. At the time of his discharge, in 1945, he held the rate of Chief Petty Officer.

Back in Elko, he went into the carpenter's trade and was employed by the Western Pacific Railroad. He had only recently married Lois, in the spring of 1948, as it happened on the day of the big windstorm described above.

But back to my job, or rather the lack of it. Because of my intrepid action I was now without a steady source of income, and had to rely on what I could earn from taxi driving; which business was in decline along with the others in town. But my needs were still

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conservative and I made out all right. However, my new mode of life led to a rather interesting incident.

One afternoon, while driving along Idaho Street "minding my own business," the chief of police, Percy Lanouette, pulled alongside and motioned me to the curb. I quickly reviewed my recent actions in an effort to think of a reason for it, but could recall nothing that should have invited censure. I parked at the side of the road and he double-parked on my left.

Now, I had always held the law and those empowered to keep it, especially chiefs of police, in high regard. But Percy, who was no stranger to me, was fat and sloppy and possessed by a highly inflated ego; not the kind of individual to automatically command respect. It was not surprising that he now remained in his car, conservation of energy being of paramount importance to him, and leaned over to talk to me through the open window.

I kept my composure, though, and asked, "What's up, Chief?"

"I hear you quit the Stockmen's."

I had no idea what he was getting at. Perhaps he just wanted to chat, though we had never exchanged more than a dozen words before. Anyway, I mumbled something in the affirmative.

"We-e-ll," he drawled, stroking his folded jowls in a contemplative manner. "If you ain't workin' I'll have t'run you in for vagrancy."

"Vagrancy!" I exclaimed, shocked by the preposterous notion that my mother's seventh son should be considered a bum and subject to arrest. I was speechless, and remained so while thoughtfully considering a suitable response to his outrageous charge. At last I blurted out, rather indignantly, "I've got a job. I'm driving cab for the Taelours.... Just ask 'em."

Without another word the chief re-wedged himself between the steering-wheel and seat-back of his big sedan and drove away, leaving me to ponder the meaning of the confrontation. What had prompted him to stop me in the first place? And why had he made an accusation and then not pressed the issue? It was very perplexing.

I drove around the city for a while, deep in thought, and then went looking for Ted and Dan to tell them about my recent experience. I found them both in the coffee shop at the hotel, where they listened to my story with rapt attention and vowed that if Percy ever arrested me they'd leave no stone unturned to see that justice was done and I was exonerated. The more they talked, the more "sincere" their words, the more it appeared that the two of them had "set me up." They knew I didn't particularly like Percy. (His lovely wife was the hostess of the hotel dining room and I had more than once wondered aloud how she could put up with him.) They must have decided to capitalize on the fact.

In the end I was convinced that Dan and Ted were the villains in the play. They had to have told the chief that I was out of work and he became an accomplice, perhaps unknowingly, to their scheme. Neither of them would ever admit that I surmised the truth, and for years they needled me for being a vagrant.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT
NEVADA MINING - FIRST DEER HUNT

Even though ranching was Elko County's predominant industry in the late 1940s, back in the 1800s mining was prevalent in "them thar hills." The most noteworthy mine operations were in and around Tuscarora, Cornucopia, Charleston, Mountain City, Jarbidge and Contact. None ever gained the prestige of those in western and central Nevada, such as those in Virginia City, Austin and Eureka, and most were in decline or abandoned soon after the turn of the century. A few of them saw renewed activity during World War I, and again in the early forties.

A relatively new operation, the Rio Tinto Mine, opened near Mountain City in the 1930s and produced 1,500,000 tons of copper ore from then until after the Big War. It was still in business in 1948, when I had occasion to drive through the company town, but just barely.

There were a lot of hopeful prospectors around Elko, though, and a few intrepid miners - a couple of men or a group in partnership - who worked the old shafts and tailings in hopes of making a living from minerals hitherto passed over.

Having never seen a real mine, I was really tickled when Bob Taelour invited me to accompany him to old Cortez. He was forever out to cut some big deal or other, so I figured he must be thinking of buying into the property; which was then being reworked by some men he knew. Characteristically, he suggested using my car for the trip but promised to buy half the gas.

To get to Cortez we had to pass through Beowawe, a village astraddle the Southern Pacific and Western Pacific railroad tracks on the south bank of the Humboldt River a few miles west of historic Gravelly Ford.

Gravelly Ford had been a popular crossing for wagon trains, and it was there that the Donner Party's troubles really began, when James Reed killed John Snyder and was banished to the surrounding desert. Reed made it to California, and was instrumental in organizing the first rescue party to aid the others when they got marooned in the Sierras. But that's another story.

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From Beowawe, we travelled a straight graveled road across the flat Crescent Valley, observing a few hawks and jackrabbits but no vehicles on the way to what was left of the old mining camp. It was not yet noon when we arrived.

Cortez had been a fair producer of silver in its heyday, but now, except for a weather-beaten old boarding-house, four or five small shacks, concrete foundations and rusted remnants of a mill site, there was nothing but the idea. Bob told me that a half dozen men were reworking the old tunnels, gleaning small amounts of rich gold and silver ore from the leftovers. (Prospectors always described ore as "rich.")

We found three of the boys at the big building - where the group had set up rough housekeeping - just as they were headed back to the diggings. We followed them up the rutted road and parked on the dump just outside the main tunnel; near a rusty ore cart resting on equally rusty rails leading from a dark opening in the steep hillside.

"Come on," one of the miners invited, "Joe's back there in the right-hand branch. Let's see how he's doin'."

Trying hard to conceal my apprehension, I fell in behind Bobby and the others to enter the abysmal-looking tunnel. I'd never been known for bravery, or foolhardiness either, and that musty hole-in-the-mountain didn't appear at all safe to me. However, my curiosity was thoroughly piqued and I didn't want those guys to know that I was chicken.

There were two flashlights in the party; their yellow beams darted eerily through decades-old floating dust and bounced off of hard-rock walls and ceilings, cracked and straining timbers. Stumbling over ties and rails we penetrated deeper and deeper into the very bowels of the earth.

It was too late to turn back without losing face, but I was damned nervous about the whole adventure. A natural cave is one thing; it has already stood the test of centuries. But a manmade tunnel with decaying timbers - such as the one in which I was now virtually trapped - that might result in a cave-in at any moment is quite another. Perhaps my experience as a kid, when buried up to my neck in a sand bank, had something to do with my apparent phobia.

Time and distance pass with ponderous speed when encountering the unknown. I was sure we'd walked a mile in this place-of-the-devil whose tunnels branched first one way then the other, past numerous blocked "drifts" and fallen rocks and rubble. At long last I saw a flickering glow far ahead, and the sound of running footsteps pervaded the tunnel. We halted in our tracks and two shadowy figures, each carrying a light, appeared from around a corner.

"Fire in the hole! Go back!" the one in the lead shouted, at the same time motioning us to the rear the way we had come. If I was nervous before I was now confused and scared as well.

"Lit fuses! Gonna blow!" Bob explained as we ran uneasily to an alcove off to one side of the tunnel. Together we crowded unceremoniously into the three-by-five space and waited. I was not sure for what, but we waited.

Bob took advantage of the opportunity to ask the guys about the mine: Were they finding good stuff? Had they shipped any ore yet? And

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so on. My mind was involved in trying to imagine what it would be like when the powder exploded.

I might have felt differently had a more professional appearance prevailed, but even I recognized the operation for what it was; a fly-by-night enterprise. I doubted if any man among them possessed more than a peripheral knowledge of mine safety, or paid much heed to it if he had. I did note that the powder-monkey was older than the rest, a factor that slightly restored my confidence.

Suddenly a cool wind hit me in the face. Conversation ceased. I felt a tremor and heard a muffled boom in the distance. A cloud of dust filled the air. Rivulets of gravel rattled down from between overhead beams. A new strange odor filled my nostrils.

The older man held up a grimy finger. "One," he announced.

Then came another blast of air, another tremor, another boom, another raised finger and, "Two."

The sequence was repeated at regular intervals: "Three..." "Four..." "Five..." And then, "That's it. That's all of 'em." There was a note of pride in his voice.

"If they don't all go," Bob responded to my quizzical look, "it's a bad situation. Y'have to wait, sometimes all night before goin' back to check."

Walking with Bob through the choking dust toward the source of the blast, he continued to explain. "Sometimes a fuse goes out, the fire never gets to the powder...but you don't know for sure, maybe it's just creeping along, smoldering, waiting for you to get close and 'Poof!' you're mincemeat." The only danger now, he said, was the possibility of a hidden crack or weak shoring somewhere.

I wished I were back in Elko.

On reaching the end of the tunnel, we found the dust still settling on a pile of rubble that sloped upward from the floor to the ceiling. I was not much impressed with what I saw, but the miners picked up and enthusiastically examined several pieces of rock. I suppose my degree of anticipation far exceeded reality, for I expected to see bits of pure silver sticking out of the rocks. If there were silver present, it was in such amounts that only an assayer could verify. Perhaps Bob's friends had already sampled the stuff and knew what they had to deal with, but I could only shrug. I had the feeling that none of these guys would ever make a living, much less get rich, off the old Cortez Mine.

Bob may have come up with the same conclusion. Back outside in the bright light of day (which renewed my spirits immensely) he chatted with the miners a while, shook hands all around, and then we left them to their toils.

On our way to the county road, Bob suggested and I agreed that we should turn south and go to Eureka, a small community in central Nevada. It was fifty miles away, forty-five of them on dirt roads. What a relief it was to reach the pavement after having endured eighty miles of jarring bumps and swirling dust.

Eureka, actually a city of about 500-souls, was nestled in a shallow canyon at the base of the Diamond Mountain Range. A couple-of-dozen businesses occupied dilapidated buildings on both sides of the highway, which doubled as the main street. Behind them, served by dirt

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streets, was a variety of houses, cabins and shacks, some of them, by comparison to the majority, rather neat in appearance. In the whole town, though, very few structures showed any sign of having been recently stroked by a paintbrush; exceptions being the three story, red brick courthouse (Eureka is the seat of the county of the same name), a large movie theater directly across from it, and two or three gas stations.

Eureka came into being in 1864, the year Nevada was admitted to the Union. It became the center of a prosperous lead and silver mining region, and attracted thousands of people in the late 1800s. Then, like so many others, it went into gradual decline. Recently, in the 1940s, there had been a small revival, due primarily to activity at the Ruby Hill Mine just west of town. But that endeavor ran into bad luck when, at the 2300-foot level, the miners encountered an underground river of water. Bob and I went up to the site, and a man showed us two enormous, diesel operated pumps then being installed to take care of the problem. (The venture would prove to be only partially successful.)

Back in town, we filled our stomachs with food at a greasy spoon, the car with gasoline at a Standard Station, and then turned toward the north, toward Carlin, Elko and home.

At day's end, relaxing in my little room on Oak Street, I calculated that we had travelled over 300-miles that day, many of them on unpaved roadways. We'd observed only a handful of vehicles along the way and encountered less than two dozen people. What a country.

Six months of life in the West did not dull my enthusiasm for it. On the contrary, I found myself looking for reasons and excuses to stay.

The long summer days were being replaced by the short, crisp, clear ones of autumn. The meadows had long since turned brown, and now, high in the Ruby Range, brilliant, golden leaves disclosed patches of quaking aspen that had gone unnoticed when clad in summer green. The sun's low-slanting rays enhanced the contrasting hues of tan, gray and purple, and produced alternating triangular shapes of light and dark on west-tending canyons and ridges. It was my favorite time of the year.

Unknown to (and un-appreciated by) the average city-dweller, autumn in the country virtually cries out to the hunter. It is a call of the wild, a call that draws out the most fundamental of man's instincts: to pit his prowess against that of the wily beast. After all, whether or not one admits to it, man has always been the consummate predator. And is it any less admirable to prey on wild animals than on those in captivity, such as cattle and sheep? I think not. At least the wild ones have the freedom to exercise their cunning and survival abilities.

Other than a few forays after squirrels I had done little hunting in the East (partly due to the war-time limitation on ammunition), so I was eager to try my hand at the sport in Nevada. I was introduced, first, to rabbit shooting. I say shooting rather than hunting because jackrabbits were so plentiful one hardly had to hunt for them. They existed in the old Bullion Road area, southwest of Elko, by the

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hundreds, perhaps thousands. It was impossible to drive that road without hitting two or three of them per mile.

As with all animals, except man, rabbit populations increase and decrease in cycles dependent on the availability of food and the prevalence of disease and predators. The rabbit population was at a peak in the late 1940s, the result of a decrease in the number of coyotes, their natural predators. It seemed only logical that we should assist the balance of nature. The rabbits would soon succumb to disease in any event. It was Mother Nature's way.

To make the shooting more sporting, we used twenty-two caliber rifles as opposed to shotguns. To make the killing less inhumane, we used hollow point bullets to hasten their death.

The best time for the shoot was at dawn or dusk, when the jacks moved about in search of tender grass or wild clover. We'd drive along an old road or trail through the sagebrush until one or more of them were sighted, then stop the car and commence firing, usually through an open window. When it got dark we'd "trap" them in the headlight beams, or with a spotlight, and dispatch the poor devils while thus disadvantaged. Sometimes we shot them from the moving vehicle, a practice that required considerable skill.

Dan was a pretty good shot with a pistol, even when in motion. But one time, when a fast-running jackrabbit ran right under the car, his bullet bounced off the rear tire. I wasn't too happy about that, and pleaded with him to put the pistol away in favor of a rifle. He just chuckled at my naiveté and - like the hero in an old movie firing at outlaws from a stagecoach - continued to shoot-em-up through the open window.

Shooting jackrabbits honed my skill with a rifle. And then came deer-hunting season. For about a decade, after 1945, deer hunting in northeastern Nevada was truly outstanding; probably because there had been so little such activity during the war. There was abundant food in the habitats, the deer were numerous and healthy. It was said that there were more deer per-square-mile in 1948 than at any time in recent history, possibly more than when the "white eyes" first invaded the country, certainly more than when early miners considered venison a staple in their diet.

It was October. Ted, John and Bob were preparing for a deer hunting trip and included me in their plans. I would drive my Ford to the base camp, and then we'd hunt out of a well-used (beaten up) war surplus Jeep borrowed from Mac the Plumber, a cigar-chomping friend of the Taelours. Dan, who would stay behind and operate the taxi business, loaned me an old Springfield 30-06 rifle.

On the appointed day, anxious for the hunt, we loaded the two rigs with groceries and necessaries, and headed east on US-40. At Deeth we left the paved highway, drove through the mostly deserted town, passed through the gates of a shipping corral, bounced over a rickety plank bridge over the Mary's River, proceeded northeast over dusty Tabor Flat for twenty-five miles, forded Tabor Creek and went another seven or eight miles to our turnoff.

Much of the land where we would hunt was under private ownership, belonging to the Mary's River Ranch which (along with the Mala Vista

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and 71 Ranch) was being run by William B. Wright in partnership with Marble and McClaren, all well known names in the cattle industry.

(The Mary's River and Mala Vista ranches, both situated on the Mary's River, would, in 1954, come under the sole ownership of Bill Wright and eventually William B. Wright, Jr. Permission to hunt on the property or pass through it would finally be revoked, after a few so-called sportsmen cut fences, allowed cattle to stray, even shot at and wounded the animals and left them on the range to die. One could hardly blame the Wrights for closing off their property.)

We would hunt with Bill Wright's permission, which was easily obtained, I assumed, since each of the Taelour boys had worked on his ranch at one time or another in the recent past.

It seemed a long way from the county road to our destination, over a twisting track through sagebrush and four or five "bob wire" gates. It was said, in the West, that if there were three people in the front of a vehicle you could tell which one was the real cowboy; he sat in the middle. He'd rather ride a horse than drive, and he wasn't about to get out to open and shut the gates. But there were only two of us in my Ford, and since I was driving that chore automatically fell to Ted. He finally pulled the last gate taut and flipped the loop over its cedar post, breathed a sigh of relief and climbed back into the car.

From there it was another quarter-mile through shoulder high sagebrush into the mouth of the canyon, where a line camp nestled in a grove of quaking aspens bordering a small stream of crystal clear water. Currant Creek. I drove down off the canyon road and parked among the trees beside the cabin.

In the diffused light of the overcast, late afternoon sky, the camp reminded me of those portrayed in the Westerns. I wished for my camera but I had left it in Elko.

(Now, lacking such a record, I must reach back over the forty-some intervening years to recall the details.)

The cabin was of frame construction, perhaps 12' by 18' in size, resting on hewn timbers directly on the ground. The rough board siding was unpainted and weather beaten. The corrugated metal roof was rusty from age and exposure. A similarly constructed lean-to provided additional space to the rear. A pair of windows, their small panes intact (I noted with amazement), looked toward the southeast and southwest. A trio of large flat rocks stepped up to the sill of the main doorway, where a once-fancy paneled door, no doubt a castoff from the home ranch, stood latched against the weather but unlocked as was the custom.

I didn't think about it at the time, but that line camp was a symbol of a way of life in Nevada that had endured since the 1860s when cattle were rounded-up, driven and otherwise controlled almost entirely by cowboys on horseback. Cowboys were still the backbone of the industry in the forties, especially in the hill country, but the motor vehicle had already begun to change things dramatically.

I followed Ted inside, and was immediately struck with a sense of déjà-vu. I had seen this place before, through the eyes of Zane Grey. Except for the metal cots along the walls and modern labels on the shelved canned goods, I could have been standing in the nineteenth

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century. How many dusty boots had pounded that creaky board floor? How many saddle-weary butts had settled onto that hard bench over in the corner? How many cold-to-the-marrow cowpokes had backed up to that cast iron range, palms out to soak up its radiant heat? How many tall tales had echoed off those bare walls? Or arguments over who rode the best cow-pony in the remuda? I couldn't know the numbers but I could feel the "spirit of cowboys past."

Ted crumpled an old newspaper and stuffed it into the firebox of the range, added a handful of dry kindling from an old bucket on the floor, and lit a fire.

"It's the custom," he explained for my benefit, "when you use a line cabin you leave it like you found it or better. A buckaroo gets caught in a blizzard up there roundin' up cows and heads for this place to hole up...looks like a mansion to him. Worst thing's to find it cold and empty...no kindling...no food. We'll leave more than we use when we go, for Old Bill's boys."

I joined Bobby and John, who had arrived in the Jeep, and helped them pack our goods inside. (I had learned that in the West the word "pack" was synonymous with "carry" or "haul.") By the time we'd finished and closed the door Ted had a roaring fire a-going, and we warmed our hides in front of it, turning like so many roasts on spits and tossing down shots of terrible tasting whiskey to thaw our innards.

Ted brewed shepherd coffee, a handful of grounds in a pot of cold water brought to a boil. John dumped the contents of a big bean-can into another pot, to heat, and dropped a batch of fat hamburgers onto a sizzling skillet. Bob and I fetched water from the creek and readied a wobbly wooden table for the meal. The taste of whiskey and the smell of food whetted my appetite, and when we sat down to eat I ate like a hog, a manner quite uncharacteristic of me.

After dinner, wound up by whiskey, the Taelours went through a lengthy repertoire of stories, most of them new to me, that ran the gamut of possibly true, obviously fabricated, totally outrageous, and finally, when they were having trouble pronouncing their consonants, way off color.

Ted dominated the session. He was far-and-away the best teller of jokes I'd ever met. In time, though, having grown tired and sore from laughing so hard, I unfurled my bedroll on one of the cots and turned in for the night. The others stayed upright, loudly bickering over a card game till long after I'd fallen into a deep sleep.

I awoke before sunup to the sounds of rattling stove lids and a roaring fire. Ted was already up-an-at-em, and in a few minutes we all rolled out, anxious to get a head start on the deer. Motivated by the near freezing temperature I dressed very quickly, then pitched in to help with breakfast. It was a hearty meal, of greasy bacon, spuds and eggs, toast and coffee. Enough fuel, we hoped, to keep us going all day.

I bundled-up with all my available clothes and jackets, and still shivered when I stepped outside. There was ice at the edge of the flowing creek that morning, and small pools were frozen tight enough to hold my weight.

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The old Jeep was cold too. When Ted hit the starter the engine groaned in protest, hesitated, but finally fired-off in a dutiful clamor and the rest of us climbed aboard. Bob and I sat on the cold metal wheel wells in the back, along with the necessities, John sat in the front. Each of us, except Ted, had a rifle loaded and ready for action.

Moving slowly up the canyon, the dim headlights revealed a rough road ahead, one consisting of little more than two wheel tracks through the grass and sagebrush. We bounced over rocks and willow roots, slid through muddy springs, forded the trickling stream from one side to the other and back, and scraped under low-hanging limbs that threatened to decapitate both Bob and me.

A couple of miles above camp we broke out of the canyon onto an open, rolling upland. It was now fairly light and Ted turned off the headlights. Bob spotted a small bunch of deer on the skyline. Does, we guessed, judging by their silhouettes, and we continued on toward the rim-rock country.

"That's where the big ones hang out," Bob whispered to me, as though the deer might hear his voice above the grinding noise of the Jeep.

We came to a fence line and Ted turned to follow it. It was a perfectly straight fence, probably one boundary of a mile-section, so we had an up and down ride over the hills. The ground cover was all bunch grass and white sage up there, too short to slow us down much, but the sidehills were so steep I had to cling to the side of the Jeep to keep from falling out. Straight up or straight down was okay with me, but I sure didn't like the sidling. I never knew that a motor vehicle could lean so far without tipping over.

Coincidentally with the rising sun we reached the top of the Snake Mountains (as they are known) and dropped down the other side into a shallow draw filled with almost naked quakies. Two does, startled by our presence, trotted out of the opposite side of the patch, hesitated, looked us over, and then moved away. We piled out of the Jeep, almost before Ted got it stopped, and shouldered our rifles.

"There y'go George," Bob indicated a small buck just exiting the trees, "Nail him!"

For a moment I seriously considered his advice, then discarded it. "Too small," I said, "I want a big one."

Bob raised his rifle and squeezed off a round that found its mark in the left shoulder of the animal. It was a good shot, and the little buck fell virtually on the spot. While Ted and John hiked around the ridge, in case there were more deer in hiding, Bob and I hurried to the downed buck. It was my first good look at a mule deer - so named because of its large size and long ears.

Thinking ahead to the time when I might get to field dress a deer of my own, I watched carefully as Bob and John slit his throat and commenced the bloody chore; which took them less than twenty minutes to complete. By rights (legally) it was Bob's deer. But he conned John into tying his tag to the young three-pointer. We then lifted it up, secured it to the hood of the Jeep and went on with the hunt.

Bob, who had taken the wheel, drove up the edge of a draw above the quakies, forded a couple of small creeks, and eventually came to a

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talus slope where we left the rig and proceeded on foot. Spread out in a line abreast, Bob and I on the right, Ted and John on the left, we crouched low and gained the top of a northwest-facing rim. I took a position beside a block of desert varnished basalt, and peered into the canyon below.

What a sight! The canyon extended from its head, off to our left, a quarter-mile to the northeast where it cut through seven-or eight-hundred feet of solid rock. Directly in front of me the cliff dropped fifty-feet straight down then inclined toward the bottom, the closest point of which was some 200-yards away. The wall across the way was sheer, possibly steeper and higher than the one on which we lay.

The boys had insisted that we would see deer in this canyon and I was not to be disappointed. While scanning from one end of it to the other I caught sight of a movement way down in the cut. At least I thought I saw something, and beckoned to Bob for confirmation. He crawled over to my vantage point and together we watched and waited. There it was again. Yes, it was a deer. A doe. Then I spotted a buck. And another. They were still pretty far away but appeared to be moving slowly toward us. We would wait.

The herd came through the narrow defile in single file, and then disbursed to browse on the rich bitterbrush in the bottom. I began to count them: two, four, five, ten, fifteen, twenty, fifty, sixty, eighty, a hundred. I quit counting.

There must have been at least a hundred-and-fifty deer down there (evidently migrating southward for the winter), feeding unconcernedly up-wind from us and oblivious to our presence. They drew closer and I identified several bucks bearing great racks, but my gaze always returned to a big fellow in the van, an outstanding buck, I decided, and one that must inevitably come within range. I signaled to Bob and pointed toward the big guy. Unexpectedly, he nodded his head and lifted his rifle to shoot. I panicked.

"Let me have a shot at him," I asserted hoarsely, "You've shot lots of deer."

"Aw...I think I'll take 'im," he spoke, pressing his cheek firmly against the rifle butt.

"C'm on, Bob," I pleaded. "Give me a chance. If I miss...you take him."

"Okay," he conceded, and lowered his piece. Anyway, the buck had disappeared behind a stand of tall buckbrush.

I had been lying on my belly on the rocks, so now I rose up on my left elbow, shouldered my "ought-six" and swung its muzzle toward the point where the buck should emerge. I flipped the safe to off and held steady, trying to remember all the things I must do if I were to make a successful kill.

I had shot Dan's rifle before - in practice I had blown away a coffee-tin at two-hundred yards - but it belonged in a museum. The stock was weathered and nicked and worn, the barrel was nearly devoid of bluing. Worst, though, was the front sight. The bead that normally sat atop the vertical blade was missing, knocked off nobody knew when, leaving it an eighth-of-an-inch short. I must allow for that when taking aim.

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Suddenly the antlered head came into view. But I didn't want to shoot him in the head. A few more steps and his shoulder would be in the clear. I adjusted the rifle appropriately and wished to God my heart would quit pounding so hard. He moved slowly forward and paused, revealing a dark, flowing cape. What a beautiful animal, I mused, forgetting for an instant why I was there.

Then up went his head, antlers laid back horizontal, and nostrils high in the air. He had sensed danger but knew not where it lay. He was sampling the wind.

Over my shoulder Bob whispered excitedly, "Shoot! Shoot!"

I took a deep breath, held it, aligned the sights to my target compensating for the missing bead, and squeezed the trigger. The buck stood very still.

"BOOM! Thunk! A-boom!"

The report seemed extraordinarily loud. Even the echo from across the canyon was loud. But it was that second sound that was music to my ears: I had scored a hit. Wincing from the recoil of the rifle I stood up and watched as the buck, mortally wounded, staggered and lay down in the brush, all but hidden from view.

"You stay and watch," Bob offered, "I'll work my way down."

The rest of the herd had scattered and was out of range. The hunt came to a standstill. Ted shouted from up-canyon, "You got one?"

"Yeah!" I returned, satisfaction in my voice.

He climbed down and joined Bob near the wounded deer, where they stood guard in case he decided to get up and run off. John went for the Jeep. It was a wonder I didn't break my neck then, in my haste to get off the rim.

The proud buck lay on a carpet of dry grass among the bushes, head held high, big black eyes staring in wonder. We approached him cautiously, afraid that he might jump and run. But he was too badly hurt for that.

When I got close to him, though, he got up on three legs, the left front one hanging limp, lunged and fell forward striking his great antlers on the ground. Remembering that the little buck, the one Bob shot earlier, had thrashed around and broken a tine on the rocks, I sprang forward and latched onto his antlers with both hands, to prevent his breaking them. It was an unnecessary and unwise thing to do, for there was little danger of his damaging one of those sturdy appendages and a real likelihood of my being gored. In a flash I was hoisted ignominiously clear of the ground.

The Taelours laughed at my predicament until Ted, seeing that I was not going to turn loose, came to my rescue. Bob then helped Ted control the animal, directing the tips of his antlers into the soft earth while I took out my knife and administered the coup-de-grace. With a great tremble, the beast drew a last breath and slumped to the ground. It was over.

I had mixed emotions then, emotions which, I believe, most hunters experience in the circumstance. One cannot help but admire the living animal. It is proud, beautiful, wary, cunning, strong, swift, keen, and instinctively intelligent. But so is the hunt to be appreciated. It is a test of man's own cunning, intelligence and

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strength, a test of his ability to search, stalk and position himself to advantage, a test of his inherent ability and skill.

Having participated in the hunt, I can say unequivocally that neither emotion can be adequately evaluated by one who has never hunted. Unlike a majority of humanoids (in recent times) I was extremely fortunate. I took advantage of an opportunity and gained a true perspective of man's important relationship with the other species of the animal kingdom.

But back to the job at hand; the hard work part of the hunt, the field dressing. With my coat removed and shirt sleeves rolled up, with lots of advice and a little help, I took my knife in hand and cut the musk-glands from the buck's legs (to avoid having their contents come in contact with and contaminating the meat). We then turned the deer onto its back and I made a slit in the belly hide, from pelvis to rib cage, to expose the entrails. I was happy to note that my bullet had found its way to the flesh of the shoulder and not to the guts. Or I'd have had a messy job of it.

Following the "explicit" instructions of my partners, I removed the penis and urine-sac (again, so as not to taint the meat). Next, with a great deal of effort, we removed the innards, separated the liver from the mess and set aside the rest for the coyotes and vultures. I then severed the diaphragm and reached - with bare hands and arms - into the warm steaming cavity to remove the heart, lungs and esophagus. The heart we saved; the breathing apparatus was added to the pile of entrails.

Done! My arms were bloody up to the elbows, but I had a fine, well-dressed deer to show for my (our) efforts.

The end of the gray day was fast approaching and we were an hour from camp, so we quickly loaded my buck into the back of the Jeep (leaving hardly enough room for Bob and me), headed across the high country to the road near the head of Currant Creek and went on down to our camp. It was virtually dark when arrived, and I was more than a little weary from the activities of the day.

But there was still work to be done. While John got a fire going in the stove in the cabin, Ted, Bob and I set about taking care of the two deer. In turn, each one was hoisted into a suitable tree, by means of a rope tied around the base of the antlers, there to be out of reach of possibly hungry coyotes, and to air and cool during the night. We then rustled up some firewood, for the night's fuel and to replenish the standing supply, and returned to the cabin.

It was pleasurable beyond description, being in that warm sanctuary. Jim Beam made the rounds and we soon forgot how bushed we really were. The story of the day's events began to unfold, each of us adding to the narrative with more and more embellishment as the level of liquor lowered in the bottle. And in spite of earlier cries for food, any thought of eating was now secondary.

I finally stoked-up the fire, brewed a pot of black coffee, opened a can of pork-and-beans and put it on to heat. I had to get something solid in my stomach.

Long after it was timely (in my estimation) the Taelours quit drinking. Ted, who had turned up his nose at my beans, sliced off some fresh liver and set it to sizzling in the big iron skillet. Having

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downed most of the beans, I now tried some of the meat. The flavor was okay but the texture was very strange indeed, not unlike rubber. I was sure that I'd never again eat the stuff, unless, perhaps, I was stranded and starving to death on a remote mountaintop.

It must have been after 9:00pm (early by the clock, late by the sun that had set at 4:30pm) when we hit the sack. I would not awaken until it was light again in the canyon, well after sunrise.

I noted a definite absence of conviviality that morning, even some grumbling about the cold, since no one had gotten up in the night to tend the fire. We picked at our ham-and-eggs and sat for a long time drinking black coffee. None of us felt good (I swore it was the liver that upset my stomach) but we somehow got the deer loaded into the Jeep and the camp gear in my Ford, tidied-up the area and headed down the road.

The trip home was uneventful. We were in Elko by late afternoon and went directly to John's place, south of the tracks near Fourth and Douglas Streets, where we hung our deer in his back yard preparatory to skinning them out.

But even before they were unloaded, Ted insisted that I should have a picture taken of me with my first deer. I said I couldn't afford it, whereupon he called a studio and a professional photographer came over and did the deed, at Ted's expense. It was your typical "big game hunter" picture, with John and I kneeling, rifles in hand, before our "trophies."

Ultimately, with its head and hide removed and the carcass ready for butchering, my deer weighed 154 pounds. The magnificent antlers, with six points on the right and five on the left sides thus qualifying as a five-pointer, measured thirty inches at the outer extremes.

(I look back on that buck with particular pride, for, as it turned out, after many years of deer hunting and several kills it was the largest one of all.)

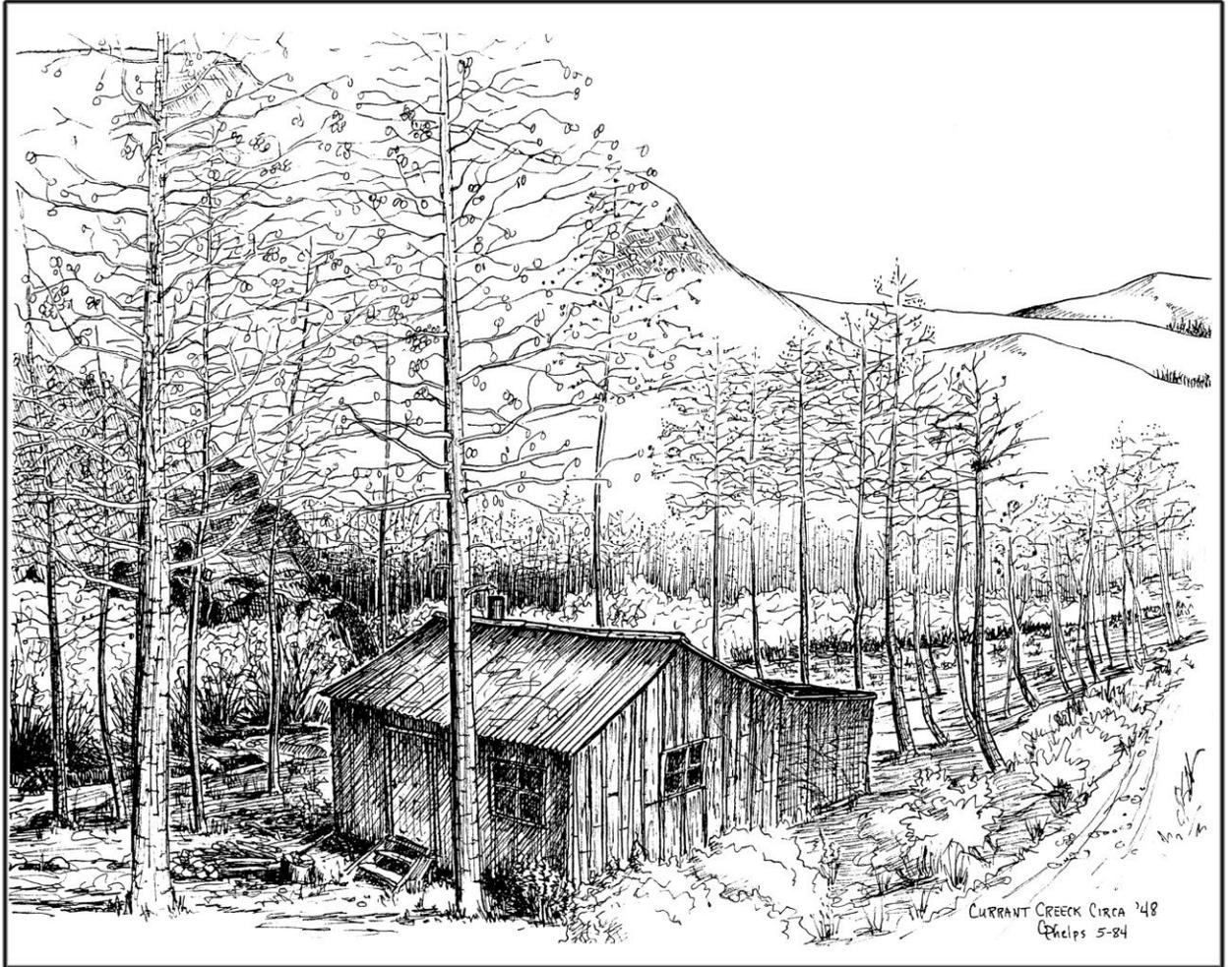
As a matter of interest, a typical, mature, western mule deer buck is one with a set of antlers containing four tines on each side, in addition to the "eye guards," and is designated a "four-pointer." Older bucks often grow additional tines.

I think Ted exhibited as much enthusiasm for my kill as I did, perhaps more, and urged me to have the head-and-cape mounted by a professional taxidermist, to hang on my wall. But I had no wall of my own and was short of money so it was out of the question.

Instead, I mounted the antlers on a wooden "shield" and hung it in the garage, to be privately admired from time to time, and placed my photograph (one of two that were made) in an album.

Perhaps one day I could show them off to my children, and tell the story of my first real hunting adventure in Nevada.

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**CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE
A NEW BEGINNING**

November rolled around, and my father told me about a job that he thought I might be interested in. I guess he figured it was time I worked at something more substantial than taxi-driving. Or maybe he was anxious for me to take up permanent residency in Nevada. And then again, he may have simply been trying to help.

He had learned of the job while chatting with his across-the-alley neighbor, Ralph Michelson, who was the boss of Bell Telephone Company of Nevada's Elko operations.

The Company (as I will henceforth refer to it) was a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company (PT&T), which in turn was one of the great Bell System Companies of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T). Long distance toll facilities in northeastern Nevada were then owned and operated by the Bell System, while a small independently owned business, Elko County Telephone Company, provided local service.

I made an appointment with Mike (as he was known) and went to his home one evening for an interview. It would turn out to be a very informal and pleasant session.

Mike was a handsome man, probably in his early thirties, of less than average height but, like his Scandinavian ancestors, broad shouldered and barrel chested. I took an immediate liking to him.

Comfortably seated in his living room, he told me all about the telephone company, its purpose, and of his own responsibilities. An Elkoan, Mike had worked for the Company since his high school days, and was recently appointed to the job of Chief Testboardman, a first-level management position. He questioned me at some length about my past experiences, about my tour in the Navy, why I had come to Nevada and so on.

I told of my first jobs in Northfield, at The Northfield Hotel and the IGA Store; that I joined the Navy, attended an electronics-technician school but, after three months of intensive training, flunked out, wound up at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and worked in meteorology. I explained that I came to Elko hoping for a job with the Weather Bureau, missed the opportunity but stayed on to see the West.

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Since then, I said, I was a desk clerk at The Stockmen's and a taxi driver.

I then met Mike's lovely wife, Ozell, a well dressed woman who came into the room bearing a tray of refreshments, a smile on her pretty face, a twinkle in her blue eyes, and honey blond hair with braids encircling her head like a halo.

When she had gone, leaving behind the tasty cakes and coffee, Mike asked if I had papers proving my participation in the Navy's electronics school, to which I was forced to reply in the negative. Such proof, he said with a hint of sympathy, would have been of value to me, for it would mean that, if hired, I could start at a higher rate of pay.

He talked on, saying that the Long Lines Department of AT&T was about to construct the final link (from Denver to Oakland) of the first transcontinental microwave-radio communication facility, a portion of which would cross northern Nevada, following, generally, the paths of the original open wire and subsequent underground cable routes.

The Bell System's microwave-radio, he explained, was similar in technology to the radar of World War II. It was the latest thing in communications. A single channel was capable of transmitting a vast number (for the times) of telephone conversations, or a television program, over great distances from terminal to terminal.

The microwave-radio repeater stations were to be constructed about thirty miles apart, and at high elevations in mountainous terrain. When built, the stations in northeastern Nevada would be maintained by Mike's crew of toll testboardmen; in addition to a dozen or more existing toll telephone repeater sites.

Up to now my knowledge of the telephone company had been, like most people's, limited to the black telephone set on the stand in the hall, the coin-operated phone in a booth, the familiar voice of a female operator, mile-after-mile of poles and wires alongside roads and highways, and little brick buildings filled with God-knew-what. I had never given a thought to the possibility of my becoming an installer of telephones, of climbing poles or working inside one of those mysterious buildings. I had no desire to be a telephone man. Period.

But a radio repairman, that was a horse of a different color. I sensed that opportunity was indeed knocking loud and clear at my door. Perhaps those difficult weeks of study at Great Lakes would come to fruition after all.

Our conversation drifted to the subject of the West, of its wide open country and attendant outdoor sports. I learned that Mike loved to hunt and fish, usually with friends or family (Ozell and their two boys included). So, unable to resist the temptation, I bragged about the big buck I'd shot up above Current Creek.

(Afterward I would kick myself for that. He'd probably shot a dozen deer as big as or bigger than mine.)

We then came back to the job interview, and Mike alluded to a contingency to my being hired. He was authorized to add two, maybe three, men to his crew at that time, he said, and had pretty much made up his mind on the first two, both of whom had certifiable

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"electronics related" military experience. One of the two, Arvel Hayes, had been an electrician; the other, Ernie Simonsen, a radar operator. Furthermore, he emphasized, Ernie was born and raised in Elko County and Arvel was a longtime resident. That a third man might not be hired I understood, but being an established resident of the area seemed a curious requirement. He explained it to me.

For a number of years the Company had hired people in Reno or California for jobs in Elko. They invariably became disenchanted with the city, the climate, or something, and transferred out as quickly as possible. Mike was determined to hire men who were not only capable but likely to enjoy the area and the environment, and who might stay put for a while.

"It's hard to believe that anyone wouldn't like this country," I observed.

"Well, it's true enough," he said, "and I want you to give me your word that if you're hired you'll stay in Elko for at least two years."

"Fair enough," I answered without hesitation. "You have my word on it."

We stood, shook hands, and the interview was over. I hoped Mike could, and would, make me the third new-hire, for even on such short acquaintance I was eager to work for him.

A week went by before I heard from Michelson, and then the die was cast. Instead of a career in meteorology, as I had so often dreamed, Fate insisted on my entering the field of electronics. I was to report to the job on the 1st of December.

And that's how I came to be employed by the Bell System, the greatest telephone company the world has ever known. At the same time, the question of whether or not I'd return to New England became a moot one.

At eight o'clock on the first, I entered the red brick building at Eighth and Court Streets; a rather nondescript, flat roofed, single story edifice with windows that let light through but no images. Known as the Elko Repeater Station, it contained equipment necessary for through telephone traffic as well as that required to interconnect local service with the "outside world." Originally designed to house the transcontinental open wire repeaters (amplifiers), it was expanded in 1940 to make room for Western Electric "K" carrier repeaters for the underground cable system.

Michelson was in his "office," a wooden desk, chair and file cabinet squeezed into one corner of the "K" equipment room. His clerk/secretary, Mary Elmore (sister to one of the craftsmen) occupied a chair and desk nearby.

All three of us new-hires, Simonsen, Hayes and I, reported for duty that day and would have the same anniversary date. For the purpose of seniority, however, Ernie was first, Arvel was second and I was last. The job title was "toll testboardman," a holdover from the days when the primary work was testing long distance circuits using a testboard specially designed for that purpose. The job now included a wide variety of duties, but the title remained the same.

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During the war a force of about six men, including Mike, worked out of the Elko center, maintaining equipment in repeater sites that stretched along a line from Silver Zone, 100-miles to the east near Wendover, to the McCoy Valley, 130-miles to the west (a distance equal to that from my birthplace to Quebec). Now, with men returned from military duty and those recently hired, including the three of us, there was an even dozen.

Ernie and Arvel received credit for their military experience, giving them a considerable pay-scale advantage over me. I started at the bottom, at \$28.00/week. However, we were almost immediately assigned to the night-shift, for training purposes, and received a \$3.00 differential. Further, because of my low wage, I was eligible for Veterans Administration Job Training Assistance pay, which amounted to an additional \$7.00, for a total of \$38/week. It was far from a get-rich-quick scheme, but not bad for a naive kid just turned twenty-one.

The Company had a good method of training its employees - not unlike that used by the Navy - a system incorporating both formal and informal types of instruction. Classroom training served to acquaint the men with the operation and maintenance of specific types of equipment; the "buddy system" provided informal training.

It was deemed cost efficient, in those days, for men to work in pairs, particularly in the outlying areas, each pair being assigned the responsibility for maintenance of certain repeater stations, and a motor vehicle for transportation.

A new employee was teamed with an older one, to learn by observation and hands-on experience. This method was not flawless, of course, human beings being human, but I liked the system and never had a problem getting along with an assigned partner. The key to it, I suppose, was my inherent respect for my elders and the ability to accept instructions.

Our first serious training took place while assigned to the night shift in the Elko office. Arvel, Ernie and I were placed under the direct tutorage of James E. "Red" Wayman, who was given a "senior" title and off-shifted to nights for the task that would last several weeks. His was the job of teaching us the rudiments of toll telephony: basic technical aspects of open-wire, cable, and telegraph carriers; testing and measuring of "faults," using a Wheatstone bridge; procedures for monitoring and switching transcontinental network-radio broadcasts (NBC and CBS); maintenance of battery and power plants; and how to communicate in Morse code. Telegraphy was still being used for interoffice communication, but was slowly being phased out in favor of the telephone.

Red was never really successful in teaching us the Morse code. I learned to "read" the dots-and-dashes well enough to recognize Elko's call letters (dah-di-dah, dit-dit for "KO"), could get the gist of most incoming messages and could send with a fairly good "fist" (as the saying went). But if I had no preconceived idea of what the guy on the other end was about to send I was totally lost, especially if he used a "bug," an extremely fast-acting telegraph key.

Routinely, in the early morning, a telegrapher at Sacramento would call each office in northeastern California and Nevada for a

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wire report. In turn we responded with a summary of the circuit outages and/or failures in our particular area of responsibility. Now that fellow was a master of the art of telegraphy. We'd listen intently to his barrage of dah-dit-dahs until, recognizing the code for Elko, one of us would break in and laboriously send the report. We would hardly be through when the sounder took off again like a rattlesnake; the man was impatient with us and anxious to contact the next office on the list.

Only one man in Elko could send like that guy, old Robert Romans. Bob had been with the Company for years, and before that was a telegrapher for one of the railroad companies. But he worked the evening shift and it was up to us neophytes, in the morning, to respond as best we could to the Wizard of Sacramento.

As time went on the key was used less frequently. The simple message "CM FN" (come fone) became commonplace and the telephone, which was less subject to message error, supplanted the telegraph. Besides, the Company was changing so rapidly there wasn't time for new-hires to become proficient telegraphers. Recognizing this, the management caused more order wires (special inter-office telephone circuits) to be installed. But old methods die hard, and the familiar telegraph key would be seen on testboards for years to come, little more than a reminder of a past era in the industry.

Winter descended on the high desert. The thin red line in the thermometer outside the telephone building took to plunging below the zero mark, and the color of the sky alternately turned to gray and greenish blue. In many ways it was like the winters I had known in Northfield, except that here the precipitation was minimal. I learned that when the sun shone the climate was amazingly comfortable, unless the wind was blowing, even at sub-zero temperatures.

This was a period of extra-frugal living for me. While waiting three weeks for my first paycheck, I was forced to dip into the money I'd hoarded for a return trip to Massachusetts. But I felt good. I was learning a craft and making new friends in the bargain.

I reported to work five nights a week, on third trick. (I've always thought it should be called the "first trick," since it begins at midnight.)

Most people assigned to work a night shift, the natural time for man to sleep, never get accustomed to it. There are exceptions, of course (my brother Charlie would work the swing shifts throughout his career with the Irving Paper Mill in Massachusetts), but it is hard to adjust to. At least I had the same schedule for several months and was able to cope with the abnormal routine. Still it was difficult having to sleep during the day, as if it were a waste of precious hours of sunlight.

There was a saying that applied to toll testboardmen, especially those who worked the off-shifts: "When a tollie [nickname for a toll testboardman] is idle the Company's making money." Meaning, of course, that when all was quiet there were no troubles in the system. When our routine chores were done, in order to stay awake we found it useful to occupy our time with hobbies. Some of the guys played cards; one fletched hunting arrows; another carved and polished gun stocks. I took to tying flies for fishing, and spent some time restringing my

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tennis racket. Our main objective was to be alert to the sound of an equipment failure alarm, or to a call from another office for a test of some type.

Still there were times when I just couldn't stay awake; just had to get some sleep. It was then that my Navy training came into use, for I had learned to sleep in almost any position on almost any surface. For example, I could rest quite comfortably on the eighteen-inch-wide writing shelf at the "K" carrier test position, or on the boss's desk if it were not too cluttered with papers. The familiar rattle of "KO" on the telegraph sounder, the ringing of a telephone or an alarm bell were enough to arouse me from a drifting slumber. I'd immediately roll off my temporary bed and go to work.

Those of us who could manage to rest and still get the job done had little sympathy for the guy who slept through a call to duty. Such was a fellow named Evard Van Welch, who had perfected, in my opinion, the art of goofing off. He frequently showed up with sleeping-bag and pillow, and racked-up a full quota of sleep on Company time. But it was not without some hazard to his health, as I will attempt to illustrate:

We used a variety of inventive forms of harassment in an effort to keep Van awake. There was the shock treatment, wherein opposite polarities of voltage (130 volts DC) were applied to his fingertips or toes; the cold water dowse, poured by the bucketful on his face; even exploding firecrackers, set off in an empty metal wastebasket nearby. But the only ruse that proved effective was to set off an alarm and yell "FIRE." He would jump up, glance around, sniff the air for smoke, then crawl back into his warm bed. After a while even that didn't faze him. He wouldn't even open an eye. It was apparent that more drastic measures were called for.

One morning, before sunup - after an unusually busy period of alarms and troubles while Van snored comfortably in his sleeping bag atop a work bench - some "person or persons" finally succumbed to the old devil and got the best of Van Welch. A wastebasket was filled with crumpled newspapers, placed near the bench at his feet and the contents ignited. When the flames grew to a fair height, literally licking at the foot of his bag, an alarm was sounded and the warning "FIRE" was shouted loud and clear.

But the subject stayed put. By the time he realized that this was an alarm to be taken seriously his bag had actually caught fire and was smoldering and smoking something terrible.

Now it's not an easy thing to extricate oneself from a zippered sleeping bag, in any circumstance, but to accomplish the feat while but half awake, while reclining on a narrow table top, was just too much for poor Van and he was still imprisoned when he fell to the floor, kicking and flailing and rolling around in a futile attempt to put out the fire.

In witness to this Hardy-esque portrayal we could not contain ourselves, and from a safe distance burst into loud guffaws. Until, that is, concerned that our harmless prank might backfire, we each grabbed a fire extinguisher and doused the flames.

Evard survived the fall and the fire, but both he and his bag were "burned" by the incident. Fully awake now, the "sleep master"

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delivered a tirade of curse words and threats that turned the air blue. After a while, still mumbling, he hauled the soggy sleeping bag to his car.

Van finally calmed down and resigned himself to the fact that he must stay awake the rest of the shift. But he spoke no words, except in the line of duty, to any of us. Not then and not for several weeks thereafter.

I might add that Van never registered a complaint about the matter. How could he? Had he admitted to being asleep on the job he might well have been fired. Anyway, he gave up using a sleeping bag after that (until certain of us left the night shift) and learned to sleep on a hard surface like the rest of us.

Long before the above incident took place, before Van Welch was hired, Red went back to working days and Ernie and Arvel left the night shift. Doug McVae (who was senior to me) and Alfred (Al) Fialdini (a new-hire) came to work nights.

Doug and Al were natives, a fact that had not been overlooked by Mike, graduates of Elko High School. They were both of medium height. Doug, of Scotch descent, was fair and husky and somewhat reserved. Al, a first generation Italian, was dark and slim and, like most Italians, demonstrative.

Al's career nearly ended before it got started, though, when Michelson dropped in early one morning to see how we were doing. Doug and I were busy at work on a telephone carrier system, at the south end of the main equipment room, when Mike suddenly appeared in the aisle with a cheery, "Mornin' boys."

We were trapped; that is, there was no way we could warn Al who was asleep in the "K" room. Mike asked about the equipment we were testing, how we liked the work in general, and then, "Where's Fialdini?"

I looked at Doug and he looked at me, both at a loss for words. Doug shrugged and tried to buy some time with "He may be in the power room."

But that didn't work. Mike opened the door to a room full of generators and batteries but no Al. Without further ado he turned and headed for the "K" room, where he found our partner sleeping comfortably on a work bench in the corner.

Mike shook him awake and said, "You look like you need more sleep.... Go home to bed and report back to me at ten o'clock."

Al sputtered but there was really nothing he could say, he'd been caught in an act for which there was no reasonable excuse. So he went home, though I suspected he was no longer the least bit sleepy.

I guess Al received a pretty serious reprimand, may even have been docked some pay. I never knew, nor was it any of my business to know. But when he reported to work that night he seemed peeved that neither Doug nor I had warned him. We tried to explain what happened but I doubt if Al was convinced of our sincerity. Anyway, after that close shave no one slept as well on the job. Until, that is, Van Welch came to work for the Company.

The fact that Van was hired at all was a source of amusement to us, based on some unethical observations on our part. While relaxing one night near Mike's desk we "happened" to see a pile of completed

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job application forms and took the liberty of reading them. One of them, signed by an Evard Van Welch, was filled with the most boastful and flowery language ever seen outside the covers of a dime novel. We laughed and chortled, asked the rhetorical question, "Who'd hire a guy like that?" and considered the whole thing very comical.

And then, the following day, we discovered that the poet had already been hired.

Van Welch, a fairly large man with coarse features and tight, wavy hair, and who was much older than we, was really a talented fellow. He held a first-class radiotelephone license, was then an engineer and sometime announcer at Elko's broadcast-radio station, and was well known for his ability as an organ player. On top of that he owned and operated a successful radio/television business in town. (While working the night shift at the Company, I add with just a tinge of sarcasm.)

We wondered at the boss's decision to hire Van. But with that one exception, Ralph Michelson was, in my opinion, one of the best managers in the Company. Not only was he a natural leader and organizer, he was innovative, practical, firm and fair. He knew how things worked and what was going on at all times.

Destined for bigger and better things, Mike would rapidly work his way up the Company ladder to second- and third-level management positions in Nevada, and to division-level jobs in California.

My first couple of years on the job were filled with hard work and fun, usually in combination. As additional men were hired, my name climbed slowly up the office seniority list. That was an important entity, the list, though not as sacred then as it would become in a few years. The list was used in deciding who worked what shift, who got first pick of vacation weeks, who was eligible to work overtime and so on; assignments that were monitored by the union steward with great zeal.

Although my heart was not in it, somewhere along the line I joined the union; the Order of Repeatermen and Toll Testboardmen (ORTT). I remembered reading about the nastiness of unionism in the industrial East and Midwest. Unions and companies were always adversaries, it seemed, and I believed it incongruous for anyone to fight the very institution responsible for his employment, and therefore his paycheck. I agreed with the concept of dialogue between management and craftsmen, to discuss things, but all too often union leaders, feeding on their own private egos, pushed too far, sometimes to the detriment of the workers who they were elected to represent.

But I hadn't really understood a labor organization at all. Only after becoming a member of the union did I learn how like a religion it was. Union dues are really tithes, and union members are expected to follow the dictates of their leaders with blind trust. Seldom does a legitimate religion receive greater devotion from its membership than occurs in a union organization.

In hindsight, I suppose, if I were convinced that a cause warranted a strike I would have joined the effort. I do not know. For during my half-dozen years as a member of the ORTT, I was never thus convinced. Fortunately, in Elko, several-hundred miles removed from

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the big city union organizers, we enjoyed a practical rapport with the boss.

It seemed clear to me, even in the 1950s, that if our nation's unions continued in the direction they were headed they would price their members right out of work. It would take longer than I anticipated, but sure enough, the cost of labor intensive, U.S. made goods turned the buying public (ironically, most of them union members) to foreign made products, leaving economists to "wonder where the money went."

Speaking of money: I had been paying room rent for over a year, and, in spite of the fact that it was a fine room and the Critchfields were good people, all I had to show for my expense was a stack of receipts. So when I heard about a used, eighteen-foot camp trailer for sale, I decided to buy it. Providing I could raise the money.

It was a well built trailer, with interior walls and ceiling of birch paneling and an exterior of Masonite (typical for that period) painted forest green. It was equipped with a gas range, an ice box, a coal oil (kerosene) heating stove, a very comfortable bed and plenty of storage space. A small tank held water for cooking and drinking purposes. There was no toilet, nor was it wired for electricity. But those would be minor drawbacks since I was working nights and intended to use the trailer primarily for sleeping and light-housekeeping.

There were two major problems to be worked out, though, before I could become a property owner: a way to pay for the trailer and a space on which to park it. I talked with Father and Ruth about the latter, of the possibility of setting it on the driveway beside their home, and not only received concurrence for that but also the offer of a loan (by Ruth) if I needed one. If I needed one? Did I ever. I had less than \$150 to my name and no tangible assets with which to satisfy a bank loan.

The trailer cost \$1,000. I borrowed \$900 from my stepmother, wrote up a contract (using a sheet of Stockmen's Hotel stationery) promising to pay on demand the sum of "Nine-hundred dollars...to Ruth R. Phelps" with interest at "four percent...payments to be made quarterly," dated "May 28, 1949." I used \$100 of my savings to make up the difference.

I borrowed a pickup truck with a trailer hitch, towed my new home across town and backed it onto the driveway at 1107½ Court Street. There was just sufficient space in front of a storage garage for it and my car. Father and Ruth would park their vehicles, his old pickup truck and her forties-vintage Dodge coupe, on the opposite side of the house by the alley.

The folks were involved with church work and their friends. I with my job and a different group of acquaintances. I sometimes joined them for Sunday dinner, which they routinely took in the early afternoon, often with Homer Fraley and his wife, at one of the major restaurants. Otherwise our paths seldom crossed.

In the months that followed I faithfully made payments, which ranged from \$180 to \$270, and on receipt of the final installment Ruth penned on the contract (of which, by the way, there were no copies) the following words: "Done and so be it with all of your bills. R.R.P. 6-20-50"

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Since the financial arrangements had been made without any input from Father, I concluded that he and Ruth maintained separate financial accounts. She certainly possessed a great deal more money than he ever had, presumably acquired from the estate of her first husband (whom I never knew). Whatever the circumstance, I was thankful for the loan, especially so when, at the end of the period, Ruth waived in its entirety the interest due.

CHAPTER THIRTY
MOUNTAIN LAKES AND STREAMS

There were scores of streams and lakes in Elko County, and virtually all of them were teeming with trout. The daily limit was twenty-five, and relatively few areas were posted against trespassers. It was a fisherman's paradise.

Equipped with a telescoping steel rod with an automatic reel, I fished quite a number of them. I learned to seek out the most inaccessible holes, push through tangled thorny bushes - ever alert for rattlesnakes - and to wade the knee-deep icy waters.

One of my fishing companions was Albert Salls, a young man of my age whom I met when I began dating Rita. Albert's pretty young wife, Jeanne, and Rita were close friends, having been acquainted since their early school days.

Albert was tall and lean and square-jawed, quiet yet friendly, had a subtle sense of humor and good moral habits (he didn't drink, smoke nor curse). He had lived most of his life in the area and was very familiar with the mountains and streams of northeastern Nevada.

It was June when Albert and I first got together, when the foothills were turning green and the higher slopes were bursting with blue-velvet lupines and bright-yellow sunflowers. Albert suggested a fishing trip to Toe Jam Creek, west of Tuscarora. We could make it an overnight trek, he said, and I agreed. I was anxious to camp by a creek with such an unlikely name. With bedrolls, fishing gear and groceries stowed in my Ford, we took off. (Albert always referred to food as "groceries," and consumed it like a wholesaler.)

Along the way we stopped beside an old glory hole, a remnant of some early mining operation near the southern edge of the sleepy town of Tuscarora. Standing on the rim of the water-filled crater, which was perhaps a hundred-feet in diameter and forty-feet deep, Albert explained that its spectacularly brilliant azure color was the result of dissolved minerals. He also claimed that the hole was home to some really big trout, three- and four-pounders, big because they were left alone by the locals who considered them poisonous due to arsenic in the water. I saw no evidence of fish, and was skeptical of his information.

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(His story was later corroborated by other fishermen who claimed that the big trout were edible if, after being caught, they were kept alive for a time in pure water.)

Not far from there we took a road leading to the west. Every back road in Nevada leads either to a salt lick, a mine, or a ranch, this one followed a ditch full of rushing water bordered by stately Lombardy poplars, to a fair-sized house and outbuildings nestled under a copse of giant cottonwoods. It was the Quarter-Circle-S ranch, recently acquired by Bing Crosby. There appeared to be no one about so we went on through the yard.

"It's the only way to get to the country up above," Albert said, "and they won't mind so long as we leave the gates the way we find them."

That was a rule of the West: "Always leave the gate the way you found it, whether open or closed."

When I stopped at the corral for Albert to open the first gate, an arthritic, black and white dog appeared from nowhere, ambled over to the car, dutifully checked all four tires and left without comment. As far as he was concerned we were free to go. I drove on through; Albert closed the gate behind me and opened and closed two more before we were clear of the empty corrals.

Our road deteriorated to two wheel-tracks through the sagebrush. It was rutted but dry, and we made good time in the bottom of a draw. We forded McCann Creek, at its confluence with Berry Creek, and went up a steep hill where I had to straddle a wash to keep from high-centering the Ford. The hill got increasingly steeper, the engine got ever hotter and I was forced to slip the clutch to maintain headway.

"Keep 'er goin'," Albert urged.

It was needless advice. I certainly didn't want to become stalled and have to back all the way down. Just in time, I judged by the smell of burning clutch, we reached a leveling-off place and stopped to give the old car a rest before proceeding to the top.

"Wow!" I exclaimed.

The scenery was, to me, almost unbelievable. I was compelled to get out for a better look, and Albert joined me.

"How's this for country?" He asked proudly, as if it were his very own.

Before us lay a pastoral setting such as one might expect to see in a movie, or in a travel brochure touting a European estate, or on a nineteenth century master's canvas. It was a perfect garden, a Garden of Eden, beautiful beyond my most avid imaginings.

Lush green grass, close cropped by grazing cattle, rivaled that of The Northfield's golf course back home. Scattered beds of sunflowers and lupines blazed in peak bloom. Gray-trunked, new-leaved quaking aspen stood in asymmetrical groves; not too thick or too sparse. Outcroppings of metamorphic rock poked through the ground, providing contrasting colors of browns to various shades of green. Overhead puffy, white, fair-weather clouds were quilted into a deep blue sky.

Although Albert was a man of few words, I sensed that he, too, was moved by the perfection of our surroundings, in spite of the fact that he'd witnessed such scenes many times. We leaned against a

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convenient boulder and exchanged superlatives, until the Ford's radiator had cooled and it was time to move on toward the headwaters of Toe Jam Creek. (I never learned how it got its name.)

Albert informed me that this road was once the stage route between Tuscarora and Midas. When I suggested that it was in awfully poor condition, a mere trail, he allowed that, because of its susceptibility to deep snow and mud in the winter season, it had long ago been abandoned in favor of a way around to the north. To prove his point, that it was once an important roadway, he showed me where the grade had been meticulously shored-up with stones, now overgrown with brush but still intact.

We came to the head of the high mountain stream, which was born in a collection of clear springs and flowed through spongy grass and skunk cabbage between juvenile quaking aspens. I had trouble finding even a semblance of a trail here, so Albert got out and walked ahead. Finally, near a series of beaver dams - some as small as a patio, others as large as a city lot - he turned and signaled to stop. I parked the Ford right there, in the dappled shade of the quakies.

"How's this?" he asked rhetorically. Then added, "You'll never find a better place to camp."

Seated on a convenient log we munched our groceries, sipped clear, cold, spring water and surveyed the surroundings. There were no beaver in sight. They were timid animals, Albert said, and generally worked nights. But I saw their signs; quakie logs and brush cut and trimmed for building material and food.

And then it was time to get serious about fishing. That was, after all, our main reason for being there. All the rest of it, the wonderful sights and sounds and smells, was a bonus. I turned my attention to the art of dangling a baited hook in the water in a manner designed to induce a trout to swallow it. My skills were no match for Albert's, but I was amply rewarded nonetheless. Every rock and every snag played host to a hungry trout. I had never known fish to be so eager to bite.

"Brookies," Albert called them. "Eastern brook trout that were introduced in the West many years ago." Now they were "natives," reproducing prolifically in such streams as had not yet felt the pressure of an ever-increasing human population. Pretty things, in addition to being hungry, with bright orange or red spots on their sides, orange and black lower fins, cream colored bellies and stippled, gray-green backs. They ranged in size from five- to nine-inches, the bigger ones fewer in number and hard to deceive.

All day long we fished, moving up and down the canyon, gingerly crossing and re-crossing the creek on fallen trees or fragile-appearing but strong beaver dams; leap-frogging around each other searching for the best holes, until the sun indicated it was time to quit.

But before actually quitting Albert came up with a neat plan, or so it seemed at the time, a plan that might result in a couple of extra trout for our creels.

We baited our hooks, cast them to the deepest part of a beaver pond, one situated a hundred feet downstream from our camp, propped our poles on forked sticks planted in mud on the bank, and left them

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for the night. That done, we walked on up to our campsite, confident that in the morning we'd find trout on our lines, hooked fast and just waiting to be reeled in.

It was twilight. Jacket time. Together we kindled a small fire in a handy circle of rocks left by a previous visitor, and cooked up a fine mess of fresh trout in a pan balanced over the coals. Then, seated on a clean aspen log, we dined in the warm glow of the embers.

Darkness and quiet fell simultaneously. No sound of the civilized world pervaded our sanctuary; none but the "gron-n-n-nk" of a swooping nighthawk in search of flying insects, the peeping of frogs in some distant bog, and the "yip-yip-ye-a-a-ays" of a choir of coyotes on a nearby hillside.

The atmosphere had that pure clean quality found only at high elevations. The sky was an inverted black bowl leaking myriad pinpoints of light. I thought of the early day explorers, and how they must have experienced nights exactly like this.

For a long time we sat there in silence, or spoke quietly on subjects of mutual interest, and then it was bedtime. Letting the fire die down of its own accord, we rolled out our bedrolls on tarps spread over a soft place on the ground, and wearily (me, at least) turned in for the night. I was quickly asleep, sometimes to be awakened by an unknown sound of the wild but otherwise like the proverbial log.

At dawn, because of the cold air and an eagerness to check our set-lines in the beaver pond, I was dressed in a matter of minutes. However, we were both in for a surprise. On approaching the pond we found it to be empty, or nearly so, only a couple of bathtub-sized pools remained. Worse yet, our lines were broken and their business ends missing. My steel pole was lodged far out in the mud. What sort of devil's work was this? I wondered. Surely not wrought by human hands, for Albert's and mine were the only ones around. It had to have been the dam owner (pun intended) on whose property we encroached. A little investigation proved that to be the case.

The reason for the beaver's action was unclear, but there was no doubt, based on the available evidence, that the main part of the dam had been purposely opened at the bottom, in the channel, and the pond drained. How did we know? Elementary. The sticks and branches removed from the opening were stacked nearby, ready for later re-use. We found no sign of our lost hooks and lines, and assumed that the animal(s) had become entangled and dragged them away somewhere; hopefully without being injured in the process.

To lessen our losses, and to save face, we scooped three nice trout from the shallow pools where they were trapped when the water receded. And when I had to wade through foot-deep, oozing, stinking muck to retrieve my pole, I swore I'd employ a more conventional method of angling in the future.

After painstakingly cleaning the mud from our boots and gear, Albert and I returned to camp and cooked up a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs. We then returned to our sport in earnest.

At noon we quit fishing, cleaned and laid out the brookies on the grass. (It would have made a pretty picture if I had had a camera.) Only then did we count our catch, which totaled over eighty trout, almost a two days' limit for each of us.

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The journey off the mountain was a whole lot easier than going up, and we arrived home before dark. But not until the following day did we get to tell the story, as any true angler would, of our trip and all the fish we'd caught. And then our braggadocio was effectively squelched when one of our listeners wondered aloud why we talked so openly about taking an unlawful number of trout.

It seemed that the rules (without our having paid heed to them) were changed that year, from an allowable two days' limit in possession to one day's. There were no more fish stories.

In the weeks that followed Albert and I fished a number of streams in northeastern Nevada, some of them twice. Then I was persuaded to make an overnight backpack trip with him, over the July Fourth holiday, to some alpine lakes in the Ruby Mountains. They should be open by now, he said, free of ice, and the trails would be passable. I wasn't quite sure how I'd make out, loaded down with a pack of food and blankets, but I prepared for the journey with great enthusiasm. And on the appointed day, we went in my Ford up the graveled, Lamoille Canyon road to its terminus.

Lamoille Canyon is still one of the most picturesque places in the country, but at that time - before the advent of a paved road, summer homes and a busy campground - it was indescribably beautiful. In truth, it might have been more beautiful in an earlier time, before the white man moved into the area, but I don't know how.

Back in the 1930s the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) set up an encampment near the mouth of this canyon, not far from a small hydroelectric power house that was built sometime around 1912. In 1948, all that remained of the CCC camp were concrete foundations, but the ten miles of road that they'd constructed to the upper end of the canyon made it possible for people like us to effortlessly access and enjoy the spectacular scenery.

The power system consisted of a generating plant near the canyon mouth, a water storage fore-bay high on the opposite sidehill, and almost three miles of wooden flume from the head-gate up the creek to the fore-bay. Just downstream from the head-gate, a Boy Scout Camp had been recently built at the confluence of the right and main forks of Lamoille Creek.

Our road followed along the bottom or side of the canyon, in some places carved from vertical rock cliffs, in others gently cut through groves of quakies or mahoganies. The last mile-and-a-half traversed a long sloping meadow where beaver had dammed the creek and where native trout spawned in season. The elevation at the end of the road was 8,700' above-sea-level, 2,300' higher than the powerhouse.

Traveling by dawn's early light - we startled two small herds of deer on the way up - we arrived at the trailhead well before sunup. From there we would hike (or climb, depending on one's point of view) to Lamoille Lake and over a pass to Liberty Lake. I stuck my arms through the ropes of my pack, lifted it up on my back, adjusted the leather strap of a food-laden fishing creel, shouldered it, grabbed my fishing rod and joined Albert on the trail.

I always thought of myself as a pretty good hiker but I was no match for my partner, who found the going relatively easy even though

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he carried the heavier (about seventy pounds) of our two packs. But then, I consoled myself, he worked for the Post Office Department and walking with a pack was a routine matter. Furthermore (I thought of another excuse) I had spent all of my life at sea level while he was used to elevations of a mile or more.

The trail was typical of those in the high mountains (unimproved and more difficult than today's), climbing over rock ledges and grassy knolls, through stands of yellow pine and patches of buck-brush under towering, tree studded cliffs. In many places it was hard to find the track at all, and sometimes Albert chose to take a shortcut which added to the degree of difficulty.

But it was well worth the effort. I observed dozens of new and different wildflowers and grasses, springing to life near the many snow-melt rivulets that cascaded over rocks all around us.

The combination of steep trail and thin air made me dizzy. I was forced to stop frequently to rest and regain my breath, which caused me to lag farther and farther behind Albert. He'd come to a ledge and stand on it, scanning the far-off cliffs with his clear blue eyes while waiting for me, and when I caught up with him, unless it was to point something out to me - an eagle circling in the sky or an almost invisible deer lying in the shade across the canyon - he'd move on. I was always in arrears.

We came to a small lake, or lakes, and I immediately concluded that we had arrived at our first destination, Lamoille Lake. But I was informed that these tiny ponds (Dollar Lakes) froze solid in the winter and were devoid of fish. It was, I noted, a haven for tadpoles, little green frogs, insects and other late spring creatures. The smooth waters reflected inverted images of the trees and crags beyond, and I paused to take a picture. This time I'd remembered to bring my 35-mm camera along. The interlude proved to be both rewarding and restful, and I felt a lot better when we resumed hiking.

The real Lamoille Lake, a mile from the trailhead and a thousand feet higher in elevation, was almost half covered with ice and snow. Open water at the near end mirrored a dirty white ice field that extended almost to the top of the mountain above, almost to the blue sky itself. Albert finger-tested the water temperature, and deduced that the fish were still in a state of dormancy.

"We'll pass up this lake," he said, and with a wave of his arm described where the trail wound around to the left and up over a series of steep ledges and packed snow to a niche in the mountain. "That's Liberty Pass...over ten-thousand feet high. Think you can make it?"

I shrugged. There was, after all, no alternative if I wanted to see the other side of the mountain. By way of encouragement he added, "It's all downhill from there on."

And away he went, skipping from boulder to ledge to rock like a mountain goat while I trailed behind in the manner of a barnyard sheep.

On attaining the high summit, or pass, I was filled with excitement and a feeling of great accomplishment. I couldn't help myself. It was awe-inspiring to look out over the vast South Ruby

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Range, a never ending series of escarpments, peaks, canyons and lakes, and off into the Ruby Valley beyond.

Weary, we shed our gear and rested beside a weather-beaten wooden sign that proclaimed:

LIBERTY PASS ELEVATION 10,500'

"I made it," I congratulated myself inaudibly. But my heart pounded hard under my ribs and I had a throbbing headache; no doubt the effects of insufficient oxygen. I felt better after a while, though, almost normal when we headed down the south side of the mountain.

There was very little snow now, and we made good time getting to the south end of Liberty Lake, some 400' lower in elevation, where we found a small stream trickling out over the rim.

"This is the place," Albert announced, paraphrasing Brigham Young's words when he chose the site for Salt Lake City.

I had trouble estimating distances and sizes in the rarified air, but guessed this lake to be about 400-yards long and 300 wide. Sculpted by an ancient glacier, the northern half of it was embraced by steep, virtually vertical walls. The southern rim, where we stood, resembled the lip of a shallow bowl. I was surprised to see a pocket of aromatic pines growing on the east side. I thought we should have been above the tree line.

Upper tree line elevations vary, I learned, depending on latitude, climate and other factors. Within the Great Basin it is the lower tree line that is most significant. Except along year-round streams, native trees are seldom found on the valley floors.

Liberty Lake was extraordinarily clear. I could easily make out objects thirty or more feet below its surface. As with clean air, however, pure water is a deceptive medium. When I tried with a ten-foot pole to touch a rock that appeared to be six-feet down, I could not.

From the standpoint of angling, that factor was both good and bad. We could tell where the fish were hanging out, but they could easily see us as well. They would be hard to catch.

We began by using nice, red, garden worms, and then tried salmon eggs, and finally a variety of artificial lures - spinners, spoons, flies, everything we had - but caught only three or four trout that first afternoon. However, toward evening, when shadows crept from the west bank and a breeze cast a ruffle on the water's surface, we had an hour of great sport; catching, between us, a dozen lively, colorful, pan-sized trout.

Albert insisted on fresh fish for supper, and cooked them in an aluminum pan over a pine-fueled campfire. With peas, heated in the can, slightly mangled Wonder bread, without a spread, we had a gourmet meal; every bite the epitome of flavor. To wash it down we sipped sweet, cold water dipped from the lake.

We didn't spend a whole lot of time by the campfire after supper. Both of us were tired and my headache had returned. "Altitude sickness," Albert diagnosed, and I wished for one of man's most marvelous drugs, an aspirin. God, how I wished for one. I'd have to suffer through some way, I told myself, and looked to my bed.

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It wasn't much: a navy blanket in a piece of canvas spread on dry pine needles, foot to the fire. I turned in with most of my clothes on and was snug and comfortable. At first. As the night wore on and the temperature plummeted and dew formed on my tarp and the fire died out, I got downright cold.

The worst of it was just before dawn. I thought of getting up to rekindle the fire, went so far as to peek out at the canopy of stars overhead, but couldn't bring myself to leave the comparative warmth of my cocoon. I hoped that Albert would feel the cold and crawl out to do the job, but he did not.

At least the pain in my head was gone, so I pulled the blanket back over my face, curled up in a tighter ball and actually went back to sleep. At half-light I awakened again, this time to the sound of crackling flames. At last! Albert had turned out and was stoking the fire.

We agreed to forego breakfast until later, when we could sit in the sun and be warm, and went immediately to fishing. The exercise soon warmed our bodies and we caught several trout before old sol broke over the east rim rocks.

I cleaned the fish while Albert made a breakfast of mouthwatering bacon and eggs, then we sat by the fire, relaxed, and tried to come up with a plan to catch the big trout, those that we could see from the cliffs at the deep-water end of the lake.

Albert remembered hearing of a novel method of angling that we might try, and explained it thus:

"You bait a hook with a mouse, or a frog, or something, put it on a piece of shingle or a flat stick and float it on the water. You have to fish from the windward side, where the breeze will blow it on out. You pay out line until it's way out...then jerk the bait off the float and let it sink until the trout takes it."

In theory at least, it was a great plan. The fish, thinking it a natural occurrence (a mouse on a raft a natural occurrence?) would find the mouse to be an irresistible meal and get hooked. I couldn't wait to try it out.

So much for theory. We used everything we could think of and could obtain for bait (frogs, grasshoppers, worms, but no mouse) and various kinds of floats (pieces of reed, sticks, tree bark) but something always went awry. The wind would reverse itself; the float would roll over prematurely, or something. The few times we succeeded in getting the raft out where we wanted it, and got the bait into the water, we came up empty. Liberty Lake trout were obviously too smart for such subterfuge.

We must have spent three hours or more in that futile endeavor, before deciding to try our luck at fishing the next lake, Favre (named for an early Forest Service employee). It was 600' lower and a mile distant. Leaving our camp intact we made it down in about fifteen minutes, and then spent the rest of the day circling the shoreline and angling in earnest.

But the Favre trout were smaller, and we caught even fewer of them than we had in Liberty. So we headed back to the upper lake again, to be on hand for the evening rise.

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Albert was good with a fly rod. He wasn't afraid to wade into the ice-cold water and he caught several nice trout before quitting time. I tried, but the trip to Favre had done me in. My poor old head pounded unmercifully, to the point that I became nauseous and had to lie down. I finally forced down a slice of bread, drank a little water and turned in early.

By morning I was my old self again. I joined Albert for the early rise, our last chance at the trout, ate a hearty breakfast and snapped a picture of Albert kneeling beside our laid-out catch (one day's limit each this time). We surrounded the fish in our creels with snow, packed and shouldered our gear, took a last look around and, reluctantly, headed up the steep trail.

We'd gone but a hundred yards when I paused to photograph the lake, and coincidentally to catch my breath, but something was amiss with my camera. When I tried to advance the film it didn't respond properly. Without stopping to think I opened the camera to see what was wrong, and found that the film was a 20- rather than a 36-exposure roll as I had thought. The sprocket holes were torn, from my cranking effort, and now the film was exposed to sunlight. Damn!

Right then I lost my temper, jerked the film out and cast it to the winds. It was a foolhardy thing to do. I could have opened the camera in the dark at home, and saved most of those great, latent images. Now they were lost forever.

A temper is a costly thing to lose.

We made good progress on the trail over the pass, even dog-trotted at times on the downhill slopes, and got to the road by late afternoon. Tired but happy we climbed into my old Ford and bade farewell to the high mountains; soon, I hoped, to return. It is interesting to note that, except for a shepherd tending his flock on the meadow, Albert and I were the only people in the canyon when we started our trek, and mine was the only car in sight when we returned.

In the months and years to come, with Albert as my "mountain mentor," I would revisit Lamoille, Liberty and Favre, and journey to several other alpine lakes; including Castle, Island, Soldier, Echo and Robinson in the Ruby Range, Steel and Angel in the East Humboldt Range. A trip to that last one, Angel Lake, was no challenge at all. The CCC boys had built a road all the way to its rim.

We made two sojourns to Echo Lake, both memorable but for different reasons. In the first instance we went in from the north, over the mountain from the Boy Scout Camp in Lamoille Canyon. The second time we approached it from the west, from a point near the little town of Lee, near the South Fork of the Humboldt River. Due to its remote location we decided, both times, to make the trek in one day, thus eliminating the need for back packs.

As the eagle flies, the distance from the Scout Camp to Echo Lake is about four miles. For us it would be much farther: a zigzag climb from the camp, at the 7,100' elevation, to a mountain crest at over 10,500' followed by a 600' descent to the lake. We estimated it would take four hours to make the in-bound trip, fewer to return. It would be tough going but the rewards, Albert assured me, would be well worth

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the effort. Echo was purported to have the biggest trout of all the high lakes in northeastern Nevada.

In order to be on the trail by first light, we left town in the pitch black wee hours, and the headlights were still necessary when I parked the Ford at the bend in the road across the creek from the flume-tender's cabin.

Pete's Cabin, as it was referred to, was actually a tiny frame house that fit neatly into a niche of the alpine environment. It was located near the head-gate of the power company flume, where the canyon narrows and the creek cascades over a natural rim, and where it was literally dwarfed by an enormous, ice-age monolith that stood guard beside it.

Old Pete Arcimes once lived there the year round. It was his job to keep the gate clear of sand and debris in the summer, and to remove ice blockages in the winter. To pass the time he carved utensils (forks, spoons etc.) from the wood of the mountain mahogany, a tree that grows in plentiful supply in the canyon, and doled them out to admiring friends and relatives. I never met Pete, who retired about the time I came to Nevada, but whenever I saw that cabin I wished it were mine.

(Pete's Cabin, abandoned and left unattended, fell into disrepair. It was removed in the early 1970s, along with the flume and power plant it served, by the Forest Service, in compliance with rules resulting from environmentalist pressures in the 1960s, without due regard for historic value.)

Wearing jackets against the cold, packing a meager supply of food in our creels, with our fishing rods in hand, Albert and I crossed the narrow bridge to the cabin and struck out on a faint trail. It was difficult to follow in the dark, but led up the glacial valley south of the Boy Scout Camp. Our pants and boots were soon soaked from the heavy morning dew, and my fingers grew numb from grasping at handholds.

After a while the trail got better and we put a lot of ground behind us in a short time before veering from the water course to scale the steep mountainside that lay in the direction, according to our dead-reckoning instincts, of Echo Lake. Now there was no vestige of a trail, just a pick-and-choose course over rocks and ledges through buck-brush and bunch grass and loose dirt. It was slow going, but I was in better shape than I'd been on that first trip over Liberty Pass. I even took the lead from time to time.

It was during a pause, while leaning back on an up-thrust of basalt, that I first saw a strange looking gray mass against the faraway canyon bottom. It looked somehow unnatural, different from its surroundings, and I could swear that it moved. Imperceptibly, perhaps, but it moved. Puzzled, I ventured, "What the devil's that down there?"

Albert let out an abbreviated chuckle. "Ha," he said, "It's a band of sheep."

I stared in disbelief - having never before seen sheep from this distance or angle - at the undulating bulk of tan-white bodies against the brown earth. More than anything they resembled maggots as they would appear to a six-foot man standing nearly over them.

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Using both hands and feet we climbed a giant slide whose rocks moved disconcertingly beneath my feet. Near the top of the talus I slid my butt onto a flat rock for a rest, and pulled a handkerchief from my pocket to dry my sweaty brow. Hearing the unmistakable ring of silver, I glanced down in time to see a dollar, mine, cart-wheeling from boulder to boulder "cling-ing-ing-ing" down the mountainside until it disappeared.

Albert chuckled again. "If you're going back for that dollar I'll wait for you right here," he said.

Even if there were a chance of finding it I wouldn't have expended the energy. Not for a dollar. I left it there in the rock slide at the 10,000' level, an obscure monument to man's presence. I did wonder, though, if somebody might come across it one day (the odds must be a million-to-one against it) and question how it got to be in that particular place. He might postulate forever and never arrive at the truth.

Albert studied the ridge above, then volunteered, "Should be right on the other side." (Referring to Echo Lake). I climbed with renewed vigor, anxious to look down on our goal, and reached the crest right behind him.

The ridge, I was surprised to learn, was exactly as it appeared from the far-off valley floor; that is, it was indeed knife edged. Because of the wind I didn't dare to stand upright on it, but threw a leg over as one would straddle a stone fence, to sit and enjoy the view.

With Albert's binoculars I could make out buildings in Elko, twenty-five miles away to the northwest. I needed no optics to get a good look at windswept Ruby Dome, in the dust free atmosphere less than a mile away. How I longed to stand on that peak, the highest point in the range and 11,349' above-sea-level. Perhaps someday I would do just that.

Below, almost straight down, lay Echo Lake. Or was it? It seemed awfully small and a long way down from our present position. A thousand feet at least. It didn't take long to realize the truth; it was not Echo Lake at all. It was not much more than a pond in size and its out-flowing creek ran in the wrong direction, northwest instead of southwest.

Albert allowed that it must be Seitz Lake, a shallow tarn at the head of Seitz Creek, one not always marked on the maps. We were too far north. Now what?

A peremptory scan of the ridge to the south revealed no easy passage. The only possible way appeared between two peaks at the top of a steep cliff of rock several hundred yards away. I had already learned that, in the mountains, once you gained height you tried to maintain it to conserve energy. But to traverse the ridge we were on, at elevation, would require mountain climbing paraphernalia. So it was certain that we must angle downward, then head back up and hope for a revelation. But what if we were stymied after all? The sun was already three hours old; we might spend the rest of the day climbing and end up with a glimpse of Echo Lake and no more.

With an exchange of shrugs we slid off the ridge and started down, picking our way carefully over the slide to avoid falling. We'd

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gone no more than a hundred yards when Albert stopped suddenly and motioned to our right below, toward an outcropped shelf that supported a grove of mahogany trees. There, much to my amazement stood a herd of mule deer. They were moving out of concealment, fifteen of them at least, maybe more. But the astonishing fact, to me, was that they were all buck deer, every one a four-pointer or better.

I had never seen such a fraternity. At least half of them wore trophy-size antlers. The least buck among them was as big as the one I shot above Currant Creek. Then, miraculously, as if guided by an unseen hand for our benefit, they climbed slowly toward the possible pass we had spotted earlier. Finding footholds invisible from our vantage point, they climbed like mountain goats and finally walked single file, like dairy cows at a gate, through a narrow opening at the top.

Albert and I looked at one another knowingly. They had shown us the way! Where they could go, we could go.

It wasn't easy getting there, even following the route of the deer. In places, to free our hands for climbing, we had to pass the gear between us. And more than once Albert had to boost his faithful dog - a big black-and-white spaniel - onto ledges too high for the willing canine to reach. But within an hour the two of us stood at the summit, in the same gateway through which the bucks had passed, and looked down at last on azure-blue Echo Lake. A half-hour later we began filling our creels with lively trout.

Except for its small population of animals, the lake basin was ours alone and we fished in quiet contentment. Albert's dog found amusement in chasing marmots and chipmunks, but in his eagerness he fell from a boulder and hurt his leg, causing Albert to worry that we might have to carry him over the pass on the return trip. He was lame, but okay by the time we were ready to go.

It had taken four-and-a-half hours to reach our destination that morning, and would take at least three-and-a-half to return. So we left the lake in the late afternoon, as usual just when the fishing was at its best. The way was now familiar to us and our estimate of travel time was about right, but we miscalculated the hour of complete darkness. The cabin was a mere silhouette among the rocks when we came near to it, and when we crossed the narrow footbridge to the car, the rushing creek could be heard but not seen at all.

I was tired. Never in my life had I expended so much effort in one day. Eight hours of climbing and another eight of fishing, at high altitude, had almost done me in. Furthermore, I was sore from having barked a shin bone. But I had some wonderful memories to live with, memories of a unique alpine lake that echoed not just earthly sounds but the power of God as well. It is true, I mused, that the best things in life are free. Or nearly so. They might cost a little in effort but not a whole lot of money.

Our second journey to Echo Lake was not a carbon copy of the first. It was, however, equally adventurous, and the tale bears relating. This time, instead of taking the high route over the mountain from Pete's Cabin, we would hike in from the west, from a ranch road that terminated at the base of the mountain by Welch Creek,

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the stream that emanates from the lake. At five miles, this trail was actually longer than that from the Scout Camp, but because it paralleled the creek much of the way it would be a more gradual climb. Our estimated time for a round trip was about the same.

Albert and I arrived at the National Forest fence-line at dawn. (I marvel at my apparent ambition for early risings.) We quickly got under way, keeping to the north sidehill at first in order to clear a box canyon that Albert was aware of. It was a good plan, for we found a fine cattle trail and there was no high brush to contend with. Within a mile we intersected the main creek, well above the waterfall, and a path of hoof-printed soft dirt that led upstream through the quakies.

It was a typical summer day, with blue sky, calm and sunshine, cool and crisp air. Just right for hiking. When we got thirsty we drank from the stream, like a creature on all fours sucking-up the stuff in a sort of refueling operation.

The last half-mile reminded me of Mount Monadnock: eroded granite ledges and nutrient-filled crevices where twisted, gnarled, lightning scarred trees found life.

Compared to the north-south route, this one was easy. Even so it took us five hours of fast hiking to reach the threshold of the lake; which I found no less magnificent than before, reposed and reflective in its cirque. From this perspective it was easy to see why the lake had acquired its name. It was virtually surrounded by near-vertical walls that formed a natural amphitheater.

"Hallo-o-o-o!" I shouted, and waited over two seconds before receiving the first reply. A rock, dislodged by a careless deer across the way, sounded like the crack of thunder.

Albert and I quickly rigged for fishing, and spent the morning casting for wary trout. When the sun reached its zenith we lunched atop a house-sized boulder at the water's edge, observed a short siesta, then fished some more. But our success rate was poor. By five o'clock in the afternoon we had caught but two or three trout apiece.

We held a discussion, to decide when we must leave the lake in order to reach the car before dark, which should occur between 8:30 and 9:00pm. Ever the optimists, we figured that by dog-trotting the first mile we could make the total distance in three hours. Thus we could fish for another hour when the shadows would grow long and the trout should begin feeding.

Sure as shootin' they rose to the occasion, and by six o'clock we were having the time of our lives. What self-respecting fisherman would quit at such a time? Certainly not me. Neither of us could bring ourselves to say the words "Let's go!" Till finally, reluctantly, at six-thirty we hurriedly cleaned our fish, packed them with wet grass in our creels, and made ready for the long trip down.

I stood for a moment at the shoreline, anchoring a shadow that extended far out onto the surface of the lake. Unable to resist the temptation I cupped my hands to my mouth and shouted, "Adio-o-os." Albert and I then turned toward the trail.

"Adio-o-os," my farewell was returned. Echo Lake always has the last word.

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As planned, we loped on down the trail at an easy gait, slowing only to cross over ledges, tree-roots, and the creek, and maintained that pace for at least an hour. But the sun was winning the race. The going got rougher lower down, where bare ledges gave way to trees and brush, and we were forced to slow to a fast walk.

I suppose we were but halfway to the car when the sun dropped like a rock behind Grindstone Mountain, and I thought, "We aren't going to make it." We were only three-quarters of the way down when twilight gave way to starlight.

Previously, not long after sunset, when Albert and I stopped for a breather near a grove of mahoganies, we seriously considered bivouacking for the night in the protection of a rock outcropping. There was no sign of a storm; it was not uncommonly cold; and there was a plentiful supply of good wood for a fire. Nor was there a question, in either of our minds, that it was the logical thing to do in the circumstance. But at the same time we knew that both Jeanne and Rita would worry if we failed to show up at a reasonable hour, and without knowing we were safe they would likely instigate some kind of a search. For those two reasons (Jeanne and Rita) and for those reasons alone we kept going even though it was foolish to do so.

As we neared the top of the box canyon, forewarned by the roaring falls, we left the creek side for the sidehill, searching, as best we could in the darkness, for a semblance of a path through the brush. Sometimes I'd light a match and look for an opening, but the darkness was matchless.

At last we stumbled into a dry irrigation ditch and congratulated ourselves on our good fortune. All we had to do was walk along its bottom to the fields below. At Albert's suggestion, I took the creels and rods and climbed up on his shoulders, to act as pilot. But within a few yards we encountered thickets of wild rosebushes and impenetrable willows that had overgrown the ditch. The branches struck me full in the face, knocking both me and Albert down in a heap. So we abandoned that mode of travel.

If only there was a moon, even a sliver of one. But there was only starlight. Of course starlight was better than none, better than the dark of a cloudy sky, but it was not enough. Our only visible reference was the dim outline of the canyon rims; the ridge across the creek and the one above us on our right. In other words, except for the occasional glow of a far-off car's headlights, we could see nothing but stars.

"This is ridiculous," I complained. "There's gotta be a better way."

There was not, and we somehow managed to keep going.

For more than an hour, perhaps two (I lost track of the time and couldn't read my watch without expending valuable matches), we stumbled along in this game of blind man's bluff: arms extended to the front and sides, grasping at rocks, often sharp-edged, and bushes, usually thorny, to keep from falling. Sometimes, when my fingers closed over a thorn or loosed a stone, I'd utter a mild epithet. Albert hardly spoke. (To my knowledge he never succumbed to the banal pleasure of swearing.)

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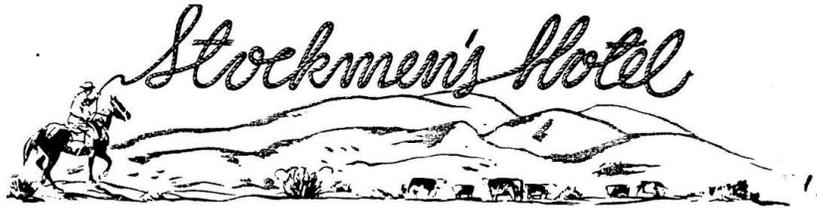
At long last we bumped into a bob-wire fence. Literally! Using the wires as a guide, an act that resulted in more blood-letting, we followed it downhill to a gate where, by some miracle, my Ford was parked. Right where we'd left it.

It was half-past ten. We had made the trip in four hours, in spite of that last torturous stretch. But not without a price, grudgingly paid in torn clothing, barked shins and a certain amount of skin and blood from our hands and wrists.

The girls, when we finally got to Elko, were indeed worried. And angry, as always when we arrived home late. Even so they fed us and dressed our minor wounds with care.

In the final analysis, we were fortunate to have made the canyon descent without breaking an arm or a leg. It was also fortuitous, with due credit to Albert's sense of direction, that we did not wind up at the wrong fence line and a different field from that where we'd left the car.

From this, my second and regrettably last venture to Echo Lake, I learned yet another valuable lesson: "Never go for a hike in the high mountains without a flashlight."



Stockmen's Hotel

ON HIGHWAY 40 * ELKO, NEVADA

Demand Note

I, George A. Phelps, promise to pay on demand, sum of Nine-hundred Dollars (\$900.⁰⁰/_{xx}) to Ruth R. Phelps, or Phyllis W. Marston, with interest at four (4) per-cent. Payable Quarterly.

George A. Phelps

May 28, 1949

Paid on note \$180.⁰⁰ leaving balance of \$230.⁰⁰

Ruth R. Phelps
George A. Phelps

Paid in full \$230.⁰⁰/_{xx}

Done & so be it with all of your bills, R.R.P.

June 20, 1950

(Interest waived)

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE
ESCAPADES - PHILOSOPHIES

My friend Albert dutifully followed the precepts of his religion. Perhaps that accounted for his apparent good luck, for he sometimes took what appeared to be undue risks yet seldom suffered serious consequences. An example of his good fortune occurred when on a fishing excursion, with me, in Rattlesnake Canyon in the Ruby Mountains above Jiggs.

After hiking a couple of miles into the steep narrow canyon, testing the creek from time to time along the way, we concluded that the early season runoff had rendered the water too swift and muddy for good fishing. So we elected to go mountain climbing instead.

We cached our gear and, unencumbered, followed a whitewater cataract toward its source in the cliffs above. With the objective of reaching a castellated rock formation that loomed tantalizingly, we gained a high bench, angled off on a zig-zag course through rock-clinging pines and brush, and skirted to the left of a north-facing ice field. The largest boulders were mostly exposed, a definite aid to our progress, but there were numerous patches of snow across our path.

A thousand feet above the canyon floor, we came to the base of a precipice that necessitated our traversing the upper part of the main ice field (the one we'd been skirting) to reach an opposite dry ledge and the mountain's spine above.

Characteristically, Albert led the way, kicking a foothold with the side of his boot at every step. I followed, about ten feet behind, carefully jamming my own boots into his footprints.

The slope of the ice field held an angle of forty-five degrees or more, and had obviously spawned several avalanches during the recent winter season. Its surface, already loosened to a depth of two or three inches by the morning sun, was grainy but relatively firm and we made good headway.

Suddenly I heard a loud grunt, and instinctively stopped in my tracks; in time to see the ice give way beneath Albert's feet as he twisted and turned in an effort to gain a new toe hold. He spun around, lost his balance, and began to slide head first down the snow-packed mountainside.

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The next few moments in time stood still as I watched and tried to anticipate the outcome of this movie-like scenario. A couple of possibilities came to mind: One, that he might slide down the middle of the ice field all the way to the rocks and trees some 200-yards below, in which case his chance of survival was slim; two, he might collide with one of the jagged rocks sticking up through the snow, in which case he'd be terribly injured. In either case, God forbid, he could be killed.

With arms outstretched and toes dragging in an attempt to brake his rapidly increasing speed, down...down...down he slid. Still I had sufficient time to ponder how I should pack his battered body off the mountain.

The farther he went, the more likely it seemed that he might miss the rocks and go all the way to the bottom; although it was unclear to me which event might be the least harmful. And then he struck the very edge of the farthest boulder, somersaulted high in the air and landed feet first, his legs jammed into the hard snow up to his knees.

"You okay?" I hollered.

But he was out of breath and probably unable to hear because of the snow in his ears. As quickly and as safely as possible, I retraced my steps to bare ground and descended to the site of the accident, still worried, still thinking of dire possibilities.

Albert stood where he had landed, below the rocks, calmly but methodically emptying snow by the hands-full from inside his coveralls. He could hardly move his right arm, he said, and was bruised all the way from right shoulder to hip. I could see that his face and hands were bruised as well.

Every button had been stripped from his coveralls, and one pants-leg was torn up to his thigh. Everything that he'd had in his pockets, coins, comb, pocket knife and so on, were lost to the environment.

Albert was really wet and cold. His teeth were chattering and he shivered uncontrollably. He was obviously in shock, but by some miracle he had no broken bones.

Not without some difficulty, we managed to extricate his legs from the ice and get him back to the warm dry rocks. He rested and we talked about what had happened, about what could have happened. After a reasonable time he tested his legs, found them to be weak but serviceable, and we started down the mountain.

Our descent from the ice field was extremely slow and arduous, but Albert never complained. We had plenty of time though - the day was still young - and we stopped often to rest or for a drink of cool water on our way to the main creek. There we retrieved our fishing tackle and creels from the shallow cave where we had cached them, and walked out of the canyon to the car.

It was another adventure successfully, thankfully, concluded.

Come to think of it, something unusual happened almost every time I went out with Albert. One time, after hiking in to Robinson Lake, we witnessed the near drowning of a saddle horse.

We were having exceptionally good luck fly-fishing. The trout were hungry and hit at every kind of lure, wet or dry, cast their way. They even took a cigarette butt that I'd found and tied to a hook.

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It was almost noon when a pair of ranch kids, whom I judged to be around ten years of age, came up from the Clover Valley side of the mountain on horseback. They were equipped with rods and tackle, and commenced fishing from the opposite shore. One of them, to increase his advantage, rode the horse out into the water; too far, as it turned out, and both horse and rider went under.

The boy, obviously a good swimmer, made his way to a rock and pulled himself up, shivering and gasping for breath. The horse, meanwhile, panicked and made a terrible commotion, snorting and thrashing about in the icy water while we all watched helplessly, unable to think of anything to do for him. He kept up the struggle for several long minutes but eventually tired and sank slowly in the water until it appeared certain that he must drown.

I felt a great sympathy for the poor beast, who now drifted silently in the calm water with only his eyes and nostrils showing, like an alligator's, above the surface. I wanted to turn away from the sight but could not. My eyes remained transfixed on the helpless creature.

After a very long time the horse, having apparently drifted to a point where his feet touched bottom, suddenly moved toward the shore and walked out onto dry land where he stood and shook water from his back like a dog.

The unfortunate lad, after a period of rest on the rock, waded ashore, stripped down to the buff and dried himself and his clothes by a roaring fire. He was more than a little mad about the loss of his well-equipped tackle box, but shrugged off the dunking as just a part of growing up.

One time my own partner fell into icy water. Albert and I were fishing at Island Lake (so named for the mammoth boulder protruding above its surface a short distance from the south shore), a small lake on a bench above Lamoille Canyon. At that time, fairly early in the season, an ice field extended quite a ways into the lake and provided a nice platform from which to cast our lines into deep water. I was afraid I might slip, and carefully avoided walking too close to the edge, but Albert was less constrained.

He may have been planning to jump to the island, which lay just beyond the ice edge, or he may have just happened to be in its vicinity. Either way he ventured too close to the open water. I heard a splash, and turned in time to see his head disappear under the surface between the ice field and the rock. A big segment of ice bobbed in his wake, and then he popped up like a cork, reached for the rock-island, and clung to the side of it while straining to regain the breath that had been taken away by the cold.

For a long while I thought he wasn't going to make it. But he finally recovered enough to climb to the top, where he shed most of his clothes and lay them out to dry while he recuperated in the warm sunshine. Of course there was still the problem of his getting back to shore.

A half-hour later, when I had a roaring fire going, he tossed his bundle of clothes over the ten-foot-wide open channel, filled his lungs with air, plunged in and swam the distance in record breaking

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time. I extended a pine branch to him at the ice-edge, and with our combined efforts he emerged from the death dealing frigid water.

Young people have amazing powers of rejuvenation. At least Albert did. Within the hour Albert was warmed, dressed, rested, and enthusiastically casting for wily trout. This time, well back from the icy shoreline.

Albert and I pooled our money and bought a one-man rubber raft, to use on the mountain lakes. With it we could get out to deeper water and catch bigger fish. It was a rather unusual investment for me, considering the fact that I didn't like being in the water and couldn't swim. If the raft should ever capsize with me I would surely drown. But I put aside such fears and took my turn in the vessel, and enjoyed the experience immensely. It was a real thrill to drift quietly on a blue-water lake, or be towed across its surface by a lively trout on the end of my line.

About the size of an old-fashioned tin bathtub, and equally heavy, the bright orange raft was carried (deflated) like a back pack (usually by Albert) and inflated at lakeside (by lung power). It was not the most comfortable craft in the world. You sat in the big end and extended your legs to the small end, and that was it. Once aboard there was no moving around. Your butt, separated from the frigid water by only a thin rubberized canvas, was always cold. And you were nearly defenseless against the un-attenuated sun's rays, both direct and reflected off the water. I invariably got sunburned, particularly the backs of my hands, wrists and ankles, the latter between my socks and pants-cuffs.

Ah, those were the days.

I had lived almost two years in Nevada, had done a lot of hunting and shooting, but still didn't have a gun to call my own. It was an ill-advised hunting trip that convinced me it was time to buy one, one with which I could become totally familiar.

The hunt included Ted and Bob, and either Dan or John Taelour. They furnished the "artillery," I supplied the transportation. It was a comedy of errors from start to finish, and only Dame Fortune prevented one or another of us from being injured.

The first in the series of incidents occurred while we were still on the open highway near Halleck, when Ted, who was sitting in the back seat, began to load a twenty-two rifle. I initially heard the sound of the rifle-bolt clicking in its breech. Soon Ted asked to borrow a pocket knife. Someone obliged, and I caught the sound of metal-on-metal as he tried to extricate a misaligned cartridge.

"WHAM!" the report was deafening as Ted's rifle "accidentally" discharged and sent a bullet through the roof of my Ford.

That was number one.

A few miles north of Deeth, on the Mary's River road, Ted suggested that our shotguns should be loaded so as to be ready when we got to cottontail country. Without hesitation I pulled off the road and stopped, and insisted that that job be carried on outside the car. I didn't want another hole, especially a shotgun-sized hole, in my roof.

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We got out and loaded up, then Ted decided to test fire his gun at a can on a nearby fence post. Which he did. Only the shot dribbled from the muzzle and never reached the target. An investigation revealed that he'd fired a sixteen-gage shell in a twelve-gage shotgun. Luckily, it had neither jammed nor exploded in his face.

That was number two.

Farther up the road we came to a place to hunt, a field of sage and rabbit-brush interspersed with large clumps of willows. Ideal habitat for cottontails. I armed myself with an old single-barrel, single-shot shotgun that Ted had loaned me, and followed the others through the roadside fence. We spread out along a line, and very shortly I was presented with a target: a white-tailed bunny heading for cover. I had not used a scattergun enough to handle it instinctively, but I raised the thing in time to take rough aim and squeeze the trigger.

What happened next was right out of a Laurel and Hardy movie. At once the gun fired; the breech opened and ejected the empty shell-casing over my shoulder; the shot found its mark and killed the rabbit. Additionally, much to my surprise, I found myself holding the gun barrel in my left hand, the breech-and-stock in my right. The firearm had come neatly apart.

"Y'get him?" Ted shouted.

"Yeah," I responded, not a little disturbed. "But you forgot to tell me this is an automatic."

Big joke! Ted laughed uncontrollably while belatedly explaining that the gun was a little worn and that when you fired it you should hold it together.

That was number three.

I picked up what was left of the rabbit, and was pondering whether or not to quit hunting right then and there when I heard Bob announce, "Hey, there's a rider comin'."

Sure enough. A big cowboy on a big horse rode up from the direction of the river. "What'n hell you think you're doin'?" he asked in lieu of a greeting.

"Huntin' rabbits," Ted replied, a bit quizzically.

It was Bill Wright himself, though if he recognized any of the Taelours he gave no indication of it. Nor, apparently, did he remember giving them a blanket invitation to hunt on his land any time they wanted to, as Bobby had previously asserted.

"Can't y'see those cows?" He pointed toward the river where a couple-of-dozen Herefords were moving rapidly away, startled, no doubt, by the sound of my shot. It was a rhetorical question. He expected no answer and didn't wait for one.

"Just git off the property!" he snapped, and, without further ado, turned his horse and rode off.

Bill Wright's last words, pronounced in a well-modulated voice with an overtone of disgust and an air of finality, would stick in my memory forever.

That was number four.

Sheepishly, we unloaded our firearms and returned to the car. No one spoke till we were well down the road, when Bob started to grumble about what a mean bastard Bill turned out to be. His remarks were

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totally different from an earlier assessment of the prominent rancher, whom he had depicted as a close friend. It was yet another example of Bob's propensity to exaggerate.

The episode was not ended until a few days later, when I took my Ford out to the parking lot by the CAA building at the airport where Ted, with a borrowed iron and solder, helped me plug the bullet hole in the roof.

When it was over and done with, I thanked Ted for the use of his shotgun and promised to never borrow it again. Furthermore, I resolved to save enough money to buy a gun or two of my own. Reliable ones.

Many of my fellow acquaintances in Elko were known to imbibe. (Albert was a notable exception.) Most of them could "hold their likker," a knack that I would never achieve. Having been brought up in a town where liquor was difficult to obtain probably had a lot to do with it. A taste for alcohol is an acquired one; you don't just "like it" when you take your first drink. I am certain that if young people could abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages before reaching the age of adulthood, they'd stand a better-than-even chance of never becoming addicted.

Sadly, like too many other people, I submitted to social pressures and drank to be companionable. And for that reason alone. In truth, I could live just as well if there were not a drop of liquor in the whole wide world (as I have often proclaimed).

Now the use of tobacco is another thing entirely. Except for the period of my enlistment in the Navy, I smoked the Native American weed (mostly in a pipe) since the age of fourteen. But even smoking tobacco must be used with care and moderation, for the pleasure derived from its taste and aroma and never inhaled.

You see how easily I have condemned the practicing of one vice while condoning another? Such is the power of the mind to rationalize. But, I hasten to add, I have personally known no one who was killed, maimed or incapacitated as the result of another's smoking. I have known of people so affected as the result of another's imbibing. And the number of people who have died as a direct result of smoking is small compared to the number killed (directly and indirectly) as a result of drinking.

Having disposed of my views on drinking and smoking, how about another of man's temptations? Girls. From an early age I was keenly aware of the beauty and sensitivity (in general) of the female of our species. Then I learned that, throughout history, women have had a profound and equal share in the forwarding of society and the shaping of world events; usually from behind the scenes, but often from positions of prominence and authority. Alas, in recent years a lot of women have chosen to reject their engendered female attributes - qualities that contribute so much to their attractiveness and real importance - in favor of masculine ways and means.

As for the romantic notion that "you're the only woman for me" (and vice versa) I disagree. Granted, the number of compatible couples in the world is relatively small - considering racial, ethnic, religious, environmental and other factors - but any one of a given

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number of men could be married to any one of an equal number of women and live in harmony.

To insure a successful marriage, perhaps the most important criteria are commonality (class, values, background and so on), personality and character (fairness, honesty, courtesy, sense of humor), and the ability to compromise. The ability to compromise may well be the most important attribute of all.

Young people, lacking experience and shunning the advice of their elders, tend to succumb to the powerful forces of emotion at the expense of rational judgment. To them, idealism is paramount to practicality; dreams larger than reality. I'm sure it has been that way since the dawn of humanity.

Could I avoid those normal tendencies? Could I, after a romantic encounter in the moonlight, resist the temptation to propose marriage? I invariably came to the same conclusion: I was too young for such a commitment. I would wait, difficult though it might be, until I reached the age of majority.

There it was again! Everything of worldly substance must be put off until I reached that significant milestone.

Doris and I continued to communicate, by letter, throughout the years 1948 and 1949. However, contrary to the ancient adage that "absence makes the heart grow fonder," I found that time and distance effectively cooled my ardor. New girl friends, girls near at hand who could be wooed, held, and kissed, clouded the memory of my passion for her.

My conscience troubled me but there seemed to be nothing that I could do about it. I suppose the die was cast way back in Northfield, when I decided to go west and parted with Doris. Perhaps I should have known that it was good-bye and not farewell. Possibly, just possibly, there were forces at work unknown to both of us.

Though I had become acquainted with several young ladies in Elko, I spent more time with Rita than I had with any of the others. And before long we were sort of going steady.

My acquaintance with her siblings partially accounted for that. I was a frequent "guest" at Katy's get-togethers and parties, and since Stan and Jim included me in many of their hunting and fishing plans, I was often in and out of the Zunino home. I got to know the mother and father, Antoinette and Sam, and developed a fond admiration for both of them.

The Zunino family was a big one. With ten children almost as big as our Phelps clan. I was invited to dinner on holidays and birthdays, when most of Rita's brothers and sisters, their spouses and kids were present, and more often than not one or more outsiders. Pop and Mom (as I came to call them) always sat at the head of the long table, and beamed with well deserved pride. And they made me feel at home.

Most similarity between the Phelps and Zunino families ended there, for the Zunino tribe took a bit of getting used to, especially for me who hailed from a staid, protestant, Yankee locale. Not only were the Zuninos of the Catholic faith, but their habits and customs (a mix of Old Italian and modern American West) differed considerably from those with which I was raised.

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The family characteristic that I found hardest to get used to, though, was the practice of shouting and arguing with one another. I suppose it was a generic Italian trait but that sort of behavior would have been unacceptable back home. And yet, as I would learn, despite all of the verbiage they were good hearted and very generous people.

By way of celebrating the completion of my first year with the Bell System, in December of 1949 - having earned a one week paid vacation - I decided to make a solo tour of Northern Nevada. I put a few things into my old brown suitcase and headed west on sometimes icy US-40. I went through the "cities" of Battle Mountain, Winnemucca and Lovelock to Reno, stopping only once, in Winnemucca, for gas and food.

On entering Reno, then with a population of maybe 30,000, I was greeted by a proliferation of glaring neon signs and an iron arch (erected in the year I was born) that proclaimed:

RENO THE BIGGEST LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD

Tired and weary, I made a quick tour of the main streets, observed two relatively new big hotels, the Mapes and the El Cortez, a couple of older-but-sizeable ones, the Riverside and the Golden, and a number of medium-sized establishments where one could put up for the night. I bypassed all of them in favor of one that I might afford, the tiny Windsor Hotel that I found just off West Second Street, a block east of the El Cortez.

I arose early the next morning, and walked to a nearby restaurant, The Wigwam, for breakfast. It featured hotcakes with a variety of syrups. My kind of food. Once my appetite was satiated, I acted the part of a tourist and traipsed in and out of the casinos lining Virginia, Commercial and Center Streets.

First was Harold's Club, close by the arch on Virginia Street. Harold's Club was established in 1935 by the Smiths (Raymond I. and Harold of New England) who had pioneered modern gambling in Nevada. It was much larger and boasted a higher degree of glamour, if that could be said of a gambling joint, than any I had yet seen. A new, illuminated Western mural dominated the outside front of the building. Inside, on the first floor, poker-faced people milled around and patronized hundreds of slot machines and dozens of gaming tables. I was more interested in an extensive collection of wagons, guns, Indian artifacts and vintage slot machines located on the second floor, and a waterfall behind the bar that flowed (it was claimed) with real whiskey.

A couple of doors to the south was Harrah's Club. It was much smaller but nicer than Harold's. There, noisy slot machines were separated from the table games. The latter room was richly decorated with plush carpets, drapery and soft lights, and the tables were presided over by well dressed croupiers. William Harrah, a tall, thin, studious appearing man (who was pointed out to me by a native of Reno) had added a touch of class to the business of gaming.

(From that austere beginning, as most everyone knows who has heard of Reno and Lake Tahoe, Harrah built a gaming-restaurant-hotel enterprise that rivaled any in the state. As an avocation, he acquired

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and opened to the public the largest automobile collection in the world. After his death, in 1978, the corporation was sold to the Holiday Hotel chain. Most of his auto collection was auctioned off. The remainder became the nucleus for an automobile museum in downtown Reno.)

I made the rounds, frittered away some nickels and dimes to the slot machines, a few silver cartwheels to the roulette and crap tables, then wisely invested a couple of bucks in a movie before packing it in for the night.

In the morning, even though the streets, clubs and restaurants were not the least bit crowded (it was the slow time of year for gamblers), I concluded that the "biggest little city" was a "little too big" for me. I was anxious to get out of town.

Anyway, a storm was approaching. Low clouds were already pouring down the canyon from the west, and a sheet of high stratus covered the sky in the east. I buttoned my pea coat against a gusty south wind, and made my way to the Wigwam for breakfast.

With a full belly, a full gas tank, and no cares in the world, I set out for Carson City, the smallest capital city of all the forty-eight. But instead of getting ahead of the storm I was heading into the worst of it, and received a terrible buffeting from strong winds in the valley south of Reno. Then it started to rain, so I elected to forego touring the city of Carson and turned to the east instead, east on US-50.

Unlike US-40 - the route chosen by early wagon masters for its relatively level grade - this one crossed Nevada's north-to-south ranging mountains like a writhing serpent, twisting and turning over seven major ranges between Carson City and Ely.

It was, however, the route of the short-lived Pony Express, the Overland Stage, and the first telegraph line to California. I would see no sign of those historic endeavors (or seeing, would not recognize them), only the unique basin-and-range terrain of Central Nevada, changing from sand to sage to juniper to pine on the up-slopes, reversing in order on the down-slopes.

After passing through Fallen - a sprawling agricultural community in the middle of a huge, flat valley at the terminus of the Carson River - I was engulfed by a colossal pillow of dust rolling across the alkali plain. It was the biggest such storm I had ever witnessed. Blown by the sand-laden wind, my Ford rocked from side to side and I had trouble seeing the roadway; which, luckily, was straight and empty of traffic. For twenty miles or more I fought it, even considered turning around, but I couldn't bear the thought of giving in to the weather.

So intent was I on my driving I almost missed seeing a mountain of sand off to my left. When I did catch a glimpse of it I paused for a better look. What a sight! It was phenomenal. A natural mountain of sand whose flowing contours were even then being reshaped by the swirling winds.

I would learn that the giant dune is one of only three or four in the world that, as a result of its unique composition, emits a droning sound when disturbed - such as by the wind or footsteps. It is a sound

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not unlike that of a flight of B-17s. (The Indians called it "The Singing Mountain.")

In unison the storm and I moved eastward. The blowing dust grew muddy with moisture, then the mud finally gave way to clean rainwater. Along the way, separated by miles of uninterrupted scenery, were several oases of human occupation: Frenchman Station, in the middle of an alkali flat (and coincidentally a Navy bombing range); Middlegate, at a highway junction; Eastgate, near the mouth of a canyon (where I stopped for a cup of hot coffee); Carroll's, a way station on the east side of the summit of the same name. Each site consisted of a cluster of rundown buildings, a bar and cafe, gas pumps and a garage, sometimes an overnight cabin or two. Each one displayed a pack of wrecked and tired cars and trucks, and piles of rusty and broken machinery.

The rain eased and the clouds diminished. Damp, gray-green sagebrush reflected the light in silvery contrast to the black-and-brown earth beneath. It was a sculpted carpet laid out on the valley floor, broken only by the long, straight seam of pavement stretching to near infinity. Somewhere in the middle of this valley, I noted a sign alongside the road that signified the presence of the Reese River. I did not see any sign of the river.

Some distance beyond, my road took a turn and wound upward into a narrow canyon, and there I found the city of Austin. At this time of year it could well have been blanketed with snow (it was 6,600' above-sea-level) and I was lucky to arrive when everything was merely wet.

I stopped at the first gas station on the right (the fuel gage had registered "E" for a half-dozen worrisome miles), had the tank filled, then proceeded to the first eatery in sight; a restaurant in the old International Hotel on the left. I stepped up to the entry way, wiped the mud from my shoes on a corrugated iron mat, pushed open the sagging door, which scraped on a battered linoleum floor, and walked into a spacious high-ceilinged restaurant. Two grizzled miners were seated at one of the oilcloth-covered tables. At my noisy entrance they looked up, gave me the once-over and went back to talking and eating.

Except for them, and the cook/waitress/cashier who served up a grilled cheese sandwich and some of the best French fries I'd ever eaten, there was no one in the place. From my stool in front of the U-shaped counter at the rear of the room I observed an assortment of framed photos (of early mines and miners), prints and paintings (of landscapes and nudes), and five or six dusty deer-head trophies on the walls. This must be the real West.

I finished eating, got back in my Ford and toured the city. There was hardly a level street to be found. Even the main thoroughfare (US-50) had to be negotiated in low gear. A row of ragged, wood-frame and brick buildings lined each side of this street, ascending the canyon like stair steps, each with its roofed-over boardwalk in front. They housed the bars, eateries, stores and other businesses necessary to man's existence.

The side streets, all of them narrow and unpaved, led to several dozen modest homes, cabins and shacks perched on the canyon sides. On my way out of town, I noted a second gas station, a couple of churches

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and the courthouse. Austin was still the seat of Lander County, although in matters of commerce and population it had long since been eclipsed by Battle Mountain, ninety miles away to the north but in the same county.

The summit above, at the top of an extremely steep, curved, dangerous, switch-backed road, was nearly a thousand feet higher than Austin. Virtually bristling with juniper and pinyon pines, it was the highest point on my route.

Seventy miles east of Austin I zipped through Eureka, which I had already visited with Bob Taelour. Four summits and four valleys later I arrived at Ely.

Ely, situated on the morning side of the mountain (though it was now nearly dark), had the reputation for being one of the coldest, windiest, most miserable places in Nevada. That day it was like a town in faraway Yukon. The main street was a veritable dog-sled course between icy banks of snow. I guessed the residents were in for a hard winter, harder, perhaps, than normal.

But it was the haven I'd been looking for so I stopped at the Nevada Hotel, signed up for a room, drove to a roadhouse at the southeast edge of the city, downed a steak dinner, then enjoyed an evening of entertainment back at the hotel.

By comparison with Austin and Eureka, Ely was a metropolis. It, too, was a county seat (of White Pine County), but unlike the others, whose days of prosperity were history, Ely, with her sister cities Ruth and McGill, was doing rather well, supported in large part by payrolls from the giant Kennecott Copper Company's mine and mill operations.

I stayed two days in Ely. Long enough to see and do everything I wished to see and do there in the winter time. I had intended to get an early start for home on the third day, but time slipped away and it was already noon when I drove up to a pump and ordered a tank-full of gas. Fluffy white flakes swirled about the pumps. I went inside to warm my backside by an oil-burning Coleman stove. Preoccupied, thinking of the long stretch of road ahead, I didn't notice the soldier seated in a corner.

"Which way you goin'?" he broke my train of thought.

"North," I answered, turning to have a look at him. I figured he was about to ask for a ride and I wanted to see what kind of a guy he was.

"To Wells?" he asked, adding that he was on furlough trying to get to Twin Falls. Then he popped the question, "How 'bout a lift?"

Remembering my Navy days and the folks who had given me rides, how could I refuse?

"Grab your gear," I said while paying the bill, "I'm ready to go."

Highway US-93 extends from Mexico to Canada (some said it was in one long valley), its narrow pavement binding together numerous interesting communities but few important cities. For all of its length, though, it carried very little traffic; almost none on that stormy winter day in December.

Even before reaching the stage-stop at Shelbourne, the snow began piling up on the pavement. The white center line was totally obscured

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and there was little to indicate the roadsides. To say that the visibility was poor would be an understatement of fact. I took to "feeling" for the pavement; when it felt rough I knew the wheels had drifted onto the shoulder.

The going was slow, my passenger was uncommunicative, darkness approached and conditions worsened. Every ten miles or so (at first) we'd pass a car or truck going south. I'd swing over and use its tracks until they filled in, then I was on my own again. The wind shifted to westerly and it was harder to hold a course. It swept the snow off the road in places, producing alternate stretches of dry and drifted-over pavement.

At Lages (pronounced Law'-geez) Junction my route veered to the northwest. Fifteen miles farther on we came to Currie, a tiny railroad town eighty miles south of Wells. It almost went unnoticed in the blizzard but I did make note of two facts: Currie had a gas station, though it was closed and dark, and one dimly lit house. At least there were people there in case I needed to return for help.

The soldier was fast asleep.

Now a layer of blowing snow flowed across the road from left to right just under the headlight beams, totally obliterating all reference to the tarmac for several seconds at a time. My only recourse, other than stopping, was to hold the steering wheel steady and pray for a straight road ahead. In some locations, particularly in the cuts, I plowed through drifts higher than the front bumper; and with each encounter the Ford shuddered like a ship nosing into a mountainous wave. I'd shift down to second gear, spin the wheel to starboard and port like a helmsman to keep my heading. I raised up off the seat as if to lighten the load.

Now, for the first time, my companion awoke. He straightened up in his seat and stared wide-eyed through the windshield. Light, reflected from the wall of blowing snow ahead, revealed a degree of concern in his features.

"D'you think we'll make it?" he asked.

"Long as we keep moving we'll make it," I replied, and smiled to myself as the obvious logic of my statement sunk in.

But we didn't keep moving. Part way through a particularly long drift the old Ford slowed, wheeled to the right, stalled and stopped dead in her tracks. She had met her match. The sudden quiet inside the car, compared to the roaring wind outside, seemed ominous. I switched off the headlights to save the battery, but it was black as the inside of a whale and, in order to see, I turned on the parking lights.

I pushed on my door, struggled hard against the wind and snow, and finally succeeded in opening it an inch or so. The floor boards under my feet quickly filled with snow (I estimated the wind velocity at 30- or 40-mph) so I let it close again and reached for my overshoes and pea coat.

"What're you gonna do?" The soldier asked nervously. Whereupon I explained that we'd have to get out, do a little shoveling and chain-up. With that he shrugged, leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes.

Flashlight in hand I pushed my door open as far as possible and climbed out to survey the situation. Wading through crotch-deep snow I

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found that we had made it three-fourths of the way through the drift. Encouraged, I got my shovel from the trunk and went to work removing most of the snow from around the rear wheels. I even managed to install one of the tire-chains before succumbing to the cold. Then I got inside, started the engine and warmed my fingers by the heater. My, but it was cold!

In due time I returned to my tedious chores, put on the second chain and proceeded to clear a pathway in front of the car. It was a race against the wind, a wind that tried to replace the snow as fast as I removed it, but I was winning the race.

I had just a short way to go when I heard the droning sound of a motor vehicle. It was coming up from behind, from the south, and was the first I'd heard (or seen) since leaving Lages Junction. Great! I thought to myself. Now, when I've gotten my car almost free, help arrives.

It was a Dodge, four-wheel-drive pickup truck with two people aboard. The driver steered around the lee side of my car, stopped near where I stood, rolled down his window and shouted above the storm, "Looks like you need some help."

"I sure could've used some an hour ago," I replied. "But I think I can make it now, thanks."

At that time my passenger did something totally unexpected. The soldier, that guardian of our nation and preserver of the peace - got out of my car, duffle-bag in hand, and trudged through the snow to the Dodge.

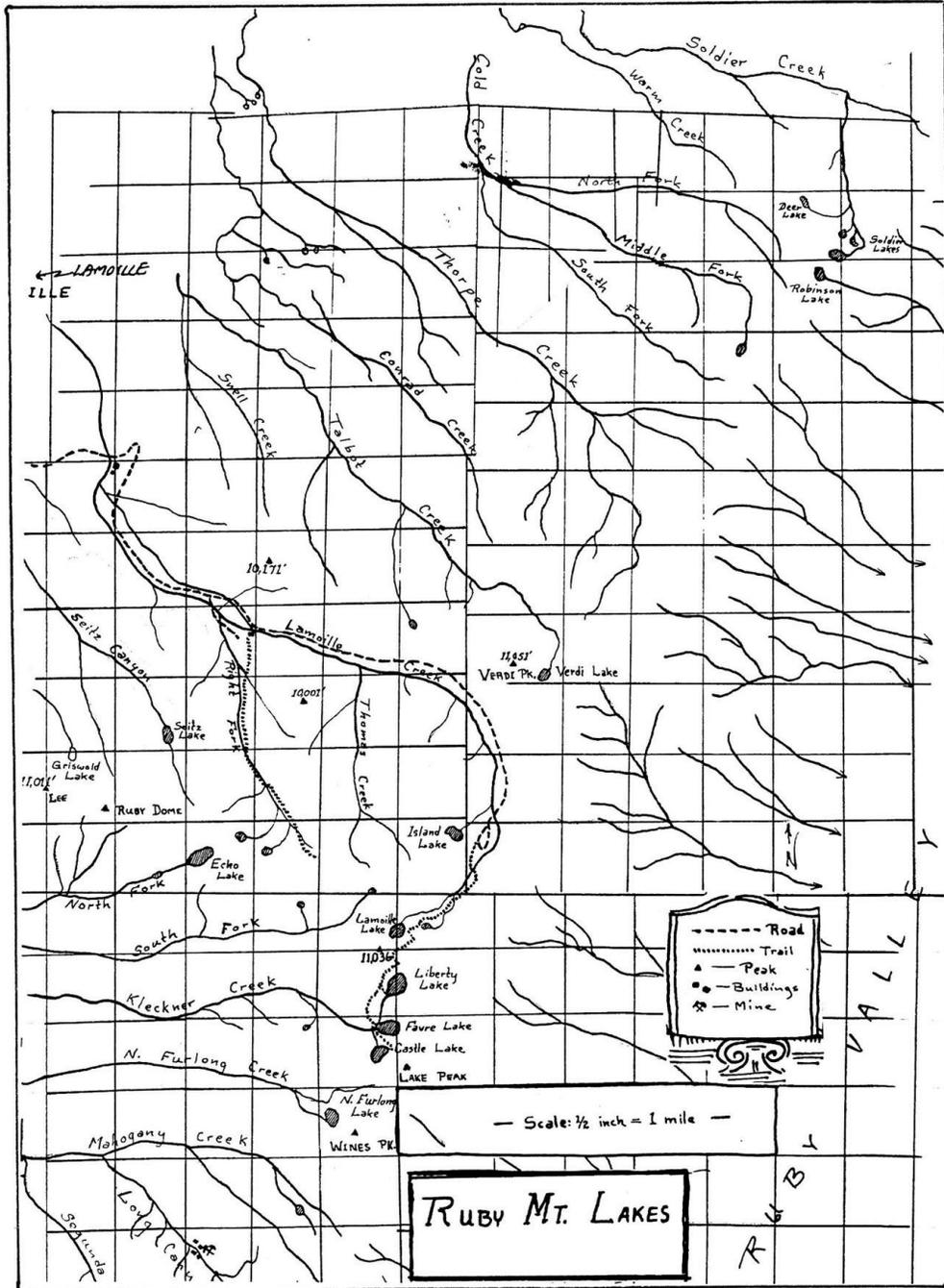
"Can I ride with you?" he asked of the driver.

I was so taken aback I was speechless. He was a rat abandoning a sinking ship. It was no loss, of course, he'd been neither a burden nor a help to me. It was just inconceivable. I waited for a word of thanks or appreciation but none was forthcoming. A curious fellow, that soldier boy.

The driver of the Dodge pulled ahead and waited while I got my car past the drift, then moved on up the highway to break trail for me, all the way to Wells.

At the Four Corners Cafe I stopped for a hot meal and coffee, during which time the storm eased considerably. I then removed the tire-chains and headed west on US-40. The going was easy now, on hard-packed snow, so I relaxed and reflected on the events of my first real tour of northern Nevada.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO
NEW VENTURES

My '38-Ford had served me well, but now it was beginning to show signs of old age and wear. Perhaps my year-end tour through stormy northern Nevada was just too much for it. It had been driven close to a hundred-thousand miles, which, in those days, was considered a lot without having had some kind of major engine repair. So I looked around for a newer car, preferably a bigger and heavier one. A light vehicle was fine for the byways of the East, but in the West I needed one that could take the punishment meted out by mountain and desert roads, a vehicle that could comfortably and safely "eat up" the miles and "spit them out" in the wide open spaces.

I could not yet afford such a car, though, and opted for a middle sized, two-door club Sedan, a 1942 Dodge priced at \$895. It was a slick looking car, metallic green in color, with an in-line-six under the hood, an automatic transmission (such as it was) and hydraulic brakes. The seats were plush and the trunk was unusually large.

That I should buy another Dodge, after the terrible time I'd had with my first one, was rather an incongruous idea. But I went ahead and consummated the deal, trading in my Ford and paying the difference in cash. It was the day before Christmas, 1949.

A couple of weeks later, I filed an income tax form to report that I had earned \$2,726.24 in my first full calendar year with the Company; from which \$305.80 for income tax and \$27.26 for social security had been withheld.

It was early spring when I ordered my first firearm, from the Montgomery Ward Co. It was a .22-caliber, semi-automatic Remington rifle with open and telescope sights. As I recall, it cost me almost a week's wages.

This rifle had an unusual gunstock, made of a new kind of hard plastic material (Tenite) instead of wood. Being ignorant of the properties of plastics, I laid the rifle under the rear window of my car, one day, and the stock warped in the heat of the sun. I tried to straighten it; by heating the stock over a gas flame, by drilling holes and filling it with hot water and bending it, but all of my attempts were unsuccessful. So I learned to use the dog-legged rifle.

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Whenever an opportunity arose, I took my new rifle out north of town and practiced shooting it, using either the telescope or open sights. At first I shot at paper targets, then graduated to running jackrabbits. By the fall of the year, in cottontail season, I could nail the white-tailed fellows in the head more often than not. That was my objective, to hit them in the head (or more precisely in the eye) to avoid ruining the nice white meat along the back, the so-called "back straps." It was for that reason that I never again (after my experience at Mary's River with the Taelours) went rabbit hunting with a shotgun.

Without doubt, the quintessence of cottontail hunting was to be found at the ranch of a friend of Dan's, located about six miles south of Twin Bridges on Huntington Creek. A short distance from the ranch house, the creek meandered through a field overgrown with willows, brush and tall grass. The willows, in clumps ten feet high and five-to-twenty feet across, were separated by small glades, where deer and cattle came to lie in the shade in the summertime.

This unique area, not over a hundred feet in width but extending along the creek a half-mile or so, was an ideal habitat for cottontails. And when the water and soil were frozen, it was a good place to hunt them. To illustrate: Four of us left Elko at three-thirty one fall afternoon, drove to the ranch, shot our limit of cottontails (ten apiece), and were back in town by six-thirty.

The best hunting strategy, we found, was to walk through the willows just prior to sundown, when the shadows were long and the little critters came out of hiding to feed. A bouncing cottontail was easy to see, but much too hard to hit with a rifle bullet. So we looked for them "at rest." With fur of gray tinged with brown and white, they blended into the background and were difficult to spot then, but with practice you could locate them by their round, black eyes.

Most of our shooting was done from a distance of not over forty feet; much of it from less than half that. Getting close depended on one's ability to creep under the willow boughs. Being small and agile I was good at that, often closing to within six feet (muzzle-to-eyeball) of my target. When the sloughs froze hard enough to walk on we used them as avenues of approach, the ice being quieter underfoot than dry grass.

Never did I enjoy such sport, nor harvest so many delectable rabbits, as during that first season on Huntington Creek.

It was on that same ranch that I was initiated to the sport of hunting sage grouse (sage hen to the natives). The sage grouse is a large, slow-flying bird and not easily spooked. They inhabited the rolling sagebrush hills, always in proximity to water - a spring or a small creek - usually in flocks of from a half-dozen to thirty or more. Up to a hundred in the wintertime. The sage hen was the ideal game bird for a beginning shot-gunner.

"If you can't hit a sage hen," I was told, "then you might as well give up." Luckily, after expending far too many shells, I brought down a big old rooster.

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"You're supposed to shoot only the young ones," my friends chided. (Who has time to be selective?) It was the toughest bird I ever ate.

When springtime came around again, one morning I jumped into my Dodge and took off on the old Bullion Road, south of Elko, to do some shooting. I crossed the South Fork of the Humboldt, went up Dixie Creek about five miles, stopped, and with rifle at the ready took to the sagebrush.

It was great to be out in the country. Spears of seedling grass poked through the soft, moist earth; tiny pink and white flowers grew in patches among the sagebrush; the air was pungent with spring's heady aromas. It was the time of life's renewals.

A jackrabbit leaped from its hiding place and crossed in front of me. I quickly raised my rifle, held the cross-hairs on the tip of his bouncing nose and squeezed the trigger. Splat! A good clean kill. Another jack jumped up, farther away. I followed suit but missed. Continuing up the rise I saw no more of the long-eared devils, but enjoyed my walk in the sun all the same.

Then, on my way back to the car, I came upon a pair of jacks and got off a shot at the closest one, hitting it (I guessed) in the shoulder. Anyway, it was not a mortal wound and the creature, much to my surprise and chagrin, set up the most horrible screaming imaginable. It was a scream that evoked within me a feeling of empathy if not outright guilt.

(That sound, by the way, of a wounded rabbit, is the one used by coyote hunters to lure their prey within range.)

The second rabbit, having run off, now returned to join the wounded one; and only moved away when I approached. I dispatched the first one with another bullet and the horrendous screaming ceased.

But why had this particular rabbit protested so vocally? I had never before heard a sound from a jackrabbit, even a wounded one. And why had the other jack returned to its side? Was it to render aid?

It was a conundrum that I was bound to investigate. I would field dress the animal in search of a clue. With the sharp blade of my pocket knife, the one reserved for cutting flesh, I made a neat incision in the rabbit's belly and revealed its innards. The riddle was solved. I had shot a pregnant female.

Now my curiosity compelled further investigation. I carefully made a slit in the uterus - that resembled a string of sausages - to see what an unborn jackrabbit looked like. On removing the first one I was utterly amazed. Little Jack was already completely formed in his mother's image, long ears, bright eyes, soft fur et al, and began to breathe the instant air fell on his quivering nose.

Excited, I further opened the tube and removed a second jack, and a third. By the time I removed a fourth and last "Caesarean," the first little fellow was dry and hopping around on the ground, in danger of straying away. So I picked them up, one at a time, and carried them to the nearby car where, for lack of a better place, I put them on the carpeted floor behind the seat.

The whole bizarre experience, playing doctor to a bunch of rabbits, effectively ended my shooting fun for the day. I drove

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straight home to my trailer, placed the jacks in a cardboard box inside, and began to personally question my sanity.

Rita, who was forever fond of baby animals, came around to help me feed the little furry fellows. We gave them milk, for lack of anything better. However, as with most truly wild animals in captivity, without the benefit of proper nourishment they were destined to die. Two of them expired the second day, two survived three or four weeks.

It would have been better if I had "done them in" at the very beginning. But man, in spite of his so-called wisdom, is prone to the temptation to exert his power over lesser animals and "save" them; often for reasons of guilt (as in my case), sometimes in an attempt to prove his superiority. So much for the jackrabbits!

A friend of my father's had built a unique boat of wood and Masonite. When assembled it was a flat-bottomed craft eight feet long, consisting of three watertight sections held together by inverted U-clamps and bolts. When disassembled, for purposes of transporting and storage, it could be nested; the bow in the stern and both of them in the mid-section.

The man who built the boat had no further use for it, and offered it to me free gratis. The thing should fit in the trunk of my Dodge, so I accepted his offer.

The sole purpose of my having a boat, of course, was to serve as a movable platform from which to fish. While the one-man raft worked well on a small mountain lake, this vessel should be more suitable, and safer, on a large body of water.

To make it shipshape, I went to work with glue and screws, caulking and paint, and accomplished the repairs in a short time. For a trial run I recruited a helper, and hauled it to the Humboldt River (down by the old iron bridge near the hot springs) where we assembled and un-ceremoniously launched it. The "somewhat flexible" boat seeped a bit, having been so long out of water, but not enough to require bailing. I pronounced it seaworthy.

Yale Haskins, a CAA tower operator and friend, volunteered to "crew" my boat's maiden voyage on Wildhorse Reservoir. We loaded it and an old Sears outboard motor - borrowed from Paul Walther, a fellow worker at the Company - into my car and away we went, acting for all the world as if we knew what we were doing.

It was a nice day for an outing. A scattering of lazy cumulus clouds dotted the sky and the wind was virtually calm. We Arrived at the lake before noon, quickly assembled our craft, piled the fishing gear and lunches aboard, attached the motor to the transom and made ready to shove off for a day of trolling for trout.

But the motor wouldn't start.

A typical, small, outboard motor is a two-cycle, internal combustion engine with a shaft and gear mechanism, a propeller, a fuel supply, a housing to hold it all together and a means of attaching it to a boat. Hardly anything could be simpler. But for some reason, when it is hung on the end of a boat on a remote lake, pond or marsh, this elementary device is invariably cantankerous if not inoperable. Or so it seemed to me. There was never a time, when boat-fishing with

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friends in the early 1950s, that we didn't experience trouble with an outboard motor. Admittedly, it was usually an old or borrowed motor.

One time, Dan and I put in a ten-foot aluminum boat at the north end of Wildhorse Reservoir at nine o'clock in the morning, pulled on the starter-cord for an hour, removed the motor to the beach and spent another hour "tuning it," put it back on the boat and got it running, only to break the propeller's shear-pin while backing away from shore. We installed a new pin and made it to the middle of the bay before the motor quit again. In turn we jerked on the rope for another half-hour, in an attempt to restart it, and then the cord broke. We paddled to shore, tied on a new starter rope and set out again. The wind came up, the boat became unmanageable and we went aground, shearing another pin. By now the sun was halfway down in the west and we called it a day.

I allowed that we'd gotten to fish about a half-hour in all, and I told Dan, only partly in jest, "Next time you want to go fishing in a boat powered by pulling a starter-cord, look for another flunky."

"Well," he grinned, "at least we didn't use much gas."

Paul's motor would prove to be typical. It spit and puffed for a good half-hour before giving in to our efforts to start it. Once running, though, it sounded pretty good and we climbed aboard; Yale toward the bow, me at the "helm" in the stern. It was actually not a very good arrangement (as we would learn) for Yale weighed over 200-pounds while I tipped the scale at 130. But I was the coxswain.

The boat was "down at the bow" by at least three inches, leaving very little freeboard forward. No matter, everything was going good and we were fishing at last, trailing a pair of shiny lures in the greenish water.

Entertaining the unwritten maxim that "the fishing is always better on the opposite side," I abandoned my normal tendency to caution and steered for the southwest corner of the lake, across the deep water. The fishing there was no worse than on the north side, nor any better. After two hours we had yet to get a strike.

The riffle on the lake changed to a chop. I drove the boat onto the beach and we went ashore for lunch and a short nap. I awoke with a start some time later, when the sun suddenly disappeared behind a cloud. It was a big, black-bottomed cloud that was rapidly maturing into a thunderstorm. A chill wind whipped across the reservoir, blowing foamy whitecaps off of heightening waves. It was an ominous sight.

"Damn!" I said to myself, "Now see what a mess you've gotten us into."

Yale and I stood on the shore and pondered our options. There was no road on this side of the lake, at least not nearby, and even if there were the distance around the shoreline to the car was many miles long. We didn't much relish the idea of staying on the low, sagebrush covered ridge in a lightning storm, nor did I like the odds of our making it back across the lake in the boat. In the end, though, we agreed on the latter course of action; we hastily loaded our things and shoved off. It was undoubtedly one of the most foolhardy decisions of my life.

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Articulating from wave to trough and back again the little boat creaked and groaned. The bow dipped dangerously low, shipping water with every plunge. At the same time the propeller rose out of the water and the motor whined annoyingly. But it continued to run like a Trojan. I hesitated to think of our fate should it quit, we'd stand no chance at all without power and the ability to maintain a heading. Not that our chances were good as it was. Yale, soaking wet from the spray, was bailing full-time now, slopping water by the coffee-can-full over the side.

I steered for the closest landfall on the east shore. No sense pressing our luck trying for the north beach where the car was parked. It was black as night under the storm cloud and the rain came down in a torrent. We were drenched to the skin.

The gunwales were barely above the frothing waves. Lightning flashed, rendering Yale as in a Winslow painting: jacket flapping in the wind, water streaming off his hat and nose. It thundered and I felt the vibrations in my guts, even above those caused by the boat's plowing through the swells.

"Hang in there!" I shouted at Yale, more in self-encouragement than anything.

No question about it, I was apprehensive. The boat was overloaded, especially at the bow, the sea was rough, the water was cold, we were far from land, I couldn't swim and we had no life-jackets. What a predicament. All I could do was grit my teeth, do my best to control the boat and pray. And pray I did, fervently, but with my eyes wide open.

At last the wind abated and, instead of just holding our own, we began to make some headway. But it was not until I felt the bow against the beach that I breathed easy. Yale half-tumbled over the side, found firm footing, grabbed the bow line and pulled the boat nearly out of the water in his exuberance.

"We made it!" he shouted, then removed his soggy hat, kneeled and kissed old terra firma.

"Were you ever in doubt?" I asked, faking an attitude of confidence as I stepped ashore.

It was good to be on firm ground once more. The rain tapered off to a drizzle. We lit a sagebrush fire, using Yale's cigarette lighter and some old receipts from my wallet, dried ourselves off and eventually quit shivering. Within an hour the storm dissipated entirely, the sun returned to the sky and the lake calmed. We emptied the water from the boat, shoved off, got the motor started (it was a miracle) and made an easy crossing to the north shore and my car. We had no fish to show for our efforts, but came away in good humor and with our bodies intact.

But there is more to the story. An incident that I almost forgot (and really should have). Just after starting for home, while crossing an arm of the reservoir on a causeway, Yale observed four or five ducks on the water in the middle of the bay. I pulled the car to the side of the road and parked; we got out, studied the birds and began an idle discussion about how far away they were.

"Aw," I bragged, "they're not so far I couldn't hit 'em with a twenty-two if I were of a mind to."

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They were at least 200-yards distant and Yale, forcing me to "put up or shut up," bet that I couldn't hit a feather. So I took my rifle in an offhand position, stood beside the car, aimed about three feet over the ducks and squeezed the trigger. And then, when I heard the bullet strike and saw one of the mallards flop over and lie still on the water, my heart sank.

I won the bet but lost my honor. It was against a federal law to shoot migratory waterfowl with a rifle, to shoot them out of season, or to shoot them without a valid license and stamp. I was guilty on all counts. Besides, it was a totally unsportsmanlike and unethical thing to do.

The odds against my scoring a hit at that distance were astronomical, but that fact did nothing to assuage my conscience. Nor did the fact that I was unobserved, except by Yale.

(In those days, very few people visited Wildhorse Reservoir. Today there is a year-round population of residents, campers, boaters and fishermen.)

Both Yale and I were struck dumb by the accident, and tried in vain to retrieve the hapless bird. But it was way far from shore and we had to abandon the effort. Too late I remembered the creed: "A good sportsman is one who does the right thing even when no one is looking."

I became disenchanted with lake fishing. I seldom had much luck angling from shore and trolling from a boat was (as indicated above) more trouble than it was worth. Besides, Elko County had some of the best trout streams in the Great Basin.

The South Fork of the Humboldt River was probably the best fishing creek in the country. Like a nail to a magnet I was drawn to that stream, and would spend many a pleasant day or evening along its winding course.

At first I used old, reliable baits, angle worms or minnows, but later got "hooked" on fishing with a new lure that was just gaining popularity, the "flatfish." The original flatfish was made of wood, came in a variety of colors and patterns and was available in sizes ranging from 1½ to 3-inches long. The smaller one was fitted with a single hook, the larger with three treble-hooks.

The flatfish was lightweight, had an action that seemed especially alluring to a trout, and caused no impedance when "playing" the fish, as did weighted bait or a heavy spoon. The fish took a flatfish as it would a fly, in its jaws, so it was possible to release unharmed an unwanted catch. Also, as with fly fishing, it was not easy to land a trout hooked on a flatfish, a factor that enhanced the sport of it.

One of my first experiences on the South Fork was with Ernie Simonsen and Mike Michelson. They took me to the lower fields of the Tamara Ranch, where the willow-lined stream wound through a rich, green meadow bordered by sagebrush covered benches. (The present site of South Fork Reservoir.) We fished from there downstream, following the swollen creek from pool to pool into the canyon. My partners were using traditional lures and salmon eggs; I opted for a flatfish.

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Mike kidded me about my lure. "You'll scare 'em away with that thing," he said. A few minutes later, when I landed a foot-long cutthroat trout, he offered, "Probably got snagged trying to get away."

At the end of the day, Mike and Ernie each had two or three nice trout, fifteen-inchers, while I had only the one. But I had hooked and lost a couple of "big ones" and was seduced by the action of the flatfish and the potential of South Fork.

On my very next visit (same place, different companions), while opening a gate I was startled by a rattle at the base of a fence post. Acting on instinct - a wonderful asset in rattlesnake country - I took a giant step backward, picked up a four-foot-long willow, forced the rattler out into the open and beat the life out of it.

There is an interesting theory about rattlesnakes. In time, it states, through the process of evolution rattlers will give little or no warning of their presence before striking or slipping away from a predator. It seems a sensible theorem: those that rattle are often killed, those that remain silent avoid detection and subsequent death, and live to propagate the species.

Over the years I encountered a score or more desert rattlers, and dispatched at least half of them to the "great serpent den below." I never (but once) went looking for rattlesnakes, but came upon them while hunting, fishing or otherwise minding my own business. In fact, I saw more rattlers while fishing than in any other pursuit. And every time I met one, my ability to concentrate was impeded for an hour or more thereafter. Every meeting was a surprise to me, and probably to the snake, but I never hesitated to kill one when I could do so without danger of being bitten. I did so on the premise that there are plenty of other reptiles (the bull snake, for example) to do the job for which they were intended.

One time, while fishing with Pop, Stan and Jim on the South Fork of the Owyhee River - downstream from the Spanish Ranch in northern Elko County where it flows through shallows and along deep, silent runs under cut banks - I came face to face with a big rattler. I was climbing out of the stream bed up a shoulder-high cut bank and almost put my hand on him before seeing his watchful eyes. He didn't rattle, nor did he elect to strike even though I was within easy range. My pulse rate quickened about three-fold, I hastily retreated to the creek, which was over the tops of my hip boots, and found a more propitious exit downstream.

Up to that time I had enjoyed unusually good luck. I had landed several feisty rainbows and browns, of two or three pounds each, but from then on I was so preoccupied with the thought of meeting another rattlesnake, my heart wasn't in it. I caught up with Jim and learned that he had come across two rattlers, killed one and followed the other to its "stinking" lair under a ledge rock. (A rattlesnake den gives off a horrible, acid odor.)

Leaving Jim, I turned upstream and found Stan. He, too, had seen and killed a rattler. Together we went up-canyon in the Jeep to find Pop, whom we hadn't seen for some time. We spotted his familiar felt hat above the sagebrush. Stan parked the truck, we got out, walked a

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short distance to the creek and crouched at the top of the cut bank to talk to the old man.

We had not yet uttered a word when both Stan and I saw yet another rattler. It was lying between us, coiled and alert, not three feet from Sam's head. We froze, sized up the situation and spoke, almost in unison, "Don't move, Pop. There's a rattler here!"

Surprised (because of the rushing water he hadn't heard us approach) Pop slowly turned his head toward us. Stan repeated the warning and pointed out the menace, which was just at Pop's eye-level. Without a word Pop returned his attention to a trout that was nibbling at his bait.

Stan and I backed away. The rattler moved his head from side to side, watching and guarding against the three of us, but it was his last act. He'd done no harm, this time, but could easily have struck a fatal blow to Sam.

Between the four of us we encountered five rattlers that day. Who knows how many went undetected. It was enough to make a guy wary of fishing in that canyon. On subsequent trips (we would return) we always saw at least one but never again as many as five in one day.

Every time I killed a rattlesnake I cut off and saved its rattles. One experience taught me to stand on its head when working on its tail, even if it appeared to be dead. I had run over this rattler with my car, more or less on purpose, and then backed over it to seal its doom. It lay still on the pavement, obviously crushed, so I took my knife and reached for its tail for my trophy. Without warning the serpent struck, barely missing my left hand. Smarter now, I got a shovel from the car, chopped off its head and retrieved the rattles from the other end of the now inert creature.

Two rattlers in the canyon of the South Fork (of the Humboldt) should have won medals for successfully scaring the wits out of me; although one of them would have received his posthumously. The first incident took place on a hot summer evening, after work, when I went out for an hour or so of fishing before dark.

I parked the car on the canyon rim, pulled on my hip boots, grabbed my fly rod and creel and descended the steep slope. I was half sliding down the canyon side when, too late to stop or even change direction, I saw a big rattler directly in my path. He was coiled and braced for a strike. Having no other option, I aimed my left boot at the center of the coil and landed right on top of him.

In self defense he struck, but harmlessly against rubber. We both slid and rolled a dozen feet down the mountain side, both of us out of control. When I finally came to a stop amid a cloud of dust and bouncing rocks, over my shoulder I caught a glimpse of the diamond-decorated fellow as he disappeared under a ledge.

As soon as possible, with shaky hands, I dusted myself off, gathered up my fishing gear, keeping an eye out for another rattler knowing that they are more often than not found in pairs, and went on to what turned out to be a great fishing time. I hooked and lost two "really big ones" and successfully landed one beauty, a three-pound cutthroat trout.

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The second scary event took place near the old Bullion Bridge, where the South Fork crosses a small flat in the lower canyon. I arrived at the bridge in the early morning and was working my way from hole to hole downstream when I came to a steep cut bank that required my making a detour through the sagebrush. The brush was extremely tall there; head high, in fact, so I felt my way along a cow path while holding my nine-foot rod overhead to avoid snagging the line.

Midway through the patch, with probably twenty feet still to go, my boot fell on something soft. My brain quickly evaluated the signal from below, concluded that it was a cow-flop, but almost immediately rejected that conclusion in favor of "rattler" and issued an order to "move out!"

On telling the story later, back in Elko, I was asked, "Well, what'd you do then?"

To which I replied, "I took three giant steps to the clearing ahead."

In the open I paused to catch my breath and allow my heart to slow down, and took a look at my boots. There were two distinct fang marks halfway up the right one. Once again my boots had saved me from snakebite.

I fished on downstream, but was so unnerved from the episode I avoided the brushy holes, the best holes, and caught no trout at all. Disgusted at having my day thus ruined, I swore to wreak a harsh vengeance on the very next rattler I met. And on the way back to the car, while carefully skirting the patch where I'd stumbled onto the reptile, I was presented with an opportunity to make good my promise.

It was some distance away, the rattle I heard, off to my left. A rattlesnake seldom signals from that far away so I was ready to bet that it was the same fellow who'd struck my boot. Without hesitation I put down my gear, searched for and found a stout willow, and headed for the snake. He was thoroughly entwined in a bush at the base of a fence post. I poked around, succeeded in dislodging him from his refuge, got him into the open and methodically beat the slithering devil to a pulp. All four feet of him.

If I were to name my favorite place and time for fishing, it would have to be the South Fork of the Humboldt River downstream from Twin Bridges on the Tamara Ranch, in the summer of 1950. It was there, where the creek meandered between willow-lined banks under overhanging cottonwoods, riffing from one deep swirling hole to another, that I met with both pleasure and success.

It was especially good in the evening, when I'd spend a couple of hours there before dark. I would park my car at the edge of a field, pull on my hip boots, hang my wicker creel over a shoulder, take my trusty fly rod in hand and wade through the tall grass, with its hidden irrigation ditches, to the creek.

That fly rod, by the way, was the finest piece of fishing gear I ever owned. It was manufactured by True Temper (the same company that made garden implements) of hollow drawn steel with an enamel coating, and was nine feet long when assembled from two sections. It was gradually tapered, from a quarter-inch diameter at the butt end to an

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eighth-inch at the tip, and weighed only four ounces (comparable to a split-bamboo rod).

In the judgment of my fly-fishing friends, my steel rod was not nearly as efficient as a good Montague split-bamboo rod, but it was much stronger, more durable, and required little or no maintenance. Unlike a bamboo rod, it could be used for all kinds of angling in addition to fly fishing; such as bait fishing, flat-fishing, casting lures, even trolling behind a boat.

(As a matter of fact, for 25-years it was the only fishing rod I owned. It is now 45-years old and still as good as new.)

I studied the rudiments of fly fishing, learned how to tie flies and how to cast them. But I would never really master the art. In actual practice I'd make three or four sloppy casts for every good one, so by the time I laid out the good one any self respecting trout had left the vicinity. I found that it was easier cast on a stream than on a pool or lake. The narrow course, the riffles on the surface, the fact that the trout always faced upstream against the current, all added to my advantage, overriding to some degree my inabilities.

One evening in late June, just after the peak runoff, when the water was still murky but no longer muddy, when the air was calm and filled with voracious mosquitoes, when a myriad swallows zoomed back and forth gorging themselves, I went to my favorite stretch of the South Fork convinced that I was about to catch a record-sized cutthroat. A wise owl (is there any other kind?) was perched on a low-hanging branch in a cottonwood by the creek, and I watched out of the corner of my eye as his head swiveled in synchronism with my passing. I concluded that he was more interested in mice than men, but he may have counted on my spooking one of the former from its hiding place and he'd have an easy meal of it.

Just as the sun's lower limb hit the mountain, I found the place I was looking for. There, shallow water tumbled over rocks and tree roots into a deep dark pool; an ideal place to work a flatfish. I sneaked quietly along the bank, positioned myself near the head of the pool, dropped the flatfish gently onto the water and let the current take it bobbing and weaving toward (I hoped) a hungry trout.

WHAM! A strike. And on the very first presentation. And it was a big one, I could tell by the feel of it. Letting the thick line slip through the fingers of my left hand, but not too freely, I allowed him to run into deep water, then cinched up before he could tangle with the willow roots on the opposite bank; all this while following along and stumbling over rocks and brush, slipping and sliding on the dewy grass. With a 2½ pound tippet it would never do to let him put too much strain on the line.

SPLASH! He broke the surface and leaped a foot-and-a-half out of the water with a shaking, twisting motion that caused me to gasp excitedly. "Wow! What a beauty," I heard my voice acclaim.

Now I was certain he'd break the line or tear the hook from his lip, but he did neither and sank back through his own concentric wake. Underwater he moved rapidly away, and then came toward me again equally fast. Trying to catch me off guard, he was. Then he went for the fast water, turning from side to side against the flow, fighting, relentlessly, for his life. But I was just as determined to haul him

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ashore. I held fast. My right wrist tired, from holding the rod up, the fingers of my left hand grew numb, from slipping and gathering the line, and the fear of losing him was almost unbearable.

Time passed and I rejoiced, knowing that the longer I kept him on the line the more tired he must get from struggling and taking on too much air. I played the game of patience.

I talked to him. "Don't go in the fast water. Hold on to that hook."

He raced downstream, stripping line by the yards from my buzzing reel.

"Don't do that," I ordered, but was ignored. Twice I was able to maneuver him close to the bank; twice, at the sight of my net, he lunged away.

"Damn!"

Did early-man's heart pound like this in a similar moment of uncertainty? When the hunt could go either way, success or failure, food or hunger. Or was he an unemotional creature; deliberate, measured, calculated? Did he utter the equivalent of "damn!" or "sonofabitch!" as I invariably did when I missed netting a trout? Did he accept failure as sometimes inevitable (in his case it meant prolonged hunger) and go calmly about his business, hoping for better luck next time? I think he would have cursed. But who knows?

In my case, whether I landed or lost this particular trout had nothing to do with survival. I didn't even particularly like fish, although I felt an obligation to eat some of those I caught. It was more a sense of failure if it got away, a feeling no doubt inherited from my long-ago ancestors, so I directed all of my efforts toward winning the contest.

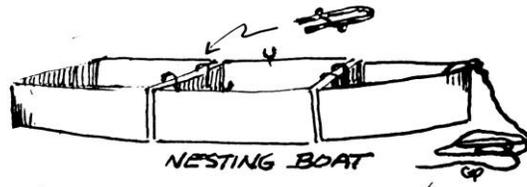
Once again, for the third time, I eased the trout in close. "Aha," I gloated. "You're tired now, aren't you?"

I clasped the line with my right index finger and held the rod tip high, though it wobbled incessantly as a result of my own fatigue. With my left hand I slowly and deliberately lowered the net into the water, just behind the now listless fish. My, what a beauty, I thought, running my eyes over his rainbow-colored lateral line.

And then, "**SPLASH!**" Like a streak of lightning that trout lunged, obviously not as tired as I thought, tore loose from the hook and sped away to sanctuary.

Quiet reigned. Only the soft sound of running water met my ears...and the "Whoo-who-who" of a chortling owl. Ah well, it had been a fair fight and a long one (it was now quite dark and I'd have a terrible time crossing the irrigated field) and we were both winners. The wily trout got away with his life, I with a wonderful memory.

To reiterate: I spent a great many happy hours fishing the South Fork, often alone, sometimes with a partner. I seemed to do better when alone, though, moving along at my own pace. I always got strikes, usually went home with one, two or three nice cutthroats and/or rainbows, occasionally with none. Whatever the outcome, I was happy.



First Boat

The Big One That Got Away



(Sketches from original Manuscript)

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE
DECISIONS

In the first year of the second half of the twentieth century, there were 2.3-billion people in the world. That is according to the statistical record, though I suspect a few-hundred-thousand must have escaped being counted. Six-and-a-half percent of the world's population resided in the United States; point-one percent of them, or 160,000 people, lived in Nevada. There were about 440 acres in the Silver State for every person but less than eighteen percent of the land could be privately owned.

The Yankees beat the Phillies in the World Series of baseball. The Brooklyn tunnel opened in New York. Benny Goodman performed the "Clarinet Concerto" with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. The movie "All About Eve" won an Academy Award. An assassination attempt on President Truman was thwarted. The United Nations building was completed. Communism was viewed, by the Western World, as an ever-increasing threat to society. And the United States became involved in another foreign conflict.

North Korean Communist forces invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. Two days later the United States, declaring a "state of emergency," offered its services, and General Douglas MacArthur, to help repel the invasion. The following year MacArthur was fired by his Commander in Chief, President Truman, after which a negotiated peace was sought but would not be effected until mid-1953. Overall, more than a million people were killed in the Korean conflict. Many of them were Americans.

But for the grace of God I would have been a participant in the Korean affair. I was not particularly attuned to current world events, nor could I claim a prophetic insight into the situation in Korea. It was simply a matter of good timing and luck that led to my avoidance of that war.

I was settled into a pretty good job with the Company, and decided that membership in the U.S. Naval Reserve (even inactive) was no longer particularly alluring. So I dispatched a letter to the Navy Department requesting "out" and received my honorable discharge, effective May 9, 1950, less than two months before the reserves were called up.

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In hindsight, the duty might have been very beneficial to me. Several of my friends served at the time, chalked up some very interesting experiences in Korea and Japan, and were none the worse for it. Instead, I was hard at work back home at Nevada Bell, serving an apprenticeship with the "old" guys; Bill Manca, Vic Snow, Ivan Meyers, Art Richards and others.

Two years had elapsed since my first sighting of Elko. Two years away from my mother and family. Two years of steadily decreasing communication with Doris. I had never before been so long away from family and friends. I was homesick.

By July, the idea of making a trip to New England took firm hold in my mind, and I began formulating plans to do so. First I would need a better automobile. The Dodge, while a fine car for around town, didn't inspire me with sufficient confidence for a 5,000-mile round trip. The idea of flying never occurred to me, and the cost would probably have been prohibitive.

I asked John to keep an eye out for a good used car, and within a week he found a gray, two-door, 1948 Packard Club Coupe. It was a beauty. It was powered by a rugged 135-horsepower, straight-eight engine, and had a standard (manual) transmission with overdrive. It was big and heavy, for a coupe, but was aerodynamic in design. It was roomy and comfortable inside with ample leg and head room, and it had mohair-upholstered seats. The previous owner had bought the car new, driven it 40,000 miles, then traded it in to Harris Motors on a new one. There were no dents or mars in evidence, and its metallic-gray paint glistened like the surface of a ceramic vase.

Brick Harris let me take it out for a test drive. I was favorably impressed. It was easy to drive, and stable, even at ninety-mph, in contrast to many of today's little boxes on wheels.

I went to see Butch Parker at the Nevada Bank of Commerce, where Rita worked, and with the assurance of a loan I returned to dicker with Brick who wanted \$2,000 for the car. I offered him \$950 and my car, that he allowed was worth \$950, and in the end, on July 17, 1950, I forked over \$1,000 and my Dodge for the Packard.

Now I had a decent automobile but only two weeks of vacation time coming. Travel time would eat up ten days or more, so I obtained permission from Mike to take some extra days, without pay, to allow for visiting while in New England.

I had a little cash saved up but not enough to buy gas and other necessities on such an extensive tour, so I decided to apply for a Chevron credit card. There were two problems in connection with that idea. One, since I had always paid cash for goods and services, I had no credit rating. Two, even if my credit were approved, I might not receive a card before my time of departure.

And then I got a break. "Who you know" can be very beneficial in getting things done, and I knew Lloyd Hessel, the Standard Oil Distributer who supplied the Company's needs for fuel. Over coffee one day I asked him if there were some way to expedite the process.

He listened to my story and shrugged. "No problem...I'll see that you get one right away."

Three days later the card was in my possession.

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On the fourth day of August, a Friday, I got away from the job early, packed a few things in a suitcase, kissed Rita good bye and drove away from the setting sun. I reached the Great Salt Desert when it had begun to cool, and quite a distance beyond before stopping for the night. As I had done in 1948, I planned to sleep some nights in the car and some in a room, eat some meals in a cafe and others on the road. I slept in the car that night.

I had chosen the northerly route, US-30, rather than US-40. It was clearly the faster of the two through the Rockies, crossing the divide on the rolling prairie rather than in the high mountains. As a matter of interest, this was the preferred trail of early wagon masters and later became a part of the prototype national highway, the Lincoln Highway, which began in New York City and ended in San Francisco.

The weather was perfect; dry and clear except for an occasional thundershower. The highway, straight as a die for miles on end, was an invitation to speed. I eased the throttle toward the floor and the Packard accelerated smoothly through 75, 80, 85 and 90-mph. Some different from the old Ford, I mused, which I had seldom driven over sixty. Traffic was light, almost nonexistent, and even though the highway was narrow (one lane in each direction) I made good time following my usual rule to "Drive at a prudent and safe speed on non-posted stretches, stay within posted speed limits in populated areas."

Perhaps I should explain that in many western states, including Nevada, there were no maximum-speed limits on rural highways. It was, however, unlawful to drive at any speed inconsistent with safety and conditions.

It might seem implausible now but there were times when, in Wyoming and Nebraska, the Packard averaged 21-miles-per-gallon of gas at speeds up to 85 mph. You couldn't "burn rubber" with it, but once you got that hunk-of-iron rolling and into overdrive, inertia was a real ally.

A hot meal and a room with a shower was in order that night, both of which I found in an old hotel in the small-but-friendly town of Medicine Bow, a picturesque village on the river of the same name.

In the morning, I passed through Cheyenne (much larger than I thought it would be), met the Platte River and followed it downstream through North Platte and Grand Island to Omaha, where I unexpectedly bumped into someone I knew: a CAA tower-operator from Elko. We were both off the beaten path, both having left US-30 to find a restaurant.

I was in for a surprise when I got to Iowa. For some unknown reason, the highway across that state was constructed without the benefit of shoulders. Instead, there was a curb at the edge of the pavement. Not a sharp curb, fortunately, but one that sloped up and out an angle. The paved road was not much wider than two full-sized trucks, and to watch those behemoths pass one another in opposite directions was a sight to behold. One or both of the drivers would steer to the right, putting his outside wheels on the curb to allow a two-foot cushion between their respective vehicles.

It goes without saying that my average speed was greatly reduced in the state of Iowa, but I made up for lost time by staying at the wheel until well after dark.

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In the vicinity of the Great Lakes, I met with a violent thunderstorm and had to stop until it passed over. The weather was good by the time I reached New York, however, and I sped toward my destination with hardly a stop.

Familiar landmarks appeared, the Hudson River, the city of Troy, and I was soon climbing up the Mohawk Trail.

"By George, we're almost home!" I said aloud when the summit gift shop and lookout tower appeared on my left.

It is perhaps strange, but true, that both time and distance appear to compress when one returns, after a time away, to the well known surroundings of his youth. That's the way it was that day. Northfield had seemed infinitely distant when I was in Elko, but now that I was "home" it was as if I'd been away on a short visit.

I was greeted like a prodigal son. I had left town out-of-work with but one slim prospect for the future. I returned driving a big Packard, wearing a broad-brimmed Stetson, jingling silver dollars in my pocket and bragging on the West.

Mother was happy to see me, and fussed over me as only a mother can do. I visited Pris and Charlie, at their home which was all slicked up and neatly painted as usual, and reminisced with some of the old gang at The Northfield.

I planned to see Doris "to talk things over" but found that she had moved back to Worcester. I was told that she had been going with someone new. I was relieved to hear that, for it eased my conscience considerably. I had lived with a feeling of guilt for some time, ever since falling for Rita, now I could conclude that our love affair was over; a thing of the past, relegated to the annals of history, dead of natural causes.

I travelled up and down the Pioneer Valley, visiting my many brothers and sisters and their families. Betty had married Arthur Bolton, a native of Northfield and a carpenter by trade, and they were renting a little house just north of the IGA store in East Northfield. Ray and Les, who were living way up in New Hampshire, asked a lot of questions about Nevada; an indication that a move to the West might be in their future. Ruth and Roy talked of going west, perhaps to California, as did Dot and Elly.

My other siblings were apparently content to remain in New England and in many ways I envied them. Bob was then serving in the U.S. Navy.

But my place was now in the West, and west was the direction I turned, once again, on Sunday the 20th of August. It was fitting, I thought, that it should be raining and dismal as I drove over the Berkshire Hills toward home, rather as if Mother Nature was shedding tears in my behalf.

"Toward home?" Yes. Now I had two homes. No matter which way I faced across the nation it was always toward home. I wondered how long it might be till my next visit to my eastern one.

When driving long distances alone, one has a lot of time for thinking. On my first trip westward, Doris had been constantly on my mind. Now the scenery was the same but the name had changed. Rita occupied my thoughts and I found myself reliving our times together.

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I remembered our impromptu picnic with Dan Taelour and Pat (who was now his wife) on Lamoille Creek below the old power house; of munching sandwiches and potato chips, quaffing beer and soft drinks, of wading in the icy-cold stream and lying in the warm sun, bathing, on blankets spread on a grassy slope.

And another outing, with Albert and Jeanne, in a secluded glen on Spring Creek (now the site of a large housing development). It was a peaceful place, a narrow stretch of wild grasses partly shaded from the sun by a grove of budding quakies, through which the tiny, crystal clear stream trickled. It was also the home of numerous birds and animals.

We'd taken a picnic lunch and our twenty-two rifles along. After eating a sumptuous meal, that the girls had fixed, the four of us shot at targets (some of them moving ground squirrels) then lazed in the sun to watch a pair of kestrels looping and diving at one another in a ritualistic flight that only Mother Nature could properly explain.

At a different time of year, in quite dissimilar weather, just for the fun of it Rita and I took a bagful of "nibbles" (crackers and cheese and fruit) and headed for Lamoille. It was wintertime; right after a maintenance crew had cleared the highway of snow. On the bench above Rabbit Creek I stopped the car in the middle of the road and we got out. I took a snapshot of Rita standing on the snowdrift that had been neatly cleaved by a rotary snow-blower. It was higher than the roof of the Ford. I drove on toward Lamoille, found a clearing, and we lunched in idyllic bliss while observing the snow-blanketed landscape. That was a record year for snow in Elko County.

But back to my journey. I entered Bryan, Ohio, a tiny town near the Indiana border, where I found and mailed a postcard or two. The following day, in a steady rain, I drove around the south end of Lake Michigan and through Chicago to Waukegan, Illinois. I hoped to visit Bob that afternoon, the 22nd of August, at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. He was studying electronics there and doing very well, I'd heard. Better than I had done back in 1946. It was pouring hard by 4:30 when I drove up to the familiar Main Gate and asked to see my brother. He was summoned to meet me and we spent a few hours together, though I don't recall what we did or talked about.

On my way back through Chicago I revisited some of my old haunts in and around the Loop before leaving the area.

By the 24th I was in central Iowa, in a little town called "Nevada." I spent a refreshing and comfortable night in the Story Hotel.

The farther west I travelled the more I thought about Rita. I enjoyed being with her, we seemed to share a certain affinity. Of course we didn't agree on everything but our basic values were pretty much in tune despite our diverse backgrounds.

I tried analyzing our relationship from a practical standpoint; that is, without letting emotion interfere with judgment, asking myself, "Are we ready for marriage?" "If so, are our differences less significant than our alike?" "Would religion be an obstacle?" "Could we manage on my meager salary?" And further, "Would she even agree to marry me if I asked her?"

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The vast prairie swept by almost unnoticed while I mulled over these and other questions. And then I became frustrated, by the thought of having to make so momentous a decision as marriage, and shoved the entire subject out of my mind. I would concentrate on the scenery and things of a more trivial nature.

In Nebraska, far from the crowded towns and byways of the East, the driving was easy (in more ways than one). At the same time I grew tired of ubiquitous fields and a lack of mountains, the absence of a distinct horizon in the distance. Inevitably, I succumbed to drowsiness.

There is nothing so good an antidote for drowsiness, when driving, than speed. So I eased the throttle forward until the speedometer needle pointed straight down, and held it there. Cruising at an even 100-mph, I was wide awake and alert in no time.

When traveling at that luxurious speed, one has little time for looking in the rear view mirror. Nevertheless, it's always a good idea to keep track of what's going on back there, so I sneaked a peek every once in a while. Still, I was surprised when I saw a vehicle coming up fast from behind, and a little shocked to see that it was a motorcycle. Wow! I thought to myself, I wouldn't want to go that fast on two wheels. A moment later the cyclist passed me by, nodding his head in salute on the way.

Out of curiosity I paced the fellow. According to my calculations he was doing 115-mph. Anyone who travelled at that speed must be familiar with the highway, I reckoned, so I decided to stay with him but at a respectable distance.

I would be thankful for that cushion when his taillight suddenly glowed red and I had to brake to a quick stop behind him.

"CONSTRUCTION ZONE" the sign read, in big black letters on a yellow background.

A half-dozen cars were lined up in front of us. There would be a wait while a pilot-car led a dusty parade from the opposite end of the zone. It was a good time to get out of the car and stretch. I walked over to the cyclist, who was holding a big Harley between his knees, and asked, "How fast were you goin' when you went around me, anyway?"

"Don't know," he replied, grinning and unfastening the flaps of a leather, World War-II pilot's helmet. "Just felt like passing you." He glanced at my Packard and added, "Fast car you got there."

We talked a while and I learned that the guy lived in Denver and was on his way home. "Say," he volunteered. "I know the country pretty well and there's a road around this damned construction job. If you're game, follow me."

"Yeah, I'm game...if you won't lose me."

He laughed, secured his helmet, powered-up the noisy Harley and wheeled away onto a side road. As fast as possible I followed.

Although our detour was well paved and straight - except for the right-angle turns so typical of roads in the trans-Mississippi states - it was not easy keeping up with my "pilot." But I held him in sight for twenty miles and together we successfully bypassed the construction zone.

Back on the main highway (US-30) once more, the guy turned in his saddle, touched a fingertip to his forehead and sped away. I tapped my

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horn in acknowledgment, and watched him shrink to a pinpoint in the distance. This time I'd not follow in his wake. He was too fast for me.

Ours had been a brief encounter. One human being's life-line in parallel with another's for a span of a few minutes, then separating forever. For what purpose? Who knows? Perhaps it was meant that I should be guided around that particular piece of real estate to circumvent some untoward occurrence, or maybe there was no significance at all to the whole event.

A few miles past the sleepy town of Ogallala, I drove onto a side road and parked beside a cornfield. "Only a couple of days to go," I mused, then tipped over on the seat and fell asleep. It was a deep sleep, undisturbed even by dreams.

Fully rested I awoke at first light, switched on the dash lights and checked my watch. Four-thirty. Time to move on. I pulled myself upright, put on my shoes, got out of the car and stretched to restore the circulation in my cramped body. A layer of mist hung over the South Platte River, and there was crispness in the early morning air. Fully awake now, I settled into the driver's seat, fired-up the straight-eight and maneuvered my Packard back to the highway.

I had not gone far when a sign, featuring the word "Denver" and the number "195," pointed to the left. For miles I had been toying with the idea of going home by way of the big mountains instead of the high plateau. I yearned to see the tall peaks again, to be among them. With a mild twist of the steering wheel the headlights pointed southwest.

Ten miles farther on, still following the river, I crossed the border into Colorado; almost exactly at its northeast corner. The sun, its golden rays reflecting off the distant mountain-tops as from His Majesty's jeweled crown, rose to yet another perfect day. So distracted was I by the unfolding panorama, I slowed to 70-mph the better to see it. Until the sunlight reached the valley floor and my surroundings once more assumed a look of normalcy.

Inextricably captured by the beauty of the mountains, I decided to bypass Denver and challenge the land dead ahead. Who was to argue? I was alone and could go where I wished. (One of the advantages of traveling solo.) So I turned toward Greeley, remembering that it was Horace who, with his much quoted words "Go west, young man, go west," was largely responsible for the migrations of the 1800s. I chuckled at the term "West," which, when I was a lad, was anywhere beyond the Appalachian Range. Now, in my contemporary opinion, it began at the front of the Rockies.

It was still too early to stop at Greeley so I drove on to Loveland, a quaint little city close under the mountain whose citizens were just coming awake. I made a quick tour of the place, admiring its tree-lined streets, its buildings and homes all neat and clean and well maintained. I stopped for gas, then found a friendly coffee shop and ate a hearty breakfast of eggs, bacon, hash-browns and coffee; and envied anyone lucky enough to inhabit such a place. No wonder the songwriter was inspired to write, "I'd love to be in Loveland...." It was a community where one could live with pride, or so it appeared to

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me, and I made a mental note of the fact in case I ever had an opportunity to move to the area.

For thirty miles, from Loveland to Estes Park, the highway twisted in synchronism with the Big Thompson River and its tributary. And then I found myself in the Rocky Mountain National Park, where the road curved and climbed alongside and over small streams, through forests of evergreens and across meadows of tall grass. Alpine wildflowers graced the byway above the 8,500-foot elevation, and frequently a marmot, squirrel or deer showed up in a secluded glen or on a hillside. Off to the south, above the tree line, pockets of glacial ice persisted in the shadows of towering crags. These mountains were a lot like the Rubies in Nevada, only exaggerated in all their dimensions.

At the summit of a pass, at 11,796', I stopped for a breather in the thin-but-windy air, then went down, up, down and around on an almost deserted highway that ultimately intersected with familiar US-40. This time the roadsides were not piled high with snow. As I drove on, having already covered a third of the distance to Elko since morning, and it was not yet noon, I entertained an idea to go all the way that day. The more I nurtured it the more the idea took hold. I calculated the miles yet to go, my average speed, the time remaining, and concluded that with any luck at all I could make it to my doorstep before midnight. And in spite of the many hours I'd spent on the road in recent days, I drove with renewed vigor.

Earth's star, its shape distorted by refractive heat waves, was just setting over Nevada when I crossed the Great Salt Desert. The temperature was still in the hundred-degree range. Night fell and time, for me, ceased to exist. Unseeing, I stared into an ethereal tunnel of light; a mere passenger in a vehicle that, apparently its own master, proceeded without human intervention. I would remember nothing after Wendover, having succumbed at last to a case of road hypnosis.

Finally a cluster of bright lights (the city of Elko) appeared in my dream world and I was shocked to wakefulness. I blinked hard and checked the time. Ten o'clock. I had done it. I had completely traversed the states of Colorado and Utah, and crossed a hundred miles of Nevada since arising. And then, like a ton of bricks, it struck me that I was indescribably tired.

For the record: I had driven a thousand miles, two-fifths of the distance from Northfield to Elko, that day. Most of them, including those in the national park, were on relatively narrow, hilly or winding, non-divided highways. Three important factors contributed to my accomplishment: a well designed, well constructed automobile, comparatively little traffic, and lawfully high speed limits.

I was now firmly convinced that my love for Rita was genuine. I was now certain that we could share a life of toil and happiness together; certain that we could successfully raise a family; reasonably certain that she would agree. And so, at the very first opportunity, I asked her to marry me.

It was not a storybook proposal, in the parlor on bended knee and all that, but in my car at the city park. I was telling her all about

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my trip back east when somehow the conversation evolved to that of marriage and culminated in our agreeing to do so.

I had often joked that I'd marry her when she had a thousand dollars in the bank. She may not have actually achieved that goal, but had saved enough to pay for the wedding and a bit more. It was November, though, before our engagement became "official," sealed with a small diamond ring.

Rita's folks showed little emotion when apprised of our engagement, expressing their approval with smiles but few words. Her brother Ben said to me, "You know, you're supposed to get her father's permission before you propose to an Italian girl."

I wasn't sure if he was serious or joking, but shrugged and replied to the effect that, while it might have been the rule in Italy, I doubted if such were customary in Elko, Nevada.

I was a bit puzzled by my father's reaction to the news.

"Well, if you really want to get married," he said, "then do it and good luck to you both."

Ruth (my stepmother) exhibited her usual exuberance, and wanted to know all about our plans.

By way of preparation for married life, I moved my trailer across the river to the Carson Trailer Court, just off South Fifth Street. There, for a fee of \$4.50/week, I was entitled to a space for the trailer and the use of a community bathhouse, toilet and laundry. It was not the greatest of accommodations, the court was barren and dusty, or muddy, and the trip from trailer to toilet was a nuisance, especially on a cold night. Even so it was an improvement in my standard of living.

It seemed appropriate (to me at least) to have the wedding before the end of the year, to take advantage of a joint income tax return if for no other reason. But I was supposed to attend a twelve week, radio-license class beginning in November, and was concerned that such an event (getting married) in the middle of school might prove too distracting from my studies. Then I learned that the class would be suspended over the Christmas holidays, so everything should work out fine. I'd have a welcome break from study; we could be married and take time for a proper honeymoon.

The Company was rapidly preparing for the coming microwave-radio system. PT&T and AT&T engineers, building, road and power line contractors, all were busy with the new route. By the time we obtained our radio licenses, the stations should be ready for our part of the job.

A couple of radio license classes had already been held in Reno, where classroom facilities existed, and I fully expected to be sent there for my training. But since so many of us from Elko were scheduled for the class (including Michelson) it was decided to hold it there, recruiting men from Lovelock and Reno as necessary to fill the seats. It was a break for me.

In rented space on the second floor of the clinic building (now long gone) on Idaho Street, Chuck Herrington, an instructor from the Inland Division Training Staff in Sacramento, set up the school.

Before we got started, though, just when everything was running along smoothly at work, the union struck the Company. It was a

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nationwide affair, initiated in the East by the CWA (Communications Workers of America). The real reason behind the strike was unclear to most of us, but that was beside the point; true to the spirit of unionism, the ORTT elected to go out in sympathy. Our Elko force was split - some of us worked while others did not - and I was concerned that our class might be postponed. I need not have worried. The strike ended within ten days and, except for some residual hard feelings among the brethren, things went back to normal and the class was begun on time.

Quiet, modest, middle-aged Chuck was an outstanding radio technician and very much in earnest about his teaching assignment. In many ways he reminded me of Miss Lawley, my high school teacher, particularly in classroom demeanor. Like her, he'd not put up with any kind of horseplay. And it was equally difficult to get him to smile. I held him in high regard and determined to pay strict attention in class. I could not afford to fail again, as I had the Navy school, it would be too hard on my self esteem.

At night, in the quiet of my trailer, I pored over my books, exercised my slide rule, and crammed my brain with formulas and other useful information. And while I was engrossed in the study of math and electronics, Rita was busy making plans for our wedding, the reception, and all the other things that custom and tradition require. The wedding party would be small, consisting of (besides the bride and groom) the bridesmaid, Jeanne Sails, the best man, Dan Taelour, Rita's parents, my father and step-mother.

(I always thought "groom" and "best man" a contradiction in terms. Certainly the man to be wed should be the "best" man; his second ought to be the "groom," as in "knight" and "groom.")

Rita insisted on a Catholic wedding. Because I was not a Catholic, the ritual could not be performed within the actual "Church." We could be married in the Rectory (the Catholic Church and Rectory were located on Court Street adjacent to the Company building where I worked) but I must first meet with the priest, in Rita's company, and make certain concessions to the Church; most significant of them, that any children of our marriage would be raised as Catholics.

While in the Navy, in the interest of learning, I had attended a variety of religious services; including Methodist, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Catholic, Episcopal and Southern Baptist. I found that there was a common thread through all of them, only their rituals differed appreciably. But I had felt uncomfortable in the Catholic Church. It was far too formal. I always believed in Almighty God, but had difficulty accepting the New Testament "miracles." I also believed, then as now, that adherence to some religious principle was important, and Catholicism was better than many. So I accepted the priest's demands.

The big day was fast approaching, when I would voluntarily relinquish my independence - forever! Christmas came and went in comparative insignificance. My thoughts, now that school was out, were consumed by plans for the wedding and honeymoon. I invested in a new suit of clothes, made sure the Packard was ready for a tour, and then it was time.

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Wednesday afternoon, December 27, 1950.

Without exaggeration, our wedding was the most formal, the most demanding, indeed the most significant ceremony of my life. In the dimly-lit St. Joseph's rectory, with Jeanne Salls and Dan at my side, I nervously awaited the inevitable. Proud and erect, Sam ushered his next-to-last daughter to her place beside me at the altar, then stood quietly beside her mother, Antoinette.

Rita was the quintessential bride. Young, beautiful, sweet, innocent and radiant in her gown and veil of pure white. Together we stood before the Man-of-God in solemn silence, while he delivered a litany of prayers and blessings (punctuated by the sign of the cross), advice and counsel. We repeated the sacred vows, exchanged rings of gold and a kiss, and were deemed properly married.

Handshakes, hugs and congratulations - and payment to the Rev. Louis F. McKean - concluded the main part of the day's important events.

Next came the reception at the Zunino home. It was a full house, with most of the Zunino family, my father and Ruth, and a great many friends in attendance. The women and girls gravitated to the front room, the men and boys to the kitchen, close to the liquor supply. The customary finger-foods and punch were served, and, judging by the level of noise, everyone was having a good time.

Yale Haskins (my companion in the Wildhorse Reservoir adventure) was soon in his cups, and inadvertently hit Paul Brown's shot glass spilling its contents. My new father-in-law, never one to leave a man with an empty glass, quickly refilled it, with Tequila, and raised his own in "salut." Those of us in the vicinity followed suit and downed our drinks. Paul, unaware that it was Tequila in his glass, coughed and sputtered and turned quite red in the face. (The Mexican cactus juice is not to be taken lightly, or unknowingly.)

Sam chuckled. "I thought that's what you drink," he said innocently enough.

We finally gathered in the main room, where Rita and I drank to each other's love, cut our three-tiered wedding cake (topped by a bride and groom in effigy) and opened our many gifts; all to the accompaniment of chatter and camera flashes. Rita fairly beamed. She always did like a party.

As the evening waned I commenced to get bored and nervous, anxious to take my bride away from this crowd and get on down the road. I was a little uneasy about my car as well, even though I had placed it in the care of the only man I knew who could be trusted, the only one who would not succumb to trickery, my friend Albert. But what if someone got to it without his knowledge?

I had good cause to worry. Not long before, on the occasion of Doug McVae's marriage to Laverne Crosson (one of Rita's school chums) I was a participant in "mischievous activities" involving his car.

Al Fialdini, who worked the night-shift with Doug and me at the time, had come by some important information relative to Doug's plans; that is, where his car was to be hidden and the name of the hotel in Salt Lake City where he and Laverne intended to spend the first night of their honeymoon. Those little tidbits of knowledge were too much to ignore, so we formulated some plans of our own.

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As soon as we got off work, on the morning of the wedding, Al and I found Doug's Pontiac; right where we were told it would be, on the lot behind the Carlson Motors building among the used cars. It was easy to spot, some of his other "friends" had already decorated its hood and trunk and sides with big white letters spelling "JUST MARRIED."

We made sure that no one was watching, then jacked-up the back of the car, removed the right-rear wheel, let the air out of its tire, took it to the service area and asked the young fellow on duty to fix a "suspected" slow leak.

"No hurry," we assured him, "We'll be back later."

The attendant, Mike Corta, who would later become a fellow employee, obligingly complied with our request. But the leak would take an inordinate amount of time to locate.

Meanwhile, Al and I returned to the honeymoon car and, taking care not to get any of the stuff on the paint (lest it mar the shiny finish that Doug was deservedly proud of), smeared the windshield with a black stencil-ink borrowed from the office. And then we left the scene.

A couple of hours later, when the wedding party assembled at the car-lot to speed the happy couple on their way, all hell broke loose. First, someone had to clean the windshield. A task that slowed things down considerably. That done, the slightly disgusted couple got in and Doug started the engine. But the car wouldn't move, of course, because of the jacked-up rear axle. An alert bystander pointed out the missing wheel and Doug's father, already angry because of the inky windshield, stormed into Carlson's (on a hunch, I guess) and found the necessary part. He then berated Mike, who, unable to locate a leak, had not remounted the tire to its rim.

Poor Mike. Until that moment he hadn't an inkling that it was Doug's tire that he was working on.

All who were acquainted with Doug knew of his short temper, but it was nothing compared to that of his father who ranted and raved like a madman, vowing to beat the devil out of the culprit as soon as he found him out.

For obvious reasons, neither Al nor I could bring ourselves to confess; and Mike withheld our names, possibly because he couldn't stand the sight of bloodshed.

Ironically, it was not the ink on the windshield that proved damaging to Doug's car but the writings on the painted surfaces. I never knew the perpetrators of that deed, but the letters were indelibly etched into the paint - forever.

But there's more to the McVae story. Al and I had to work that night. At about three o'clock in the morning we initiated a long distance telephone call to Mr. or Mrs. Douglas McVae at their hotel in Salt Lake City. The groom, who answered the phone and quickly recognized our voices, seemed less than cordial. Despite his attitude, before he could hang up we wished him a happy honeymoon.

So, you see, I had good reason to be concerned about my car. I could not have blamed Doug if he'd decided to take revenge, and there were others who might delight in decorating it as well. But Albert had done a splendid job of protecting it. So good, in fact, that even I

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knew not where it was hidden. At about ten o'clock, on a prearranged signal, Albert quietly left the house and returned with my Packard. It was clean and undecorated.

Once again I was indebted to Albert.

Under a barrage of banal remarks and flying rice, Rita - who had changed to traveling dress - and I made our way through the well-wishers to the car and drove away; followed by a half-dozen horn-blowing automobiles. With John and Loretta leading the pack they followed us through town and east on US-40 toward Wells.

It was a ruse. As soon as they gave up the chase I turned the car around, drove leisurely back to town, to the trailer, where we picked up our pre-packed suitcases and left town once more; this time on a westerly course.

I had made a reservation at the Sonoma Inn, the finest hotel in all of Winnemucca, and it was there, in a snug and comfortable room on the second floor (facing south over the casino roof) that our marriage was providentially consummated. Gone from my head were thoughts of the past, of home and New England, of studies. They'd been replaced by thoughts of love and sex, of companionship and sharing, of a whole new future with the woman I'd come to love so thoroughly.

I suppose we had breakfast in the hotel's dining room in the morning before checking out, but I couldn't swear to it. Down the road a ways we stopped at Rye Patch Dam, the first of the "sights" we'd see on our planned trip to California.

Instead of going over Donner Summit, though, we detoured to Herlong, California, to the home of Rita's Sister Mary and Arnold Young. It was not just a social call. My bride had inadvertently left her coat in Elko, and instead of our returning for it she hoped to borrow one from Mary.

This was my first visit to Herlong, where Arnold was employed as a civilian on the U.S. Army Ordinance Depot; the beginning of what would be, for him, a long and successful career. (During WW-II he had served in the Navy on a battleship in the Pacific.) They were living in a barrack-like apartment with their three children; Judy, a pretty, dark-haired lass of about nine; Butch (Arnold), a boisterous three-and-a-half year old; and Mary Ann, a cute little tyke who had turned two the day before.

Our stop was a short one. Then we traveled through Susanville, Red Bluff and Redding, along the Trinity River in the Coast Range to the little city of Arcata on the Pacific Coast. It was an interesting and scenic drive, in spite of a moment of trepidation on meeting a speeding, fully-loaded logging truck on a mountain curve in a dense fog.

The thing I remember best about Arcata was the water. It was the color of urine and I could not bring myself to drink it. Our waitress, in the village restaurant, chuckled at my expression and tried, unsuccessfully, to convince me that it was indeed potable, that its color was the result of stain from the redwood trees.

To gaze on the great Pacific Ocean, a tiny piece of it at least, was a new experience for both of us; although, because of a bank of low-lying clouds, it was not the scene I had anticipated. We soon left

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the coast and proceeded north on US-101, past giant timber mills flanked by multi-story-high stacks of logs and lumber, and mountains of red sawdust.

We were dwarfed by the enormous trees, whose branch-tips touched a hundred feet above the roadway to form a dark and misty labyrinth through which to drive. At a tourist stop, "The Trees of Mystery," brightly-painted wooden figures of legendary Paul Bunyon and his Blue Ox beckoned, so we paused for a look around. There was a nature trail through the misty woods, where signs described the redwoods in general and certain unique trees in particular, and which terminated at an inescapable gift shop on the way out.

It was my intention to drive inland from Crescent City, north into the state of Oregon, eventually crossing the Cascade Range to re-enter Nevada from the north. But near the Oregon border, southwest of Grants Pass, we encountered rainfall and then snow. Five-inches of the fluffy stuff had accumulated on the narrow, twisting, climbing highway (US-199) and our progress was seriously impeded. I was accustomed to driving in snow and was not worried about getting through, but Rita was visibly and audibly nervous. I breathed a sigh of relief when we came to the downhill slope, and to the welcome glow of city lights. It was Grants Pass.

We located a place to eat, talked about the weather and the feasibility of continuing northward and agreed that, since it would be impossible to do much sightseeing, we might as well head back south. Anyway, my little bride was not feeling well.

Our room that night, though austere, was warm and cozy. In the morning, after breakfast, we headed back toward California. The weather was much improved; that is, it had quit snowing and turned clear and cold. At a leisurely pace on the virtually deserted highways we crossed over to Alturas and turned south on US-395 to Herlong. We had to return Mary's coat.

Our second visit to the Youngs' place within a week was an enjoyable one. Mary fed us a fine meal, and I had a chance to get acquainted. And then we were off again, retracing our route to Elko and my (now our) little trailer home off South Fifth Street.

The honeymoon, as the saying goes, was over. It was back to work at the bank for Rita, back to the classroom for me, off to the future for both of us.

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CAR ORDER DATE 7/17 1950

DEALER Harris Motors

PURCHASER Geo. Phelps

PLEASE ENTER MY ORDER FOR ONE used CAR AS FOLLOWS:

MAKE <u>Packard</u>	MODEL <u>2265</u>	TYPE <u>club</u>	YEAR <u>1948</u>
ENGINE No. <u>6-250285-D</u>	SERIAL No. <u>2265-10384</u>	TO BE DELIVERED <u>7/17/50</u>	
CASH PRICE OF CAR			<u>1950 00</u>
TAX			
LICENSE, LICENSE TRANSFER, TITLE, REGISTRATION FEE, ETC.			
TOTAL CASH DELIVERED PRICE			<u>1950 00</u>
CREDITS	DEPOSIT ON ORDER		
	USED CAR ALLOWANCE	<u>950 00</u>	X X X X
	LESS: BAL. OWING TO <u>New. Bank</u>	<u>420 00</u>	<u>530 00</u>
	CASH ON DELIVERY		
RECORD OF TRADE-IN			TOTAL CREDIT <u>530 00</u>
MAKE	YEAR	TYPE	MODEL
ENG. NO.	SERIAL No.		TIME SALE CHARGES
LIC. No.	TITLE No.		AMOUNT OF CONTRACT <u>1420 00</u>
CONTRACT TO BE PAID IN <u>24</u>		INSTALLMENTS OF \$ <u>76 94</u> EACH	
AND ONE INSTALLMENT OF \$		FIRST INSTALLMENT DUE <u>9/15 50</u>	

The front and back of this Order comprise the entire agreement affecting this purchase and no other agreement or understanding of any nature concerning same has been made or entered into, or will be recognized. I hereby certify that no credit has been extended to me for the purchase of this car except as appears in writing on the face of this agreement.

I have read the matter printed on the back hereof and agree to it as a part of this order the same as if it were printed above my signature. I certify that I am 21 years of age, or older, and hereby acknowledge receipt of a copy of this order.

BUYER'S SIGNATURE X George T. Phelps

ADDRESS 1107 1/2 Court 1st

THIS ORDER IS NOT VALID UNLESS SIGNED AND ACCEPTED BY DEALER

SALESMAN _____ ACCEPTED BY M. F. Harris DEALER'S SIGNATURE

FORM SA 191 THE REYNOLDS & REYNOLDS CO., DAYTON, O. LITHO IN U.S.A.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR
TRAINING

The winter of '50-'51 turned out to be another tough one, with alternating periods of deep snow and subzero cold. We had a coal-oil (kerosene) stove in our tiny home that put out plenty of heat, but the floor was as cold as ice. To alleviate the problem I enclosed the space under the trailer with flattened cardboard boxes. At least the wind didn't whistle through there anymore. The trek to the toilet and back was something else again. But it was all part of our getting a foothold on life.

Six more weeks of classroom study and night-time homework brought the radio-license course to an end, and arrangements were made for us (the whole class) to travel to San Francisco to take the Federal Communications Commission exam. In those days, the Company considered a train or bus the normal mode of commercial transportation, an airplane being too risky and costly (I suspect that cost was the controlling factor) so in the early hours of a March morning we boarded a Western Pacific "Vistadome" car bound for the big city. It was my first out-of-town travel experience on Company expense, the first of many.

We were in the dark most of the way across Nevada, but daylight made our trip through California's Feather River Canyon, one of the Sierra's most scenic routes, a pleasurable one. The great Sacramento Valley, between the Sierra Nevada and Coast Ranges, was bright and green in stark contrast to the still-brown valleys back home. Off to the sides of our speeding train I noticed a lot of square ponds, the water contained by earthen dikes.

"Rice," Ernie responded to my question. "That's where they grow rice."

Farther on, the train seemed to be crossing a lake whose muddy waters stretched as far as the eye could see.

"That's one helluva rice paddy," I observed. To which my friend explained that that was the Sacramento River in flood. Wow! It was the flooded Connecticut River to the 10th power.

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Beyond the plain our train climbed over the low, rolling, grass-carpeted, tree-studded hills of the Coast Range. I caught a glimpse of San Pablo Bay. We sped past giant, brightly-painted oil tanks and refineries, dun-colored mills and warehouses, junk yards, run-down slums and shacks. At last the city closed around us. Our conveyance slowed to a crawl, rattled and swayed from track to spur and finally, with a grinding of metal and a blast of steam, jolted to a stop. I guessed that we had arrived at the railroad terminal.

Totally unfamiliar with my surroundings, I concluded that we were in San Francisco. Had I taken the time to study a map I would have known that the railway terminated on the east side of the bay, in Oakland. I soon got the picture, though, when a friendly black conductor directed us to a ferry at a nearby pier.

We were hardly aboard before the old iron vessel moved out of its manmade estuary into the bay. I stood by the rail, carefully dodging the calling cards of ubiquitous California seagulls, and stared wide-eyed at the underside of the towering San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge as we crossed beneath it. I recalled its story and pictures in "Life" magazine when it opened to the public in the thirties.

"The city of San Francisco," framed by the bridge and piers, had a picture postcard quality about it. Bright row-houses ran up and down steep hilly streets to the north of a cluster of multistory structures whose tops were hidden by low clouds (or high fog) oozing over the peninsula from the ocean. Soon the Ferry Building loomed up before us. I was impressed by the clock in its tower, one of the largest clocks I'd ever seen, whose face could be seen from across the bay.

(The Ferry Building still stands but is reduced to relative insignificance by an almost solid backdrop of high-rise buildings.)

Our ferry docked, we disembarked and took cabs to the Fielding Hotel, near Union Square, and checked in. Some of us, including my friend Ernie, then spent the evening dining and sightseeing while others remained in their rooms to cram for the exam. I subscribed to the theory that "if I haven't learned what I need to know by now, it's too late." A few more hours of study could hardly be productive. I did insist on a good night's sleep, and was in bed by ten o'clock.

The examination room, in the U.S. Customs House on Battery Street, was a sterile hall containing about twenty tables-and-chairs and little else. An inspector, a dour individual whose job it was to handle the papers and make sure that no one cheated or created a disturbance, sat at a big desk in the front of the room.

The examination was an all day affair; a couple of hours devoted to narrative questions on "rules and regulations," the remainder dealing with problems relating to math, radio and electronics. I was not the last of our group to finish the exam, but I was not far ahead of him.

Rather in a daze after the ordeal, I walked out to the street and into a nearby saloon where I guessed I might find some of my peers. Sure enough, there were Michelson, Vic Snow, Bill Manca, Ivan Meyers and others bellied up to the bar, unwinding and comparing answers to remembered questions. (Ernie was still poring over the exam.) Only then did I begin to worry, on learning that some of my answers differed from theirs.

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I finally decided, since it was impossible to prove whose answers might be right and whose were wrong, that we would have been better off not comparing notes at all. Now I was destined to fret until the official results were available in a week or two. There was one thing we could count on. Based on previous classes' experience, 25-percent of us would fail the test. But who?

The next day, somewhat rested, we returned to Elko.

I suffered through ten agonizing days of waiting before our test results came through. Three of our number had failed, but I had "made the grade" and now possessed a Radiotelephone Second-Class license. When asked how I did on the exam I responded, tongue in cheek, that I'd earned a grade of 98. No one could prove otherwise for the FCC officials were prohibited from revealing any test results. (Had I failed I'd have used the number 74.)

The next step in our training was also in the classroom, where we studied the theory and operation of microwave-radio, specifically the Western Electric TD-2, a system so new that very little had yet been published on the subject. But the Bell System Practices, the Company's comprehensive set of instruction manuals, contained all of the necessary information for our needs and doubled as textbooks. The course came in two, two-week sessions. The first was all book-work, the second practical application. Classes were held in Reno, taught by staff technicians from Sacramento.

We traveled to Reno in pairs, usually in someone's personal vehicle at company expense, stayed at a motel on East Second Street (now the Reno Motel) and walked two blocks to class in the Company building at 100 North Center Street. Chuck Herrington taught my first class, "Moose" Walther the second.

Moose was as big as his nickname, with a voice to match. Like many of the Company's best technicians, he had served in the U.S. Navy. A likable fellow, he was nonetheless demanding and brusque in the classroom, the kind of guy only a fool would trifle with, as I would learn.

It was summertime, and there was no air-conditioning in the old building where the TD-2 equipment had been set up temporarily for training. On Friday, the last of the week's long hot days, our class of eight crowded around the test-bay while Moose patiently explained the workings of a particular piece of equipment - for the third time. We were not very alert. Some of us had dined at the Santa Fe (a Basque restaurant) the night before and washed down great quantities of food with dark red wine. I felt awful. It was stifling hot, well past lunch-time, and I for one was ready for a break. Not for a sandwich - the thought of food was sickening - but for a breath of fresh air.

Moose twisted knobs and flipped switches all the while describing his actions in great detail. But none of it registered with me. Suddenly he paused, turned toward me and asked, "Am I doing it right, Phelps?"

Spontaneously I responded: "Damned if I know."

Moose's face turned livid (not unlike old Miss Brailey's back in grammar school) and he exploded. "What kind of answer is that?"

My fellow students and I stood in mute silence.

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"Why in hell are you here if you're not going to pay attention?" he went on. "I know it's hot and you're hungry, but as long as I'm talking you'll by-God pay attention. All of you."

What could I say? I already felt bad, physically, now I was embarrassed as well. I had cheated myself and the class and lost credibility with my instructor to boot.

Needless to say I was really relieved when Moose, deciding that our concentration was hopelessly broken, turned us out for the noon half-hour. I went straight to the Lake Street Bridge, stood by the rail, gazed into the clear flowing water and breathed deeply the wonderfully fresh air. By the end of the lunch period my headache had worn off, and I went back to class with a more receptive attitude. Moose had calmed down too. He accepted my apology and grinned good-naturedly.

I am reminded of the time when, a year later, I saw Moose in a totally different light. He was in Elko giving us technical advice and assistance relative to our radio system, and stayed over the weekend. We talked him into a fishing trip, loaned him a rod and reel, a couple of hooks and bait, and took him to the Owyhee River below Wildhorse Dam.

By late afternoon our well-dressed white-collared technician had been transformed into a hatless, sunburned, windblown, grinning Tom Sawyer. His once white shirt, long sleeves rolled up to the elbow, was torn across the shoulder and dirty with dust and leaf stains. His slacks were rolled-up to his knees, but he had obviously found deep water and was wet to the crotch. His shoes, expensive fine-grain leather ones once suitable for wear in a San Francisco staff meeting, sloshed with every step, leaving muddy puddles in the dry dust by the roadside.

But the "grand touch" was his bulging pants pockets, each possessed of two fine trout, their tails sticking out and waving as banners to his success.

The Sacramento staff people spent a lot of time in Elko, giving us on-the-job training and at the same time making sure the equipment was installed correctly and working properly. Besides Moose and Chuck, there were George Barnes and Windsor Meals.

George was a quiet man, whose knowledge of and experience in telephone power equipment was extremely helpful to us. Windsor was more of a radio man. He was also a droll fellow, whose brilliant mind reduced the subject of almost every conversation to one of facts, figures and statistics. On learning that I came from a family of eleven children, for no particular reason he quickly calculated the interval between births and our probable ages.

Windsor was well known for his maxims. For example, when adjusting a transmitter and observing the oscilloscope trace he'd advise, "You've got to get the garbage out" (meaning, tune out the noise and interference) and "Limits is limits" (don't waste time trying for perfection).

It was Michelson's practice to divide the workload by assigning routine maintenance responsibilities for specific sites to teams, or crews, of two men each. While anyone might occasionally work in

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another's bailiwick, a crew was accountable for the overall condition of its stations and equipment. It was a good plan. If a location was well maintained, Mike knew who deserved the credit; if it was not, it was easy to assess the blame. Pride of ownership, even pseudo-ownership, is a strong motivator.

Two of the new microwave sites, Rocky Point (in the Pequop Range) and Wendover Notch (three miles west of Wendover town), and three "K" carrier sites - Pequop, Oasis and Silver Zone - were assigned to Ernie and me. They would always be, in my possibly biased opinion, the best maintained sites in the country.

Four of our five sites were somewhat unique. Only Rocky Point, to which an AC high-line had been extended from Wells, was provided with commercial power. The Company generated its own power at the others, using gasoline engine-generators at the three "K" stations, diesel engine-alternators at Wendover Notch.

As a matter of fact, there was insufficient power available in Wendover to supply our station. In those days, many of the town's establishments generated their own AC while others, including the majority of residential homes, received electricity from the power plant at the Wendover Air Base. Public utility power in that corner of the world was a thing of the future.

By way of explanation; all telephone associated equipment in the Bell System was powered by direct current (DC) voltage from batteries (similar to those used in submarines). That is why telephones keep working when commercial power fails. But all batteries must be recharged, if not continually at least frequently. Where commercial power was available this was done by means of an AC-to-DC rectifier; where unavailable, by a DC engine-generator or an AC engine-alternator and rectifier. (Too complex?) Even an AC powered station required a standby engine, to take over in the event of a power failure. So you see, engine maintenance constituted a large part of our job.

As toll-testboardmen working outside of Elko we had a diverse set of duties. We did everything from housekeeping, sweeping, dusting, swabbing and waxing, to battery, engine, wire-line carrier and microwave-radio maintenance. In addition we spent a lot of time driving up and down the highways and access roads. In the winter time, when the snow got too deep for a four-wheel-drive vehicle, we plowed it off the road with a blade attached to the front of a Dodge Power Wagon. When that became impractical, we drove over the white stuff in a "snow cat." Getting to and from a site often took more effort and time than the equipment maintenance job itself.

On August 17, 1951, with the start of actual service on the world's first transcontinental microwave-radio route, a new era in the history of communication began. And while the success of that event went un-heralded, I was proud to be a part of it; confident in the knowledge that my contribution, while minute in comparison to the overall undertaking, was an important piece of the whole.

Two-and-a-half weeks later the world was made aware of the accomplishment, when President Truman's opening of the Japanese Peace Conference in San Francisco was televised and transmitted from coast to coast.

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Those dates, and others thereafter, were significant to me in still other ways. Because of the susceptibility to failure of certain components in this new-to-the-industry microwave system, it was deemed prudent, should remedial action be necessary when an important televised event was being transmitted, to man the mountaintop sites. Since much of this "standby" work took place in the evening it was subject to overtime pay. It was a welcome source of extra income to us craftsmen.

Should a microwave-radio transmitter require repair or adjustment, the attendance of at least one FCC-licensed technician was required. Because working extra time was common, a licensed tollie was often paired with a non-licensed man to "equalize" the overtime list. Vic Snow, with whom I was frequently teamed, was one of the latter.

A man of good disposition Vic and I got along right well, as people of opposite temperament often do. He had been with the Company since the early 1940s, and had a good background in the maintenance of carriers, batteries and power plants. I benefited by his experience and knowledge in the "K" stations; he let me take the lead in the microwave sites. When the situation demanded work was not a stranger to Vic, but he was a master of the art of "pacing" himself.

The men who built and maintained the first telephone line across the Great Basin and Sierras, the men who braved the elements from horseback, snowshoes and open wagons to keep the wires humming, were the true pioneers of long-distance telephony. But we, too, were pioneers. When it came to working on mountain-top sites, except for a few government weather observation posts (the best known being Mt. Washington in New Hampshire) and early radar facilities, our Bell System Microwave Radio stations were the first to require day-or-night, year-round accessibility. The sensitive electronic equipment could not long operate without attention, and failure to reach a site in trouble might result in both costly service outages and adverse public reaction.

And mountain-top activities, especially in winter, can be very hazardous. Even before any microwave equipment was installed in one of our buildings, Rocky Point, a potentially tragic event occurred. (The Rocky Point site, at 8,200' elevation, was the second highest such installation in the United States; actually, in the world. Mt. Rose, near Reno, at 10,000' was the highest.)

It happened in November, 1950, while I was attending the radio-license school. A Company construction crew of four, under the direction of Klone Draper, was at work on the new antennas atop the building when a sudden storm came up. It turned into a blizzard. They were forced to quit working and started to drive off the mountain.

They had gone but 150-yards, however, when their truck stalled and had to be abandoned. With great difficulty, due to gale-force winds and biting snow, they regained the sanctuary of the building, which was then but an empty shell devoid of power or heat. To get warm and dry they built a fire in a five-gallon-can, using scraps of lumber for fuel, in the middle of the main room.

At 9:00pm, having heard nothing from Draper since morning, Shorty Wentworth, the construction supervisor, and Paul Walther, a tollie, left Elko in a Jeep Station Wagon to investigate. After a fruitless

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search for the men in Wells they proceeded to Rocky Point, making it to the mountain-top by midnight. It was now clear and calm but frightfully cold. The worried pair came across the stalled vehicle, attempted to start its engine to move it, but could not, and made their way up to the station.

There was no trace of the crew in the drifted snow, or any sound, nor sign of life. On opening the door a cloud of acrid smoke poured forth, but there was still no evidence of the men; until Paul stumbled over one of them on the floor.

Fortunately they were all alive, but languid from the effects of smoke inhalation and lack of oxygen. And were they glad to see their rescuers? You bet!

That incident was a stark warning of what could happen in the mountain environment. As a consequence, new rules of operation were immediately enacted, the most important of which was the following:

"Every employee must report to the Elko office in person or by phone when going to work at a remote site and again on returning."

Anyone overdue would be the subject of a search. Additionally, Michelson started the ball rolling for the provision of a mobile-radio system, with units to be installed in maintenance vehicles and at certain mountain-top locations.

My own introduction to the formidable pairing of "Old Man Winter" with "Old Man Mountain" came in the spring of '51, when I helped to haul a trailer-mounted engine-alternator to Rocky Point. Delayed by wintry conditions, the power company's line was not yet in place and the microwave equipment installation was way behind schedule. It was now a case of hurry-up and catch-up; Western Electric installers had to have electricity.

With the trailer in tow behind our new Dodge Power Wagon, and with a Jeep along for good measure, Mike, Vic and I were able to get the precious alternator through to the site. And despite the wind and cold, we got it hooked-up and working.

But it was during the following winter that we really got to know the "Old" twins on a first-name basis, when the microwave route was "up and working" and we had become familiar with its maintenance. The big snows came, and in the absence of a construction crew to clear the road for us we had a lot to learn.

Prior to the 1950s there were very few over-the-snow vehicles in existence. The military had some, such as the Bombardier (built, I think, by the Canadians and used in WW-II) and there were some homemade and custom-built rigs around the country. It was one of the latter types, a sort of half-track, half-ski machine, which was used by telephone linemen to patrol the open-wire lead over Donner Summit.

No doubt the most efficient snow vehicle of the time, though, was the Tucker "Sno-Cat," a large tractor originally designed for use in the Antarctic. The Company purchased two or three Tuckers (a smaller version of the polar machine) for use in the Reno and Elko areas. It was a beautiful but expensive vehicle, ideally suited to the deep snows commonly found on Mt Rose in the Sierra Nevada. It worked rather well on Adobe Hill, north of Elko, where the snow accumulated fairly evenly, but its running gear was subject to damage if driven over bare

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ground or shallow snow, so we would seldom use it on windblown Rocky Point.

We were not to be left out in the cold, however, another over-the-snow vehicle, one capable of traveling over bare ground, medium sized rocks and brush in addition to snow, was in an advanced stage of development by a team of researchers at the University of Utah in Logan. Called a "Frandee Sno-Shu," its composite design incorporated features of a four-wheel-drive Jeep and a crawler tractor.

Two rubber-belted, wooden-cleated tracks (that evenly distributed its weight over the snow) were propelled by an automotive drive train and two pairs of rubber-tired wheels fore and aft. Two more pairs of wheels served as idlers. It was powered by a snappy, in-line-six Ford engine. It was steered by means of two up-right levers, located between the operator's knees, to brake the tracks, either right or left. To stop the vehicle, both levers were pulled at once. Hard! A steering-wheel, linked to a steel rudder at the end of a twenty-foot boom in front, could be used to augment the primary steering system when conditions were right. A heated cab accommodated the driver, a passenger and a small amount of cargo.

The little yellow SNO-SHU (its logo emblazoned with a snowshoe hare) could travel over snow at speeds up to 30 mph without undue vibration. Faster when the surface was smooth.

As with any prototype machine, this one had inherent problems. But the concept was good and it was especially suited to winter conditions at Rocky Point, which generally consisted of alternate stretches of wind-swept ground and hard-packed drifted snow.

Vic Snow and I had the privilege of taking the Frandee on its maiden trip to the Point. Secured to a tilt-bed trailer behind our workhorse Power Wagon, we hauled our charge to the access road near the Pequop summit and off-loaded it on a convenient embankment. It was an ideal day, cold but calm.

Comfortably seated in the Frandee, my senior partner at the controls, we began the six-mile journey to the mountaintop. Unlike the mountain men of yore who crossed the white expanse with muffled footsteps, our passage was heralded by the barking of an engine and a rattling of cleats. (It is my belief that he who devises a silent propulsion system will rank right up there with he who invented the internal combustion engine.)

At the head of the first draw we crossed a bare ridge, and then cut cross-country through a swale of sagebrush-deep and relatively smooth snow. We avoided following the road, where eddying up-slope winds had deposited drifts three-feet deep.

Vic decided to test the Snow-Shu, and ran it up to 35 mph. It rolled along right nicely, throwing a rooster-tail of soft snow to the rear like a speedboat on water. He tried a couple of turns and found the rudder to be of help in a large-radius turn but almost a hindrance in a tight one. (On ice or bare ground it would prove to be totally ineffective, rendering the braking system essential.) Overall, we were pleased with our new vehicle.

The last mile of access road to the site, having been designed by engineers as yet unfamiliar with mountaintop snow conditions, followed the north side of the main hogback ridge. As a consequence it was

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closed by the first snowstorm of the season. We had been using the ridge top, in the Jeeps, but now decided to try our snow-cat on the north-side road; at least where the road should be. Vic hit the throttle and started up, but the drifted snow was so steep the rig tipped and slid to the left, dangerously close to the brink.

He complained that it was hard to steer. I accused him of getting weak, or "chicken." Still I was relieved when he came to a stop, backed down to bare ground and took the ridge top to our destination. Now I could see that he really was having trouble steering. He had to use both hands and all his strength to achieve a ten-degree turn.

At the station we got out to investigate, and found that the brake drums were encased in solid ice and the right-rear hydraulic line was broken and dripping fluid. No wonder it was hard to steer. Now, it is a simple fact that a non-steerable vehicle is as good as none at all. Either we'd have to find a way to fix it, or plan to spend the night on the mountain. But first there was a case of trouble to repair inside the building. Besides, we desperately wanted to get in out of the cold. A 15-degree, 20-mph wind cannot be tolerated for long.

With the snow shovel (that was stored in a protected place for the purpose) I dug through the drift at the entrance, unlocked and shoved the door inward - against a foot of snow that had been blown through cracks into the vestibule - and in a moment we were snug and warm in the heated, windowless, concrete building. Vic made a pot of coffee; I set about fixing a defective component in one of the radio channels. That done, we took our ease at the kitchen table, savored the hot black Java and munched on our sandwiches - which had frozen but were now thawed - and discussed the problem with our snow-cat. If we could just get those right-side brakes to work...?

"We could pinch off the copper line where it's broken," I suggested, "and the front-right brake should work." Then I wistfully added, "If we had some brake fluid."

"Aha!" my partner looked pleased. "There's anti-freeze in the engine room. We can use that."

I'd have never thought of it but the idea sounded good to me. So we bundled-up again in the down-filled, foul-weather parkas and pants provided by the Company, and stepped out into the cold. The wind had increased in velocity while we were inside, and chunks of ice and bits of real estate were being swept around the corner of the building, pelting my cheeks till I thought they would bleed. We hurried to the task, bending and flattening the broken line to seal it. We filled the brake reservoir with Prestone and bled the lines of trapped air. But wearing mittens we were "all thumbs" and the job took an eternity. Including the time spent inside, warming our hands over a hot-plate, we were more than two hours getting that infernal machine back in running order.

Following our custom of taking turns, I drove off the mountain. The steering-brakes worked at only fifty-percent efficiency, but the going was good and we got to the truck-and-trailer just as the sun was setting. We then loaded the snow-cat onto the trailer, in sub-zero temperatures, accomplishing the job before dark. Tired and hungry we headed down the highway toward home.

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That was the first of many troubles with the Frandee's brake-and-steering system. There was just too much strain on it. What was needed was a clutch-and-brake device similar to that used on a bulldozer.

The Thiokol Corporation ultimately took over production of the Frandee SNO-SHU (renaming it the "Trackmaster") and incorporated just such a system in succeeding models, thus eliminating the need for the cumbersome and inefficient boom-and-rudder. Other improvements, some of them based on our recommendations, were made as well; for example, the track supporting wheels, originally shod with standard automotive tires that frequently went flat, were replaced by rubber-on-steel sprocket drivers and small idler wheels.

In spite of its drawbacks, I was partial to the prototype Frandee. It was a workhorse. It was fast, for those days. It was fun to drive. And it was considerably safer, especially in inclement weather conditions, than today's "snowmobile."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE
EXCITING TIMES

Only once did the Frandee SNO-SHU leave us stranded, and then the fault was wholly our own. On that not unusually cold and wintry day, in January of 1952, Ernie and I were dispatched to Rocky Point to clear some case of trouble or other. We left town well before daybreak, with the Frandee on its trailer behind the Power Wagon. I was driving.

It had stormed most of the night before and now the highway was snow-packed, slippery and treacherous. It was still dark when we got to Welcome, where an unidentifiable something suddenly appeared in the road dead ahead. It was too slippery to safely slow or swerve, and I almost ran over it. On our way by, the headlights revealed a pair of animals in deadly combat; a bobcat and a badger, probably fighting over a car-killed rabbit. We wondered aloud who would win the meal.

I thought we were goners when we entered the narrow underpass at the curve near the bottom of the hill west of Wells. There was no way to slow down, so I aimed for the middle of the opening and, luckily, there was no one coming from the opposite direction. We had the whole space to ourselves. (We needed it.)

As usual we stopped in Wells for gas at Dudley's Station, and for breakfast at the Ranch House, before proceeding toward the Pequop Range. On Moor Hill we encountered dry snow; sparkling ice crystals that danced in the headlight beams and swirled like dust behind our rig. The phenomenon triggered anew a discussion on one of our favorite subjects, a subject of great mutual interest to Ernie and me, the weather.

Having been an aerologist I considered myself somewhat of an expert on meteorology. Ernie, having lived and worked on a ranch in the Great Basin, where the weather was key to every operation, felt secure with his knowledge. So we had our little arguments and if our prognostications differed appreciably we might even wager a dollar on the outcome.

Even the outcome was not always cut and dried, however, since I tended toward certain meteorological "distinctions" that Ernie would not agree with. For example, if I bet that it would rain and five drops showed on the windshield, I believed that I'd won.

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"We don't call that rain!" he would exclaim.

"Well it qualifies in my book," I'd respond, quoting some obscure passage from the Navy manual.

On this particular day, though, we agreed right from the start that the weather on the Point was likely to be bad. Even so we had no qualms about going, we had the best of equipment at our disposal and could deal with any kind of adversity. Or so we thought.

The Power Wagon ground noisily up the steep curves in the Pequop Range, and stopped with a sigh at the access road. We offloaded the snow-cat onto a new-fallen snow that, when added to the old pack, was two to three feet deep on average. It was sometimes impossible to find an average, on that wind-blown mountain, but this snow lay like a blanket over all.

It was extremely cold. The Frandee was slow to warm, and we both shivered while painstakingly scraping the ice off its windshield. It was Ernie's turn to drive, and he followed our usual course which, at the lower end, lay roughly superimposed on the summer road.

"Why am I here?" he grumbled in his inimitable way. "Why did I come to work for this outfit anyway, to wind up on this damned mountain in weather that ain't fit for a cow much less a man?"

"Aw, you know you like it," I offered absentmindedly. But as we continued, I too began to wonder at the advisability of our making this particular trip.

After topping the first ridge, Ernie headed cross-country through a wide ravine. We had used this route all winter, and I usually goaded my partner to greater speed across the smooth snow. But now all signs of the trail were obliterated and I made no such comment. Everything was white and the clouds hugged the hillside. We were totally engulfed in white. No object was discernible beyond our own little yellow-and-black machine, and Ernie was literally driving by the seat-of-his-pants.

As you may have guessed, we were in a genuine, first class white-out, a condition all too familiar to arctic explorers and mountain men but new to us. Ernie slowed and finally braked to a stop. We climbed out, stood on the tracks on either side of the vehicle and peered into the frozen fog.

"You see anything?" I asked.

"Not a damned thing," came the response. "Maybe we better turn around."

Not wanting to admit failure so early in the day, I volunteered to walk along in front of the snow-cat while he drove slowly and aimed at my back. The visibility might be no better afoot, but if I fell out of sight then he could stop the cat.

Thus we proceeded. But the deep snow soon discouraged me from that pursuit, and I returned to the comfort of the cab. Ernie then suggested that we sit tight for awhile, and in hindsight I would admit to the logic of his plan. But at the time, I argued to press on and he reluctantly agreed. Only now I held my door open and leaned out, directing my attention to a point just ahead of the right-hand track and hoping to observe any pitfall before it was too late. In this manner we crept along at the slowest possible speed, slower than a man could walk. The "barking" engine eventually signaled that we were

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climbing. Good. We should soon intersect the access road at the end of our short-cut.

But there was no way of knowing our true position and my partner was really grumbling now, cussing the lousy weather, the snow-cat, and his shortcomings as a driver. In an attempt to reassure him, I allowed that we must be on course. "I'll let you know if it looks bad," I asserted.

He was not reassured but drove on anyway, working the brake levers with the deftness of a seasoned cat-skinner.

Unless one has personally experienced a white-out, it is impossible to understand what it's like. You become totally disoriented with respect to direction, and, except for the extreme, you cannot tell whether you're on a level or sloping surface. I sensed that we were climbing, which we were, but had no idea that we were angling off to the east.

And then it happened. In slow motion the front end of the cat track, over which I was peering, began to fall away.

"STOP!" I yelled. But it was already too late. I knew we were going to roll over even as Ernie strained at the brake levers in a superhuman but futile attempt to arrest our motion. Instinctively I struggled to close the door that I'd been holding open, but gravity won the contest. The cat was half-sliding, half-rolling to the right, but I could see nothing beyond the cleated track. For all I knew we could be falling into the sky. Unable to close the door I pushed it all the way open, so it wouldn't be crushed when we hit bottom - we must hit bottom sooner or later - and with my other hand I clung to the edge of the seat to keep from falling out. Finally, when I could no longer hold on, I stepped through the open doorway into the white void below.

As if by magic my feet sank into soft snow...the cab settled around me...and I felt the bulk of Ernie on my shoulders. The snow-cat's engine raced while its free track whirled unbridled, making a frightful racket in the air overhead. The pungent odor of gasoline sent the thought of fire racing through my mind.

"Turn it off!" I blurted from the bottom of the pile.

"Can't...reach," came the reply from an unlikely direction. Ernie's head was lodged between my shoulder and the seat-back.

Two torsos, two heads, four arms and four legs were jammed into a space less than 3-feet cubed. For a while it appeared that none of our hands could reach the ignition key, but I finally managed a different position, groped upward past Ernie's legs, found and turned it off. The engine stopped whining but the track continued to roll and clatter for another minute; the last twitches of a dying monster.

And then there was silence. Only the "drip-drip-drip-drip" of leaking fluids marred the quiet. I tried to move my legs and Ernie groaned. He was a big guy, over six-foot tall and 200-pounds heavy, and all of him was on top of me upside down.

I found it very hard to breathe. "You okay?" I ventured, half afraid of the answer.

"I don't...think...so," he mumbled.

"Can you move?" was my next anxious question.

"Dunno.... I'll try."

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I winced from the pain of a knee in my back.

"Give me a boost up," he said. "I've gotta get the door open."

With strength beyond my belief I pushed upward. Ernie kicked at the latch, shoved the door open and maneuvered his big frame up and out. Relieved of his enormous weight I took a deep breath, reached up and followed suit.

Once clear of the machine we sized up the situation. It looked grim indeed. The radio, its antenna embedded in the snow under the cab, was useless; even if there were enough electrolyte left in the battery to provide it with voltage. I stumbled around (we were still in a white-out) and viewed our erstwhile conveyance from all perspectives, hoping to discover a way to right it. It was no use. Together we stared at the thing, both of us (apparently) perceiving it in the same way: a big orange elephant half-lying on its back, glassy eyed, one ear flopping, padded feet in the air, its trunk (the steering boom) partly buried in the snow. Ernie wished aloud for a gun with which to administer the "coup-d-grace."

"They're goin' to fire me," he said slowly, matter of factly. "Anybody has an accident in this outfit gets fired. We shouldn't have come out today. I should've stayed in bed."

In an attempt to console my big friend, I offered, "It's as much my fault as yours, I was the lookout." (Actually it was all my fault. Ernie had wanted to quit long ago.) "Anyway, nobody's going to fire us. It could have happened to anyone. We'll get chewed-out all right, but not fired." I hoped my words sounded sincere.

Ernie's back was hurting, and I suggested that he wait by the Frandee while I hiked the half-mile up the mountain to the microwave station, to call for help. He would have none of that. It was his accident, he said, and his duty to make the report. He would make it if it killed him. I was afraid that it might.

We donned our foul-weather gear and made our way up the hill, grabbing for handholds in the rocks, searching for footfalls in the snow. Packing a case containing a spare transmitter - that might be needed to repair the trouble, and that seemed to put on weight with every step - I broke out in a sweat. My lungs hurt from inhaling the crystalline air. I was bruised from stumbling over hidden rocks and falling into holes deceptively filled with soft, fluffy snow. With every step forward I slid a half-step back.

Following in my trail, every move a painfully heroic effort, Ernie came up behind; and within an hour we reached the top of the ridge, in time to catch the northwest wind just starting to blow.

The ice-encrusted building loomed like a friendly fortress. We ignored the sting of blowing ice and sand, and hurried across the open space to refuge. Once inside, after catching our breath, I brewed a pot of coffee while my teammate called the control office to report in, and to relate in brief the details of our accident.

Paul Brown, our new boss (who had replaced Michelson when he was promoted to a job in Reno) was out of the office, so Ernie gave his message to the Elko testboardman.

As a matter of fact, Paul was then on his way to the Adobe Hill site with a group of out-of-town dignitaries, a group that included Walt Harms (from Sacramento) and Mike himself. They were all traveling

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in the Tucker Snowcat and its ski-equipped trailer. Ivan Meyers was at the wheel.

When told of their trip, Ernie recommended that an advisory message be radioed to them warning of possible zero-visibility conditions. It was too late. They had already met with trouble.

As their story later unfolded: While crossing over a big snow-drift, to prevent the Tucker's tipping over Ivan made a quick turn that resulted in the upsetting of the trailer and its "contents," among them Walt Harms and Michelson who were dumped ignominiously, head-first, into the deep snow. How embarrassing!

In the meantime, Ernie and I made preparations for an all night stay. There was no way that a rescue party could get to us before late morning on the morrow, the Tucker being the only other vehicle for the job. We were on our own.

If it weren't for Old Ern's aching back it would be an enjoyable stay. We had plenty of heat, light, food and drink, good bunks to sleep on, and a broadcast radio for entertainment.

We spent the afternoon, what was left of it, doing maintenance work; the evening cooking and eating a hot meal. While chain-drinking coffee we recounted our fateful trip and talked about what we "should've done." We always came to the same conclusion: when the visibility zeroed we should have stopped in our tracks and waited, all day if necessary, for an improvement. Just as Ernie had suggested. Well, we couldn't undo the accident but from now on there would be no flirting with a white-out.

Every microwave station in Nevada contained some survival gear; canned goods, crackers, coffee, folding cots and blankets. But only three of them, Stillwater, Mount Rose and Rocky Point, were equipped with food and supplies sufficient for an extended stay. Mount Rose, because of its 10,000' elevation and deep snow conditions, was completely outfitted with a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom, even windows to look through at the outside world.

Ernie and I were disappointed that we had no windows at Rocky Point. Whenever we wanted to know what was going on outside, we had to open the heavy metal door for a look. That night there was nothing to see but ice-crystals, reflecting white from the tower lights, floating in the frigid air like a deathly shroud.

At ten o'clock, I informed the attendant in Elko that we were going "off duty" for the night, and we soon prepared ourselves for sleep. The kitchen area doubled as a sleeping quarters, and was separate from the equipment room and relatively quiet. Ernie, who was really suffering from nervousness and pain, didn't sleep well at all. I never opened an eyelid from the time I hit my pillow until five in the morning, when I got up to check the weather, found it unchanged and returned to bed.

On venturing outside after sunup, the dissipating clouds revealed a sculpted world of pure white, a fairy wonderland. Every wall, every post, every rock, every weed and twig exposed to the freezing fog was now encrusted with exquisite crystals - Pogonip, in the language of the Paiutes - some extending a dozen-inches toward the prevailing winds like "horizontal icicles." Mother Nature had done it again.

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She'd come up with a scene of beauty that could not be duplicated by man.

Now came the cold northwest wind. Not strong, but biting. I stood in the sun and looked to the southeast, into Goshute Valley. A pencil-thin black line (US-40) cut across the white expanse, bisecting the flat and disappearing in the Silver Zone range. The backbone of a near ridge prevented my seeing Independence Valley, to the west, but not the northern reach of the East Humboldt Range with its lofty peaks of ermine. From my vantage point, as far as I could see the world was at peace.

Ernie, who felt slightly better after a night of rest, if not sleep, joined me at the edge of the precipitous ledge south of the building. There it was, upside down on the sidehill far below, the Frandee SNO-SHU "dead in the snow." From this perspective, in the bright light of day, it was hard to conceive of the accident's ever happening. What a difference the day makes.

Back inside, we busied ourselves with eating and housekeeping chores, worked on the equipment and waited, going outside at intervals to see if anyone were coming. It was just before noon when our rescuers hove into view; an orange spot crawling at a snail's pace up the draw on our trail of the day before. There was plenty of smooth snow and the Tucker, on its maiden trip to the Point, had encountered no hazards.

Ernie and I suited-up, locked the doors and left the building, planning to be at the accident site before the Tucker. Going down was ten times easier than the up-trip had been. Horrible obstacles of the day before were now easily avoided; the force of gravity, a former foe, was now a friendly ally. We all arrived at the accident site at the same time, exchanged greetings, then Ernie and I took a ration of "friendly criticism" of our mountaineering skills.

Tall, slim Art Richards had driven the Tucker, with Bob Burns, Paul Brown, Red Wayman and, most importantly, Bill Bellinger on board. It was Bill who would get things squared away and us off the mountain. Already the morning sun had given way to clouds, and the west wind sent a steady cascade of snow over the cornice above the prone Frandee; prompting me to pull the fur collar of my leather jacket close while we huddled to form a plan of action.

It was agreed that the machine could be rolled on over, so I climbed up and attached one end of a long line to its frame while the other end was tied to the tow-bar of the Sno-Cat. In the clear, I watched nervously as Art applied power to his rig, took up the slack and eased on forward. With a groan the SNO-SHU rolled and bounced, then settled down on both tracks, once more upright. It had sustained surprisingly little damage, due, I expect, to the soft characteristic of the snow.

The rest of our job should have been simple: Install a new battery; fill the crankcase with oil that Bill had brought with him; check the gasoline supply; start the engine and drive away. But that's not quite the way it would work out. Somehow, things are never as easy as one expects them to be.

When all was ready, I climbed into the driver's seat of the Frandee to start the motor. "Click! Click! Click!" was all the

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response I could get. No pleasant sound of a grinding starter-motor. What now? Perhaps the engine was just too cold to turn over. A logical conclusion, judging by our own reactions to the ambient temperature that was well below zero with a sharp wind blowing. Well, we'd try towing it then.

With a taut line between the two vehicles, Art drove the big Tucker forward and I, at the proper moment, engaged the Frandee's clutch. The tracks never turned an inch and soon dragged the big Tucker to a standstill. Twice more we tried. Twice more we failed, each time with the same disheartening conclusion. The "beast," that had lain on its back all night in the cold, was not ready to again breathe fire.

But Bill was not discouraged. With a knowing look on his face he grabbed a couple of wrenches, a giant screwdriver and a hammer, and slid under the snow-cat while the rest of us stood around trying to keep warm. He quickly removed the flywheel cover, exposing the starter pinion and gear, and I heard him mutter, "Oh my!" (He was never one to use profanity). The housing was filled with solid ice. No wonder the thing wouldn't run. I had often heard the expression "a frozen engine," but had never heard of such a literal example.

The next challenge was to get rid of the ice. Using the screwdriver and hammer proved ineffective so Bill came out from under, whisked a handful of snowflakes from his collar and said, "Guess we'll have to build a fire under her."

We all could have used a fire by then, for warmth, but there was no available fuel nearby. Anyway, it wasn't a bonfire that he had in mind but a blowtorch from his bag of tricks; one just like my father's back on the farm, one that burned white gasoline. He pumped it up and touched a flaming match to the raw gas in the reservoir under the nozzle. Hah! The wind blew the fire away. We rigged a blanket for a windbreak, and, after expending a score of matches and several minutes, achieved a roaring, blue-white flame on which the wind had little effect. Bill crawled under once more, converted the irksome ice to water and let it drain away. When he could turn the flywheel with his screwdriver he pronounced the machine "ready to go" and came up for air, grinning and bragging how warm it was down there out of the wind.

It was none too soon to suit me. I climbed into the cat and got the engine going with a roar. What a beautiful sound; music to my half-frozen ears. Ernie climbed in with me, the others boarded the Tucker, with Burns at the wheel, and we raced to the parked trucks by the highway. Ernie and I loaded the Frandee and were tying it down when the Sno-Cat approached. I did a double-take.

What was that Burns doing, anyway? The cat was moving at an oblique angle, like a ruddy crab, with both sets of pontoons heading to the right. And that was not a normal mode. It finally came to a stop.

The Tucker was a totally different machine from our Frandee. It had a car-like body (roomy enough to accommodate six to eight people and some equipment) spring-mounted above its chassis and running gear. The cockpit was identical to an automobile's, with conventional controls including a steering wheel. The running gear consisted of

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four separate "pontoons," each with a sprocket-driven cleated track. It was the pontoons that gave the Tucker its excellent snow-float ratio (weight/square-inch of supporting area). The pontoons were designed to track; that is, the rear set followed in the tracks of the front set. When the front set, or truck, was steered to the right, the rear truck turned to the left by the same amount.

Poor old Burns had gotten a lot of criticism from his backseat drivers, until Bellinger noted that the fault lay with the machine, not Burns. And they were lucky that it failed near the parked trucks instead of on the mountain above.

On investigation it was found that the forward steering-arm, a one-inch-thick steel rod, had snapped in two (no doubt due to the extreme cold) allowing the front truck to go where it pleased.

Bellinger jury-rigged a kind of temporary repair, sufficient to allow the cat to be loaded onto the truck bed, and we were finally in a position to call it a day (two days, for Ernie and me).

It was sundown. Wearily, we headed for home.

On my days off from work, weather permitting, I helped Rita make our trailer site a little more attractive. Using discarded packing-crate boards scrounged from the microwave sites, I built a stoop in front of the door. Later, when spring arrived, she and I planted a postage-stamp-sized lawn, then ran a picket fence across the front and painted it white.

For entertainment we went on Sunday drives and picnics, and sometimes to a movie. Television may have been coming on strong in the East, and in the big cities, but in Elko it was still a thing of the future. The cinema was "it" and affordable.

Which reminds me: Back when I was single, I occasionally worked at the Rainbo Theater on Fifth Street as a projectionist. Bill Manca was one of the regulars, and he talked me into filling in for him a couple of times a month.

The projection machines were not the first ones ever built for commercial service, but must have been among them. It was not at all unusual, on a summer evening, for the electric motors to get so hot I'd have to send an usher for bags of ice from the refreshment stand, to pack around the housings to cool them. The arc-light carbon sometimes burned too fast, faster than the automatic drive would feed it, so I'd have to stand by the machine and feed it manually. A film break was a problem of major proportion, one that required re-threading the broken end through the projector - while an irate audience yelled and stomped in an unnerving manner - and later splicing it back together on the bench. Projecting, though an interesting occupation, was subject to too many pressures to suit me, and the pay was lousy.

In the late spring of 1951, Rita, who was normally hale and hearty, experienced some illness. She made an appointment and saw Dr. Hadfield, who confirmed her suspicion that she was pregnant. Like most new husbands I received the news with mixed emotions; happy that we were going to have a child, worried that it was happening so soon, before we really had our feet on the ground. But the "die was cast"

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and arrangements must be made in preparation for the event. Our tiny trailer would no longer serve as a home.

Rita talked to her brother John, about the possibility of moving a trailer home onto the back of his lot at 371 Oak Street where he and Loretta had recently moved with their young son Jack. (It was Sam's property and John was renting it.) I was relieved when he consented to the proposition. Not having to rent a trailer space would result in considerable savings in our budget.

That fall we obtained a loan from the bank and purchased a 30' x 8' trailer home (at a cost of \$2,788) from Jack McAdam's Nevada Motor Company. With the help of John and Stan I towed it up the alley, maneuvered it onto the west corner of the lot (371½ Oak Street) and leveled it up on blocks.

I dug down to the sewer line and hired a plumber to connect the trailer to it. I ran an underground water line from the house-main to the trailer, then carefully wrapped the above-ground portions of both lines with thermostatically-controlled heat tapes, to prevent their freezing. Lastly, I completely enclosed the area under the trailer.

We sold the little trailer "in situ" at the Carson Trailer Court, and moved into our new (second) home. It was virtually a palace compared to the old one, with at least twice as much room and all the modern appurtenances. Quite honestly, it was the most luxurious place I'd ever lived in. Rita began to accumulate things for the expected baby and we settled in for the long cold winter.

I had always taken advantage of emergency call-outs, which resulted in overtime pay, and now that Rita was "heavy with child" and no longer working at the bank, the extra money was welcome indeed.

Rita nagged me to take her along on a call-out some time, so she could see for herself what it was that so often took me away from home. It was against the rules for a non-employee to ride in a company vehicle, but she knew that others had done so and couldn't understand my reluctance.

And so, one evening, when I received a call and learned that Albert Sails (who was now working for the Company) was to be my partner, I agreed to her going along. Albert didn't mind. In fact, he offered to get the company truck and pick us up at our home, which was on the way out of town. Our job was to go to the Argenta microwave site, some 70-miles west of Elko, to repair a defective radio channel.

I chuckled to myself as we headed down the highway, for although Rita had known Albert for years she was unprepared for his style of driving.

As far as I knew, Albert had never had a serious accident. But he had earned a reputation for driving "too fast for conditions." There were those in the crew who wouldn't ride with him, even at the expense of an overtime call-out. At any rate, Rita was openly nervous throughout the whole of our journey to Argenta, especially when Albert raced up the winding mountain road to the station.

Inside, Rita looked around while Albert and I worked on the ailing radio component, which turned out to be an easy job. But we were not destined to return to Elko right away. As so often happened,

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we were dispatched farther west on another case of trouble, this one on the "K" carrier route. We left the station and headed west.

At Battle Mountain, where we stopped for gas, it was my turn to drive. I knew that the roads ahead were really rough, too rough for Rita in her "delicate condition," and decided to impose on our friends Vernal and Mary Jones, who lived at the edge of town, and leave her there while we went on west. It was almost midnight and the Joneses were surprised to see us, but they were more than willing to have her stay until we returned. Whenever that might be.

It turned out to be a wise decision, leaving her there, because we spent several hours driving from one "K" station to the next in search of an elusive case of trouble. Then, when we had located and fixed it (50-miles down the road), another case arose at the Fish Creek microwave station and we were sidetracked to take care of it before returning to Battle Mountain.

Dawn was just breaking when we got back to the Joneses' place, to get Rita, and the day was no longer young when we arrived at Elko. Albert dropped us off at our home, then returned the truck, logged in at the office and wrote up our many overtime hours.

Rita was tired and sore after the rough trip and long night, but her curiosity must have been satisfied. She never again asked to go along with me in a Company vehicle.

January of 1952 was cold in the extreme. And when it wasn't cold it was snowing. The time drew near for Rita to deliver, and so that I'd be close to home I took an assignment in town, repairing microwave-radio parts. Of course, giving birth to the baby was really her job (with Dr. Hadfield's help) but I wanted to be in a position to take her to the hospital and be on hand when the newborn arrived.

After days of waiting and apprehension on my part; waiting, apprehension and misery on Rita's part, her time arrived. It was late Monday afternoon (if memory serves me) on the 28th of January. I drove her to the Elko General Hospital, placed her in the care of the experts and repaired to the waiting room.

I suppose Rita remembers every minute detail of the event, such as the time we left for the hospital, how long she was in labor, the exact hour and the vital statistics of the birth. My recollections are limited to the period of waiting, of trying to conceal my anxiety, and of a nurse finally coming in to announce that I was the father of a girl.

A short time after that another nurse brought forth a tiny bundle, lifted a corner of the bunting and announced, "Here she is, a beautiful baby girl. Congratulations."

Weighing in at 6-pounds, 13-ounces, Georgina Kaye (the name Rita and I had chosen for her) had arrived.

I never thought it possible that I would consider a newborn baby, any newborn baby, cute or pretty or beautiful. But in spite of her being a little red and wrinkled, Gina (as we would call her) was absolutely whole, flawless in every detail and, there was no getting around it, beautiful! I felt an enormous sense of pride in Rita's and my accomplishment.

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At work the next day, I handed out cigars (it was traditional then) and received congratulatory handshakes and hearty back-slaps from my friends. A few days after that I retrieved the new mother and child from the hospital, and did my best to make them comfortable at home.

It was cozy and warm in our trailer, which was heated by an oil-fired stove located up front with a blower that pushed hot air through a duct to the bedroom in back. Gina slept in a tiny crib beside our bed.

For the next several months our little baby doll demanded and received our attention; Rita's around-the-clock, and mine when I was not at work or asleep.

I was certainly fond of my daughter, although I refrained from holding her (much) until she was old enough to recognize who was doing the holding. And when she could crawl and stand and do things by herself I appreciated her all the more. She was a good baby, too, and seldom cried or fussed.

One of her many endearing habits, when she got a little older, was getting her own bottle in the morning at sun-up. She'd stand up in her crib, reach for the bottle on the shelf nearby (where Rita had placed it), lie down and drink its contents. After a while we'd be awakened by her cheerful, wordless chatter.

By any definition or comparison, Gina was a model child.

Although the Bell Laboratories had already invented and demonstrated the transistor - the amazing device which would revolutionize the field of electronics - the vacuum tube was still the keystone of radio and telephone technology in the 1950s. One type of vacuum tube in particular, designated "WE 416-A" and also developed by the Bell Labs, was paramount to the success of microwave-radio communication.

The 416-A was a smaller, more sophisticated version of an earlier "lighthouse" tube (so-called because it resembled a miniature lighthouse), a triode that operated at UHF frequencies. The 416-A, manufactured to incredibly close tolerances for those days, was capable of amplifying the extremely short-wavelength radio frequencies in the 4000-megacycle (now megahertz) band. Its elements (the grid wires were one-fourth as thick as a human hair) were enclosed in a gold-plated, metal-and-glass envelope, smaller overall than an English walnut. (I'll not attempt to describe the technical aspects of the tube.)

Despite Western Electric Company's rigid manufacturing controls, in operation the 416-A dissipated a great deal of heat and had to be air cooled. The heat contributed to the tube's relatively short service life; a few months at best, a few hours at worst. It was not unusual, after expending two hours replacing a tube and realigning the associated equipment, to have to start all over again when that new tube failed.

So, in spite of its unique properties, the 416-A tube was very expensive to operate; not only because the tube itself was costly (upwards of \$185 initially) but also because of the cost of labor to

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replace it. That little jewel was a major contributor to extra wages in our bi-weekly paychecks.

The microwave-radio route had not been in service a year when additional radio channels were installed, along with more power equipment and batteries, to handle the increased demand for transcontinental communications. We now spent twice as many nights on the mountaintops as before, on a schedule that kept us away from home three or four consecutive days and nights at a time. And this meant getting used to a whole new style of life; sleeping in hotels, eating in restaurants, looking for ways to entertain ourselves in the daytime.

Typically, Ernie and I would leave Elko on a Monday evening, drive to Wells, stop for gas and for coffee, then drive on to Rocky Point arriving at 10:00pm when the radio channels could be released from service for routine maintenance work. In the early days, when we were still learning, the two of us would work together on one channel. But as we became more proficient we took turns; one guy would "tweak" and adjust the equipment on one channel while the other checked the parameters and replaced tubes or hardware on another. Or the second man might work on power equipment and batteries. Or perform some of the endless housecleaning chores in the station. Electronic equipment, batteries, engines, floors, walls, everything at the site had to be kept immaculately clean and polished.

Except for those nights when things just didn't go right, we'd complete our routine work and leave the mountaintop at 4:00am, drive sleepily to Wells, breakfast, then go to our hotel rooms. In the wintertime, when Rocky Point was accessible only by snow-cat and travel was limited to daylight hours, our work-nights were considerably longer, sleep time more appreciated.

It was a strange phenomenon: No matter how tired you were when you hit the sack, you were invariably wide awake after five or six hours. So what did you do then? Some of the guys spent their afternoons at the mahogany bar in the Wagon Wheel, Elite, or Bull's Head Saloon. But that activity was too expensive for Ernie and me. Besides, it was hard enough getting accustomed to an upside-down day without compounding the problem with alcohol.

Neither Ernie nor I was seduced by the saloons, preferring instead to utilize our spare time in exploring the surrounding countryside. To accomplish this end, in the absence of private transportation, we used the Company truck; an unauthorized and improper act but condoned by local supervision. Like our predecessors, we resorted to the limp excuse that since we were there at the Company's behest, it should provide a vehicle for our off-duty activities. And cruising the back roads would certainly increase our knowledge of the local geography, a factor that might one day prove valuable to our employer. Further, we rationalized, driving around in the back country, even in a familiar green truck with a yellow-and-black Bell System logo, was far better than being drunk or disorderly in town, directly in the public view.

Our forays took us into Clover Valley, up to Angel Lake, out to the Moor Hills, Pequop and Silver Zone Ranges, but never more than twenty miles or so from US-40. In deer season we packed our rifles,

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with the hope of bagging a big buck before dark, although I recall shooting but two deer in this manner.

Our back country tours were not always without incident. One afternoon, Ernie and I drove north from the Rocky Point access road to hunt for deer. The browse was thick on the ridges in that area and we saw quite a few deer, but none within shooting distance. At length we came to the flats and the Southern Pacific railroad, near an abandoned water-stop called Pequop. Rather than retrace our slow and tedious way back to Rocky Point, we headed west on a road parallel to the railroad, intending to intersect the highway at Moor Summit and return to Wells for dinner. All went well until, a mile short of the highway and just at sunset, we ran out of gas.

We could walk to the highway and hitch a ride, or take the easy way out and call on the mobile radio for help. We chose the latter, made contact with old Bob Romans (in the Elko office) and asked to have someone dispatched from Wells with a can of gas. Of course we had to reveal our location, and our side trip was no longer a secret. Within the hour Glen Dudley, who owned the Chevron Station, came to our rescue. (In less time than that, Romans had spread the story of our transgression throughout the office.)

One cool, autumn dawn, after completing a night's work at Rocky Point, Ernie and I drove to Oasis, a way-station complex with a garage, gas pumps, a cafe, a half-dozen cabins and a couple of homes in the valley east of the Pequops. We ate a hearty breakfast and then headed for the sagebrush-pinyon-juniper hills above the Johnson Ranch, southwest of Oasis, to look for deer.

This was also the area where Ernie and I looked for Christmas trees in December, trudging through the snow in search of the "perfect" pinyon pine. Unlike fir, balsam and spruce trees, pinyons usually outgrow their classic "Christmas tree" shape when fifteen or twenty years old, and only about one out of every dozen of the younger ones fit our requirements.

There was an anomaly in this canyon. Just past a narrow cut, a tiny grove of fir trees grew. The only firs in forty miles that I knew of. There could not have been more than three dozen trees in all, ranging in size from a few- to fifty-feet tall. One year Ernie and I succumbed to temptation, climbed and topped two of those nicely shaped trees for our homes. But the following year, afraid of decimating the grove, we reverted to cutting pinyons.

But back to the hunt. We went through the narrows, a cleft in an up thrust wall of rock, past the copse of firs and into a ravine above. Tall rye grass, its shiny yellow blades reflecting early morning light, almost hid a pair of uneven tracks that passed for a roadway. To the left and right of us, on the steep canyon-sides, were gnarled but sturdy mahogany trees. The ridges above, topped by jagged, bronze-colored blocks of rock, finally gave way to a turquoise sky streaked with mares' tails.

I was at the wheel of the Marmon-Herrington (a 1950s 4-W-D panel truck, similar to a Chevrolet Suburban) which was barely crawling up the draw. All of our attention was turned to the search for deer, or

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at least some sign of them, when an animal raced across the road a hundred yards ahead.

"There's a doe!" we exclaimed in unison."

Preconditioned by thoughts of deer, that's what we saw. Or thought we saw. But when the tawny "shape" bounded up the steep sidehill off to my left it was perfectly clear that what we had mistaken for a doe was in fact a swift, sleek, long-tailed mountain lion (a-k-a puma, cougar).

The canyon-side was nearly vertical at that point, as steep as it could be and still support a growth of brush and mahoganies, so I allowed the vehicle to slow to a stop, cranked-down my window and leaned out to see where the big cat was going. He reached a safe haven atop a jutting rim-rock, and lay down with only his head and shoulder exposed to view.

Ernie was as excited as I was, even though he couldn't see the lion from his position. "Can you get a shot?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"I'm sure gonna try," I responded, switching off the ignition and groping for my 30-06 while keeping an eye on the beast. I sure didn't want to lose sight of him. I'd have one chance, and only one, for a shot, and it would have to be through the open window. I dared not risk opening the door to get out.

My partner, ever perceptive, placed the rifle in my hand. I grasped it firmly, pulled the bolt back and thrust it forward and locked - as quietly as possible - all the while intent on the patch of tan above the ledge. Very slowly then, I nudged the rifle barrel through the open window and angled it sharply upward.

It was an extremely awkward position to shoot from, but I pressed my cheek to the stock and took aim. So far, so good. The lion's head was my best target, by far the biggest part I could see, but I believed that a bullet in the shoulder would be more effective. So I sighted on that part of his anatomy and squeezed the trigger.

WHOOM!

What a racket! The report echoed through the inside of the Marmon like a boulder in an empty oil tank. My ears rang like an alarm bell, as did Ernie's, and a sharp pain coursed through my right shoulder from the rifle's recoil. Still I riveted my gaze on the rim above and saw a fragment of rock explode an inch below the target.

Missed! My heart sank.

At once the lion sprang up from the ledge, turned, leapt over the branches of a nearby mahogany tree and shot with lightning-like velocity up the mountainside. I shoved my door open, jumped out, and with rifle clutched in my right hand ran straight up the hill in pursuit.

There were his tracks: deep gouges in the dark, damp earth six-to-eight-feet apart, testimony to the animal's great power. He had successfully defied gravity and made good his escape over the top of a high ridge. My own ascent, while pretty fast I thought, was meager by comparison.

By the time I reached the top of the bench I was on the verge of collapse. My heart pounded like the proverbial trip-hammer. I had never before forced myself to such exertion. I slumped to the ground,

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wretched, nearly doubled-over from the pain in my stomach. Whatever adrenalin had pushed me to such an extreme was used up.

I wondered what I would do if I should see the lion now, and doubted my ability to raise the rifle much less take aim for a viable shot. But never mind. The great cat was gone. Forever. From somewhere in the cover of rocks and brush and trees in front of me he was probably watching my puny form with feline curiosity. I lay there on the hard ground for a long time, to regain normalcy, then stumbled back to the vehicle and my apprehensive companion.

"You're crazy," Ernie opined, shaking his head in disgust. "You're a fool...runnin' up that hill like that. You can't outrun a mountain lion. You never had a chance. You're lucky you didn't have a heart attack. And I'm the one who'd have to pack you out...in a company vehicle at that."

Ernie broke out a thermos of coffee and poured two tin-cups full. We leaned against the warm hood of the Marmon, sipped the wonderful, black brew and discussed the various aspects of our encounter with one of Mother Nature's shyest creatures.

I was disappointed at my loss, but not totally dejected. After all, in the real-life world of predator and prey the hunter does not always win; especially when the hunter is a man and the hunted is an elusive mountain lion.

The more I thought about it, the more satisfied I was with the way this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to bag a mountain lion, turned out. I had been given the chance. I took my best shot and missed. The magnificent lion was still Lord of his Kingdom.

The remainder of the day's outing was anticlimactic. I kept looking to the craggy peaks and mahogany pockets for a glimpse of the lion, predictably without success. We managed to see a few deer on the ridges, but none within range. So we went on to Wells, ate a hearty steak dinner, and got some sleep before going back to the mountaintop for another night's work.

And that's how we lived during "night-routines" week. Work all night; drive off the mountain; eat an early breakfast (or dinner?); explore the country-side; sit and sip at a bar; attend a matinee movie; get a few hours' sleep; eat another meal; drive back to the mountaintop site - not necessarily in that order. It usually took three or four nights to complete the routine microwave-radio work. Then we'd return to a day shift for a couple of weeks, or a month, before going back to that strange but never boring occupation on a Nevada mountain peak.

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CERTIFICATE OF DEPOSIT
P622 ELKO-LAMOILLE POWER COMPANY 422

RECEIVED FROM Geo. A. Phelps DATE 12/15/50
-CONSUMER

STREET 446 Grant Ave T 13

THE SUM OF ten and 10/100 \$ 10.00
DOLLARS

AS SECURITY FOR PAYMENT OF ANY AMOUNT WHICH MAY BECOME DUE THE UNDERSIGNED COMPANY.
WHEN THE CONSUMER'S CREDIT SHALL HAVE BEEN SATISFACTORILY ESTABLISHED THE DEPOSIT WITH INTEREST DUE, AT _____ PER CENT PER ANNUM WILL BE REFUNDED.
OR, IF SERVICE BE DISCONTINUED THE DEPOSIT WITH INTEREST DUE AT _____ PER CENT PER ANNUM SHALL BE CREDITED AGAINST THE FINAL ACCOUNT AND THE BALANCE, IF ANY, SHALL BE REFUNDED TO THE CUSTOMER.

THIS CERTIFICATE IS NOT TRANSFERABLE

George A. Phelps
CUSTOMER'S SIGNATURE

ELKO-LAMOILLE POWER COMPANY
BY Norm M. Wood
FOR THE COMPANY

Date 19 49 7003

Received From George Phelps
Dollars (\$ 4.50)

For Rent of space # 13

From Dec 14th To Dec 21st

HOW PAID	
CASH	<u>4.50</u>
CHECK	
MONEY ORDER	

By Mrs Jim Carson

RENT MUST BE PAID IN ADVANCE

1949

Receipts for Trailer Space & Power Payments

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX
DEER HUNTING ADVENTURES

Ernie Simonsen had hunted deer for many years. Ever since he was old enough to hold a rifle. One day, on our way back from a fruitless hunt in the Pequops he said to me, "If you really want to see some big bucks I'll take you where they're at, up in the Ruby Mountains above Jiggs."

I agreed, and the following weekend we took off. Ernie was really familiar with the Hankins Ranch, and had no trouble finding his way through the corrals and up a canyon to the high country, up where it opened into a wide basin.

He parked the car (a Ford coupe as I recall) on the near side of a creek and we hiked from there, working our way up the south slope of a high ridge; the north slope of the basin. Before we'd gone half a mile, my "elder" partner became winded (he was an incessant cigarette smoker in those days) and agreed to a strategy whereby I'd take the high ground, along the base of the rim-rocks, while he poked along through the brush lower down. I'd have the advantage. Commanding the view from above I could easily spot any deer that he might flush from hiding. But Ernie didn't mind.

It was a fine day for a hunt, for a climb, or for just being in the mountains. A thin veil of cirrus filtered the sun at first, but it soon dissipated. A light, northwesterly breeze slipped over the ridge, kissing the mahoganies and wafting their aroma my way. I stayed downwind as much as possible, moving from boulder to boulder for cover, and finally gained an elevation where I could look out over the whole of Huntington Valley.

Shielding my eyes, I searched the hill below for Ernie and located his seated form in the shadow of a mahogany tree, several-hundred yards away. I grinned, knowing that it was as high as he would climb that day. He'd sit quietly and wait for an unsuspecting deer to come by while I wore myself out traipsing all over the difficult country above.

I cut across to the north side of the wind-blown ridge, and began a sweep around a likely-looking point of rocks and trees; alternately walking, stopping, looking and listening. I paused to sit on a ledge

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rock, ate a candy bar, waited and listened some more then continued my quest.

In this way my day wore on to afternoon. And then I saw him: a magnificent buck standing in shoulder-deep brush, half facing me. He raised his head, and with flaring nostrils attempted to identify the intruder. But he must rely on senses other than that of smell, for the wind was blowing from him to me. I quietly raised my rifle, released the safety, took aim and applied pressure to the trigger.

Though not the grandest buck I'd ever seen, he was certainly among the best of them; a six- or seven-pointer at the very least, with extra tines on each antler. But wait. I was on the wrong side of the mountain. True, it was but a hundred yards over the top but a wounded deer could go a long way down such an abrupt slope, as I had learned the hard way on an earlier hunt. He was a large deer and would be difficult to handle alone; Ernie could never make it up here to help; and the sun was already low in the southwest.

My quarry simply stood still while I weighed those factors, and then, possibly cued by my lowering rifle, he whirled about and disappeared into the forest. So much for that, I sighed, pleased that I had gotten close, relieved that I had refrained from shooting him.

Afterward, I would often be asked why I'd climb to the highest points in search of deer if I had no intention of shooting one up there. My answer was simple: I liked the high country. I liked seeing where the great bucks reigned. And I probably harbored the subconscious thought that, if I should be so lucky as to encounter a "really big" buck, I would shoot him first and then figure a way to pack him out.

With the big buck's image still large in my mind I crossed back to the south side of the mountain, found a faint trail, descended to a convenient outcropping of ledge-rock, settled into a narrow crevasse, took up my binoculars and searched for Ernie. But without success. All was quiet. Even the breeze, sensing that the sun would soon slip over the horizon, stopped blowing.

Then I detected something, or things, moving slowly and deliberately up from the brushy bottom. It was a herd of feeding deer, eight or ten of them. I could see no antlers. They must be does. The herd ultimately reached an elevation directly across the canyon from my place of concealment. I grew impatient; wondering where in the world was Ernie. He should have been in range for a shot, and would likely shoot a doe if there were no bucks.

The deer climbed higher and farther away. I must somehow turn them around. Raising my rifle I aimed well above and beyond the uppermost animal and squeezed off a round. A moment later, the bullet exploded in a puff of dust on the opposite hillside. The deer looked up but stood still. I threw another shot over their heads. This time they reacted as I hoped. Confused, they turned and moved back down the hill. It was then that I saw Ernie, who, alerted by my shots, came out in the open and waved to signal his presence. I motioned in acknowledgment and pointed in the direction of the herd, hoping he'd catch my meaning and make an attempt to intercept it. In the meantime the deer, seeing a human being in their path, turned and moved off to

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the west, causing me to fire more rounds in an effort to turn them back toward Ernie.

It was a futile endeavor. Totally alarmed they ran strung-out in single file, rapidly picking up speed and increasing their distance. They were now four-hundred yards away, still at the same elevation as my own but about to pass out of sight over the end of the ridge. With a singular purpose in mind, to head them off, I again raised my rifle; this time taking aim at the brow of the hill, well in front of the lead deer and six-feet above the point where he should cross.

"**Cra-a-ack!**" My final shot knifed through the air just as the lead deer became a momentary silhouette against the sky and dropped out of sight; by coincidence almost exactly where the sun was about to set. In turn the other deer followed, each one popping into view for an instant, then disappearing from the skyline.

I felt a little sorry then, having heard no shots from Ernie's rifle, for needlessly frightening the herd.

"You got one!" An unexpected shout came from below, from halfway between me and the vanished deer.

"Naw...I couldn't have!" I hollered back.

Ernie insisted, so I headed for the point. It took me a good ten minutes to get there, arriving, winded, well after he did.

"Okay, so where is it?" I asked, still unconvinced that I'd hit a deer.

I explained that it was well-nigh impossible, considering where I had aimed, to hit a deer running at flank speed on the dark side of a hill against the setting sun from a distance (we agreed) of over 400-yards, and with a broken front-sight. (I was using Dan's old rifle.) Furthermore, there was no sign of a carcass; not even of blood on the trail of fresh hoof-prints.

We searched the area in ever-widening circles but my heart wasn't in it. I was merely patronizing my friend, who seemed so certain of his convictions. Anyway, to find a dead deer now, one that must certainly be a doe, was the last thing I wanted to do. My personal pride was at stake. I was not a doe killer, I was a buck hunter. Had I not passed up a great buck earlier in the day?

(I couldn't resist telling Ernie about "the big one.")

Tired and sick of the search, I climbed to the top of a car-sized boulder for a look around. I noted that our daylight was fast disappearing but the coupe was only two-hundred yards away. And then I saw the deer! A gray lifeless form lying in the sagebrush not twenty yards distant.

"By God, Ernie!" I shouted in disbelief. "You were right all along...there it is!" I then cursed to myself for having killed a doe after all.

Ernie got to the deer first and proclaimed, "It's a buck." He lifted the head by a forked-horn to prove his point. "You're sure a lucky son-of-a-gun."

I didn't think of myself as lucky, except that my reputation as a buck hunter remained intact.

With Ernie's help holding, I quickly field-dressed the deer. (And laid my pocket-knife on a rock to be forgotten.) But I didn't find the fatal wound. Only a little bleeding from the mouth. So we took

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another, closer look and Ernie discovered it, the clincher in an already unbelievable story. My bullet had entered behind his left ear and exited through his right eye. He must have died instantly. There was virtually no blood where it went in, none where it came out.

"In my considered opinion," I said to Ernie, "that little buck died as a result of an accident...from accidentally running into a speeding bullet."

Later, as we were dragging the carcass to the car I commented, "You know, this was a really bad kill."

"What do you mean?" he asked, surprised.

"The whole thing is so preposterous I'll never be able to tell about it. Who would believe it? Even with your corroboration. I would never believe such a cock-and-bull story."

Ernie raised the trunk lid and we stashed the little buck inside. "At least you and I know it's true, eh Ern?"

I slammed the lid shut; we wearily climbed into the front seat and left the basin, whose population of deer had been depleted by one young buck.

"Anyway," I said to Ernie, "I'm glad you heard that bullet hit and made me look for the deer, 'cause I really didn't think I'd hit one. I'd have gone home without it."

"Yeah," he said. "But for a while there when we couldn't find the body, I thought maybe you were right and I'd gone batty."

It was way late in the evening when we got home, so we hung the deer in my garage to be skinned out in the morning.

Of course I told my tale, backed by Ernie's testimony, despite the unbelieving remarks it evoked; such as "Uh-huh-h-h" and "Sure-you-did!" But now Ernie's gone and only God can attest to "One of the most phenomenal deer kills in history."

It was in August of 1951, when a chance acquaintance resulted in an opportunity that would prevent my having to ever again borrow Dan's rifle, the one with the broken front sight. A microwave-radio technician from California, Earl Johnson, showed me his Springfield 30-06 (1903), a military weapon that he had converted, by shortening the barrel and replacing the stock with one of beautiful wood, into a sport rifle. Nicely blued and polished, fitted with a precision micrometer peep-sight, it was exactly what I wanted. So the next time I saw him I gave Earl \$85.00 for the rifle. It would prove to be one of my most prized possessions.

Webster defines an adventure as: "A remarkable occurrence; a noteworthy event; a hazardous enterprise...activity of a hazardous or exciting nature." While I look back on many of my fishing, hunting and camping experiences, and many job-related events, as adventures, one exploit stands out from the rest. It was not only remarkable, noteworthy, hazardous and exciting, but also harrowing and, literally, chilling.

In the early 1950s, when the mule-deer population was too high for the habitat in northeastern Nevada, special late-season hunts were put into effect in certain areas to reduce their numbers. I liked

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those late season hunts, when there was snow on the ground and cold in the air, both helpful factors when hunting and caring for deer.

Near the end of December, 1952, Vernal and Mary Jones came up to Elko from Battle Mountain to visit Rita and me, and to help celebrate our second wedding anniversary. When they arrived, the day being only half gone, Vernal and I made a spur-of-the-moment decision (as young folks are apt to do) to go deer hunting. The outing would give us a chance to visit. We might see a deer or two, maybe even shoot one. We should be back by dark, when we'd take our wives out to dinner as promised.

Neither of us owned a four-wheel-drive vehicle, so we borrowed Rita's father's Jeep, a gray pickup which was still parked at the house even though Sam already had a new red one.

Sam and the boys had covered a lot of ground in the old Jeep. The fenders were dented, the sides were scraped and the seats were torn. The bed was stained with the blood of countless deer, ducks, geese, chukars, grouse, rabbits and trout, and was dimpled from loads of timber, rock and ore.

An old wooden box - containing a prospector's pick, extra cans of motor oil, a length of logging chain, a glass jug full of water, a jack, a lug wrench and so on, all protected by a soiled piece of canvas - usually occupied a space right behind the cab. But that box of "necessaries" had recently been moved to the new truck, as my friend and I would come to regret.

In some haste, because of the time, we picked up the keys to the gray Jeep, grabbed our rifles and shells and headed north on the Mountain City highway. The weather was moderate under an overcast sky, and a warm wind blew from the southwest. (A wind whose warning we should have heeded.)

We chatted idly as I coaxed the old machine over Adobe Summit. I commented on the merits of that Jeep, that it had been through so much and was still going strong. Well, not too strong, I had to shift down to make it over the top and the front wheels shimmied "like my sister Kate." But those were minor drawbacks.

Twelve miles out we passed the Adobe Ranch, bleak and dismal, silent and cold in the low winter light. A wisp of smoke curled upward from its weathered chimney, the only sign of habitation. A mile beyond, where the highway curved over a sagebrush-covered rise, I turned to the west on a dirt road that led to Susie Creek, a small stream running north-to-south about five miles from and parallel to the highway.

Sam and I had hunted cottontails there in the fall, in the willows and natural grass meadows bordering the creek. But the place appeared totally deserted now, not a rabbit in sight.

With a loud clatter the Jeep bounced over the narrow plank bridge. I drove slowly north on a road that followed the course of the creek. We looked for deer in the brush and on the snow-patched hillsides. A cottontail scampered across the road. Except for a circling hawk it was the first wildlife we'd seen.

A couple of miles from the bridge I turned up a side road to the west, into a shallow canyon, and stopped beside a small spring. We sampled its cool clear water, and checked the recent dry-as-dust snow

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for deer tracks. Finding none, we got back in the Jeep and returned to the bridge over Susie Creek.

There was an hour of daylight left, so instead of heading for home I turned to the west on a road that led up the east side of Swales Mountain. There was just time, we agreed, for a foray to the ridge under the peak - whose 8,000' top was then hidden by clouds - before dark.

With all four wheels of the Jeep in "drive," I shifted into low range and crawled up the steep rutted trail. Four miles from the creek, at the 7,000' level, we passed the abandoned, weathered shell of a miner's cabin. Shortly afterward we passed the dark, gaping mouth of a mine tunnel. I drove on, up a switchback road bulldozed from a near-vertical hillside, to a shelf that leveled off then dropped slightly toward the rock-faced peak itself. There, I brought the rig to a grinding halt and switched off the ignition.

"Look!" I shouted. "Over there!" I pointed.

"Must be twenty of 'em," Vernal estimated. "Some bucks, too."

It was a small herd of deer moving up from our left and crossing about 250-yards in our front, apparently headed for protection in the rim rocks.

Without hesitating we jumped out, rifles in hand, and ran in a crouch toward the herd. If only they'd slow down, I thought, maybe we could get off a shot or two before they're out of range. But the wind, blowing full in our faces at 30-mph or more, was laced with stinging sand and snow; leaving the ridge bare and dry. Tears came to my eyes. My glasses fogged over.

Like a great black panther the storm leapt from the summit and landed on top of us. Both of the same mind, we stopped running and stood, braced against the tempest, to stare at the fast-disappearing herd. I saw at least six great-antlered bucks in the bunch, but they were now safe from the feel of hot lead from our rifles. Without a word (speech was useless in that gale) we turned our backs to the wind, and to the deer, and raced to the refuge of the Jeep.

"Let's get outta here," I volunteered, at the same time starting the engine. Vernal, rubbing his half-frozen hands, heartily agreed to "that" plan.

I backed the Jeep, turned it around, and then drove toward the brow of the ridge where we had come up. But before reaching the top the engine stalled. It restarted easily and I engaged the clutch to proceed. No good! It stalled again. I restarted the engine several times and tried to coax the Jeep over the ridge, but every time it gave up. It had enough power on the level but not enough to climb the gentle rise...even in the lowest gear.

"We're on the horns of a dilemma," I thought out loud. "And it's getting dark fast."

Vernal and I quickly diagnosed the trouble: Ice in the fuel line. No problem. With a wrench or pliers we'd disconnect the line and clear it. Only then we discovered there were no tools in the vehicle. Stan had removed them all, even the lug wrench, preparatory to trading it in.

But we wouldn't give up. Yet. All we'd have to do is hold a flaming torch under the gas line and melt the blockage. Right?

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I tied a rag to a stick of sagebrush, shoved it into the fill-stem of the gas tank, to saturate it, removed and lit it with a match. But that plan went awry. When shoved beneath the chassis, under the gas line, the torch was immediately extinguished by the wind. So much for that idea.

After exhausting our list of remedies to the fuel line problem, and getting thoroughly chilled to boot, we turned our thoughts in a new direction. We would abandon the Jeep, which had already accumulated a coat of frost, and walk down the road to shelter in an old mine or the cabin. We should reach the mine in ten minutes or so. It might take twenty to get to the cabin, by which time night would have fallen. Off we went at a quick pace.

At least the wind was not as bad now, in the lee of the ridge, and we were somewhat encouraged. And the walk did us good, stimulating the flow of blood and warming our bodies. At the mine tunnel we stopped, evaluated its possibilities, and abandoned it in favor of the cabin. The mine might well have been a better shelter but it appealed to neither of us at the time. Besides, we reasoned, there was likely to be more firewood around the shack and we must have a fire to survive. On we trudged, side by side, down the old mine road.

By the time our designated haven hove into view the fury of the storm had subsided. But the temperature was dropping. In the dim twilight, we saw that most of the north and west walls of the once-fine cabin were still in place; as was a part of the south wall, one corner of the roof, and a shed that leaned against the east end. The rest was a skeleton of studs and rafters.

After that brief evaluation we stepped through the frame of the doorway onto a fairly firm floor. Much to our delight, Vernal found a pile of old magazines in a corner and I spotted the shell of a round stove, lying on its side, in another. Not only did we have something to burn, but also something in which to burn it.

With mutual effort we got the stove to an upright position and over to the northwest corner, where the remaining walls should provide some protection. And even though there were no lids, doors, grates or stovepipes to be found, we started a fire in the bottom of it.

Then, utilizing the very last bit of natural light, we went outside and gathered sagebrush and old boards into a pile for a bonfire, to be lit should we see any sign of human beings around.

Up till now, our activities had kept us relatively warm. But when at last we drew up a pair of empty powder-kegs and sat before our crude heater, the cold really seeped into our veins, especially from behind. Prodged by discomfort we decided to refine our hovel.

We wrested boards from the lean-to, propped them up as best we could and covered them with bits of cardboard boxes, to form a wall around the hitherto open side of the stove. The result was a sight to behold, such as one might expect to see on skid-row in Chicago. It was a definite improvement but we still had an ongoing problem. The fire in our stove had to be carefully controlled, at a level to provide heat and yet not burn down our temporary home (which we nearly did a couple of times).

Vernal suffered the most from the cold. Not because he was "older" than me, but because he was even less well-dressed for the

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weather. He wore slacks and street shoes, and over his shirt a leather jacket with a broken zipper. I was lucky. In addition to woolen pants, a warm shirt and my old navy field boots, I was wearing a leather jacket with a zipper that worked.

Of course we both did a lot of griping; about the terrible freezing cold at first, and then about being hungry. But we never lost sight of the humor of the situation, and joked and quipped to while away the time.

The old magazines, some of which we had used to kindle the fire, included such publications as the "Saturday Evening Post," "American," "Look," "Life" and "Good Housekeeping," and provided considerable entertainment in spite of their having been edited by packrats. The words were hard to read in the low firelight but the pictures were graphic enough, particularly those portraying delicious foods and beverages, which contributed to our gnawing hunger.

Vernal discovered another, practical use for the periodicals. He held one against the hot stove until it was almost ready to ignite, then slipped it inside his jacket, in the back, to warm that side of his anatomy. It worked well, alleviating the need to stand and turn in front of the stove as we had done before.

It would be a lie to pretend that we ever achieved a state of comfort, but considering the number of worse alternatives we were quite well off.

The moonless night was well begun by six o'clock. Crisp, clear stars twinkled overhead between the rafters and the few residual clouds, but nothing else was identifiable beyond our immediate circle of firelight. We began to speculate about things back home; for one, that Rita and Mary were angry because we were not yet home to take them out to dinner.

Another two hours passed by, and the last of the clouds disappeared from view. Without Mother Nature's blanket to hold the heat the temperature dropped to an alarming degree, well below freezing. The girls must now have made the transition from anger to worry, and would doubtless call on someone to look for us. With good luck we might be found by midnight. If no one showed up by morning we'd go to our contingency plan. At dawn we would stuff our clothing with magazines, for body insulation and for building fires along the way, and simply walk to the highway.

The only sound now, aside from the crackling fire and our own voices, was that of an occasional high-flying aircraft. We considered lighting the bonfire in the hope that a pilot might see it and report our location, but I was opposed to doing anything that might trigger a full scale search-and-rescue operation. After all, we were in no immediate peril.

I couldn't speak for Vernal, but my greatest concern was not that we mightn't survive but that our families, lacking knowledge of our whereabouts or condition, might contact the sheriff or the Civil Air Patrol.

I have always thought it terribly wasteful - of manpower and material resources - for large groups of people to go out in search of those who, invariably through carelessness or improper planning, have

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gotten themselves in trouble in the back country. If I were the subject of such a search I'd be terribly embarrassed.

It must have been just after midnight when I spotted a far-off light, down low in the east. It was only a momentary glimmer. Perhaps I was mistaken. But then it reappeared and we both saw that it was real, apparently the headlights of an automobile moving slowly in our direction.

"D'you suppose they're looking for us?" I ventured.

"Why else would anyone be out on a night like this?" Vernal replied, "It ain't fit fer man nor beast!"

The light grew brighter at times, then dim, even disappeared occasionally when, we assumed, the vehicle dropped behind a hill.

"Maybe we should light the bonfire," I suggested.

But Vernal allowed that we ought to wait until we were sure it could be seen. "When they cross Susie Creek maybe.... They're sure to see it from there."

So we waited, impatiently, until we reckoned the car was at the creek, about four line-of-sight miles distant. Eagerly then, we left our heated cubicle and, with great difficulty due to the zero temperature and a layer of thick frost on the kindling, got our bonfire going. We hovered over it, encouraged the flames to greater heights, warmed ourselves in its comforting rays, and harbored the thought of soon being homeward bound.

But wait. As we stood and watched the lights moved toward the north and totally vanished from sight. Well, we were reasonably assured that someone was looking for us. They (whomever) must have seen the Jeep tracks from our early afternoon hunt and decided to follow them. It was only a matter of time until they should work their way back to the Swales Mountain road.

Sure enough, a half-hour later the lights reappeared. Southbound. However, much to our chagrin they turned not toward us but toward the distant highway. And in a short time the little red taillight disappeared altogether.

Ah well, so much for that plan. Neither Vernal nor I was sufficiently motivated to scavenge wood and prepare a new bonfire. We let our one-shot rescue beacon burn out and die, returned to the cabin, and resigned ourselves to the fact that we were destined to spend the rest of the night right there.

It was, to say the least, a discouraging turn of events!

Commiserating, we reviewed our actions. Was not the bonfire big enough? Perhaps we should have set fire to the cabin itself. Still, we agreed, it seemed illogical to burn our only shelter. As it was I felt guilty every time I tore loose a board to burn in our stove. What else should, or could, we do? I, for one, could think of nothing.

For the next several hours our efforts were totally directed toward keeping warm. Or, to put it more succinctly, to avoid freezing to death. Our actions became routine; warm a magazine, stuff it under the jacket, warm another and replace the first, occasionally stand up, stomp the feet and flex the arms, break up another board and feed the tiny fire.

Our lower extremities were the hardest to keep warm. There was just no way, while seated on a flimsy box, to elevate the feet to

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"heat height." Once, in a futile attempt to do so, I fell backward and almost wiped-out a cardboard wall.

So we suffered the cold, chatted about things of inconsequence or subjects profound, speculated as to what was happening back in Elko, joked about food and eating, concentrated on staying awake, and all the while shivered uncontrollably. (It is said that shivering helps to keep you warm. Maybe so, but I didn't feel warm.)

Inevitably, in accordance with the scheme of things, the earth turned under its grand canopy of stars and time marched on. And it followed, we knew, that dawn would come and we could move out. It would feel good to be walking, to get the blood back in circulation and the feet warm. We must leave at first light, though, and make it to the highway before a search party had time to get underway.

"Is that a light?" I was startled by my own voice. Had I been dreaming?

I looked over at Vernal, who was just straightening up with a jerk. Both of us must have been resting chin-on-chest. "There it is again. Two of 'em."

Bouncing, turning, they were indeed lights, the headlights of two vehicles not over a half-mile below. Fully awake now I looked at my watch. It was four-thirty.

"Damn! But it's cold!" I said, describing the obvious. Stiffly, like a crooked old man, Vernal got up and fetched another piece of wood for the dying fire.

I have always loved the sound of a Jeep grinding its way up a hill in low-range. But that morning it was literally music to my ears; a symphony of combustions and whining gears, of rubber tires squeaking on super-cooled snow.

We stayed by the fire until the first Jeep rolled to a stop beside the cabin and some shadowy figures emerged. A second Jeep pulled up and dispensed still more "rescuers."

I was relieved to see that it was not an official search party. They were all in-laws of mine. Rita's father, her brothers Ben, Stan and John, and brother-in-law Charlie Avery. Stan had driven Sam's new Jeep pickup, Charlie his own Jeep station wagon. They stomped through the open doorway and across the snow-packed floor, greeted us with hearty back-slaps and joked about the predicament we'd gotten ourselves into. Ben proffered a thermos of coffee and a brown bag of sandwiches, and asked rhetorically, "You guys wouldn't happen to be hungry would you?"

I was just reaching for the brown bag when Sam stayed my hand, pulled a large brown bottle from a deep pocket of his heavy plaid Mackinaw, and said with a knowing chuckle, "Here's what you fellas need."

It was a fifth of Christian Brothers brandy, which he deftly uncorked and pressed into my hand. "You take a good drink...you get warm fast."

I was never fond of alcoholic beverages (as related above) but somehow, at that particular moment in my life, the idea of downing a draft of that fine elixir seemed about the most logical and best thing in the world to do. I abandoned any thought of food, even of coffee. I clasped the bottle, tilted it to my chapped lips and drank freely of

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its contents. At once, as if by magic, I was warm all over. Even my toes seemed to benefit from the induction. I was restored. Pop sure knew what was good for a guy who'd been too long in the cold. Now I understood why that Saint Bernard carried a cask of brandy on his collar, when seeking lost wayfarers in the Alps, rather than a bundle of sandwiches.

We quickly doused the fire and climbed into the Jeeps, where Vernal and I finally took on some solid food.

I remember little of our trip to Elko. I suppose we talked about our "hunt" and subsequent demise, but I rather suspect I spent the time asleep in the bosom of that wonderfully warm, but crowded, station wagon.

It was breakfast time when we arrived in Elko (though the sun was not yet up) and I never tasted better food than that which Rita and her mother cooked up that morning.

Over spuds and eggs, bacon and toast, we agreed that the old, broken-down Jeep should be brought off the mountain as soon as possible, lest it be snowed-in for the winter. John volunteered to drive out, with me, to get it. Vernal, who had suffered badly as a consequence of his light clothing, elected to stay in town and rest. Anyway, I was now wide awake and refreshed. Only later in the day would I feel the effects of so many hours without sleep.

John put his set of hand-tools in the Red Jeep, along with a length of hose, some clamps, and a GI-can full of gasoline. I picked up a heavy coat from the trailer and away we went.

It was less than twenty hours since Vernal and I, on a mild but overcast day, had begun our leisurely afternoon hunt. Today was different in many ways. The sky was cloudless and blue, the air was clear and still, the hills were blanketed with new snow, and it was cold. Two hours after sunup and the mercury was still below zero, up from minus-fifteen. But with a good heater inside and sunshine out, we were very comfortable in the cab of the Jeep.

At the fork in the road just beyond Susie Creek, we found the tracks made by the first rescue vehicle the night before, where it turned north and disappeared.

Stan had been at the wheel of that vehicle (I now knew) with my distraught wife at his side. They were both searching for signs of our earlier presence, but their visibility was seriously impaired by frost in the cab. The ceiling and windows were layered with frost and, except for two saucer-sized peep holes that Rita kept clear with a scraper, so was the windshield. Of course they weren't looking up; they were concentrating on the road ahead.

On seeing our tracks they had followed them to the spring, found no further sign of our whereabouts and turned around. They never did see our tracks going up the mine road, which may have been obliterated by the same fast-moving snowstorm that caught us unawares at dusk. So they returned to Elko for more help.

It was Sam, when he and the others arrived at the bridge in the wee hours of the morning, who suggested taking the mine road. "Those fellas are holed up in the cabin," he said.

They drove directly to it and there we were, just like he said we'd be.

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Now John and I were going up the same road, up past the cabin (that appeared really insubstantial in the daylight), up past the mine tunnel (that looked even less inviting), up the steep switchbacks and over the ridge. There we found the abandoned Jeep; or at least its frost-sculpted form. It was totally encased in rime-ice, a testimonial to the storm and a reminder that Vernal and I could have wound up under a similar deathly shroud had we not made good our descent before dark.

It was soon apparent that the pickup's gas line was hopelessly plugged with ice. (We later learned that the Jeep had sat out in a snowstorm "without a cap on the gas-tank," which explained the water, then ice, in the line.) John disconnected the copper line and ran a hose from the carburetor to the propped-up GI-can in the cab. With this ice-free source of fuel in place, and after a few minutes of purging, the engine once more came to life. What a wonderful sound. And how easy the job seemed, performed by a mechanic with the proper tools and materials, and in the light of day. We scraped the frost from the windows and made for Elko. John drove the recently revived machine, I the new Red Jeep.

I think we arrived shortly after noon. I know it was only a matter of minutes till I was in my own bed, warm and fast asleep.

While I had always carried a few basic items of necessity in my vehicle, from that time on the list was expanded to include - in addition to the usual shovel, jack, lug wrench, screwdriver and pliers - some blankets, ropes, flares, a first-aid kit, and other items to enhance one's comfort and chance of survival if the need should arise.

Our night on Swales Mountain, the result of spontaneity and lack of planning, was a real adventure. Improperly dressed for winter weather, we had taken an ill-equipped vehicle into a remote area and were "caught in the act." But we were lucky. Shelter and heat were available to us on the mountain. And though we were most uncomfortable at times we were never close to Death's door.

**END OF
VOLUME II - PART 1**