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Title: The Life of Me: An Autobiography

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Release date: May 1, 1996 [EBook #542]

Most recently updated: June 1, 2012

Language: English

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**THE LIFE OF ME**

## **AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Clarence Edgar Johnson

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Clarence Edgar Johnson 2538 Chestnut San Angelo, Texas 76901

## **DEDICATION**

To

Ima, my wife

Virgil Dennis, our first son

David Larry, our youngest son

and especially to our late daughter, Anita Joyce.

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## PREFACE

This writing grew out of a request from my daughter, Anita, that I write to her concerning me, my family, my parents and their families; how we lived, how we grew up; our ideals, our customs, and our social life.

The original writings were in the form of letters written to Anita during the last few years. When my sons, Dennis and Larry, learned of the letters, they also asked for copies.

As I began writing, I soon realized that I knew very little about the details of the lives of my parents and grandparents.

So I set out to tell my children a few things about myself and to leave unmentioned some things which I do not want them to know about me. I also included some things about a few kinfolks and neighbors who had a part in molding the character whom my children now refer to as "Dad."

It was hoped that the letters would aid in their better understanding of how certain teachings and ideals had been handed down through generations, and that they might better understand why they grew up under those rules and customs.

Others also may be interested in the way one family lived in the Southwest around the turn of the century and later.

Clarence Edgar Johnson

(Drawing) The house where I was born

(Photo) Smokehouse at the Flint farm. Clarence, Earl, Joel, Albert, and Susie.

(Photo) Our Exum home

(Photo) The lake by our front yard

(Photo) Sunday morning, going to church

(Photo) At the Exum farm. Joel, Clarence, Earl, Albert

(Photo) Our merry-go-round

(Photo) At our home on the plains. Mama, William Robert, Ollie Mae, Clarence, Albert, Joel, Earl

# CHAPTER 1

## PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, OUR FIRST FARM

My Johnson grandparents reared nine children. Andrew was the oldest and was a half brother to the other eight. Joe was Grandma's first born, second was my father, William Franklin. All but one of them lived and thrived and raised children. That's why I have dozens of cousins.

When my father was born, the family lived in Bosque County, Texas, somewhere about Meridian. They were ranchers and owned a bunch of cattle. Some 20 years later we find the family in Concho County somewhere near Paint Rock or in between Paint Rock and where the little town of Melvin now stands.

At least two of the boys, Joe and Will, worked for the Melvin brothers on their ranch. I have heard Papa tell of breaking saddle horses for the brothers as well as trail driving near San Angelo.

In the meantime the weather turned dry, grass became scarce, and the Johnsons drove their cattle to Indian Territory, (Oklahoma) looking for grass in about the year of 1894—that is, all but Joe. He stayed with his job in Texas.

About a year after the family moved to Oklahoma, Will Johnson got a neighbor boy to go with him back to their place in Texas to bring another wagon load of household goods. They were gone about two weeks.

While the family was in Oklahoma, Will—who was about 20—taught school two terms at Nubbin Ridge, somewhere near Duncan. Simpson, being about 17 at the time, was not about to go to school to a teacher who was his older brother, so he saddled his horse and slipped away back to Melvin's ranch, to be with his brother Joe. He said he got tired of riding but not nearly as tired as his horse. The journey was about 300 miles. He was on the trail three days and nights and had to stop at times to let his horse rest. When he got to the ranch, Joe wrote to the family saying that Simpson was with him and for them not to worry. They had suspected where he had gone but were not sure.

My Gaddie grandparents reared five children, three boys and two girls. Emma, my mother, was next to the youngest. Hugh was her younger brother. When my mother was born the family lived in Larue County, Kentucky, near Hodgenville. Their farm joined the Lincoln farm. She and Abraham Lincoln drew water from the same well but not at the same time. The Lincoln family had moved away some years before the Gaddies moved there. The well was on the fence row between the two farms.

When Emma was four years old her family moved to Dallas County, Texas. Then they moved to Grayson County, where Emma started to school at age seven. When she was nine they moved back to their old home place in Kentucky. Again, when she was 13, they moved to Dallas County, and at age 16 the family moved to a farm some eight miles southeast of Duncan, Oklahoma.

About the same time the Gaddie family moved to their farm near Duncan, we find the Johnson family leaving Texas where the weather turned dry and the grass became scarce and the Johnsons drove their cattle to Indian Territory looking for grass, and they found that grass near Duncan, Oklahoma.

They stayed in Oklahoma about four years and during that time at least two of the boys were busy at things other than sitting around watching cattle grow. Andrew had married a girl named Mary, and Will had met this pretty little freckle faced girl from Kentucky.

So then, as you can see, here in farming and cattle country near Duncan is where the Johnsons met up with the Gaddies. This is where a schoolteaching cowboy named Will met a country farmer's daughter named Emma Lee. This is where the falling in love took place. And this is where Will married Emma in the fall of 1896. She was 18, he was 22. They were my parents.

After living in Oklahoma that four years, Grandpa Johnson went back to Texas looking for land to buy. He found what he wanted and bought 1,000 acres of unimproved land in Jones County about three miles southeast of Hamlin. Then he went back to Oklahoma to get the family.

So by the time Grandpa Johnson was ready to start his journey back to Texas with his family, the family had increased by two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren. Will and Emma had a son, Frank, six weeks old. Andrew and Mary had a daughter, Ruth, only three weeks old. Some thought that Ruth was too young to make the trip in the cold of winter. But they all came through in wagons and drove

their cattle. That was in January of 1898.

In later years Mama told me that she thought she would have frozen to death if it had not been for Frank in her lap to help keep her warm. The trip took two weeks in the dead of winter and it rained every day of the trip.

Since there were no improvements on the Johnson land, they all rented other farms for a year or two while they made improvements. Papa and Mama rented and farmed one year in Fisher County. Much of the well water in that county tastes so strongly of gypsum that people have to haul their drinking water from the better wells. So, the story is told that when they were driving their covered wagon to Fisher County, they stopped and asked a man, "How far is it to Fisher County?"

The man said, "You are still about ten miles away."

"How can we tell when we get there?"

"You will see farmers hauling water in barrels in wagons."

"Have they always had to haul water in Fisher County?"

"Yes, but during the World Flood they didn't have to haul it so far. The flood water came within a half-mile of Roby."

I guess Grandpa farmed at least one year in Fisher County. They tell me that Ed, one of the younger boys, went to school in that county at White Pond one year.

Grandpa had bought the 1,000 acres for all the family. Andrew and Will were the first ones to buy their portions of 100 acres each. The raw land had cost \$3 an acre. Papa's farm cost him \$300.

Papa was fast becoming a good carpenter and he did his part in helping build a two-story house on Grandpa's portion of the land. The house is still in good shape and has a family living in it 77 years later.

Andrew first lived in a dugout on his 100 acres. They used the dugout for a kitchen and storm cellar many years after they built a house beside it.

Papa's land was in the southeast corner of the 1,000 acre tract. He built his house about a quarter-mile south of Grandpa's house. It is still standing also. Since that time some of the Johnson boys and girls have bought and sold and swapped portions of the land. But most of it is still in the hands of the Johnson boys and girls or their sons and daughters.

After farming in Fisher County in the year of 1898, Papa moved to a farm in Jones County, a mile northeast of Neinda, and farmed there in 1899. And there, in a half-dugout, my sister, Susie, was born.

Many years later as we would drive by the farm in our hack, on our way to church at Neinda, our parents would point out the old dugout and explain, "There is where we used to live." Year after year as the old dugout deteriorated and began caving in, we still went by it on our way to church and there was always something fascinating about it to us kids as one or more of us would point to the old dwelling and say, "There's where Mama and Papa used to live."

During the two years my parents farmed away from their own farm, they spent many days of hard work driving back and forth, building a house, clearing some of the land, and building fences on their land. And of course they had to have a well drilled and put up a windmill and water tank.

At the end of that two years, they took their two children and moved into their new house on the first farm they had ever owned. And Papa, with the aid of an efficient helpmate, continued to improve the farm. They built a big barn and shelters for cows, hogs, horses, poultry, a hack, buggy, harness, and other things. And the family continued to grow. George was born in 1900 and a daughter in 1901. George lived 26 months and died with the croup. The daughter lived only two weeks. Earl was born in 1902 and Joel in 1904. This was the state of the family in 1906, the year Grandpa died in his home, and the year I was born. Aunts, Uncles, and cousins lived on three sides of us, and Grandma lived in the big house a quarter-mile north of us.

My parents were getting quite a collection of children by this time. And it is not always easy to find family hand-me-down names for that many kids. So by the time the seventh one arrived they had to go outside the family for a name. I don't know how far out they went but they came back with what I have always thought was a "far out" name, Clarence Edgar, and they pinned it on me. I was born January 11, 1906, in Jones County, West Texas, in the middle of a large family. Frank was eight years old when I was born, Susie was seven, Earl three, and Joel 16 months. There were three others born later, Albert,

Ollie Mae, and William Robert. So, as you can see, my parents thrived and grew rich—if you count children as wealth. There were ten of us, eight of whom attained full size and strength.

Five years after I was born, we moved to another farm about a half-mile east. Albert was born at the first place we lived and William Robert was born at the second farm. I know Ollie Mae was born sometime in between those two boys, but I don't know where she was born. I'm sure it wasn't between the two farms. Wherever it was, she became one of us and is still with us.

Mama told me that the \$300 they paid Grandpa for the farm was the hardest debt they ever had to pay off.

Money was hard to come by for a young couple just starting out.

Mama also told me all about how her family had moved from Kentucky to Dallas County, Texas, then again to Grayson County, then back to Kentucky, then again to Dallas County, and finally to Oklahoma.

During all this time Mama's younger brother Hugh was trailing along two years behind her. They were seven and nine years old when they moved back to their old home in Kentucky. There were 200 acres in the farm, and these two kids had four years in which to explore the meadows, the hills, the streams, and the woodlands. There were three springs of water, acres and acres of wild berries, wild nuts, cherries, peaches, apples, and papaws. There were many kinds of birds as well as coons and skunks. And for delicious food, there were swamp rabbits and opossums.

I was a young boy when Mama first told me that Hugh was her favorite brother. It didn't mean much to me at that time. But after I was a grown man, she told in detail how she and Hugh had roamed together over the old farm during those four years, how they had picked wild berries, and how they had carried them to the store in Hodgenville and had sold them for ten cents a gallon.

Emma's older sister and an older brother had long since married and lived far away. Henry was still at home but he was older than Emma and too busy at other things to be interested in that kid stuff. No wonder Hugh was her favorite brother. They had played together, explored together, and had grown up together.

When I was young I heard Mama tell that her brother Hugh was shot to death one day while out on his horse. I didn't know whether the Gaddies were living in Kentucky, Texas, or Oklahoma when he got shot. When I heard how Hugh had died, I was old enough to know about Kentucky moonshiners, Texas cattle rustlers, and Oklahoma desperadoes. I wondered if any of them had played a part in his death, but I didn't ask any questions .

Mama told me later that Hugh was a cowboy, had gotten his pay and was riding home when a man shot him in the back and took his money.

I was sorry I had ever wondered.

Mama told me that her brother Henry and the blacks around Duncan were not very friendly toward each other. At least one time, the blacks held hands and formed a human chain across the road to keep Henry from coming by. But Henry whipped up his horses and drove right through the crowd. After that he carried a long blacksnake whip to use on them if they ever got close to his wagon again.

**Part of the tradition that was handed down to us from the Gaddies and the Johnsons was that there were only three things to drink— water, sweet milk, and buttermilk. You might include clabber if you like. But then, clabber was more of an "eat" than a drink. Soda pop was for the wealthy and foolhardy, and coffee was not permitted for three reasons: it cost money, it was unnecessary and it was not good for you. Money was for necessities. Any drinks stronger than these mentioned were strictly forbidden.**

Even the sound of the word "whiskey" carried with it an inkling of sin and dishonor. Whiskey without drunkenness was improbable, and drunkenness was about as low as a person could go.

Mama grew up to hate whiskey because of its effect on men and because it tasted bad. However, there was always a jug of it under her father's bed—for medical use only. Any symptom of disease was treated immediately with whiskey. Mama hated the taste of it.

Mama told us about a man—perhaps an uncle—who was sick in bed and who was fond of whiskey. As he lay in bed, a few friends and kinfolks stopped by to see him. And one by one he asked them to mix him a little toddy. They did.

And wouldn't you know it, five or six toddies all in one man at one time made the man forget he was sick on disease and it made him fairly sick on whiskey which was what he had planned to be.

After I came into the Johnson family, Mama's people lived so far away I didn't get to know much

about them.

We didn't get around to visiting them much. But I remember we did go to Duncan one time to visit some of them. It seems that the trip was made in about the year of 1916. We went in our 1914 model Reo car.

I guess I was about ten years old. I don't remember much about the people we went to see, but I remember the white rabbits and prairie dogs they had for pets. They were running all over the place. I suppose it was Uncle Henry's place and I believe the pets were Leo's, Uncle Henry's son. Leo was perhaps four years older than I was—maybe even more.

I think I met Mama's sister and her older brother, Will, a time or two; I'm not sure. But Henry was the only one of them I ever really knew.

Henry and his wife, I think her name was Emma also, came to Hamlin to visit Mama and Papa a couple of times after I was married. Then, when I was attending college in Arkansas, my wife, Ima, and our youngest son, Larry, and I stopped by to visit Uncle Henry two or three times.

During one of those visits, Uncle Henry went out into his garage and took a book from the bottom of an old trunk. The book was similar to a ledger, about seven inches wide and ten inches long, with a flexible cover. In the book were 54 songs, handwritten with pen and ink, most of them in my father's hand, a few written by my mother.

It was my father's book which he had carried to parties and singings while he lived in Oklahoma. When he heard a song he liked, he would write the words in his book of songs. Other boys and girls had their books of songs also, including Uncle Henry.

Uncle Henry also had a mother-in-law—or rather, I think it was his mother-in-law-to-be—who gave him trouble at times. One time she got mad at him for some reason and burned his book of songs. So Papa loaned Henry his song book.

Then the Johnsons moved away to Texas before Henry returned the book. When he was through with the book, Henry hesitated to make a 400 mile round trip in a covered wagon just to return a borrowed book. So he didn't return it right away. He put it away for safekeeping. It was forgotten until Henry mentioned it during a visit to Texas to see Mama and Papa 50 years later

Mama was about 80 years old when Uncle Henry took the book from the old trunk and asked me to take it to her. Papa had died many years before.

I have one copy of those songs and there is a copy of them filed away at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

Neither the Johnsons nor the Gaddies had any part in the Oklahoma land rush. That took place in 1889, a few years before either family arrived in Oklahoma.

I never once saw my Grandma Gaddie. She passed away in Oklahoma in 1912. She suffered a sunstroke and died two weeks later.

Some years after that, Grandpa Gaddie came to live with us in Texas. I don't remember exactly when he came, but he passed away while we were living on the Exum place, and we moved from there in 1917. He seemed quite old, maybe old ahead of his time because of hard work and the severity of life at that time in our history.

Anyhow, he could do light odd jobs about the farm. There were always outside chores to be done. We kids were glad to have him help us do them. And he kept us kids company at times when there was no work to be done.

But Grandpa was much more of a stranger to us than Grandma Johnson was. She lived only a half-mile away; we grew up with her. But I guess we hadn't seen Grandpa Gaddie more than once or twice before he came to live with us.

Grandpa was never much of a bother in any way. He was never bedfast and never had to be waited on. It didn't take much to feed him. We raised almost everything we ate and he brought plenty of clothing with him when he came. The entire family didn't require much money, and we had plenty of other things in life.

Grandpa was agreeable and compatible. He was never grouchy. He had a room and a bed of his own in our home and he soon became just one of the family and was accepted by all of us.

Then one morning Grandpa didn't come to breakfast. A knock on his door brought no answer. Had he slipped out and gone for a walk? No one had noticed him out anywhere. This was unusual for Grandpa. He was usually there on time for meals so the rest of us wouldn't have to wait for him. In our home no one ever started helping his plate at meal time until all were seated and the blessing was asked.

Papa knocked on Grandpa's door again, then he called to him, but there was still no answer. As Mama and Papa opened the door to his room, there he was, still in bed, still asleep—but he was not breathing. It seemed that Grandpa just went to sleep and didn't wake up.

Papa went to Hamlin that morning in a wagon and brought back a casket. The women dressed Grandpa in his best suit. Some men went to the graveyard and dug a grave. Others went to tell the preacher, and found him plowing in his field. He stopped plowing and went home to clean up and eat dinner.

Grandpa was placed in his casket and loaded into a wagon. Then about three o'clock we drove him to the Neinda graveyard where the preacher and other friends were gathered. And there, that afternoon, we laid him away in his final resting place.

It's amazing sometimes, how a very little thing can stick in the memory of a little boy, and that's the way it was this time, just a simple little statement made by an older brother one morning—a couple of mornings after we had buried Grandpa. Four of us boys slept in the west room of our home, the room usually referred to as "the boys room." We boys were getting out of bed and getting dressed when Frank said, "Well, Grandpa's in heaven by now." That was all he said. That was enough. After that, an air of reverence filled the room. And as we finished dressing, we left the room one by one, in complete silence. Frank had no way of knowing how much I honored and respected him for that little statement and the thought that went with it. I was too young and timid to know how to tell him.

That's about all of my childhood memories concerning the Gaddies. In later years I had a desire to learn more about my mother's people. But as I began digging into census records, I soon found that Grandma Gaddie had a first cousin by the name of Jesse James—yes, that's right—"The" Jesse James. So my desire suddenly changed to fear and I gave up digging into records.

## CHAPTER 2

### EARLY CHILDHOOD AT THE FLINT FARM

The first farm we owned, the one where I was born, is still spoken of as the Flint place, because we sold it to a family named Flint. So at times I may refer back to it as the Flint place.

Since I was only five when we moved away from the Flint place, I remember only a few things which took place while we lived there.

I remember we had old hens that laid eggs for us to go gather up and take to the house in a bucket. Sometimes the bucket would get so heavy I couldn't carry it. And sometimes we had to get eggs out from under old setting hens that wouldn't get off their nests. They would peck me to keep me away. I was too little to get those eggs. Mama or some of the bigger kids would have to get them.

But if the old setting hen was off the nest, I knew which eggs to get and which ones to leave in the nest. The ones she was setting on to hatch out little chickens were marked all over with a lead pencil. The ones that didn't have marks on them were fresh eggs that had been laid that day.

Some city folks are confused at times about some of the words we farmers use. For instance, take the words sitting and setting. The truth is, if an old hen is on an egg that she has just laid, and if she is planning to go away in a minute or two, she is just sitting on the egg. But if she is on the egg or eggs with the intention of hatching out little chickens, then she is not sitting, she is setting.

Even some people who are supposed to be smart don't know farm words. In college English, the teacher had us making sentences using certain double words like, "*Look up* a word in the dictionary." And "*Hand over* your gun."

I made a sentence like, "The cow wouldn't *give down* her milk."

The teacher gave me a zero on the sentence. And when I asked her why, she said, "A cow can not

*hold up her milk nor give down her milk."*

I told her, "Lady, you may know your English, but you sure don't know milk cows."

Now back to the Flint farm.

I was so little that, when I would throw out corn and maize seed to feed the chickens, I couldn't throw it far enough away from me. Some of it would fall at my feet. So the big chickens would crowd around my feet to pick up the grains and I was afraid of so many big hens so close to me. And I really got scared when they started pecking the feed out of my feed bucket. Sometimes I would drop the bucket and run away.

I remember seeing Papa digging up big trees where he was going to make a field. It wasn't far from our house. Sometimes I would go take him a drink of water. And sometimes Mama would send me to tell Papa dinner was ready.

While Papa was drinking his water and resting a bit, I liked to get down in the big hole he dug around the bottom of a big tree. The dirt was damp and cool in the hole. Some of the holes were so big and deep it was hard for me to crawl back out.

Sometimes our old surley (bull) was close by and I was afraid of him, so Mama would leave me at the house to watch after Albert while she took Papa a drink. But if the cows were way over in the other side of the pasture, I wasn't afraid to go.

I remember our garden just outside our yard. I was big enough to pick fresh beans and peas. The older ones in the family taught me how to break the peas off the vines without breaking the vines. Mama could pick them so easily, with just the right twist of her hands. But I had to hold the vine with one hand while I twisted the peas off with the other hand.

I had the smartest Mama. She could do so many things, and she could do them so easily.

I especially remember one little incident that took place in our home when I was three. Most of the things I remember from my early childhood have been almost forgotten and I now remember them through special effort and recall. But this one brief moment has lived with me and was never put aside to be recalled later.

Mama was sitting in a chair in our living room. Albert was in her lap getting his natural milk breakfast. I was in a hurry for the baby to get through nursing so I could play with him down on the floor. In the meantime, I was standing leaning against Mama and playing with the baby—playing with his hands and feet, rubbing and patting his "tummy," and sometimes tickling him to make him laugh.

Now all this activity caused a lot of wiggling and squirming in Mama's lap. And it also caused a lot of letting go of, and getting back to, the baby's morning meal. This kind of playing with the baby might have aggravated some mothers and might have brought a word of scorn, or at least an expression of impatient dissatisfaction from them, but not from this mother. She was one of a kind. She seemed to enjoy it all. She was my Mama.

I was standing on Mama's left. When Albert finished and was full, Mama stood him down on the floor on her right. And while he was standing there holding to her dress for support, before Mama put his breakfast away, back into her blouse, she looked over at me and very motherly asked, "Now, do you want some of the baby's milk?"

I didn't say a word. I just bashfully backed away a step or so and looked up at her and thought something like, "That's for the baby, not for me."

For the first time in my life I was consciously aware of my mother's love for me, in that brief moment, because of that simple little gesture. The poet expressed it better than I can, when he wrote, ". . . the love of a mother for her son that transcends all other affections of the soul." I was deeply moved by the thought that, although she had another little one to hold closely and love and nourish, she had not pushed me aside. Her love included me too.

As the years went by, sometimes all seemed hopeless and I would ask myself, "What the heck? Who cares anyway?" And always that little three-year-old kid would give me the answer, "Mama does."

I remember the windmill by our garden and the water tank way up high on the tower. When the wind blew and the mill was pumping water, we could open a faucet at the top of the well and get a drink of fresh cold water. We had a tin cup hanging on a nail on the windmill tower to drink out of. And we kept some water hanging up on our back porch in a wooden water bucket made out of cedar. There was a dipper in the bucket that we all drank out of.



Once when Papa was building his big barn at the Flint place, before he got it finished, a strong wind hit it and leaned it way over, but it didn't blow it all the way down. Papa took a block and tackle and got some men to help him and they pulled it back up straight.

Our house had three rooms. One of them was a kitchen and dining room together. There was a long porch at the front of the house and an L-shaped porch on the back. There were flower beds and flowers in our front yard, and morning glory vines on the front yard fence and china trees in the back yard. They made good shades to play in.

There was a hog pen on the north side of the barn, with sheds to protect the hogs from the summer heat and the winter cold. The horse lots and cow lots were on the south side of the barn, with sheds to shelter the stock. Feed troughs were under the sheds and feed was stored in the big barn.

I remember the hill west of the barn about a hundred yards. It wasn't a steep hill—just a gentle rise in the land. But it was high enough to get up on and see Uncle Andrew's house and Grandma's house. I couldn't see Grandma's house as good as I could Uncle Andrew's because hers had so many big trees all around it.

I remember we had a syrup mill too, up on the slope northwest of the barn. We had a horse that would go round and round and make the big iron rollers squeeze the juice out of the cane stalks. The juice would run down a spout and we would catch it in buckets. Then Mama would cook the juice in a big pan over a fire out there in the pasture.

Of course Frank and Susie and Earl would all help keep the fire going and help Papa keep putting cane stalks through the big rollers. Joel would help a little bit, but I was just in the way. And Albert had to be looked after too.

Sometimes the cows and horses would come and try to eat the cane and we had to put them in pens by the barn. When we finished squeezing the juice out, we would let them all come out of the pen and eat the stalks we didn't want any more.

When we got the juice cooked enough it was good ribbon cane syrup and we would put it in big jugs and take it down in the cellar. But not all of it. We would take some of it in the kitchen to eat.

I remember a big pile of wood and lots of mesquite posts. They were southwest of the barn on the slope of the hill. The wind had been blowing and lots of sand had drifted up in piles by the woodpile. Some of our plows and wagons were out there too by the woodpile. The posts were leaning up against big trees.

Just north of the hog pen was our stack lot with big stacks of bundled feed in it. And when I think of the stack lot, I think of a little black horse we had named Keno, because all too often Old Keno was in the stack lot without an invitation. He was not a big work horse, yet he could hold his own when hitched to a cultivator. And he could outdo all the others at acrobatics.

Yes, Old Keno was a fence jumper. We often found him in the corn patch or maize patch, what time he wasn't in the stack lot. That's probably the reason I always remember him as being fat and having a shiny coat; he got more than his share of goodies to eat.

Anyway, one time I remember seeing Old Keno in the stack lot when we were coming home from church or from Uncle Andrew's. We drove up from the west and as we came over the rise west of the barn, there he was, in the stack lot again.

I really believe we were coming home from church because we were all dressed up and were in our new hack.

We had an old buggy and I think we had an old hack. I think I sort of remember when we got the new hack. The old one was good enough for everyday use, and so was the old buggy. But for really stepping out in style, that shining black new hack was something else. For Sunday and for going to town, we used the new one. It had two seats, rubber tires, and a beautiful glossy black finish—with tiny little yellow pinstripes at just the right places. When Papa hitched his two trotting horses to it, it was truly a carriage to be proud of.

We also went socializing in the new hack. And Papa never fooled around with a walking team, they always trotted. Even when we drove 18 miles to Anson to visit the Hood family on Sundays, our team trotted practically all the way. And then they trotted back the same day.

As I said, Old Keno was eating more than his share of the grain from the bundles of feed, and he was wasting a lot also.

I was in the front seat with Papa and some of the other kids. I was probably in Papa's lap, I don't remember. Mama was in the back seat with some of the others. In fact, Mama always rode in the back seat. There is no picture in my memory of Mama ever riding in the front seat of our hack. I don't really know why she chose the back seat. Fact is, it never occurred to me until now that she may not have chosen the back seat; she may not have had a choice. While she was with us, it never entered my mind to ask her why. But now as I ponder these things, I wish I had. If she were sitting here in the room with me now, I would stop writing long enough to look up and ask, "Mama, why did you always sit in the back seat of our hack?"

And I haven't the slightest doubt that she would answer, "Why, Willie and you children always rode in the front seat. There wasn't room for me."

Anyway, I was less than five years old, probably less than four. And I don't remember what else Mama was doing, but I'll bet a dollar she was holding Albert in her lap. And I'll bet another dollar I can guess what Albert was doing. Since baby bottles were almost unheard of in those days, and were not needed in our family, he was probably getting his milk from some other source, as mother nature meant for him to.

Be that as it may, Old Keno was eating at the feed stack and he seemed to be much happier than Papa was to see him there. I don't remember what Papa said, if anything, but I do remember that Mama expressed her disapproval of Old Keno's bad manners by calling him a scoundrel. That was the name Mama gave to troublesome animals and mean people.

There was plenty of work to be done on the farm, and we kids learned to work early in life. Joel was just 16 months older than I was, and one spring, when he was too young to go to school, Papa had him planting in the field with a two-row planter. In the afternoons, when Earl got home from school, he would relieve Joel, so Joel could go home and play the rest of the day.

Then one day Joel got a foot hurt and couldn't run the planter. So I had to take his place on the planter for a few days. Planting had to go on. I don't remember how old I was at that time. I do know for sure I was planting at the Flint place. And we moved from that place in January—the same January in which I became five years old. So, I must have been planting when I was a little over four years old or when I was just past three, I'm not sure which. I am sure, however, I was older than two, because, when I was only two, Earl was too young to go to school.

If it were not for skeptics, I could go ahead with my memoirs. But I feel I should detour here and explain a thing or two, or some folks will think I am lying. One man has already questioned my story about the two-row planter. He thought they hadn't made a two-row planter as early as 1910. This one happened to be a special type planter. I have never seen but two of them in my lifetime.

But you could be sure, if William Franklin Johnson heard of a farm implement that he thought could be used to do a better job on the farm, he would get it, if at all possible. And if it wouldn't do to suit him, he would make it do whatever he wanted it to do.

I remember having seen Papa, as early as the Flint place, mind you, using a combination cultivator-planter. He could cultivate his young feed or cotton and, at the same time, plant new seeds in the skips where the first planting had not come up to a good stand.

He built the implement himself. That was ingenuity. He was my father.

This special two-row planter that I used was pulled by two big, gentle horses. They knew how to follow the furrows and stay on the rows. And they knew that "whoa" meant stop, even when a three-year-old said it. What's more, Papa was plowing along beside me, just a few rows away, and he worked the lever and turned my team around at both ends of the rows.

Now, that doesn't sound so far out, does it?

I'll bet the people around the little town of McCaulley would believe me without an explanation. They had a man in their community who used a dog to do his plowing for him. It's true. And the man didn't have to be there to work the levers for him and turn the team around at the end of the rows.

There were no rows. He was flatbreaking his ground, going round and round. His mules followed the furrow all day long and the man only had to sit there hour after hour doing nothing. Then he got the idea of tying his lines up and slipping off to the house without his mules knowing he was gone.

This worked well except when the mules would stop once in awhile, and he would have to go start them again. So, next he put his little dog on the plow seat. The dog liked to ride so well that, when the team would begin stopping, he would bark to keep them going.

People could hardly believe their eyes—the very idea—a dog plowing while his master sat on his porch in the shade.

Now, Papa didn't have a dog, so he used me.

We Texans have to be careful what we say and to whom we say it. When I start talking with a man, the first thing I want to know is, where is he from?

I know, Texans have a reputation of being big liars. It is true, all Texans are capable of lying, but they are not all liars. They don't have to lie. In Texas the truth is wild enough.

If I am talking with a man from north of the Mason-Dixon line, I only have to tell the truth and he thinks I am telling a big Texas lie. But if the man is from Oklahoma, I sometimes have to lie just a little to make the story interesting to him. Those Okies are almost as bad as Texans about story telling.

Some people think Texas is a state, but it's not. Texas is a state of mind, an attitude, a broad open expanse of freedom and liberty known only to Texans. It's a feeling you can never get just by living in Texas, you've got to be born in Texas.

There are other happenings dating back to the Flint place. Here are a couple which took place before my time. I can only relate them to you as they were told to me.

We don't know where Frank got his first taste of chewing tobacco, but he liked it and he wanted another taste. It was only a half-mile from our house over to Uncle Andrew's. Now, Uncle Andrew chewed tobacco and Frank knew it. So, Frank found it easy to get Mama to let him walk over there to play with Ruth. He also found it easy to ask Ruth if she knew where her dad kept his tobacco.

She knew all right, and she found it easy to "snitch" a chew for Frank. She also had the forethought to make sure she took enough for both of them. But, now that they had the tobacco in their possession, it wouldn't be smart to risk being caught playing around the house with tobacco in their mouths.

So, now Frank tells Aunt Mary he came over to see if Ruth could come over to his house and play. Yes, Aunt Mary would allow her to go, which was a perfect set-up for five-year-old kids. They could chew the tobacco all the way from Ruth's house over to Frank's house, just so they got rid of it before they got there. Who cares how long it might take two little kids to walk a half mile? They could chew a long time.

However, one little problem developed. The tobacco didn't affect Frank at all, but before they got to Frank's house, Ruth was as sick as a horse.

Naturally, they didn't dare tell why she was sick. And she was sure she would feel better in a little while.

Another little story came to me from Susie, my older sister. She was always having to see after the baby of the family. At this time Albert was the baby and I was about three years old. She probably had to take care of me also, when I was a baby. But on this particular day—the day of the snuff—Mama, Grandma, and I went out to the garden. Susie wanted to go but had to stay in the house with Albert.

This was one of the few times during my childhood that I was just the right size, and here I am, unable to remember a thing about it. Susie had to tell me about it. If I had been any smaller, I might have had to stay in the house with Susie and Albert. And if I had been any larger, I might have had to watch after Albert while Susie went to the garden.

Anyway, Susie's brain was partly angry but mostly just idle, so the devil used it for his workshop.

Grandma had put her snuffbox on the door casing above the kitchen door. Susie had never been allowed to taste snuff, but she reasoned that it must be something special, because Grandma "dipped" it all the time.

Many's the time Grandma would send me to the "branch" (creek) to bring her a small hackberry limb for a tooth brush. (It was really a snuff brush.) She would take a hackberry twig about twice as big and twice as long as a wooden match and chew on one end until it "frazzled" out into a bristle. Then she would dip the damp bristle into her snuff, put it in her mouth, and work happily for hours, with the "brush" extending out one corner of her mouth.

Now, this picture of contentment on Grandma's face as she dipped and worked, is what the devil showed to Susie when he told her she ought to climb up on the kitchen cabinet and get her some of that delicious brown snuff in the little tin box.

She climbed up in a chair and got up on the cabinet, only to find that she couldn't reach the snuff. But she didn't give up. She climbed back down and put a chair up on the cabinet. Then she climbed up in the bottom chair to get onto the cabinet so she could get up in the top chair. And by leaning way over, she could reach the snuffbox.

Now, Susie didn't want to climb down to dip her snuff. It would be too hard to have to climb all the way back up to put the snuff back on the shelf over the door. So she just sat down in the upper chair and began dipping the snuff.

That's about all the story. At least that's all she remembered. She never did know how she got down from the chairs and the cabinet. She only remembers that, when she began to regain consciousness, she was a mighty sick little girl, and snuff had lost its charm and glitter.

## CHAPTER 3

### AT THE EXUM FARM AFTER I WAS FIVE

We, the Will Johnsons, owned this first farm 12 years. Then in the fall of 1910, Papa bought the Exum farm, just east of us. It was much larger and it fitted our needs better. There were 332 acres in the place, and we paid \$9,000 for it.

When January rolled around, it was time for us to move onto the Exum place. And on the day we moved that half-mile, I had to stay at our old home. I was allowed to help load the wagons at our old farm, but they wouldn't let me go with them to our new home to unload the wagons. Of course, that hurt my feelings terribly.

But I was hurt even worse when one of the older boys came running back to the house to get a gun to kill a skunk down on the creek—and Mama wouldn't let me go with him.

She said, "No, you can't go. You're too little."

I didn't understand how Mama could be so mistaken in my size. I was as big as most of the other boys, I thought, and smarter than some of them.

After we got moved to the new home, again Papa set out to build whatever buildings we needed to suit our wants. There was already a house and a good size barn. And when Papa finished building, there were shelters for tools, livestock, poultry, and a blacksmith shop.

He made a large, roomy cellar at our new home. I can't remember ever having to go to the cellar because of a storm, but it was there just in case. And it was good for storing fruits, vegetables, and canned goods.

One time Papa brought home a stalk of bananas and hung it down in the cellar. Down there it would be protected from the heat of the days and the freezing nights. Papa explained to us that we should eat the ripest bananas first before they got too ripe and had to be thrown away. Then some of the older kids jokingly told that Papa said, "Eat the rotten ones first and wait till the others rot to eat them."

We were poor in terms of money, yet we had as much as or more than the average family in our community. Papa was a carpenter, a blacksmith, a good farmer. And when automobiles came along, he became a mechanic.

We never left our hack out in the weather, we had a shed to shelter it. Our barn was second to none in our neighborhood, especially by the time we finished building sheds and stalls on both sides of it. Later on, we got a car and built a shed for it. We didn't call it a garage, it was a car shed. And one time Papa bought another house, moved it up beside ours, and joined them together.

We had a good well of water, a big windmill, and a cypress water tank on a tower about ten feet tall. The tower under the tank was boarded up on all four sides to form a room that was used for keeping milk, butter, watermelons, and other things cool. Screened windows allowed the wind to pass through. That was about the coolest place on the farm.

Next to the windmill was a garden, fenced rabbit proof and irrigated with water from the well. Every summer we had roasting ears, popcorn, cantaloupes, watermelons, peanuts, okra, squash, pumpkins,

and more kinds of beans and peas than I can name.

The barn was filled with feed heads, corn, and cottonseed, both for planting and for feeding. There was room in the barn and adjoining sheds for horses, cows, chickens and hogs. And up in the loft, there were peanuts still on the vines.

Some of our neighbors had given up trying to grow peanuts because rabbits ate so many of the vines. It was all but impossible to keep the rabbits out of the patch. But we always grew peanuts anyway. When neighbors asked Papa how he managed to grow so many good peanuts, he told them he just planted enough for the rabbits and the youngsters too. I can't remember when we didn't have enough peanuts in the barn loft to last all winter. We stored them on the vines and then we picked them off as we needed them, and fed the vines to the stock.

I remember one sunny afternoon, four or five of us boys were sitting up in the barn over the horse stalls eating peanuts. I was sitting on a board that was nailed to the underside of the ceiling joists. Well, the nails pulled out of the board and I fell to the ground and hit my head on a wooden block. The block proved to be tougher than my head. It cut a two-inch gash in my scalp above my right ear. Papa took me to our family doctor and had it sewed up.

The story was told on us boys that, when we were all little, a mule kicked one of us in the head, and that boy was never quite normal after that. But then, as we grew older, we all got to acting so much alike that Mama and Papa couldn't tell which one of us the mule had kicked.

Many years later, during the depression of the 1930s, a neighbor was giving me a homemade haircut one Sunday afternoon and, when he discovered the scar on my head, he laughed and said, "Now I know which one the mule kicked."

Now let's get back to the story of when I was a boy on the Exum farm. I started to school when I was seven. In fact, most kids started at seven in those days. And since I was seven when school started in September, that meant I had been seven since last January 11th. In other words I was almost eight.

While we lived at the Exum place, we went to school at Wise Chapel, which was about three miles northeast of our home. In winter we faced cold northerners many mornings, and in the afternoons, we often faced strong southwesterly winds on our way home.

As we walked to school, other pupils from other farms joined us, and then still others. By the time we arrived at school, there might be as many as 20 of us in one bunch. One of the families whose kids walked with us was the Bruner family. Papa's younger brother, Ed, married Eva Bruner.

What do you mean, "Did we walk that three miles to school?"

Of course we walked—except maybe two or three times a year when the weather was extremely bad.

I might as well take time right here to mention another little incident which took place along our school trail. It involved one of the Bruner boys. And what happened to that boy should never happen to anyone. But when you get that many school kids in one bunch, most anything is apt to happen, and it did this time.

In the first place, I guess school trails shouldn't cut across pastures, but they did. In the second place, I haven't been able to figure out why God made prickly pears, but He did. In the third place, if school kids are going to use the trails which wind in and out among the thorny bushes and cactus plants, they should never scuffle near prickly pears, but they did. And in the fourth place, if a boy scuffles and falls down, he should never sit right flat down in a prickly pear, but he did.

After he got up, he went straight home. His mother took the tweezers and removed all the large thorns and many of the small ones. Then they took him to Mama because, they said, her eyes were better. She removed all she could see, which left the boy in fairly good shape, I suppose, all things considered.

What we now know as kindergarten was unknown when I started to school. Beginners started in the Primer, and the Primer was not a grade in school—it was a book. As Webster defines it, "an elementary book for teaching children to read."

We went to school to learn to read, write, spell, and work arithmetic problems—and to obey the teacher.

We also learned many other things that were not a part of the regular curriculum and which were not necessarily sanctioned by those in authority. We grouped them all together and called them "recess."

In my first year, I went through the Primer, the first grade, and far into the second grade. I was almost ready for the third grade at the beginning of my second year. According to my teacher and my parents, I was smart and well behaved. I was a good little boy.

Even at that early age, the teacher granted me special privileges and I was in love with her. My love and admiration for all teachers, especially women teachers, went with me all through high school and college, at times causing my wife some displeasure.

During that first year in school, one side of my face became paralyzed. I was an ugly sight, especially when I laughed or smiled. Half of my face would smile and the other half would just hang there, doing nothing.

The doctor prescribed some red medicine that Susie carried to school every day and poured some down me ever-so-often. It tasted awful. I was glad it was a beautiful red color. I don't believe I could have stood it if it had been brown.

Anyway, I slowly got over most of my ailment, but I'm sure it was hard for my family to get rid of the horrible picture my condition had printed on their memories.

Unfortunately, my paralysis was not my only ugliness. I was born with a "wen" in the corner of one eye next to my nose. It was a lump about the size of the end of my thumb—that of course, depending on what age I was when you measured the end of my thumb, and how much of my thumb you included in the measurement. After all, how much of a thumb can you measure and still call it the end.

At any rate, I was far from beautiful, even before the sagging of half my face.

Not so with the rest of my family. Papa was stately, superior in quality, as generous as he was elegant, and he was a handsome man.

Mama was a lovely woman. I can remember back to when she was about 33, and I can imagine how beautiful she must have looked to Will Johnson 15 years earlier. When I was very young, I liked to watch her do her long hair up into one big plat, then coil it round and round on top of her head and pin it so it wouldn't come down.

Frank was handsome and admirable in the eyes of a younger brother my age. Susie was a good-looking girl. However, all girls looked good to me—as they were supposed to. Earl's presence would improve the looks of almost any group of kids. And Joel was downright pretty, that is, for a boy. Although Albert and William Robert were younger than I, and at times little more than pesky little brothers, still I could easily see that they both had something to be desired far above that which looked back at me from my mirror. And of course, Ollie Mae was as beautiful as anything I had ever seen until I became 18 and fell in love.

The unsightly wen stayed with me until I was about 17—or whenever it was I started shaving. I couldn't bear the looks of me in the mirror as I shaved. So, one afternoon I drove over to the Stamford Sanitarium and asked a doctor to remove it. He got me on the operating table and then asked me if I wanted him to put me to sleep.

I told him, "No, I want to watch what you are going to do to me."

So he handed me a mirror and began whittling on me. And when he had finished the operation, he sewed me up, stuck a patch over the place, and told me to let someone else drive me back to Hamlin. But since it was only 22 miles, and since I had driven over there alone, and since there was no one to drive me back, I drove myself back and I've been disobeying doctors ever since.

But, we're getting ahead of our story. Let's get back to our younger days when my little sister was about two years old and she had two or three brothers who were not much older. One of those brothers noticed, as most little brothers do sooner or later, that there was a difference in his and her ways of draining water.

For example, when he had to go, he would merely stand behind a tree or go around behind the smokehouse, let it flow and watch it fall. Or he might play fireman up the side of the smokehouse wall. Or maybe aim at a beetle or a red ant and watch him struggle to survive.

On the other hand, his little sister would squat and her dress would hide the entire operation. But the day he became curious about her method of operation and got nosy enough to peep to see what was taking place, he committed the unpardonable sin. And it would have caused extreme pain in the region of the lower hind part of that small boy if his mother had learned of what he had done. What she would have done to him would have been a big price for a little boy to have to pay for a little knowledge that

most little boys get for free these days. But he didn't get caught. That was the beginning of a lot of secret things that little boy did throughout his childhood—secrets he didn't share with anyone.

We four boys went out together most of the time, both to work and to play. But at the Exum place, Ollie Mae was getting big enough to want to go with us when we went to play. Her presence created a little problem we boys hadn't had before, especially when there wasn't a good hiding place.

I remember one day out in the pasture where there were no trees or bushes to hide behind, one of the smaller boys had to drain his water and he solved his problem in his own way. He simply said, "Ollie Mae, look the other way." She did, then he turned his back and minded his little business.

In the fall of the year, we often missed some schooling because of so much cotton to be picked. However, we didn't lose as much time from school as some of the families around us. Many a time we would eat an early breakfast, go to the cotton patch and pick for an hour or two and then go directly from there to school. In the afternoons we would go directly from school to the cotton patch, pick cotton until dark and then go home for supper.

In my boyhood days, eating breakfast or supper in daylight was a luxury many of us couldn't afford. Cotton picking often went on until spring and sometimes we'd have to lose a few days of schooling in the spring in order to get the last of the cotton out of the field in time for planting.

But our work was not always hard field work. Sometimes there was more pleasant work to be done, like going with Papa in the wagon to haul a load of wood, or maybe to haul a hog over to a neighbor's.

That kind of work was more or less dangerous when too many small boys went along. So some of us smaller ones would have to stay home with Mama.

Papa always kept a box of sugar stick candy locked in the bottom of his trunk for the purpose of bribing us smaller ones on those occasions. I really shouldn't call it bribery; rather, it was a consolation offered to us younger ones who had to stay home.

When Papa would go somewhere alone in the wagon, it didn't hurt us so much. Mama would explain that he was going on a mission where little boys were not supposed to go, and we would accept it gracefully, since we all had to stay home. But if one or two of the boys rode away with him, that was hard for us smaller ones to bear.

But we couldn't throw a fit, because fits were not allowed in our family. We just had to suffer the heartbreak in silence and a fair amount of dignity. And as they would drive away, it seems I can still hear Mama saying to us, "Come on, children, let's go get a stick of candy." And of course, that would help our feelings somewhat, bless our little hearts.

Sometimes the smaller children would each get a stick of candy for staying home while the larger ones went down on the creek in Grandma's pasture. However, wading in water in our own pasture after summer rain showers usually included all of us, the youngest and all. It was understood that the oldest of the bunch was always the boss and had the responsibility for the safety and well-being of the entire party.

Whether we were working or playing, that rule of command held true in our family. And it was not the only ironclad ruling in the Johnson family—rulings which stood through the years without question and with no thought of breaking.

We always had a set of four boxing gloves. I say always because I can't remember when we didn't have them. And in boxing, we obeyed the rules of not hitting in the face nor below the belt. Another strict rule was, "Don't get mad at your opponent when he is giving you a beating. If you get mad, you mustn't play anymore." The same held true in wrestling. If you couldn't stand to be pinned down, you just didn't wrestle.

You can bet your boots, we all boxed and we all wrestled. No one wanted to be left out of the action. And the only way to stay in the action was to obey the rules and take whatever the other one dished out.

This didn't mean that the big kids were unmerciful to the little ones. There was another rule, "Don't hurt the little ones. Don't hold the little one down after he yells 'calf rope.' Back away and let him have a new start."

We all played "rough and rowdy," but always with smiles on our faces. And the rules of fair play applied to our animals also.

We had a big dog that was part Collie and part Shepherd. He grew up with us kids and became one of

the family. We named him Scotch. Papa brought him to us kids at the Exum place when he was a wee, little woolly ball of bouncing, playful puppy. Papa had given five dollars for him, which was a lot of money for our family in those days. He was the only dog our family ever owned.

According to his bloodlines, he was half Collie and half Shepherd, but according to us Johnson kids, he was just all dog— a gentleman canine of the highest order, a true friend, guardian and protector of children, truly a little boy's best friend.

We were taught never to abuse Old Scotch while he was a puppy, and as he grew older, we couldn't abuse him, he wouldn't allow it. And we were told never to call him without a good reason, such as to feed him, play with him or let him go hunting with us. Papa told us that if the dog trusted us, he would obey us better.

I guess that was good advice. At any rate, Old Scotch obeyed orders and commands better and more promptly than any other dog I have ever seen, either in or out of the movies. He even obeyed requests which were not meant as commands.

We kids didn't really know how to train the dog. We just let him grow up with us and by the time he was a year old, he was smarter and better looking than most of us kids.

However, we did teach Old Scotch to do a few simple little tricks- -nothing spectacular. He would sit down when we told him to. And he would hold still while we placed a small stick on top of his nose, and remain still until we counted to three. Then at the count of three, he would quickly flip it off his nose and catch it in his mouth. Then of course, he expected a pat of congratulations and a kind word or two.

We taught him to keep the chickens off the porch and out of the yard. That was an easy job. He soon learned to do it without having to be told.

We kids liked to sit under the steering wheel of our car and pretend we were driving. Soon Old Scotch was doing the same thing. Sometimes when we kids opened the car door, we would have to hurry or Old Scotch would beat us to the steering wheel. He was only playing with us kids when he did that. He wouldn't do Papa that way.

One of his favorite games was to take a stick in his mouth and challenge us to a game of wolf-over-the-river. He liked for us to try to catch him and take the stick. He also liked to play catch—but only with a rubber ball. We would pitch the ball to him and he would catch it and return it to us. However, there was a strict rule in this game—never throw a hard ball to him, because that would hurt his teeth and he would begin to distrust and disobey us.

He learned not to trust some of the neighbor kids. They sometimes threw him a hard ball. They didn't "Do unto Old Scotch as they would have Old Scotch do unto them."

At times we would offer the dog something to eat that he had never seen nor tasted before, and if he wasn't sure of it, he might reject it. But he seemed to have enough faith in us boys to think that, if he could see us eat some of it, then he would not be afraid to try it. So, we would let him see us eat some of it, or at least we would pretend to eat it.

Our dog didn't have the long Collie-like nose, but rather a beautiful short nose like the Alaskan Husky. Nor was his coat long and stringy but was short and heavy, more like the wool of a sheep before shearing. His color was a deep reddish brown, with just the right touches of white about the head. His body was round and full. His shoulders and hips were broad, as though somewhere in his ancestry there was most certainly a St. Bernard.

Old Scotch couldn't bear the sound of thunder. During a thunderstorm he wanted to go in the house and get under a bed. That's the only time we ever let him in the house. The noise must have hurt his ears. Firecrackers affected him the same way. He would tolerate the noise of a rifle when he was out hunting with us, but he wouldn't allow even his best friends to aim anything at him.

Needless to say, we would never aim a gun at him any more than we would aim one at each other. But a broomstick or a hoe handle was like a gun to Old Scotch. When we aimed something at him, he wouldn't bite us to really tear us apart, but he would certainly bite hard enough to make us drop the object we were pointing at him. He would growl in a way that told us for sure that he would not allow anyone to point anything at him.

Old Scotch saved us many a step and earned his keep many times over. We kept our milk-pen calves in the lot through the day. Then we kept our milk cows in the lot at night and let the calves run out to graze. Next morning we would tell Old Scotch to go get the calves and he would. He wouldn't get the horses nor the other cows—only the milk-pen calves.



After we ate breakfast and did the morning chores and were ready to harness the horses for plowing, we would send Old Scotch after the horses and he would get only the horses, no cows nor calves. In the afternoon we would tell him to go get the milk cows and he would bring only the cows, no horses.

When we called our dog, we didn't say, "Here, Scotch! Here, here, here." The word we used wasn't "here," it was "how." And no matter how far away he was, he would come immediately when he heard us call. He only paused long enough to make sure it was one of our family calling him and to get the direction from which the call came.

And when he came to us, he didn't come walking nor trotting, but loping. And he didn't stop a few steps away nor lower his head and ears, nor did he approach with his tail down. He bounced right up beside us, full of life and gusto as if to ask, "Oh boy! What kind of excitement do you have planned for me this time?"

It's a common thing to see a two-car family in the 1970's, but we were a two-car family as early as 1916. We still had the Reo and Papa bought a Big Six seven-passenger Buick touring car. Old Scotch knew that Buick by sound. Uncle Robert had a Little Six Buick that sounded almost like the Big Six. Our dog could recognize the sound of those Buicks a half-mile away.

When other cars drove by along the road, Old Scotch would pay no attention to them. We had taught him not to chase cars. But when either of those Buicks came along, he would run out to greet it a quarter-mile away. He also accepted Robert as a personal friend as well as a friend to our family.

Then one day Old Scotch didn't come when we called him. Nor did he come the next day. We had no idea where he had gone nor why. Of course, we kept hoping that some day he would return. But days became weeks and weeks became months and the dog was still missing. By this time we had given up all hope of ever seeing him again.

Papa and Mama taught us to be nice to our animals and taught us how to get Old Scotch to obey us. And there seemed to be no end to the little things they taught us how to do. In a jiffy they could cut a slot in the side of a pumpkin leaf stem and make us a horn to blow. They showed us how to put a chicken's head under his wing, swing him a few times and lay him down on the ground, fast asleep. Papa taught us how to tie a certain kind of a knot in a rope for one occasion and another kind for another purpose. And he taught us how to make a loop for roping calves.

We owed a lot to our parents for making our lives pleasant and exciting. They were among the most respected parents in our community. They were leaders—not in organizations concerned with business or big government, nor in local clubs, but they were upstanding church-goers with high standards of moral character and integrity. As in play, so in life, they wanted their children to abide by a set of rules which would lead them into a good life—a life of knowledge of the difference between good and evil, with a desire to do the good and shun the evil.

They may not have thought of God as some of us do today but I am sure they did what they thought was right, and they did it with consistency and sincerity. More than that we have no right to ask.

Some families have their own little unique customs. I suppose we were one of those families. When visiting with other families, it seemed odd to me to hear them call their babies by their given names. We always called our youngest one "Baby" until the next one arrived. Then we called the new one "Baby" and the one before him had to take on his rightful name.

This went on until my younger brother was born. Joel, just older than I, couldn't say Clarence, so he called me Big Baby and he called the new one Baby. No, he wasn't slow about learning to talk. You see, we didn't give him much time. He was only sixteen months old when I came along, and he was just three when the new one came. Another custom not common to all families was, we smaller ones wore dresses around home for the first three or four years of our lives. It made diapering much easier and saved a lot of laundering. Come to think of it, I never heard of diapers until I was almost grown. They were not diapers, they were breeches—in our family they were "britches." That's the only thing I ever heard them called until I was a mature man.

We were poor people, living the simple life. I wasn't any poorer than the rest of my family, but I was the simplest one.

We also had this custom of competing among ourselves. In most everything we did, there was an element of competition and hurry. Our parents had a way of causing us kids to apply pressure to each other. They found that it worked better than when parents tried to force kids to work faster.

In the cotton patch you could hear us kids saying such things as, "I picked more cotton than you did." Or if we were hoeing you might hear something like, "Come on, Slow Poke."

The plan worked well. No one wanted to be outdone by a brother, especially a little brother. And if a little brother could outshine a big brother, even just once in awhile, that was a real feather in the little one's cap.

Oh, yes! There was hurry and there was pressure. But it didn't seem to get us down as it does some people today. We had no psychologists in those days to tell us that pressures would warp a kid's brain. We didn't know that competition and hurry would drive us crazy until these educated people told us about it.

So we lived hard, we worked hard, and we played hard. Then we were able to go to bed and sleep hard. Never in my life did I ever hear Mama or Papa say, "I didn't sleep well last night, because I felt tense and worried."

There was really nothing to worry about like there is today. They didn't worry that we kids might go away from home and get into trouble. We didn't have to leave home to get into trouble. We kids made our own trouble right at home. We had a lot of fun doing a lot of different things. Most of our troubles were brought on accidentally, we didn't deliberately plan them.

There was no worry about the family losing anything, we had nothing to lose. No one would steal from us because no one wanted what we had. So, whatever pressures we might encounter during the day were dispelled during a night of welcome rest.

In the cotton patch Mama and Papa encouraged us to see who could pick 100 bolls first. The first one to pick his 100 bolls would call out, "hundred." Then each of the others would call out the number of bolls they had picked during the same time.

This competition got more bales of cotton to the gin in a shorter period of time. But, as in all activities where kids are involved, we sometimes had little disagreements.

I had this thing of humming or singing a song while I picked cotton and counted my bolls. I found that the mental work I was doing was relaxing and it allowed my hands to do their work faster. And now, 65 years later, I learn that I was doing something a little bit kin to what they call Yoga.

At any rate, it really worked for me. I could pick cotton faster than a brother or two who were older than I was. Now, I didn't necessarily use my system in order to get more of the family cotton picked. I used it mainly just to beat my older brothers picking cotton, and that not for very long at a time.

But my little scheme backfired on me. One of those brothers couldn't stand to be outdone by a younger brother. He told Mama and Papa that I was lying and cheating, because he knew I couldn't count bolls while I sang a song. But he was wrong. I could. Anyway, nothing I could say would make him believe me. I began to become an outcast among some of my brothers early in life. I believe there were times when some of them would have been glad to "sell me into slavery" as Joseph's brothers did him.

But my parents didn't seem to doubt my word. I really believe they understood that I could do a thing or two that some of the others could not do—and perhaps were not at all interested in doing.

I believe little things like that were the beginning of a wee bit of an unconscious rift between some of my brothers and me, and at the same time, the making of a stronger bond between my parents and me.

Looking back, I remember many times when Papa and I were doing things together and there was no one else around. I really don't know why I was the only one there a lot of times. Maybe I just wanted to be in good company. I loved and admired Papa and I thought he was the best and nicest man in the world. Or perhaps I was with Papa because of my inquisitive mind concerning mechanical things, like,

"How do you shoe a horse?"

"How do you tighten a loose wagon tire?"

"How do you make a row-binder do what you want it to do when the manufacturer couldn't seem to do it?"

I watched him do all these things and many more. And many of the things he did fascinated me.

The situation was much the same between Mama and me.

"How do you churn milk and make butter?"

"How do you 'take up' the butter after it is churned?"

"How do you make those beautiful decorations on it later?"

"How do you weave a carpet on Grandma's loom?"

It seems I was always watching a lot of these goings-on while the other kids were somewhere else doing whatever they liked to do. And Mama and Papa were never too busy to answer my questions. I realize now how much more I could have learned if I had only known how and when to ask more questions.

It seems that my parents favored and petted me at times. I'm not sure they did. If they did, perhaps it was because they felt sorry for their little ugly duckling. And maybe I only imagined they were especially nice to me. Maybe they were that nice to everyone. Perhaps they were nice to me just to have me around handy when they needed me to help them just a little bit.

This latter seems to be the most reasonable argument, after considering some of my stupid exploits and my senseless reasoning throughout my life.

Yet, it just might be possible that they were partial to me on account of the wen, and later on, my paralysis—these factors coupled with the fact that within the last four years along about the time I was born, they had suffered the loss of a two-year-old son, a two-week-old daughter, Mama's favorite brother, Hugh, and Grandpa Johnson.

Who can measure the thoughts of loving parents as they view their newborn child for the first time, anxious to know whether he or she is beautiful and healthy and without blemish.

And who knows the anxiety of parents who, after seeing their child with blemish, must wonder how his condition will affect his relationship with others, how it will affect his outlook on life, and whether it might grow worse and shorten his days.

## CHAPTER 4

### SOCIAL LIVING; LOVING, LISTENING, LEARNING

There were so many little stories unfolding simultaneously that I am going to be unable to keep them all up to date as I go along. While I have been telling about some of our working habits and our little family customs, I find that the story of my love life has been neglected. I must go back a way now and bring some of my social living up to date.

Oh, yes! I had a sweetheart. Her name was Gladys, and I must tell you about her.

You see, when we moved to the Exum farm, I was a little boy barely five years old. But then, when we had lived there a year and a half, I was no longer just a little kid. I was getting to be a big boy, six and a half and going on seven. And my ears were getting bigger also. I began to hear about sweethearts. Susie was thirteen and was just the very one to explain it to me.

She told me once, jokingly, "A sweetheart is a chicken heart baked in molasses."

But seriously, what she explained about sweethearts amounted to something like this, "Sweethearts are one boy and one girl about the same age who like each other and like to go together and like to do things together. He is her sweetheart and she is his sweetheart."

Now the Flints, who had moved onto our old farm, had a bunch of boys and girls and we all played together. The one I liked best was Gladys. She was just my size, she was six years old, and she and I liked to go play together. So, when I learned what sweethearts were, I knew for a fact that Gladys was my sweetheart because we liked each other and played together.

Of course, I didn't tell anyone, not even Gladys. I didn't feel any differently toward her. We just went right on playing together as we had been doing. But I had this newly acquired knowledge that she was my sweetheart.

No more than I knew or could understand about it all, I wondered why boys and girls had sweethearts at all. They were just like other boys and girls except they were your own age.

I never heard of any parents who objected to their older boys and girls having sweethearts and

dating. (In those days we called it "going together.") But in our immediate community, there were some pretty strict rules to govern their behavior.

The "good" people in our community didn't allow their boys and girls to dance. So, there were no dances in our neighborhood because there were no families that wanted to be branded as being "not so good." Instead of dances we had parties. Many a Friday night some good farm couple would give a party. These parties were always family affairs. The young people didn't go to the parties alone. Their parents took them to the parties and then the grown-ups took part in many of the games.

I remember two of the games they played. They were "snap" and "cross questions and crooked answers." There were many others but I can't recall them just now. I was only eleven when we moved out of that community, and we never had such parties at any place we lived after that.

One night at one of the parties, Frank's girl "snapped" me. (We didn't call them girl-friends as we do today, just "Girls.") But I was so timid I just backed away like the bashful country kid that I was. She told them she got "stood-up" and would have to pick someone else.

I wanted to play in the games, but I realized that I was much smaller than any of the others who took part in them, and I was afraid I might do something wrong and cause them to laugh at me.

Two of the party song-and-dance "swings" they did were "Shoot the Buffalo" and "Farmer by the Mill." These were the promenade type dances where they swung their partners kind of like in a square dance. Mr. Flint was about the best man in the neighborhood at calling those dances.

Now I have gone and contradicted myself. I first said we didn't have dances. Now I'm telling you we danced. But this was not the kind of dance where they waltzed around in each other's arms. They were party dances.

When the party activities got under way, the people were seated all around the room next to the walls. Usually some were standing in the adjoining rooms also, looking through the doors, because the living room wasn't large enough to hold the crowd. When that many came to a party, it was considered a good party.

A large crowd was just what they wanted. More people meant more games and more happy people playing games. In general, when there was a large crowd, things moved along at a faster pace.

The game of "snap" was usually played by the young set—that is, the sweetheart set who enjoyed holding hands and chasing after each other.

The game was easy to get started. All it took was a girl and a boy to stand in the middle of the room and hold hands, facing each other. Then the girls would "volunteer" one of their crowd and push her forward to be "it." Then the "it" girl would circle the room looking for the boy she wanted for a partner. When she found him, she would snap her fingers in front of his face, just as you would in school when you wanted to get the teacher's attention.

This snap told the boy that he was her chosen, at least for a few minutes. As soon as she snapped her fingers, she would hurry to the couple in the middle of the room and the boy she "snapped" would chase after her. His object was to touch the girl, and her object was to try to prevent his touching her.

She would try to prolong the chase by dodging and sometimes swinging around the couple in the center of the room. And sometimes the couple would prolong the chase by favoring the girl. They might raise their arms to let the girl go through between them and then lower their arms quickly to stop the boy. Or, if the boy was having a hard time catching her, they might let her start through between them and then lower their arms quickly and trap her in their arms.

As soon as the boy touched the girl, the chase was ended. Then the couple who had held hands would leave and let the new couple hold hands in the center of the room while another chase took place.

This was not only a holding-hands game, at times it became a body- contact game. And yet, not too much contact, because the grown- ups were watching. Anyway, snap was a popular game at our parties.

Now, this Friday night the party might be at the Johnsons, but before the party was over, you could bet good money that the teen- agers would have talked another family into giving a party next Friday night.

These were strictly play parties. There were no refreshments served, not a lot of cooking and fixing. Just make sure the house is clean, the yard is clean, and there are plenty of places to park buggies, hacks, and wagons. Then hope a big crowd begins gathering soon after sundown.

Parties were preferred over dances because it was considered immoral for a boy to put his arm around a girl before they were married. Sweethearts could hold hands in the presence of adults, if it were in the process of playing a game. But just to sit this one out and hold hands was unthinkable.

A "good" mother would never tell her daughter it was all right for her to hold hands in public, or to hug and kiss anywhere, on her way to church or anywhere else, either afoot or in a buggy— not even at night.

Somehow, I just can't help but believe that parents knew these little things were going on between lovers, but they seemed to think that if they told their kids it was all right for them to do these things, it would be like saying "sic 'em" to a dog. Putting it another way, parents were saying, "Don't ever let me catch you doing such things." And the kids were not actually saying but were thinking, "Okay, I'll try not to let you catch me when I do them."

Dances were looked down upon because they attracted boys who drank, and girls with loose morals. There were some boys and girls who lived six or eight miles from us who were not wanted at some of the parties given in our neighborhood, and were not invited by some of our neighbors who were giving the parties.

But when my parents gave a party at our house, they invited everyone who would come. They thought it unmannerly to invite certain ones and leave others out. They seemed to figure that their integrity would demand respect from the worst of them—and it did. There never was any trouble at our house—no drinking, no fighting, no "cussing."

I remember one of those parties when some young people came in a buggy from quite a distance away. I think I was about nine years old and, of course, I didn't know all about everything that went on around me but I knew enough to realize there were some bad feelings between their families and some of those in our immediate neighborhood. The main reason seemed to be that those youngsters attended dances in other communities and some parents in our neighborhood sure didn't approve of that.

The incident I remember had to do with their buggy horse which got sick with a severe attack of colic while the party was going on. Someone had wandered outside and had discovered the horse in great pain. The boy who owned the animal had seen the disease before and knew how quickly it could kill a good horse. So he offered to sell the animal to anyone for \$10. It would have been a bargain for Papa, because he knew exactly what to do to cure the horse. And the horse was probably worth \$50.

When Papa learned about the problem, he got a quart bottle, filled it about a quarter-full of soda and then added about a half-quart of kerosene. Then he climbed up in a tree, pulled the horse's head high in the air with the bridle reins and poured the mixture down his throat. Within ten minutes, the horse was without pain and resting comfortably, except for a mighty bad taste in his mouth.

I think the boy was truly grateful that Papa had not taken advantage of him by buying the horse. Will Johnson knew that a good name was rather to be chosen than the value of a buggy horse.

Along with sweethearts, there were a few other things I didn't understand altogether. One time during my younger days, I cut out a picture of a baby buggy from a Sears, Roebuck catalog. I don't remember just how old I was at the time. I was old enough to do a pretty good job of cutting out, but I didn't do so well with my reasoning. I was disappointed to learn that the buggy wouldn't sit up and roll.

That was not altogether a case of stupidity but rather, a lack of research. This was part of the research through which I learned about the third dimension.

It's hard to believe a kid that stupid could become so smart within the next few years and retain that smartness for the rest of his life.

We also learned—not through research, but from concerned parents, about the choice of words to use, the careful choice, I might add.

Some words were strictly forbidden. The word "bull" was one of them. We didn't dare use that word in the presence of Papa or Mama. And if any of the other kids heard us use it, they would tattletale on us. So, we just didn't use it. We were taught to use the word "surley" instead.

As late as 1940 I knew middle-aged men who would not use the word "bull" before a woman. One old farmer said, "I don't know what the world is coming to. I believe the time will come when men and women will use the word 'bull' in mixed company and think nothing of it."

But that was in farming country. In cattle country it was different. I'll bet a ranch boy wouldn't have known what a surley was. One of my rancher uncles was talking to a farmer who had some calves he

wanted to sell to the rancher. He told the rancher, "Three of those calves are still nursing." Well, my uncle and his daughter had to put forth an effort to hold back their laughter. They were not used to nursing calves. In cattle country calves don't nurse, they suck.

Continuing along that same line, up until I was a teenager, I never heard the words "sex" or "male" or "female" used except by some dirty-mouthed kid. Even when I was in the seventh and eighth grades, when I had to fill out certain school papers and was told to put an M for male or an F for female, there was a wee bit of embarrassment or shyness associated with the use of gender words. The use of the word "sex" was still guarded against, except in writing. The word was never spoken in mixed company. The word "gender" was considered bad enough.

And speaking of dirty-mouthed kids—no one in our family ever used any kind of dirty words, at least not in my presence. Some of the brothers I grew up with are in their seventies now and I can truthfully say, I can not recall ever having heard one of them "cuss" nor utter a dirty word.

We have all heard of that proverbial corner around which prosperity is lurking. Well, at the Exum place we finally rounded that corner and bumped right into it. We got a telephone.

I'm sure we didn't have a telephone at the Flint place. But by about the time I started to school, almost everyone in our neighborhood had one. There were maybe eight or ten parties on the same line.

We owned our own telephone, put up our own lines, and bought our own batteries. Having so many on one line wasn't the best arrangement but it was better than no phone at all. It was a big step forward at that time in the history of our community.

Every day at noon—straight up twelve o'clock—the operator would ring a long, long ring. We could set our clocks by it and we could listen to the weather forecast immediately after the long ring. I don't know where they got the weather information, probably from a record of what the weather did on that same day a year ago, or maybe from the almanac. Anyway, wherever they got it, most of us listened to it and were stuck with it.

In the above paragraph I said the operator would ring. That's not exactly right. It's true, she was a woman operator. And we kids knew she was a woman, but we didn't know she was an operator. We only knew her as "Central." As far as we were concerned, her name might just as well have been Mrs. Central.

At any rate, when we wanted to ring someone on our line, out our direction from "Central," all we had to do was turn the crank and ring their ring. For instance, our ring was a long and four shorts. But, if we wanted to talk to someone on a line out another direction from Hamlin, we had to ring a long ring to get "Central" and get her to connect our line to the other line. Then she would ring that party for us.

When any of us tried and tried to ring Central and couldn't get her to answer, naturally all the phones on our line would be ringing at the same time, and usually some neighbor on our line would volunteer to ring for us and help us get through to Central. Perhaps the neighbor's phone had a stronger magneto, or perhaps two or three of us ringing at the same time might send a stronger current and get through to her. We tried everything.

Come to think of it, there was the possibility that Central's phone had been ringing from the beginning. It was just barely possible that she was eating a sandwich in another room. And of course, we shouldn't overlook the possibility that she might have been out in the little house backed up to the alley.

Speaking of getting through to the operator, let me tell you about one day when the operator got through to me. Now, on this particular day, Frank was the operator. He was in command.

Frank, Earl, Joel and I were hoeing cotton. Frank, being the oldest and the one who would have to answer to Papa if the work didn't get done, was working hard and was way out ahead of the rest of us. I was the youngest and least and was way behind, but not too far behind to be able to talk to Earl and Joel.

After awhile Frank looked back and found us doing a lot of standing and talking and not much working. He shouted to us to get to work. We did for awhile because we knew Frank was boss. But again we got to talking more than hoeing and Frank yelled again, "Get to work back there!"

Now, I know it was hard on Frank, he being the oldest and having all the responsibility for getting the hoeing done. It was hard on me too, just being the youngest with no responsibility.

Finally Frank got so far ahead that it seemed not so necessary to obey him. Some of us read the Bible

with that same attitude. We seem to think that God has gone so far away we need not obey him any more. But I suppose God knows when we are loafing and getting further behind, just as Frank knew about us boys that day. Anyway, we got more and more lax and Frank got more and more tense. Then he shouted again. "Get to work back there!"

Earl looked at me and said, "Tell him to come and make you."

Now, Earl always was one to recommend that someone else do something he wouldn't do for anything. But Earl also knew me and he was reasonably sure I would do it. That would leave him guiltless and he would get to see the fun. His pleasure would be twofold. He would glory in the thought that he had caused me to do something that we both knew I shouldn't do and he would enjoy seeing me get a good licking which he knew I had needed many times more than I had gotten.

At the same time, I was eager to show off and furnish entertainment for my "fans." So, I shouted back, "Come and make me!"

And Frank did just that.

I knew what was coming long before he got to me. I knew it would hurt and I knew I deserved every bit of it. But it was funny—in a way.

By the time Frank got to me I was flat on my back with my feet toward him. I kicked furiously. My laughing hindered me somewhat but I managed to keep him at bay for awhile.

My feet were flying and aimed in his direction. He circled around me, trying to get at my weaker end—my head. After two or three rounds, he got me, and I got what was coming to me.

I was so tickled, it didn't seem to hurt at first. But the more I laughed the harder he whipped me. If I remember right, I think I quit laughing before he quit whipping. Anyway, I had my fun and my punishment, Earl and Joel saw a good show and Frank did what he had to do. And I worked harder after that.

Do you think I told Mama and Papa what Frank did to me? Of course not. That would have brought a reprimand from them. I knew I had done wrong. I also knew I had better let well enough alone.

And did Frank tell them I had been a bad boy? Certainly not. He had handled the situation well and we all knew he could do it again next time. That's the way our family discipline worked.

There were a lot of disadvantages to being little when I was growing up. I don't mean like the whipping I got from Frank. That was okay. I needed that. I mean like things I wanted to do. There were so many things I wanted to do that Mama and Papa wouldn't let me do. They would say, "You're too little."

With Earl and Joel, it was different. They were not too little— never had been. At least, if they had been, I couldn't remember it.

One thing I wanted to do was go hunting with Uncle Robert and his greyhounds. I remember I went one time, but most of the times I was too little. I had to stay home and hear them tell about the rabbit hunt afterwards.

I guess the time they let me go was when they weren't going very far and they figured I could keep up with the others for awhile.

Anyway, Robert had some dogs that were mighty fast and well matched. It was hard for a jack rabbit to get away from them. Old Queen was his fastest one. She was his lead dog. Old Pluto was almost as fast. He would run in single file behind Old Queen, and when a rabbit began to circle, Old Pluto would begin to cut the corner to keep the rabbit going straight.

A rabbit likes to circle back to his home territory. He knows the lay of the land at home and figures he has a better chance to survive. But Robert's dogs wouldn't let him circle back. That seemed to frustrate him and make him easier to catch.

Robert also had about three other running dogs. They were not quite as fast as Queen and Pluto but they played important roles in the pack. They were good to spread out and help flush rabbits out of the weeds and brush. And they were also there at the end of the chase to catch the rabbit in case he dodged quickly and the two leading dogs failed to catch him.

When those dogs jumped a jack rabbit, you could just about write him off as another dead rabbit. About the only way a rabbit could escape was to run into a patch of tall, thick feed where the dogs

couldn't see him.

Other men wanted to buy Robert's dogs at times but he took pride in owning the best greyhounds for miles around, and his best ones were not for sale.

Uncle Robert was a favorite of us boys. He was Papa's youngest brother and was only eight years older than Frank. We liked just about everything about him, especially the way he paid us when we worked for him. When we hoed or picked cotton for him, he paid us as soon as we were through, and he paid us in cash, never by check. We hated checks. Some men paid us boys by check, with all our wages figured in together, usually along with Papa's. Then we had to wait for Papa to go to town and get the money, which might be as much as a week later.

But not so with Uncle Robert. When time came for him to pay us boys—as soon as the job was finished—he made it a point to have a pocket full of coins so he could pay us then and there. There was no piece of paper, no writing and no waiting. And he paid each of us separately.

Another thing I was too little to do was go upstairs at Grandma's. Yet, I didn't mind that so much because I wasn't the only one. Even Earl and Joel couldn't go up there.

Robert and Ed were still living at home and not married. Their rooms were upstairs and they didn't want us little kids messing around up there. Besides, there was danger we might fall on the steps and get hurt.

I didn't know at the time why they didn't want us to go upstairs. They didn't tell us the truth about it. What they told us was, "If you go up there, the Old Bootjack will get you." Well, I was almost grown before I learned what a bootjack was. Then it was easy to see that a bootjack wouldn't hurt anyone, especially little kids. But the fear of it served its purpose. And I suppose we were not mentally warped because of having been fibbed to.

We learned other lessons also—some the expensive way. I remember, some of us Johnson kids were at Uncle John Hudson's house one day, playing with all his kids, when we discovered a pig out of his pen.

Now, Uncle John was away from home at that time and we thought we should do him a big favor and get his pig back in the pen with its mama. I don't know why, he couldn't hurt anything, he was too small. But he had a pen and we kids thought a pig ought to be in his pen. So we got after him.

It was a hot day. In fact, it was so hot that the sandy ground burned our bare feet. We were suffering from the heat but we thought we must not stop until we caught him. We felt duty bound to get that pig back in his pen.

We chased him all over the place and finally caught him out in the peach orchard. Well, we were hot, the ground was hot, the weather was hot, but most of all, that little pig was hot.

We carried our little prisoner and we all got under the shade of a peach tree. We kids cooled off right away, but the pig was so tired and was breathing so fast, we thought we ought to cool him off with some cool water.

We carried water from the windmill—good, cool water right out of the well. Then we poured it on the little pig—and he was dead in about one minute flat.

We were sorry, but how were we to know that cold water would kill a hot pig? No one had ever told us it would. We learned that lesson the hard way—that is, hard on Uncle John. And we learned some other things too, when he learned about his pig. Oh yes, he told us a few things he wanted us to know.

Regardless of all the little mistakes we kids made, we generally had the run of the farm at our Exum place, except for a few things which were not allowed. One of these was, "Don't climb on the feed stacks." That would destroy a lot of the feed and allow rainwater to run in and ruin even more of it. No problem there. Most any kid could follow that line of reasoning. But another "Don't" that was not so easily understood was, "Don't play in the cottonseed."

What could it hurt to play in it? It was in a nice bin, and we would leave it in the bin. Walking on it wouldn't hurt it. Digging holes and tunnels in it wouldn't damage the seed. This was forbidden fruit we just couldn't understand.

So, the rule about not playing in the cottonseed had its effect on cultivating our dishonesty. It was so much fun, we went ahead and played in the cottonseed bin anyway, when we thought the coast was clear. And I can't remember ever having gotten caught at it.



I can understand it all now. If we had been allowed to play in the cottonseed, we might have gotten careless about wasting seed out the door when we were having a cottonseed fight. And, more than likely, we would have left the door open at times for the rain and rats and cows to get in. And of course, a cave-in in one of our tunnels might have trapped one of the smaller kids when there were no large ones around for rescue work. We hadn't thought of that.

But we couldn't understand it at that time, and it seemed to us that this cottonseed "don't" was not an absolute "don't," but perhaps more of an "I don't think you ought to" kind of a "don't." So, when viewed from that angle, we didn't feel so guilty. We just played in the seed and enjoyed it.

But since there was at least a half-hearted rule against playing in the cottonseed, we didn't dare leave the door open when we were playing inside. Papa could have spotted that open door a quarter-mile away and, come supper time, we kids would have had to answer a question or two. Also, a few seeds outside on the ground could have been seen by conservative parents or maybe by a brother who was bent on "getting even" with another brother, and at the same time, putting a fresh shine on his little halo by tattling.

In spite of all the drawbacks, we played in the cottonseed, and naturally we stirred up dust. And when the sun shone through the cracks onto that dust, it was hard to see through it—it was sort of like a wall that you could walk right through.

One day we were playing in the seed when the sun was shining through a horizontal crack in the boards. The dust in the sunshine looked a lot like a large board, lying flat above the seed. I tried to crawl up on the dust as though it were a table top. But of course, it wouldn't hold me up.

I couldn't understand it. So I stirred up more dust until it became very dense. Then I tried jumping up on it. But it still wouldn't hold me up.

Years later, I learned why. The dust wasn't as dense as I was.

I have told you about a three or four-year-old boy planting with a two-row planter, a dog plowing for his master, and Texas kids trying to walk on dust clouds. Don't go away, I have other true stories to tell you.

As I mentioned before, I have heard Papa tell of trail driving near San Angelo, Texas. He was just a lad at that time—couldn't have been more than 17 or 18 years old. Here is what he told me about 35 years later:

One time when they were on the trail, they had bedded their cattle down one night near San Angelo and were sitting around the camp fire doing nothing when one cowboy said, "Let's go into town and get something to drink."

Another one said, "Good idea, but we're all broke and the boss is two days behind. How you gonna get whiskey without money?"

He said, "Saddle up and go with me and I'll show you."

Now this would be worth seeing, so quite a few of the boys rode with him into town—carrying jugs half full of water.

History tells us that along about that time, San Angelo was made up of at least 20 saloons and fewer than that number of all other stores combined.

Before the cowboys reached town, they all knew just what to do. After hiding their billfolds in their saddle bags, they each took a jug and split up, one going to this saloon and one to that saloon and so on.

Then each in turn told the bartender that they were out on the trail with only half a jug of whiskey, and would he finish filling it up? After the jug was filled, the cowboy would reach for his wallet only to "discover" that he had lost it. The bartender would just have to take back his half-gallon. The poor boy would have to "make out" with only his original half-gallon.

Now, with quite a few cowpokes pulling this little stunt in about half the saloons in San Angelo, you can bet your boots they rode back to camp with plenty of what they came for, a little weak, but free.

When Papa was a boy, the lives of his entire family had to do with saddle horses and cattle. Even the little girls liked to ride horses and play cowboy. The youngest girl, Annie, was one of those little girls. But when Annie became big enough to do chores, one of her chores was to churn the milk that made the butter for the family. And she hated to have to stay home and churn while her brothers rode out

into the pasture after the cows.

Now, I'm not positive of this, but knowing Papa as I do, I wouldn't be surprised if he had something to do with helping his little sister solve her problem. Whoever it was, the idea worked well and made a little girl happy. She would tie a jar of milk to her saddle and ride on out with the boys, letting her horse do the churning.

At the Exum farm Mr. Whatley's pasture joined our field. And in his pasture he had an old cow which was well educated in the art of breaking through fences. And she seemed to enjoy slipping into our corn patch.

Now, the normal procedure for the average farmer was to put a yoke on the neck of such an animal. Of course, the purpose of the yoke was to bridge across the wires and stop the cow from going through the fence.

But this old cow soon learned to use the yoke to break the wires so she could get through the fence easier. And she had been spending entirely too much of her time in our field. Mr. Whatley either could not or would not keep her out. Papa thought he ought to keep her out.

I never learned where Papa got the idea of shooting the cow— whether it was his own idea or whether a neighbor had prescribed the remedy. And even though Papa was smart in most cases, I really think he used poor judgment when he shot the cow. He only meant for the shots to sting her enough to make our corn patch unpleasant for her. But he either misjudged his distance from the cow or he misread the size of shot in the shell he used.

When he shot the cow, she just stood there, I guess wondering what hit her. Papa doubted that he had hit her at all. So he moved up closer and fired a second shot, which really hurt the old cow much more than Papa had meant to hurt her.

When Mr. Whatley took a look at his cow, he was hurt even more. He told the County Judge about it and the judge told Papa to pay Mr. Whatley for his wounded cow.

Papa argued that the cow had damaged his corn more than he had damaged the cow—in fact, more than the cow was worth. The judge agreed, that might well be true, but it didn't give Papa the right to go around shooting his neighbor's cow. Besides, in this case, the corn would get well much sooner than the cow would.

Papa paid Mr. Whatley for his cow, and went home a little poorer and a lot wiser. I don't think Papa ever shot another cow. If he did, he didn't tell us about it.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **BOOKS, FOLKLORE, MEDICINE AND DREAMS**

As I said earlier, I got along okay in school. But throughout school I was a slow reader. And this reading slowness has plagued me all my life. It even caused me quite a bit of trouble in college. As a small boy, when Santa Claus brought me a book, I was a little disappointed. I'd much rather have gotten some kind of a toy, especially one with wheels that would roll.

We kids learned early in life how to do things, purely a matter of survival. But learning the "why" of things often came through reading and I was the slowest of readers. Even in high school I read very slowly, but I got what I read tolerably thorough.

I never read my history more than one time and I made "A" throughout the course. The same was true with stories and other readings. In college I only read my history once. And I didn't even review for the final test and came out with a "C."

There were a few books on the shelves in our house when I was a boy. Some had pictures, so I looked at them. Some didn't have, so I didn't look at them. And I certainly didn't read them.

There were two books which stood out in our home, always available and close at hand. They were the Bible and the Sears, Roebuck Catalog. There were times when these two rivaled each other in

importance. Yet they were both necessary, the Bible for living and dying and the catalog for "What ye shall put on." And then the catalog, after a new one took its place each year, became the forerunner of what we now know as bathroom tissue.

Each autumn after the first bale or two of cotton had been sold, Papa and Mama would get the catalog down and make up an order that would fill a wooden box half the size of a coffin. Then we would wait two or three weeks for the shipment to come from Dallas. Finally a postcard would come from the railroad depot in Hamlin stating that the shipment had arrived. The next time Papa was in town in his wagon, he would go by and pick it up.

That night after supper we would all gather around for the grand opening. There was something in the box for one and all.

There was a pair of work shoes for each, and that pair would have to last until the fall of next year. Last year's would do to wear to school awhile yet. The new ones would do to wear for Sundays until they began to look worn, then we could wear them to school. And they would last a long time if we would pull them off as soon as we got in from school in the afternoons, and wear our old ones for doing chores. We could still wear our school shoes for Sunday by shining them up a bit. And of course, come March the weather would be warm enough to go barefooted most of the time.

There was underwear in the box, winter-weight that is. We didn't wear any in summer—just overalls and a shirt, that's all—well, sometimes a straw hat. And naturally we wore a cap in winter, with ear flaps. Each of us would get two suits of the underwear, unless some of the smaller kids could wear some hand-me-downs, and unless the hand-me-downs had already been handed down too many times and were too far gone.

The winter caps came in the big box too, and two pairs of pants for each boy, caps and pants all corduroy. Needless to say, the pants were the knee length kind, known as knickers, gathered with elastic above the knees. There were long pants for boys in their late teens, and those came down to their shoe tops. There were socks too. Socks were short and worn only by men and the big boys with long pants. Most of us boys got stockings which met the knickers above the knees. They were held up by garters of black elastic. The elastic also came in the box—yards of it. And the garters were made to individual sizes by our mother whose hands were never idle. There might have been shirts in the big box, though I think Mama made most all our shirts.

The corduroy knickers stood out full above the knees due to the gathering by the elastic. That caused the legs of the breeches to rub together when we walked, and that rubbing caused a swishing noise each time we took a step. As we walked to school, most of the boys went step, step, stepping along, but we Johnsons went swish, swish, swishing along. And everyone could hear that we were wearing our new corduroy breeches.

There were things for the girls in the shipment too, and for Mama. But I didn't know what they got, except maybe a bundle of cloth or two or three, to be made into dresses. I suppose they also made what they wore under the dresses. But that was top secret as far as we boys were concerned. However, that didn't bother me. I was by women's clothing about like I was by Santa Claus—not very inquisitive. My field of research didn't include girls' clothing.

As I grew older, of course, my attitude changed. I became somewhat interested in broadening my knowledge of girls and their surroundings. And so, with a feeling of guilt, and in strictest privacy, I turned to the women's section of the Sear, Roebuck Catalog for research and knowledge of the innermost secrets about women's wear.

Now, in that big box from Sears, Roebuck there would be blue denim for homemade overalls. There would be pots and pans for the kitchen, and gingham and calico and elastic and needles and thread. And there'd be a side or two of black harness leather for making new lines and new traces and for repairing the old ones. Papa also used the same leather for shoe soles and heels.

There'd be shoe tacks and harness thread; bolts, nuts, and copper rivets; leather lace for saddles, beeswax, welding flux and axle grease; ropes for handling cows and horses, carpenter tools and horse shoes.

And one year, for Frank and Susie, there was a phonograph and some records. Only I think the phonograph came in a separate shipment later in the fall—perhaps for Christmas.

One of the favorite records for us smaller kids was "The Preacher and the Bear." After awhile those of us who couldn't read could pick out that record easily because all the letters were worn off the label. Even people who could read couldn't read that one because there was no reading on it. We little kids had worn it all off with our fingers making it go round and round.

In those days research and technology had not advanced to the point where they could make a spring that wouldn't break. Watch springs broke in those days. Cultivator seat springs broke. Screen door springs broke. And when automobiles came along, their springs broke.

This phonograph had a wind-up spring, so it broke too. That's when we kids started putting our fingers on the label part of the record and turning it ourselves. Fingers got as good reception as a spring, so we soon wore the label off playing our favorite record

Sorry I wandered. Let's get back to the big box. In the box I remember there was a big bolt of cotton-sack ducking. We started picking cotton in the fall with last year's old leftover sacks. But now it was time for new sacks. The old ones would make good short sacks for the little kids. The big new sacks would be for those who picked the most cotton.

I didn't know it at the time but I learned later that the story they used to tell us about Santa being overloaded on Christmas Eve and couldn't bring all the toys was just not true. The fact was that Santa had ordered from Sears, Roebuck and they were out of some of the items and would have to ship them later. And by the time those items arrived in Hamlin, Santa had to deliver them a night or two later.

One year, in the big box, there was a set of shoe lasts and a stand, for repairing all sizes of shoes. I don't remember when we got the set. I think maybe it came to live with the family before I did and it was as good as new after I was a grown man. When Papa put new half soles on our shoes, he would punch holes with an awl and we little kids always wanted to place the shoe tacks in the holes. Our helping didn't delay his work a great deal—and he was always kind and patient with us as we labored with him and got in his way.

Many of the items in the big box were surprising to us kids, but a blue denim jacket was no surprise to Papa, because he was the one who made out the order in the first place. He also got socks— a bundle of twelve pairs of gray Rockford work socks, also sock supporters, suspenders, and sleeve holders. Somewhere tucked away among other relics of olden days, I think I still have a pair of old sleeve holders.

You ask, "What are sleeve holders?" Oh, I thought everybody knew about sleeve holders. In those days you didn't buy a shirt with sleeves the length you wanted. You just bought a shirt. All the sleeves were the same length—long enough for the longest arms. Then you put on the little elastic holders and let them hold your sleeves up to the desired length. They were fancy little miniature garters to wear over your shirt sleeves above the elbows.

I have on my shelf a copy of the 1902 Sears, Roebuck Catalog and I checked up to see if the socks I mentioned really were Rockford Brand. They were—and the price was 55 cents for one dozen pairs.

In the big box there were also such items as safety pins, fruit jar lids, Kodak film, Daisy fly poison, lamp wicks, and sometimes, a few views for our stereo-scopes.

I'm sure there were other things in the big box. I just can't remember all that was in it. One thing for sure, if we just had to have it, it was in there. If we didn't have to have it, we didn't order it.

Now, a couple of nonessentials that were left off the order were bicycle tires. Papa knew that the old tires wouldn't hold air and he knew they couldn't be patched. But he knew they would hold cotton. So, he showed us how and we stuffed them full of cotton. And then we wrapped tire tape over the holes to keep the cotton in. And we wrapped tire tape around the tires and rims to hold the tires on the rims.

You may ask, "Wasn't it hard to pedal?" Boy! I'll say it was hard to pedal. But I didn't care. I couldn't reach the pedals anyway. Someone had to push me on it. But I didn't have to push anyone because I was too little to push anyone. And the old bike landed in the junk pile before I was big enough to push any of the smaller ones on it.

Frank was through with the old bike when he handed it down to us smaller kids. He had gotten himself a motorcycle. I believe it was an Excelsior by name, although I think it was by name only. It turned out to be not so hot.

The next thing I knew Frank owned a Buick automobile. I think he bought it from Uncle Simpson Johnson. It had a four cylinder engine, a spare tire, and a top that would fold down for easier going when facing the wind. The top could be put up to keep off the rain and sunshine. It was the model which had the two leather straps running from the front corners of the top down to the frame on both sides of the radiator.

Another thing I remember from my youth has to do with crazy sayings which mean nothing in fact. Some of them are about as scientific as a black cat causing bad luck if he crosses your path.

Anyway, most of the parents in our neighborhood didn't want their kids going out in the hot sun bareheaded. They would tell the kids, "If you go out bareheaded, the old buzzards will puke on your head."

One Sunday we were visiting Uncle Andrew's family. At least ten of us boys and girls started out into the pasture and someone noticed that Lela, the youngest girl, didn't have her bonnet on. The older ones told her the buzzards would puke on her head if she didn't go back and get her bonnet.

About 55 years later, Lela told me that she had always had a kind feeling toward me since that day because I was the only one of the whole bunch who would wait for her. All the others ran off from us and left us to catch up as best we could.

When we threw a stick and it went end over end or round and round sideways, that was just plain throwing a stick. But if we pointed one end forward and shoved the stick forward by a thrust on the back end of it, our scientific name for that operation was "pukeing" the stick. And we might start one end of a stick through a hole in a fence or over a fence and "puke" it through or over in the same manner.

Another thing grown-ups told us kids was, "If you want to see the wind, you've got to suck the old sow." Well, I wanted to be able to see the wind, but that seemed a little far out, even to me. And before I got around to qualifying, I learned that they were fibbing to us about it. You still couldn't see the wind.

Here's another one for you. When we killed a snake, we kids wondered why he wouldn't stop wiggling. We could even cut his head off and he would keep right on wiggling. They told us a snake wouldn't stop wiggling till sundown, unless you turn him over and make him lie on his back, then he would stop wiggling. Trouble was, we couldn't get him to lie on his back. Even with his head off, he would keep rolling back over on his stomach, as long as he could wiggle.

On the Exum farm, our house was about a half-mile from Grandma's two-story house. One day Mama sent me to Grandma's. I don't remember what I went for, but I do remember that when I got there, I couldn't find Grandma anywhere. I went all through the house looking for her.

I didn't find her but I found a full box of matches on one end of her sewing machine, where she always kept them. Now, everyone knows that all little boys like to play with matches. And since I was one of those little boys, I, too, liked to play with matches, especially since I knew I was not supposed to touch them.

So, I got a handful and went outside. As I went, I struck them on the porch wall, on the porch posts, on the bricks along the flower beds and on the front yard fence. Soon I was out of matches and had to go back for more.

I figured that if a little handful of matches was that much fun, a big handful would be a lot more fun. My second handful was really full.

This time I went out in the sand outside the yard and stood up a row of matches in the sand with their tops up and close enough together that the breeze would blow the flame from match to match. Then I lighted the match on the up-wind end of the row. It worked perfectly and it was fun watching the flame leap from match to match all the way to the far end.

I reasoned that too many missing matches would cause grown-ups to become curious and begin asking questions. And since they knew that I had gone to Grandma's that day, I would be the first one they would question. So I limited my match pleasure to three handfuls and then went home.

I still don't know why I was sent to Grandma's that day, but I remember I was glad I went. I came back with a deep, dark secret of my own and a pleasurable memory to add to my storehouse.

In our youth, if any of us kids complained of feeling a little under the weather, we were given a "scientific" medical examination at bed time. We had to stick out our tongue for our parents to look at. If there was the least bit of white coating on the tongue, it meant we must take a calomel tablet and go to bed.

I'm not sure I am spelling "calomel" correctly because I failed to find the word in my small dictionary. And I sort of doubt that our family doctor knew how to spell it. But it's just as well. I have yet to find a doctor who can write so anyone can read what he wrote anyway.

But anyhow, that was the science of medicine in our family—if the tongue is coated, take a pretty little pink tablet and wash it down with a glass of water.

I hated even the thought of taking one. The slightest taste of one gagged me. To prevent vomiting in the kitchen, I would ask Mama if I could go out on the porch and take mine.

Now, I knew I wasn't apt to vomit on the kitchen floor, but Mama didn't know it. Another thing she didn't know was that there was a knothole in the porch floor, under which, as years went by, a small mound of pink tablets grew into a large mound.

They never caught me putting the tablets through the hole because it was always dark. No one ever took calomel in the daytime, unless he had nothing else to do but sit around and wait for a call to the bathroom, which was way out back in the cold—always cold. Not one of us ever had a coated tongue in the summertime.

Mama would say, "Hurry, now, it's cold out there." I knew full well it was cold out there. But I wasn't about to take that little pink tablet. I was determined to go through ice or snow or any other bad weather rather than have that little tablet go through me. It didn't take long for me to put a tablet through a knothole, throw a glass of water out into the yard, and get back into the warm kitchen. I don't know how the other kids made out. The knothole was my own secret which I shared with no one.

Looking back, I can easily see that I should have let the entire family in on my secret. They could have saved the cost of the tablets as well as those miserable early morning trips to the cold bathroom. And as it turned out, the white coating on my tongue disappeared during the night the same as theirs did.

I was about eight years old at the time—that is, at the time I learned to use the knothole. I enjoyed it until we moved away from the Exum place. By the time I was 12 or 14, I began to understand the scripture where it reads, "As a man thinketh, so is he." The scriptures proved to be true. I thought I didn't want to take the tablets, so I didn't. I thought I would get well, so I did.

Another verse reads, "The Lord will provide." We often overlook the little things the Lord does for us, like putting knotholes in the most convenient places. Fifty years later, I learned that at age eight I was a Christian Scientist. They too, are a group of people who do not believe in taking medicine.

Many years later, when I was 40 years old, a neighbor told me he had fleas under his house and he wondered if I might know how to get rid of them. I told him, "Try Calomel. I used it when I was a kid and we didn't have fleas under our house."

When I was quite a small boy, a number of us were hoeing cotton one day. We had stopped at the end of the rows to get a drink and sharpen our hoes. Playfully, Frank picked me up and pretended he was going to throw me over the fence and out into the county road. Well, he swung me over the fence and stood me on my feet down in some weeds. And there between my feet was a beautiful little pocket knife.

This seemed almost too good to be true. I was the happiest little boy in the whole wide world. I guess every boy wants a pocket knife, and I had one—all my very own.

The others all looked at the knife and wished they had one like it. Jokingly, Frank said the knife was half his because, if he hadn't pitched me over the fence, I wouldn't have found it. So, a few days later, when he asked if he could borrow it, naturally, I loaned it to him, not because I thought it was half his, but because he was my brother and wanted to borrow it.

Frank was going to school at Hamlin at that time and when I thought it was time for him to return my knife, he told me that a boy in town had borrowed it and wouldn't give it back. And that was the end of my knife.

Now, did I hate Frank for what he had done? Of course not. I was too young to hate. Hurt, yes, but hate, never! I still loved Frank just as much as I ever did. And it was the same when he had to correct me. I loved him just as much while he was whipping me as I did before he began and after he stopped.

At any rate, my little knife was gone for sure. But a few weeks later, I dreamed one night that I found another knife, just about like the first one. And, as before, I dreamed I found it by the fence at the end of our cotton rows. I dreamed I put the knife in my pocket. The next morning when I woke up, I went and searched my pockets, but the knife wasn't there.

A few weeks later I dreamed of finding still another pocket knife. And I dreamed that I remembered having dreamed of finding the first one but had lost it by putting it in my pocket instead of holding onto

it. So this time I clutched it tightly in my hand. This time, I reasoned, it could not possibly get away from me, even though I seemed to know I was dreaming. I felt sure there just had to be a way to pass from asleep to awake and bring that knife with me. But when I woke up, I was disappointed again and had to conclude that it just couldn't be done.

After that decision, I began putting my dreams to better use. When I dreamed a dream, and I seemed to realize that I was dreaming, I would do things to entertain other kids—things no one else could do, like sliding down the roof of a big barn, dropping off the edge, and just before I hit the ground, I would close my eyes so the fall wouldn't hurt me.

At other times I would tease a vicious bull until he would chase after me, and just before he hit me I would laugh at him and close my eyes. He couldn't even find me, let alone hurt me. Often I would open my eyes and get him to charge again, only to lose me and miss me when I closed my eyes.

Our youngest son is named Larry. And after he was a grown man, I dreamed that he and I were going some place in a Model T Ford car on a highway in Texas. It had been raining for weeks and was still raining. The highway was muddy and the ruts were so deep our axles were dragging. We were wet, cold, tired, and stuck in a mud hole. Then the truth came to me. I got in the car and called to Larry to get in out of the rain and take it easy. He was puzzled, but he got in the car, sat down, and asked, "Why?"

I told him, "Relax and rest, I'll wake up in a few minutes and everything will be all right. I'm dreaming all this. We're not stuck out here in the mud. It's not raining on us. There are no unpaved highways in Texas and no Model T cars on them. I'm dreaming that you are out here in this wet and cold with me. You are not really here. You can't even hear me talking to you. You are lying up somewhere in a nice warm bed. Come to think of it, so am I."

I woke up sometime later and found things to be just the way I had described them to Larry in my dream.

Another time I dreamed that Ima, my wife, and I were touring in the mountains. We had stopped at a lookout point and were looking into the valley below. Dinosaurs were grazing down there and walking around. One cute little fellow, with a neck about as long as four telephone poles, came toward us and stuck his head up over the rock banister where I stood. Ima had gotten scared and ran to the car. I called to her, "Ima, don't be afraid. Come back and let's pet him. You know we're dreaming because these things have been extinct for thousands of years. Come on, he won't hurt us and we'll be the only people living who ever petted one—or even saw one."

In high school we were told that a long dream might take place within a few seconds. But I already knew it from first-hand experience.

I was about nine years old when I had such an experience. One day I was riding in the back seat of our Reo car. Papa was driving at about his regular speed of twelve miles per hour down a country road. I was sleepy but still awake when we crossed Dry Callie Creek on a noisy bridge.

Then I fell asleep and dreamed we went places and did things that would have taken a couple of hours in real life. When I woke up, I thought I had slept all the way to town and almost all the way back home. I was disappointed because I had planned to buy some candy while we were in town.

I looked around to see how far we were from home only to find that we were about two hundred yards from the noisy bridge, and were still on our way to town.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **PROSPERITY, ANIMALS, GROWING UP**

We were about the luckiest kids in the world. We always had as much or more than the average kids in our neighborhood. And of course, we had each other. But most of all, we had parents who had the knack of teaching us how to get pleasure from working and how to make our own fun, using a minimum of worldly goods while doing it.

For instance, we played a game called "Driving the Old Sow." The equipment for playing the game cost absolutely nothing. It consisted of one beat-up tin can and a mesquite stick for each player. We

spent many happy hours playing the game, especially when we had a bunch of other kids to play it with us.

Many of our playthings were not bought with a lot of money, but were the result of our parents' ingenuity and willingness to build things for us, as well as playing with us and teaching us how to live more abundantly.

We were the only ones who had a merry-go-round all our own. It was a big one—a four-seater, big enough for grown people. And we had to hold on tightly or be slung off. There was a special seat for the smaller ones so they wouldn't get slung off. And of course it was propelled by boy power.

At Christmas we got our share of toys and things, and we got candy and fruits too. We had apples during the entire year, and we got bananas a few times. But we never saw oranges except at Christmas time.

On Christmas Eve nights, before we went to bed, we placed chairs around the living room with a name in each one. Gifts from Santa were never wrapped. He put my things in the chair with my name in it, and the others likewise. Next morning no one was allowed to go into the living room until all were ready to go in.

We were taught that our family should work together to make a more abundant life for all in the family, and now I was beginning to see families working and playing together to bring a better life to all in the community.

The Stevens family lived about a mile from us and one day one of the boys got married. The whole neighborhood knew that the newlyweds were spending the night there at his parents' home.

I was only about nine years old, and I can't remember much about that one and only chivaree I ever attended. In fact, I don't think there was much to remember about it. But when they explained to me just how a chivaree was carried on, naturally I wanted in on the action. Any country kid could beat a bucket with a stick. And it seemed that all the little kids and big kids and grown people were there with buckets and pans and sticks.

We waited until all the lights were out in the Stevens' house. Then we silently surrounded the house and when the signal was given we all marched around the house drumming up all the noise we could make.

After a few minutes, someone came out of the house with a lighted kerosene lantern. Then the newlyweds came out on the porch. I suppose they figured we wouldn't go away until they came out. The groom came out into the yard and said something like, "Ah, come on that's enough noise, leave us alone." The older ones in our bunch exchanged a few friendly words with them and then we all told them goodnight and went home.

Like all farm families, we had animals. And when a cow found a new calf out in our pasture, one or the other of us kids would claim it for our own. We would beg, "Papa, can I have it?" or, "Mama, can it be mine?" Yes, they said it could be ours. And so, it belonged to one of us kids.

Just about everyone of us had a calf or a colt all our own—until it came time to sell it. Then guess whose it became. Papa's, naturally. But then, those of us who were young enough to believe it was really ours in the first place, were young enough to forget our loss easily. After all, there was no harm done. It had been ours while it was little and cute.

We had one old mare that we called Old Ribbon. She was not only called Old Ribbon, she was old and her name was Ribbon. She was gentle and slow and patient with us young ones and didn't seem to mind if four or five of us rode her at one time.

To get up on Old Ribbon we had to lead her up beside a stump or a tub or a wagon tongue or something else we could climb up on and then jump on her back.

Along with her other admirable characteristics, Old Ribbon was also smart. When she didn't want us to climb up on her, she would move away just far enough that, when we tried to jump on her back, we would land on the ground between her and whatever it was we jumped from.

If we cheated on Old Ribbon and helped each other up without her having to get near some climbable object, she was still patient and gentle with us. She wouldn't pitch us off. She didn't have to. She knew where there was a low-hanging limb on a tree that she would walk under. And when she did, there was no way anyone could stay on her back. What's more, there was no way we little kids could keep her from that low limb. If we pulled her head to one side, she would go sideways to the limb. Then we had a



choice—jump off or be forced off. The one in front could hang onto the limb; the others would all fall in a pile behind Old Ribbon. We soon learned it was best to bail out beforehand.

But one day, I remember, Old Ribbon gave us a little trouble. However, I'm sure she didn't do it intentionally.

When the Abilene and Southern Railroad was being built into Hamlin, Papa got a job helping clear the right-of-way. And it was Mama's job to take Papa's lunch to him. Pardon, in those days it wasn't lunch—it was dinner, at or near midday. Then we had supper at the close of day. Anyway, Mama and I would hook Old Ribbon to the old buggy and take Papa his dinner every day. One day we took Papa's dinner to him and found him sawing down trees where the railroad was to cross Dry Callie Creek. While we were there, he sawed into the hollow of a big elm tree and water gushed out. After the tree fell, the hollow stump was standing full of water. Of course, you've got to be a little kid for something like that to impress you. And that's what I was.

But it was another day that Old Ribbon impressed me. It was almost dinner time when Mama and I hooked her to the old buggy to take Papa his dinner. As usual, I was in the seat with Mama, and the grub box was in the floor at our feet. It was covered with a clean white cloth to keep the flies and dust away.

Now, we hadn't gone more than a hundred yards from our house when Old Ribbon had to do what comes natural for all horses to do. But this time Old Ribbon had symptoms of dysentery and gas. Either one without the other wouldn't have been so bad. But both together made it plenty bad.

The dashboard was only half large enough. It caught what it could; Mama and I caught most of the rest. And the white cloth over Papa's dinner caught its share—but it wasn't white any more. In your eyes, it burned, in your nose, it smelled terrible, and in your mouth, it tasted a lot like what it really was.

No question about it, there was just one thing to do, go back home, wash up, wash the buggy, change clothes, change the cloth over the dinner, hope it didn't go through onto the biscuits, get going again and take Papa a late dinner. Ho hum, dull life on the farm, no excitement.

Papa may have been hungry by the time we got his dinner to him and he may have been worried and weary. He may have been upset and Mama may have been upset but they couldn't afford to say anything bad. They didn't allow any sort of rough language in our family.

Old Ribbon was a good gentle horse for Mama and us kids, but Papa had some big horses he used to move heavy loads and haul his cotton to the gin. And in the rush cotton picking season, we kids and Mama picked almost all of the cotton, while Papa took it to town, got it ginned and then sold it.

There were many days when Papa would leave home before five o'clock in the morning with a load of cotton, wait his turn at the gin and not get home until after ten that night.

Ginning was slow in those days. Sometimes it would mean that Papa could get home an hour or two earlier if he could get to the gin ahead of just one other farmer. So, a good team was valuable to a farmer during the cotton harvest season.

I never heard Papa tell of trying to go around another farmer on his way to the gin. But I have heard him tell of speeding up to beat another man to a crossroads in order to be ahead of him when they both turned the last corner toward town. And I have heard him tell of others trying to pass him on the road. But I never heard of one who succeeded. Papa drove big horses with a lot of endurance, and on a three-mile stretch of level road, they usually held their own.

Despite all the work we had to do, we kids played a lot and had a lot of fun. When it rained at the Exum place, water ran out of our pasture, across the parking area by our front yard, and continued on down a road toward the blacksmith shop.

It had just come a hard rain and was still sprinkling a little. So we took shovels and damned up the road where it was deepest and not spread out so much. Water was flowing into our small lake almost as fast as we could build the dam. The water backed up and covered the parking area by our front yard. By the time the water stopped flowing and we stopped building the dam, water was as much as three feet deep over an area as large as two or three city lots.

I don't remember where Frank got his boat. Nor do I know how long he kept it nor whether he built it especially for that occasion. But I do know we went riding in his boat just outside our front yard. They

even took Kodak pictures of us in the boat on our little lake.

In two or three days the dam had to be destroyed and the lake drained so we could use the road again and so we could get in and out of our front yard.

The years passed quickly and during the period from 1912 to 1916 things were happening fast in our part of the country. Hamlin was growing up. In the fall of the years, they had their fairs, with their carnivals, large hot-air balloons, motorcycle races and livestock shows. Prosperity was spreading over our country and everyone who wanted to work could get a job.

Frank took his horse and buggy and carried the mail at times, as a substitute carrier. But for some reason unknown to me, he became disenchanted with the job and gave it up.

Papa bought our first auto in 1916. It was a 1914 model Reo, five-passenger touring car—the cost, \$800. We drove it until 1922, then junked it.

That Reo car had a feature I have never seen on any other car. The left pedal was a clutch pedal the first half-way down. The remainder of the way down, it became a foot brake. The right pedal was an emergency brake. Both had ratchet-type bars underneath which held them down to the desired place.

Handy? You bet! Many car owners wished their cars had the clutch and brake under one foot. It was especially handy when starting a car headed uphill, because it left the right foot free to work the gas feed.

The old Reo didn't have a lot of power to brag about—maybe about as much as a couple of wooden-legged donkeys. I remember we went to Lamesa in it one time. Going up the Cap Rock, it just couldn't make it alone. The road was steep and rocky. The Buick, which we bought later, would go up the hill with all of us still in the car. But the Reo was different.

We not only had to get out and walk up, we had to push the Reo up too. There were about four or five of us pushing, and two of us were carrying rocks to put behind the wheels when it stopped. Then the driver would "rev" up the motor, let up on the clutch, and with all of us working together, we would move the car forward and upward two or three steps. Then again, rocks behind the wheels—quickly.

That kind of life gave people something to do besides griping and asking Washington for handouts. It also gave a man pride in ownership, especially if the car he owned would outdo the car his neighbor owned.

Bragging on your car was a way of life in early carhood days. If a man had a car that could do anything his neighbors couldn't do, that was something to brag about. No two cars were alike.

But now, 60 years later, we find that auto-makers have wiped out all differences and are making all cars alike. No matter which company made the car you are driving today, you have nothing to brag about. Today's cars all have at least four things in common- -they are too big, too powerful, too costly and burn too much gasoline.

But it hasn't always been that way. About the same year we bought our Reo, a neighbor family of ours had a flat tire. They set the emergency brake while they jacked up the car to put the spare on. Then when they got going again, they forgot to release the brake and drove about a half-mile with the brake on. Later, one of the boys in that family bragged that their car was so powerful it went a half-mile with both hind wheels sliding.

My brother, Frank, got rid of his motorcycle and his Buick car and bought a Grant auto. It had a reputation of having great power. They said you could run the front bumper up against a tree and it had enough power to sit there and spin the wheels on dry land. That was a lot of power for that time.

One fellow who didn't think too highly of the Grant said he knew a man who bought one and, not having a garage to lock it in, drove it out by his hog pen and chained it to the pen. That night some thieves came, cut the chain and stole the pen.

But before cars made it so handy for farmers to drive into town to buy supplies, peddlers were already plentiful, bringing supplies to the farmers.

Horse-drawn rigs were apt to pull up at our farm almost anytime. They had for sale most anything you might want, from kitchen utensils to medicine; hardware to veterinarian supplies; needles and thread and blue denim. You name it—they had it—even horseshoes and nails.

With the new prosperity came growth, and as a country grows so do her cities and towns. And as towns prosper, they breed violence.

I was only a kid but I heard some grownups telling about a man who got shot in Hamlin. One man was after another man with a shotgun. He got off one good shot, which proved to be effective enough. The man who got shot ran into a hardware store, ran through the store and out into the alley, up the alley a few doors, then ran back into a drygoods store. There he crawled under a counter to hide and died. That's how I remember it. That's all I ever heard about it. I don't know who got shot nor why.

During all this time, naturally, we kids were growing up too. Frank was almost a grown man and Susie had fallen in love. When she was born, they named her Susie. But it wasn't long till her Aunt Annie nicknamed her "Sookie." She hated that nickname ever- so-much. Nevertheless, she was stuck with it until she began to get serious about having Dode Sanford over to our house for supper quite a few times through the week and almost every Sunday night. Then she began asking us kids to call her Susie. She even gave us a penny now and then to do so.

Fifty years later she moved to California and changed her name again—to Susan. Some girls are just never satisfied with what other people give them. She still argues that she was named Susan to begin with. And she's probably right, Jones County didn't start keeping records until four years later.

Anyway, Uncle Jim's farm joined our farm on the east. Dode was working for Uncle Jim on his farm. That made Dode and Susie next- door neighbors. I think that was about the time I began to learn a little bit about what being sweethearts was all about.

Well, the long-awaited day finally arrived and Susie and Dode got married. I don't remember much about it all. In fact, I never did know much about it. They didn't tell me and I didn't know enough about it to know what kind of questions to ask to find out more. If I remember right, it seems they just drove away in the car one day with Papa, and when they returned, someone told me they were married. I couldn't tell by looking; they looked the same as ever to me. I was told they went to see a preacher but I didn't know what for.

Even at that early date, the county began to need better roads. Farmers were allowed to work on the county roads so-many days a year as a way of paying their taxes. The road work could be done at a time most convenient to the individual farmers. This was not a matter of welfare handouts to farmers. Rather, it was a case where farmers worked together to improve conditions in their community and still keep their money at home.

If a man was unable to do his share of the road work, the county would collect tax money from that man and use it to hire another man to work in his place.

Papa did his share of the county road work. But with that work added to all his regular farm work, he had to search for faster and better ways to do some of his work.

You see, one of Papa's big problems was that he had a house full of growing kids who could use a spoon right well at the dining table, but were too little to use a feed-heading knife in the field.

There just wasn't enough time to head our feed in the fall. Papa had a row binder with which to bundle the feed. But he wanted feed heads in the barn to feed his work horses.

So he bundled the feed with his binder and shocked it up to dry. While it was drying, he built a large knife, somewhat like those paper cutters you have seen in print shops. He bolted the cutter to one sideboard of his wagon Then he would drive the wagon up beside a shock of feed in the field, and while he placed the heads of a bundle across the lower knife blade, one of us boys would bring the upper blade down and cut the heads off the bundle. When the heads were cut off, they fell into the wagon.

The cutter worked quite well when Papa had the proper boy operating the knife, but sometimes he had to use me to help him.

As I said, Papa and I did a lot of things together. Cutting heads off bundles was one of those things. Almost cutting his hand off was another.

One day Papa was placing the bundles into the cutter and I was working the upper knife. I thought he was ready for me to cut, but he hadn't gotten his hand back out of the cutter. It looked to me like a bad cut. It bled a lot at first. I sure regretted what I had done, but I guess it wasn't cut very badly because he wrapped his bandanna around his hand and we went right on with our work.

Papa was always and forever doing things that fascinated me and, at the same time, taught us to use our heads and develop our skills.

When we had used all the hot water washing our feet at bedtime, and there was not enough water for Papa to wash his, he didn't seem to mind. He would get a wash pan of cold water, set it on the hearth

and put in live coals of fire until his water was hot enough. We kids liked to hear the hot coals sizzle in the water.

There were times when the kitchen was too cold for comfort at early breakfast time. Of course, the dining table was in the cold kitchen. Well, Papa would take an open-top, five-gallon can with about four inches of ashes in the bottom and a few shovelfulls of hot coals on top of the ashes and set the can under the dining table. That would warm our feet while we ate breakfast. And it would also help warm up the kitchen.

So, it was there at the Exum place that I spent six of the best years of my life. They were years of family contentment and prosperity—we youngsters working, playing, exploring, wading in the creek, hunting rabbits with air rifles, going to school; gathering eggs, feeding chickens, feeding cows and horses; playing in the barn, playing in the cottonseed, eating peanuts in the barn loft, wading in puddles after summer showers; enjoying the warm fire in the fireplace, washing our feet by the warm hearth at bedtime, snuggling between warm blankets in cold bedrooms; in short, growing up and enjoying every minute of it.

## CHAPTER 7

### DRY YEARS ON THE TEXAS PLAINS

Papa had two rancher brothers, Joe and Simpson, who had remained in the cattle business when all the rest of the Johnsons went to farming. And Papa preferred cattle ranching over cotton farming. So he got the urge to get back to growing more cattle and not so much cotton.

This was not just a far-out dream as if he didn't know what he was doing. After all, he had been in the cattle business with his father until the time they all moved back to Texas from Oklahoma. At that time he went to farming because it required far less capital to be a farmer than to be a rancher. And he was a young man just starting out on his own.

But now he had accumulated a little of this world's goods and he thought it was time to step up to a larger place that would grow enough cows and calves to afford a better future for him and his family. This was not just a wild adventure. He knew it was easier to grow a dollar's worth of calves than it was to grow a dollar's worth of cotton.

We had prospered greatly during our six years on the Exum farm. But our chances for expanding in Jones County were limited. Most of the good pasture land had been cleared and put into cultivation. But on the West Texas plains there was ample room to expand. The soil was rich for farming and yet not too expensive for pasture land.

So in 1916 Papa went to that land of promise and bought a section of unimproved land ten miles southwest of Lamesa. It was a half-mile wide and two miles long. It was part of the old Higginbotham Ranch. The ranch was being sold piece-by-piece for farms. And it seemed to be a very good place to grow feed and cattle.

Now Papa knew he would have to have a place to live. He knew he couldn't move onto unimproved land and start making a living on it. So he also bought another smaller farm about five miles from the large one. It was fairly well improved. His plan was to live on the small farm while he sent us kids to school, built five miles of wolf proof fence around the new land, had a well drilled, put up a windmill and a water tank and built an eight-room, two-story house to live in. He did all this on the new land.

With that much completed, we moved onto the new farm and started building a small barn, chicken house, car shed, tool house, storm cellar, wash house, an out house, a yard fence, field fences and cross fences. This all took quite a spell but by this time the place was fairly well improved.

But wait—before we did anything to either farm we moved into the house on the small farm in the dead of winter. Dode and Susie moved in with us—or rather, we moved in with them. The plan was for them to farm the small place and we would farm and ranch the large place. We would live with Dode and Susie until we made the other place livable.

There we were, all of us, in the cold winter, waiting for the weather to cooperate so we could begin improving the raw land.

Meanwhile the family who sold us the small farm with the house on it, and who had planned to be moved out by this date, had not moved out. And since it was coming a blue norther and snowing outside. They were not in a big hurry to move out. But they were kind to us and shared with us what they had—which was ours of course.

There were four in their family. They retained the kitchen with a cookstove in it, the livingroom with a heating stove in it, and a bedroom. They let us have two small rooms in which to store our furniture and cook and eat and sleep.

There was no flue for a stove in our part of the house. We ran a stovepipe out through one window and attached the lower end of it to a small heating stove so we could fry flapjacks and heat the room. But when the wind blew from the wrong direction, the fire smoked up our rooms and we had to aim the stovepipe out another window more in keeping with the direction the wind was going.

It seems that the family in the other part of the house was named Stewart—Mr. and Mrs. Stewart and their two kiddos. Boy! Did they deal us misery by not sharing a greater portion of our house with us. I think I would hate everybody named Stewart except I'm not quite sure Stewart is the right name.

Man, it was cold! As I said, there were four of them in three of our rooms with good stoves in two of the rooms. And in the two rooms that we had there was Papa, Mama, Susie, Dode, Earl, Joel, Albert, Ollie Mae, William Robert, and me—ten of us. And out in the pasture were all our cows and horses, practically freezing to death. Mr. Stewart was using our sheds for his cows and horses.

Papa had bought two or three carloads of cows in Jones County and had shipped them to Lamesa by rail, along with our horses, household goods and farming tools.

You know the old saying, "Things could have been worse." Well this time we didn't think things could ever be worse. But we were wrong. They did get worse; 1917 was a dry year.

We kids went to school while Dode and Papa went about farming the small farm and improving the large one. The dry weather prevailed throughout the year. Grazing dried up and cattle got poor. Papa did what he could to feed his family and his livestock.

The United States was at war with Germany and, luckily for us, Uncle Sam was buying rabbits. Jackrabbits brought ten cents each and cottontails brought six or eight cents. When we killed a rabbit, all we had to do was cut open his abdomen and sling his intestines out. Then we pitched the rabbits into the wagon and took them to town in the next two or three days.

We were looking for most any honorable way to pick up an extra dollar. I have seen Papa and Mama take a 22 rifle and a lunch and some horse feed for their team and go out in a wagon and stay all day, while we kids were in school. Before night they would come home with rabbits piled eight or ten inches deep all over the wagon bed.

One man bought a single-shot 22-rifle and some shells on credit— about eight dollars worth. In one week he brought in enough rabbits to pay off the debt. That was one time you might say rabbits saved our lives.

During the dry weather, while we were slowly losing about everything we ever had, Papa hired out to haul cottonseed cake in his wagon to ranchers somewhere west of Lamesa. I didn't know where he was taking it but there were times I didn't see him more than once or twice a week.

Monroe Hamilton was one of our neighbors. He and his family lived about a mile from us. During the drought of 1917 his work horses got so weak and poor that they became exhausted while plowing in the field. They stopped in the middle of the field and had to be unhitched and walked home. He began feeding them more and working them less while they regained their strength. Mid-afternoon was about as long as they could keep working.

By the time the horses were strong enough to work all day again, they had become accustomed to stopping their work about mid- afternoon and they refused to pull the plow after that time of day.

One day Monroe became so unhappy with them that he unhitched them in the field where they had staged their sit-down strike, drove them to the barn, hitched them to his wagon and trotted them eight miles to Lamesa to get the mail. Then he trotted them eight miles back home. They had never experienced becoming exhausted while pulling a wagon out on the road. They were not smart enough to pull a sit-down strike anywhere except plowing in the field.

During World War I, Frank wanted to join the Army. But Mama and Papa did their part in talking him out of it. He was too young to be drafted. But he wasn't at home much after that. He worked here and

there in defense work. He told us he worked awhile in a powder factory in West Virginia. After the war was over, he came home in 1919 and worked some for Dawson County, doing some mechanical work on a road grader tractor. Finally, Papa bought a big truck and let Frank take it and go wherever he could find a job, hauling whatever anyone would pay him to haul.

Another source of income for us during the dry weather was in gathering and selling dry bones. There was a ready market for bones in Lamesa. A lot of cows had died here and there due to dry weather and cold weather. We hauled and sold quite a few bones.

We also salvaged a lot of rawhides—dry rawhides. We couldn't sell them but we could use them ourselves. They were hard and stiff, but by soaking them in water we were able to straighten them out, cut them into strips and use the strips for braiding whips and making other useful articles to be used on the farm.

Despite all the work, we boys had some time off for fun and adventure. There were times after rains when it was too wet to plow. But then there might be bushes to be grubbed or we might have to build fence or maybe chop wood or do any one of a dozen things that kept bobbing up to be done. If and when we got all those things done, and then if it was still too wet to plow or hoe weeds, then we had some time off for ourselves. Also on Saturday afternoons we took time off, unless there was something which just had to be done.

We always had Sundays off for rest and play, but never for work of any kind, that is, work which was of any monetary value, except routine work like milking cows and feeding the livestock. The question of work came up one Sunday afternoon when we put some new tires on our car to go watch an airplane at Lamesa. But then, that was regarded as play since it involved only recreation and had nothing to do with work which could in any way produce anything of value. Sunday was a day for going to church, resting, visiting friends, playing games, reading, or just sitting.

Now, if we boys wanted to go out into the pasture and kill a snake or two with sticks, that was okay. And if we could get a rabbit without a gun, that was all right too. But, no guns on Sundays. When a rabbit ran into a prairie dog hole, we could twist him out with a barbed wire. That was okay on Sunday.

We would run a barbed wire down into the hole and twist it by means of a crank at the upper end, which was nothing more than the wire itself bent in the shape of a small crank. As the wire revolved over and over down in the hole, it would get the barbs entangled in the rabbit's fur and we could pull him out of the hole. That was called "rabbit-twisting."

The idea of sin being connected with shooting a gun on Sunday had probably been handed down from pioneer days when men lived by hunting game. In those days hunting was a means of making a living, therefore it was work, and work was not to be done on Sunday.

Despite the dry weather that seemed to threaten our very existence, we used water from our well and grew quite a bit of garden produce. Our garden was like an oasis in a dust bowl. And then, one day we received a bit of news that was like an oasis of good news in our desert of bad news.

Uncle Robert got word to us that Old Scotch had returned home to the Exum place. Papa began getting the car ready immediately and went after him. I think maybe Joel went with Papa.

A family named Bristow was living on the Exum farm when Old Scotch returned. Mr. Bristow thought this might be our dog, but he was not sure. He said it looked as though the dog had traveled a long, long way. The first thing Old Scotch did was lie down in the yard and rest. Then he chased all the chickens out of the yard as he had done many times before. Next he went into the house and slowly looked through all the rooms, as if looking for something familiar to him. Finding no one he knew, he went back out into the yard to rest again.

Then Mr. Bristow phoned Robert Johnson to see if he might know our dog. Robert drove over in his Buick. Old Scotch met him way down the road and leaped for joy beside the car all the way back to the house. He had finally found new hope. The Buick motor was music to his ears and, although Robert was not home folks, at least the dog knew him as a friendly neighbor.

When Robert got out of his car, Old Scotch leaped up into the front seat, sat down and put his paws on the steering wheel. When Robert saw him do that, he turned to Mr. Bristow and said, "That's their dog all right."

We had no telephone on our farm on the plains. And we were ten miles from Lamesa. I don't know how Robert got word to us about Old Scotch, but Papa lost no time in bringing him home. The round trip was 280 miles.

When Papa brought the dog home he was covered with lice, there were sores on his body, some of his beautiful coat had fallen away and his feet were sore from traveling so far. He had lost a lot of weight, was poor and half starved.

We believe that some Gypsies stole him and tied him to their wagon. Gypsies came by our farm now and then, and both we and our neighbors had a low opinion of them. Theirs were the only poor, skinny dogs we ever saw.

Anyway, we were mighty glad to have Old Scotch back with us and we soon had him as fat and sassy and as good looking as ever. And he was right there with us all the rest of his life.

Now that we had our dog back home, it was time again to settle down to facing the realities of dry weather and sandstorms. One day there came a sandstorm from the southwest, as usual. We had many sandstorms but this one was not just one of the ordinary ones. This was an extra special—the granddaddy of all sandstorms. We kids were in school at Ballard and it got so dark in the schoolhouse we couldn't see to read. We could only sit and talk or play games. You could clean the dust from the top of your desk, and two minutes later write your name with your finger in the new dust.

When school was out at four o'clock in the afternoon, it was so dark the teacher was afraid some of us couldn't make it home. She held us there until our parents came for us. The wind was still very strong. Everyone drove with their lights on, not to see the road but to see each other.

We couldn't see the sunset—couldn't even see where the sun was supposed to set. We didn't believe there were any clouds, only sand and dust. But we really couldn't tell. Anyway, dark came way before its time.

At suppertime that night there was so much sand and dust in the air in our kitchen that we ate supper with the tablecloth still spread over the table, over the food, and over the plates we were eating out of. We held the cloth up with one hand to shelter our plates while we reached under the cloth with the other hand to bring food from our plates to our mouths.

During the afternoon, sand blinded the rabbits and they couldn't find their way to their burrows. Jackrabbits don't usually burrow, but cottontails always do when they need shelter. This time it was different. They needed shelter but couldn't find it. This time they all sat behind bushes with their tails turned to the wind and sand.

For hours the sand didn't let up. About ten o'clock that night the wind shifted around to the west, a little while later, to the north, and then to the northeast. It still didn't slow up. Each time it changed directions, it stirred up more sand.

As the wind shifted, so did the rabbits. They moved around their respective bushes, keeping behind the bushes from the sand, and with their tails still windward.

When the wind came out of the north, it became very cold and began to snow. The temperature got down below zero that night and many rabbits froze to death and were buried under the snow.

For a week or two after that storm, we went hunting and shot dead rabbits, not knowing they were already dead. They were still sitting under bushes and looking very much like live rabbits. We continued to shoot dead rabbits until they were all eaten by coyotes and buzzards.

It was reported that one rancher near Lamesa lost 500 cows that night from the cold and the snow.

On one side of our house snow drifted into a huge pile halfway up our windows. After it melted, the sand which blew in with the snow was at least two feet deep. That was the first time I can remember when snow was so dirty we couldn't make snow ice cream. However, there were many other times later on.

Here is another little rabbit story. On one occasion when Frank was home, he went rabbit hunting with the other four of us boys. We hadn't had much luck until almost sundown. By that time we were still about four or five miles from home and we came to another windmill and waterhole. There was a lot of sagebrush around the waterhole and jackrabbits began to hop up here and there. This place was so far from civilization the rabbits were not much afraid of us. They would hop off a way and stop and sit up and look back at us.

We all spread out and took a swath about the width of a city block and circled the waterhole one time—and killed more jackrabbits than we could carry home. We swung some of them over our shoulders, tied some to our overall suspenders and carried some in our hands. It was a long way home and we were plenty tired before we got there.

During our stay on the plains, tractors had not yet established themselves on American farms, at least not in our part of the country. Men were still raising fine work horses and looking forward to raising even bigger and better ones. A neighbor named Debnam bought the biggest horse I ever hope to see. A big man had to reach high to touch his nose, and few men could reach the top of his shoulders. He was one of the six largest stallions in the United States and he cost the man \$3,600. By the time he was three years old he weighed 2600 pounds, and his feet were about as large as a cedar water bucket.

Now Papa needed at least four of those fine work horses but he didn't have the money to buy them, and he couldn't get the money. And farm tractors were almost unheard of before the late 1920s. However, there was a company that made an attachment to go on a Model T Ford car which was supposed to make a tractor out of the car. The manufacturers name for the "thing" was "Pull-Ford." Papa heard of a man who had such a contraption, so he went to look at it.

Now, the fact that the man was not using the gadget should have told Papa something. Moreover, the fact that he was willing to sell it at a bargain should have told Papa something more. And finally, when he went and looked at it and saw that it was practically unused, that should have been the final message to Papa.

But Papa wasn't listening good. He was a man in trouble. Dry weather and sand colic had claimed some of his best work horses. And he could buy this thing for a lot less than four horses would cost. Anyway he bought the attachment and made it fit on the Reo. I suppose he reasoned that a Reo owner had more sense than a Ford owner, and even if it was not a success on the man's Ford, he could make it do the job on a Reo.

Well, anyway he bought it and brought it home and a few days later he had it all rigged on the old car and ready to go. It didn't prove to be the best tractor in the world, in fact, it might compare with a modern tractor of today about like the Wright Brothers' first flying machine would compare with a superjet.

Anyhow it worked some. It took one to drive the car and one to ride the plow. It didn't replace the horse in the field half as well as the Reo car replaced the horse on the road. Yet it filled in somewhat when feed was scarce and horses were tired. This monster didn't have to stop and rest, just stop to get water and cool off. As a tractor it wasn't so hot—it only got hot.

We didn't spend all of our time at hard work on the farm. Come Saturday afternoon, if we were pretty well caught up with our farm work, we would spend an hour or two in Lamesa.

I remember one time we were in Lamesa, when I was eleven years old. I had spent all my money except a dime. I wanted to buy a pocketbook to put my money in. There were four stores in town that sold pocketbooks and I went to all of them but it was of no use. The cheapest one any of them had was ten cents. Now, if I spent my dime for one, I wouldn't have any money left to put in it. And if I didn't buy one, I was apt to lose my dime. What should I do? That was a big decision for me to make.

I went back to each store time and again, hoping to find a five cent pocketbook I had overlooked before. But it just wasn't there. And I don't recall whether I bought a ten cent one or kept my dime.

Now you may ask, "If you can't remember whether or not you bought the purse, how can you remember it was on a Saturday?" That's easy. Saturday was about the only day we went to town. I was a big boy before I learned that there were people in town on other days of the week. I hardly knew that stores opened except on Saturday.

I remember another time in Lamesa when a kid about my size was aggravating me. Now, we kids were taught not to fight. I grew up not knowing how to fight, not wanting to fight and thinking that boys who did fight were bad boys. And here I was, faced with the stark realization that I needed something I didn't have—the ability to make a bully leave me alone. I was about as big as he was, but I was afraid he had the know-how to fight in a way that could hurt a country boy like me.

I didn't want to fight the boy. I only wanted him to go away and leave me alone. But he had other plans. We went in and out among the cars parked by the curb. I was always in the lead, he was after me. Somehow I had hoped that I could lose him. But he kept coming back, pinching and hitting me a little harder each time. I really think my not fighting him encouraged him to get tougher and rougher.

Then he got me out behind the cars, out near their back wheels, and he was just about to really let me have it. People on the sidewalk couldn't see us. It was just him and me. I had to do something—so I hit him and ran. That proved to be the best thing I could have done. He came right after me. I knew he might hit me but he couldn't hit me in the face and bloody my nose—I had my back to him.

I jumped up on the curb with the bully right on my heels. The first man I passed asked, "Is that boy



bothering you?" Before I could answer him, the boy had turned and was going away. He didn't bother me any more. He probably thought the stranger was a friend of mine and that he had better leave me alone or else the man would get him.

On another trip to Lamesa I went with Papa one day into the back of a hardware store—back among the shelves of bolts and nuts and things. Way back there were stacks of silver dollars and half dollars and other coins, lying there on a shelf where the store was only half lighted. Papa and the clerk were around behind some other shelves. They couldn't even see me. It would have been easy to slip some money into my pocket and walk away. But I didn't, and I have wondered a lot of times just why I didn't.

There was no question but that I knew it would be the wrong thing to do. Yet I don't believe the moral aspect kept me from taking at least some of the money. That is to say, I could have lived with my conscience but I could not have lived with the condemnation I would have gotten from my family, once they learned about it. And I knew that somehow they would learn about it. Then there would have been the "dishonoring" of thy father and thy mother.

This would not have been a small thing, like talking back to Frank in the cotton patch years ago. That was an isolated case of one boy doing wrong and receiving his punishment. It was my punishment alone, it hurt no one else in the family and it was soon forgotten. But taking any part of the money from the store would have been altogether different. There would have been no way for me to take some of it, then take my punishment and not hurt my folks.

Until the depression years of the 1930s, merchants never fooled around with pennies. If the wholesale cost of an item was four cents, he would usually sell it for ten cents. Then he could sell the items at two for 15 cents and still make a good profit.

Well, Papa wanted to buy us kids some firecrackers but the war was on and they had gone from five cents a package up to ten cents a package. With six kids at home, that would put quite a strain on Papa's pocketbook. So while he was figuring how many to buy, my brother Joel began dickering with the clerk.

"Two for 15 cents?" he asked.

"Yes," came the reply.

"Four for a quarter?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"Nine for a half dollar?"

"Well, yes, okay."

Papa bought the nine packages and we all laughed at how far that was from ten cents each.

Susie had gotten married about the time we moved to Lamesa. And with her away from home, Mama was always short handed in the kitchen, there being so many men and boys in the family and only one little girl still at home, and she was too little to be of much help. And since Mama's kitchen work extended to the milk shed, the henhouse, the vegetable garden, the wash house, the clothes line, the ironing board, the yard and a few other odd jobs about the place, she had to cut all the corners she could.

She never put our eating dishes up in the cabinet. After she washed them, she stacked them back on the dining table and covered them with a cloth. So, she didn't have to place the dishes at mealtime. We simply sat down and got our own plates and tools. And we took only the tools we needed. There was no need to have to wash a knife, a fork and a spoon when a spoon was all we needed to use.

We grew up not knowing there were different forks to use for different things. We used the rule of instinct in choosing the tool to use. That is, "If it's hard, use a knife, if it's soft, use a fork, and if it's wet, use a spoon—except in the case of molasses. You sop molasses up with a piece of biscuit."

To save time and effort, Mama also left certain foods on the dining table—the salt, sugar, pepper, syrup, honey, vinegar, pepper sauce and other such things. These were all covered with the same cloth that covered our dishes. We had no refrigerator. Nothing would spoil at our house, we ate it before it had time to spoil.

Mama needed help to wash the dishes after supper. But boys don't like to wash dishes. So Mama was in trouble—but not for long. She came up with an ultimatum: "You wash your own supper dishes or eat out of your same plates for breakfast."

This was a boy's dream come true—no dish washing. This was the beginning of my sopping my plate clean. We all did. We could lick our spoons as clean as any woman could wash them in a dishpan. And I seldom used any tool except a spoon. Plates were no problem either. When it comes to shining plates, a good, tough biscuit rind in the hands of a growing boy could just about put a soap factory out of business. And no matter what he sopped out of his plate, it added flavor to his biscuit.

When we were through licking and sopping, each of us would place our spoons on the table at our respective places, turn our plates upside down over them and take off for things more interesting. The last one to finish would help Mama spread a cloth over the entire table and the job was completed. Mama was out of the kitchen in no time at all. We had learned a long time ago not to take anything on our plates that we couldn't eat. Now that habit was paying off.

## CHAPTER 8

### MOVED TO JONES COUNTY; PICKED COTTON IN OKLAHOMA

The dry weather still prevailed, and in spite of all our efforts to earn extra money, we were getting deeper into trouble month by month. By the summer of 1918 we were about finished in our new venture. There was no grazing and no money for livestock feed. Cows and horses grazed the short grass, taking in sand with each bite. Sand clogged their stomachs and they died with sand colic. Many died but a few didn't.

Something simply had to give. We just had to try something else. After a long heart-breaking battle against the elements, we rounded up the remaining cattle and drove them to the railroad stockyards at Lamesa. That was a slow exodus. They were so poor and weak some fell by the wayside and didn't finish the ten-mile drive. Most of them did make it. I don't know where Papa sold them nor what he got for them. I know he couldn't have gotten much.

After that, we sold the smaller farm and got rid of the Buick car. Susie and Dode moved onto the large farm, and the rest of us moved to a farm near the community of Abbie, about nine miles east of Hamlin. We bought out a crop from someone in mid-summer. It, too, proved to be a failure—we made three bales of cotton.

In that year and a half we had lost most of our money, our cattle, quite a few of our horses and our best car.

After the crop failure at Abbie we had to try something else again. So we loaded the Reo car and went to Wichita Falls, Texas, where the government was building an aviation camp to train flyers for the war that was still going on. Papa hired on as a carpenter at six dollars a day.

Let me tell you about one night when some of us green-horn country boys went to downtown Wichita Falls with Papa. While he was attending to some business, we boys got out of the car and were looking at newspapers out in front of a drug store. It must have been a Saturday night because the newsracks were full of Sunday funny papers.

We were keeping hands off and just seeing what we could see without touching the papers when a stranger came by and told us, "You boys can have all the funny papers you want. They only want the newspapers. Help yourselves to all you want."

Boy! We were sure pleased to hear that. I was beginning to believe that city life was much more interesting than the country life we were used to. The funnies were just what we wanted. And we were getting more than our share when a friend, Harry Stacy, came along and informed us that, "If you boys don't want to get put in jail, you better put those papers back in the racks and get in that car in a hurry." We did what he told us to do.

Harry was one of Frank's buddies. He and Frank were carpentering out at the aviation camp. As far as I was concerned, I respected Harry and I knew he had almost as much authority to spank us boys as Frank had. At least he was concerned about our well-being. We didn't know that a stranger would lie like that to country kids just to see them get into trouble.

Anyway, while Papa carpentered we lived in a tent—and it rained and rained and rained, week after week. Our tent didn't leak from the top, but it might as well have. Water soaked the ground and came

up in our tent as out of an artesian well. Everything was wet. You could almost wring water out of the air in our tent.

Mama had taken about all she thought she could. She wanted to go home to our farm at Abbie. So Papa loaded us all up and drove all one Saturday night. We arrived at the farm about daybreak. We hurried to get unloaded so Papa could drive back to Wichita Falls Sunday and be there ready to work Monday morning.

But Mama didn't want to be on the Abbie farm without Papa there. Of course he couldn't stay because he just had to make a living for us. He had to go back. So we all loaded back into the car and drove all day, back to the wet tent in a pasture about a half-mile from where Papa was carpentering.

When it didn't rain so much, we boys walked from our tent to nearby farms and picked cotton. We got to making so much money in the cotton patch that our parents reasoned that we all, working together in the cotton patch, could do much better than we could with the family split up, some picking cotton and Papa carpentering.

Knowing that the cotton crops were good in parts of Oklahoma, we got ready and headed for Duncan. Before we got there we saw that the cotton was really good—fields were white beyond our expectations. Many people were in war work and there was a shortage of laborers for the harvest.

But before we got to where we were going, we lost a suitcase off one front fender and hadn't noticed it was gone. The loss was discovered by one of the older boys when we stopped for one of the little ones to hide behind a bush. Naturally, we couldn't just drive on and leave the suitcase. We had to go back and find it. And about five miles back down the road we found it hanging on a fence post.

It seemed we were always stopping for bushes and culverts. I was twelve years old and there were three others in the car who were younger. And no two little kids ever have to "go" at the same time. So it was stop here for one and stop there for another one. Lucky for us, we had to stop for another one before the suitcase got many miles behind.

There were no service stations with fancy restrooms in those days—only greasy garages with gasoline pumps out in front on the curbs and two-holers out back by the alley, all of which were dirty and smelly. Bushes along the road were much more sanitary.

However, I remember one garage that had indoor plumbing. Years ago, when I was just a little kid nine years old, Papa had gone to a garage to get the carburetor adjusted on his car. Joel and I went with him. And since it took the mechanic more than 15 minutes to do the work it was a good thing there was a place for little boys to hide.

The nice man working on our car must have been a little boy himself at one time or another, or maybe he had little boys of his own. At any rate, when he saw us whispering something in Papa's ear, the man pointed to the stairway leading up to a storeroom, in one corner of which was a little boy's room.

Yes, we found the room all right—and we used "the thing" in the room. But then we had a little trouble figuring out how to operate the thing. There was a wall-tank six-feet high on the wall, with a lever extending outward from the top of it and a long cord hanging down from the lever. We couldn't figure anything else to do, so we tried pulling on the cord. That was the secret—it worked. Water came down from the wall-tank into the bowl with a world of fury and gusto and noise.

Now we had another problem—should we have pulled the cord? We began to wish we had not. The bowl was filling up fast. We couldn't stop the flow of water. True, we had pulled on the cord to start it, but we couldn't push up on the cord to stop it. The bowl was almost full now and the water showed no signs of stopping.

Just before the bowl ran over we ran downstairs. We looked back, expecting to see the water come flowing down through the upstairs floor, or maybe down the stairway. But it didn't run over. We had gotten scared all for nothing. It was years later that we learned about indoor plumbing having automatic cutoffs on the water supply to the bowls.

Now getting back to our trip—before we found a farmer who needed us, one tooth broke off the ring gear in the differential of our car. We were familiar with the sound—it had happened before. But we drove on, listening to the click, click, in the car's rear end every time the wheels went around. Soon it ceased to be a click, click, and became a wham, wham. That meant there were two teeth off. It sounded bad; we couldn't go on.

With the differential sounding like it might go to pieces at any minute, we decided that perhaps this

was the cotton country we had been searching for. So we spotted a large patch of white cotton and inquired about picking it. The man said he didn't need hands, but he thought Mr. Hammond wanted some pickers. He lived about three miles on down the road.

We phoned Mr. Hammond and found that we were in luck. He wanted us, and we certainly needed him. He brought a team of mules and towed our car to his place. We unloaded and began picking immediately, and before nightfall we had gathered hundreds of pounds of cotton.

Papa caught a ride to Durant the next day and ordered a ring gear for the car. Before we had finished picking Mr. Hammond's cotton the gear came by mail. Papa jacked up the car, crawled under and made the repair right there in the cotton field by our camp.

When we finished that patch, there were other fields waiting for us. We were making from \$30 to \$40 a day. The work was hard but we didn't mind. We were finally getting a little money ahead.

I was twelve, and even at that age, I enjoyed helping the family do what I knew had to be done. I was growing up. I was picking more cotton in a day than I had ever picked before. I enjoyed figuring how much I picked and how much money I was making. I knew it wouldn't be my money, but I found pleasure in knowing how much I was adding to the family income.

We quit picking cotton in time to get to Lamesa before Christmas. We didn't go by our farm at Abbie, but went west into the Texas panhandle. Then we turned south to our Lamesa farm.

All in all it was an easy trip. One stretch of road in Oklahoma was through sandy post oak country. Some of the trees were fairly large, otherwise the land was like Texas shinnery. The county road didn't go through the worst of the sand but detoured many miles out of the way to go around it. In some places the sand was higher than our car top. One man who owned some of the sandiest land had a road through his pasture so people could cut through and save many miles. He had built wooden runways over the sand hills so cars could travel easily. He charged a toll of one dollar for each car. We paid the toll and saved a good many miles.

And then, of course we came to the Red River that forms the boundary between Oklahoma and Texas. Now, in that part of the country there is just one way to get from Oklahoma to Texas and that is to cross the river. And I don't know of anyone who would choose to stay in Oklahoma if he had a chance to go to Texas. And that included us. So we crossed the river.

I remember, there was a long, long bridge made of wood. It never occurred to me at the time just why it was made of wood instead of concrete, this perhaps because I had never seen a concrete bridge, and didn't know at that time they would have such things in my lifetime. Anyway, there was this nice bridge across the big muddy river. And about 200 yards down stream from the bridge, there was a road where people could cross the river in the mud and shallow water if they wanted to.

Now the next thing I knew, we were down there in that muddy road while all the other cars were zipping across on the bridge. I wondered why we didn't ride across on the bridge. We didn't even ride across the river—well, yes, the driver rode—that was Papa, but the rest of us didn't ride. Papa was smart. He was not only smart, he was the only one who could drive the car. The rest of us didn't walk, either, we ran and pushed. Part of the time we were running and trying to keep up. The rest of the time we were pushing, trying to keep the car from stopping and sinking into the quicksand.

I think the bridge we didn't cross on was a toll bridge. My memory doesn't tell me it was a toll bridge, but by way of reasoning I can only conclude that it was. Otherwise, why would we Johnsons have been down there pushing in the mud when other cars were crossing on the bridge? And why did that man at the bridge show Papa how to get down to that muddy road? Why wouldn't he let us cross on the bridge like the other cars were doing? Yes, it all adds up, that must have been a toll bridge.

But we didn't pay the toll. And we had very little trouble crossing on the low road. Matter of fact, we didn't even stop, that is, Papa didn't, except for us to catch up and load back into the car. We saved our money and lost very little time.

When we got into the Texas panhandle, we headed south toward Lamesa. We stayed awhile with Susie and Dode and then went on to the rented farm at Abbie.

It was the end of the year now, and time to re-rent the Abbie place for another year or give it up. We gave it up and moved back to the farm at Lamesa. We moved west the first time by railroad. We went this time in two wagons. It was January, 1919 and the weather was cold.

If I had known then what I know now, I think I might have asked my parents how this wagon trip compared with another cold January 21 years ago when the Johnsons moved back to Texas from

Oklahoma in wagons. At least this time we were not driving a herd of cattle, only one old milk cow. And the weather wasn't all that cold.

I guess the coldest night was the one we spent in an old rundown schoolhouse, after chasing the skunks and roadrunners out. It was somewhere in the bad lands near Gail. The next morning it was almost too cold to travel. After going a few miles we stopped and got around behind Gail Mountain out of the cold wind, and built a fire to warm by.

## CHAPTER 9

### BACK TO OUR LAMESA FARM IN 1919; SCHOOL AT BALLARD

So we moved back to our big farm near Lamesa and farmed there in 1919. Susie and Dode moved to Hamlin. They quit farming and Dode got a job in town.

After those two dry years on the plains, there seemed to be more coyotes than ever, at least we saw more of them. The drought and hunters had taken their toll of rabbits and I guess it was harder for the coyotes to find something to eat. They would come almost to our barnyard in broad daylight in search of food. Old Scotch managed to keep them away from our chickens, but he was no match for two or three of them at one time off out in the pasture, and he was wise enough to know it.

I have seen him chase a lone coyote a few hundred yards away from our house, but then that one would join another one and the two of them would chase Old Scotch back into our yard. Then with us to back him up, he would chase them away again. When there were more than one, they made the dog stay in his place.

Now I guess you are wondering why we didn't shoot the coyotes when they came that close. The answer is simple. Coyotes are not stupid. They can tell a boy from a man, and they can also tell whether or not the boy has a gun. They simply would not come that close to a big boy with a gun. We kids had guns but they were small 22 caliber. They were too small for coyotes. And besides, the powder in the shells at that time was nothing like as powerful as the powder we use today.

We four boys had our own guns and naturally Papa had his. Albert was the youngest of us four. He had a gun by the time he was ten and he killed his share of rabbits, prairie dogs and rattlesnakes.

You see, we did a lot of target practice with our guns. Sometimes we would sit on our front porch and shoot nailheads in the front yard fence. We would also stand matches up in nail holes in the fence and shoot the heads, striking the matches without breaking the stems. Shells cost us only eight cents for a box of 50.

No one could deny that we were pretty good. One man told that Earl was so good with his rifle that we boys didn't climb trees to pick peaches. He said we other kids would walk around under the trees with buckets and Earl would shoot the stems and let the peaches fall into the buckets. But Earl denied it, explaining that we tried it but Papa made us quit because it bruised the peaches when they fell.

Now Joel was a year-and-a-half older than I, and no question about it, he was a smart boy. He was almost as smart as I was. But he was so good-looking the girls wouldn't leave him alone. So he sort of drifted away from his smartness and concentrated on dressing well and looking good. He wound up selling men's clothing, and later on, insurance. But when he was a boy on the farm at Lamesa, I remember he made a windmill. I mean this was a windmill to remember. He set it up on a tower and made it pump water. And he made a real cylinder out of a piece of pipe, with two leather valves attached to two wooden spools. One spool moved up and down, the other one was stationary at the lower end of the pipe. When the wind blew the mill would pump water from a can that was buried in the ground, up through a little pipe, out through another pipe and into a small watering trough. The mill must have been about two or three feet tall, tower and all. And the water it pumped would water a herd of about 20 tiny little imaginary cows.

Joel also made a submarine out of a piece of two-by-four lumber. He drilled a hole through it from one end to the other for a rubber-band motor. It would dive to the bottom of the water trough, circle around about one time and then float back up to the surface for a rewind. He could set the sheet-iron fins in different positions and make it cut di-dos in several different ways.

I remember the mail car that came up to Lamesa daily from Big Spring. And naturally it had to go back daily or else it wouldn't be there to come up again the next day. Be that as it may, besides hauling mail it also hauled passengers when there were any who wanted to be hauled. It was a seven-passenger car. And by placing a board across the jump seats, it could carry nine passengers with ease, all of them inside the car.

And what are jump seats? Big cars had a lot of room between the front seat and the back seat, somewhat like your living room at home. Jump seats were two in number and they folded down into the back of the front seat. They could be used if needed, or folded down to give more room, when not needed.

Now there's nothing unusual about a mail car carrying mail between two towns, nor about carrying passengers along with the mail. The point to notice here is the segregation of passengers according to color and race at that date in our history. Some were not allowed to ride inside the car with those who were commonly called "whites."

When there was a Negro or a Mexican passenger, he or she had to ride on a seat on the running board and hold onto the windshield post to stay on. If there was one "white," one Negro and one Mexican, there would be one riding in the car and one on each running board. The driver really had no choice in the matter. It was not his fault. It was the law of tradition—or, the law of justice working in reverse.

We used that mail car once to bring a part for our car. We had planned a trip to Hamlin and on the day before we were to go, the car broke a tooth off the ring gear in the differential. The garage man in Lamesa phoned Big Spring for a new gear. The parts man said he had the gear in stock and he would get it on the mail car that very day. It would be in Lamesa by noon, he promised.

Well, the mail car came but the gear didn't. Nor did it come the next day. They phoned Big Spring again and learned that the man who took the order for the gear had become sick suddenly and was rushed to the hospital before he could write up the order. We finally got the gear, Papa made the repair, and we went to Hamlin three days late.

Now this was no big deal—no great big story here. But a boy remembers a thing like this when he is 13 years old and he wanted to go to Hamlin three days ago.

I remember another time when we made a trip to Hamlin running on an old tire that was swelled up and about to blow out. Rather, it was trying to swell up but Papa wouldn't let it. We couldn't find a used tire in Lamesa but we figured we could get a good deal on one in Hamlin. So Papa bought a pair of leather bridle reins. Then he let the air out of the old tire, wrapped one rein through the spokes and around the bad place on the tire and buckled it down tightly. And then when he pumped air into the tire, the leather strap held the bad place in so it couldn't swell up and blow out. The strap lasted the 125 mile trip. We found the tire we needed in Hamlin.

Among other things I remember were the impressive sights on the plains, like the great number of windmills and the great distance you could see. Almost every farm house had a windmill, and more than half the houses in town had mills. It seemed there were so many mills there wouldn't have been enough wind to drive them all.

Since we had moved from a land of mesquite trees and since there were no trees on the plains—except those planted near homes for windbreakers—this country looked mighty bare. You could see as far as your eyes could stretch. A newcomer might wonder whether it might strain his eyes to look so far, until he became accustomed to it.

The town of Lamesa was a small county seat. On the courthouse lawn were two windmills pumping water into a cypress tank high on a tower. The tallest mill was 80 feet and the tank was 60 feet. That was the city water supply. Some of the stores around the square used city water and some had their own mills out back.

During the war the price of many things went higher and higher. Gasoline was one of them. It went from eight cents a gallon up to 29 cents a gallon. There were no drive-in service stations then, only gas pumps on the curbs out front. And of course they were all pumped by hand.

One farmer started home one Saturday and drove up to a gas pump and asked, "Gasoline up again?" When they told him it was 29 cents a gallon, he said, "Put in one gallon. That will get me home and back." Then after thinking it over for about two seconds, he said, "No, put in a half-gallon. That will get me home and I ain't comin' back."

And food went up too. Simpson and Jones ran a mercantile store in Lamesa. One day a customer said

to Mr. Simpson, "You know that quarter's worth of beans you sold me last week? Well, the sack had a hole in it and I lost two of them on the way home—and the other one had a worm in it."

We went to town about once a week, but most of our time was spent on the farm working, playing and going hunting. Joel was harrowing in the field one day, walking barefooted behind a harrow in freshly stirred soil. The harrow ran over a rattlesnake, just a small one, about 18 inches long or so.

Well the snake was running for his very life—being tumbled and tossed this way and that way. Joel saw the snake, so he ran way over to the right to avoid him. About that same time, the snake tumbled out from under the unfriendly harrow, still fighting for survival. And he didn't care which direction he went, so long as it was away from the harrow, so he too, shot out to the right.

Now, when the snake got tangled up with Joel's bare feet, there were about two or three seconds when it was hard to tell whether the boy or the snake was trying the hardest to get away from the other. They both succeeded—momentarily. But as soon as Joel could stop the horses and tie up the lines, he went back and demanded that the snake pay the supreme penalty. Not that Joel didn't appreciate the fact that the snake had not bitten him, nor did Joel have anything personal against the snake. It was just that, since the snake was a snake, he had to go.

Earl, Joel, Clarence (that's me) and Albert were generally spoken of as the four boys in our family. Ollie Mae was younger than Albert, and since she was a girl, she was sort of a different kind of link in a long chain of boys. And William Robert was much too young to be in our group. So we were the four boys.

Looking back, I am amazed that we four all reached adulthood. I don't mean from germs we got from not washing our plates—I mean because of guns and knives and rattlesnakes and wild horses and cows.

For instance, we boys were roping and riding horses one Sunday in our horse lot. We had one little mule colt about a year old that was a real pet, and at times somewhat of a pest. He was gentle and liked to be curried and petted. And naturally we enjoyed feeding and petting him. But on this particular day we were roping and riding and, in general, scaring the horses, and some of the time the horses were scaring us.

When the going got too rough for the little mule colt, he took off and jumped the fence. Now we didn't want him to run away, we wanted him back in the pen. So we thought we'd better get after him in a hurry. But our hurrying wasn't necessary. Before any of us could even get out of the pen, he was back at the gate, looking over it and wanting back in. We opened the gate and let him in and the fun started all over again.

Of course we had neighbors on the plains, some near and some not so near. One neighbor was the Nolan family. They had four or five kids, and a reputation for stealing at times. I was told one farmer missed some oats and corn from his barn one time. And about that same time the Nolans began feeding their horses oats and corn. Most of us couldn't afford such feed for our horses, and the Nolans were poorer than the most of us. They said some wolf hunters had given them the feed because they didn't want to have to carry it back home. The Nolans explained that the hunters said the corn was to keep their horses fat and the oats were to make them long-winded for chasing wolves.

One of our roads to Lamesa went by the Debnam place, the home of another neighbor. One of the Nolan boys often walked to town for the mail. It was only eight miles. Mr. Hamilton told us that one day the boy was riding with him in a wagon, and when they were near the Debnam home, the boy pointed way over toward some sand drifts and exclaimed, "Look, I see a hammer handle!" Mr. Hamilton stopped the wagon and let the boy go get it. Only the tip of the handle could be seen. It seemed quite obvious he could not have known it was a hammer handle from that distance unless he had seen it before with more of it showing. Anyway, he pulled it out of the sand and shouted, "And there's a hammer on the other end of it!" We thought maybe he had stolen the hammer from someone and had buried it there so he could pretend to find it later.

Some time later we Johnson kids were hoeing in the cotton patch with the Nolan kids and their mother. And as usual, we talked about everything, including the hammer incident. And I, as could be expected, not having mastered the art of keeping my big mouth shut, said, "Yes, and we know where you got the oats and corn."

What happened next took me by surprise. Now, it's one thing to have an older brother whip you in the cotton patch when you yell to him, "Come and make me!", as I told you earlier. But it's altogether a much more serious situation when you look up to see a mad mother coming toward you with a hoe raised high in the air and with fire in her eyes. I believe to this day, if I had been wearing shoes, they might have delayed me just enough to have allowed her to hit me. But I was barefooted and I took off

like Moody's goose. The woman slammed her hoe down where I had been, but wasn't any more.

We didn't visit the Nolans much, especially for meals. In fact, I think we only ate one meal at their house, and that was before she got after me with the hoe. At the close of the meal, Mrs. Nolan went around the table pouring up the few drops and swallows of milk which were left in each and every drinking glass, explaining that there was no need to waste anything, she would use the milk to make bread next time. So, I can't remember ever going back to the Nolans for a meal after that.

Along with all our other activities, we had to get a little book learning. So we four boys went to Ballard School, three-and-a-half miles away. It was a two-room school house but we had classes in only one room. The teacher lived in the other room with her little five-year-old girl, her two-year-old boy, and a pig. The little boy needed attention periodically, you know, like bathroom attention. Sometimes his mother took him to the bathroom and sometimes one of the older girl students took him. And if you think the bathroom was in the house, you are wrong. Now the pig needed to go to the bathroom too at times. But he didn't go anywhere—he just used the bathroom wherever he happened to be at the time. Nor did he seem to understand that one room was the schoolroom and the other room was his. He didn't seem to realize he was a pig. He thought he was a "people" like the rest of us. And when his little brother and sister were in the schoolroom, that little pig wanted to be in there too. Needless to say, when he brought his bathroom activities into the schoolroom, he disrupted the entire learning process as prescribed by the school board and the State Education Agency.

Ollie Mae was not quite seven when we boys started to school at Ballard in the fall of 1917. Mama thought it was too far for her to have to walk. So she taught Ollie Mae at home through the third grade. Our little sister was deprived of all the higher learning we others got at Ballard.

It wasn't all book learning at Ballard either. One day a couple of girls had to "be excused." In a minute or so, they came running back into the schoolroom with the news that there was a rattlesnake in their closet. (In those days they were closets, not toilets. And no one had ever heard of "rest rooms.") Anyway, we got out there as fast as possible, some through the doors and some jumped out the windows. Sure, we killed the snake all right, but it was hard for us to settle back down to school work.

Uncle Simpson was visiting us at that time and he was on his way to Lamesa in his car and he happened to be passing by Ballard School when we got news of the snake. When he saw us leaving the building as we did, he was somewhat shocked at our seeming total disregard for discipline and order. He thought we were getting out for recess and he was used to seeing kids march out in a straight line and stand at attention until the teacher said, "Dismissed." But back at home that night we told him he had witnessed a crash operation in an emergency. He was relieved to learn that it was not always that way at our school. We didn't dare tell him how nearly this procedure approached the normal at Ballard.

On our Lamesa farm, quite a lot of our raw land had catclaw bushes on it. When clearing the land for cultivation, we would cut the bushes off just under the surface of the ground and wait for strong winds to roll them away like tumbleweeds. They would cling together because of the claws on their branches, and often long rolls of them could be seen rolling across the prairie. Then they would collect against our fences and we would pitch them over the fences and let them continue on their way.

And also, there were many whirlwinds on the plains—perhaps no more than in other places we had lived, but they were more conspicuous. I was plowing in the field one day when I saw a whirlwind coming across the field about a hundred yards away from me. At first it looked as though it had hit one end of one of those rolls of catclaws and was rolling it along on the ground. But a second look revealed that this was not the case. The roll of bushes seemed to get shorter and shorter until it was completely gone. All this took place within a short ten seconds or less.

Then I realized that there had not been any catclaw bushes at all. The whirlwind, at its bottom end, was bent at a right angle and was whirling horizontally along on the ground. The balance of it was standing upright. The horizontal part quickly became shorter and shorter until the entire whirlwind was standing upright.

Do you think I rushed to tell my family about seeing this strange thing? Goodness no! They wouldn't have believed me. Why should I make myself subject to being a bigger liar than I was thought to be already? I didn't even mention this incident until I was grown and had kids of my own half grown. I really believe to this day this little story is one of the reasons my kids think I am untruthful at times. I don't really expect anyone to believe it. I sort of wish I had never told it. But it really did happen, and I hadn't been sucking the old sow, either.

The wind blew more and stronger on the plains than it did most places. So from the time we moved there we began to hear stories about the wind. For instance there was the story about the family in the covered wagon who camped one night and tied their horses to a bush. About bedtime the wind came up



and the sand started blowing. And next morning they were surprised to learn that the bush was really a tall tree which had been almost buried in the blowsand. Through the night the sand had blown away and by morning their horses were hanging 40 feet high up in the tree—both of them dead.

Before they could cut the tree down and recover their ropes and harness, the wind changed and the sand came back, burying the horses and the tree.

Then there was the story about the family who went to their storm cellar during a wind storm. The wind blew harder and harder until the cellar shook as if by an earthquake. The man opened the door to see what was happening. The cellar was rolling across the prairie and the man fell out. He ran back to get in the hole where the cellar had been, but the hole had blown away too.

The same wind blew the man's well up out of the ground and wrapped it around a telephone pole. Most of the water ran out before he could get it plugged up and put a faucet in the bottom of it. After that he didn't have to pump water, he only had to open the faucet and let it flow.

The story was told on us boys that we were not used to the strong wind and were always asking Papa if we could quit work and go in the house until the wind calmed down. They told that Papa settled the question once and for all one day. He hung a trace chain on the clothes line and told us, "As long as the bottom end of the chain is hanging down, go ahead and work. When the chain blows up in a horizontal position and waves like a flag in the wind, take off a few minutes and wait for it to settle back down a bit."

One man told us he had a rainwater barrel by his house. And since it hadn't rained for six months, the barrel was empty. One night about bedtime a southwest wind hit with all its fury and blew the barrel away. It continued to blow for three days and three nights. There were no fences, so the barrel rolled on and on. Then the wind changed and there came a blue norther from the northeast. Three days and nights later, about bedtime again, they heard something bump against their house. They took the lantern and went out to see what it was and found that their water barrel had returned home, but it had rolled so far it had worn down to about the size of a nail keg.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **SOLD FARM; MOVED TO HAMLIN**

By the summer of 1919 things were looking somewhat better. Papa had ordered two new tires for the Reo. They had come in but there had been no hurry to put them on the car. They were lying there in the garage beside the old car which had been mothballed for quite a few months.

Then one Sunday afternoon we saw an airplane flying around over at Lamesa. It was a small two-seater like they flew in the war. Anyway, there we were sitting at home and watching the action from ten miles away, when Papa asked if any of us would like to drive over there and watch the airplane. OH BOY! Would we! We got busy right away putting the new tires on the car, pumping up all four tires, and getting the old car to run again after quite a spell of sitting. Then we drove over, watched the action from up close, then went back home.

While in Lamesa watching the plane, we learned that the pilot was taking up passengers, that is, anyone who wanted to pay ten dollars to ride. And he would loop-the-loop for an extra ten dollars each loop. One man paid \$40 to ride and loop three times in rapid succession. It was hard for us to imagine anyone having that kind of money to spend for so little in so short a time.

Our parents wanted to be good to us kids, but being good to us didn't include spending a lot of money on us. By their ingenuity and hard work, they had a way of stretching a few dollars beyond contentment and happiness, almost to abundance. We each had a saddle and a horse to ride, including Ollie Mae, but not William Robert. Papa braided quirts for all of us. He would take the leather uppers of worn-out shoes, cut them into long strips, and make quirts as good as the best. He cut up Ollie Mae's old high top red shoes and made the prettiest little red quirt you ever saw. And as I mentioned before, we boys had our guns.

The Higginbotham Ranch was in a rundown condition and was being sold piece by piece to farmers. Most all the ranch houses were vacant and much of the pastureland had become a dust bowl. Tumbleweeds had caught against the fences and sand had drifted into the weeds, burying both the

fences and the weeds in many places. There were abandoned houses here and there on the ranch. The vacant houses had most all the windows broken out. Most of the doors were off their hinges or broken or had been taken by someone who had a need for them. We boys often took Old Scotch and our guns and our horses and went to a lot of the old houses— just exploring to see what was there.

In one of the old houses, behind a door casing, I found a 22 rifle. It worked but not well. It wouldn't shoot where I aimed it; the barrel had a curve in it. If I had found the old gun when I was younger, I might have thought I could shoot around corners with it. But I was much smarter now and I knew you couldn't shoot a curve with a gun, no matter how crooked the barrel was.

Actually the curve in the gun barrel was no problem. Papa showed me how to straighten it by placing it on a four-by-four, then placing a block of wood on it at just the right place and hitting it with a big hammer. Oh, yes, I got it fairly true, but not true enough for hunting rabbits. But then, I had my good new gun for rabbits. I learned a lot about guns by having the old gun around to play with.

One day we four boys got off out behind the barn, hiding from Papa, and made shotguns out of our rifles. We would take the bullet out of a 22 shell, place the shell in the chamber, pour some powder from a shotgun shell down the barrel, stuff in a little paper for wadding, then put in a few shot from the shotgun shell, and a little more wadding to hold the shot in place. Then we would aim and fire. But the little birdshot wouldn't even go through an old rusted out washtub. After a couple of tries, I put more powder in my gun next time. They still wouldn't go through the tub. The other boys were afraid to put a lot of powder, but I wasn't. So I put twice as much powder the next time—I really put in an overdose and a few extra shot.

Well, yes, the pellets went through the tub this time for sure, but the gun went the other way—right through the stock. The metal body of the gun split the wood stock and came almost to my shoulder. Smoke filled my eyes and a cloud of smoke rose above my head like an Indian smoke signal. It seemed that maybe it was trying to tell us something, so we listened, and we stopped muzzleloading our guns.

Once during a big, big rain the swamps caught a lot of water, and ducks became plentiful on them. A neighbor man and Frank and we four boys went duck hunting. The swamps were four or five miles apart. There was a lot of water and plenty of ducks, but there were practically no trees or bushes to sneak up behind. The ducks could see us coming and fly away. We met with failure at swamp after swamp—no ducks for us, anyhow not many.

By two o'clock in the afternoon we were circling back toward home but were still about seven miles from home, and with only three little ducks about the size of quail—well, maybe a little bigger, and we were very tired and hungry. We had been walking since early breakfast. It had been a long day and we had covered many miles.

Finally we decided to eat the ducks we had. At a vacant ranch house we found a rusty syrup bucket. There was water at the windmill. And in the barn we found some cattle salt with some black stock powder mixed in it. First we built a fire. Then we picked the ducks and boiled them in the rusty bucket, salting the stew with the black and white salt. We could hardly wait for it to cook.

We had walked at least 25 or 30 miles, and if you think walking that distance in eight hours doesn't make victuals taste good, you are plum loco, no matter what they are cooked in or seasoned with. That was, beyond a doubt the best food I had ever tasted in my life. We divided the meat as equally as possible, and it came out to about one fifth as much as each of us needed. Then we drank the soup—two swallows for you, two for him, two for me, and so on, right out of the rusty bucket. When a feather came floating along, we didn't risk wasting a single drop of soup. We would let it go into our mouth, suck the juice out of it, then spit it out.

We always had some good neighbors wherever we lived. One fall we headed maize for a good neighbor. He was to pay us \$2.50 for each wagon load. But the stalks had fallen down so badly in places that heading went very slowly and we couldn't make much money at it. Papa tried to get the man, Mr. Wood, to pay us three dollars a load. Mr. Wood thought we were just trying to get more pay for less work, and he wouldn't pay it, so we quit. Then Mr. Wood finished heading the maize himself. Now, I say he was a good neighbor because, when he saw how much trouble it was to head the fallen stalks, he came and paid us fifty cents extra for each load we had gathered. My parents made a practice of praising the good in people and they taught us kids that "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Yes, our parents taught us a lot of things. But there were other things which were not taught in our family. We kids just had to learn about these things as best we could. Along about my early teens, I began to learn about new-born calves and colts and babies. Up until then, all I knew was that horses and cows found their babies out in the pasture, and doctors brought babies to women at times. And

about Santa Claus, I wasn't curious about him, I was just happy about him. I well remember how disappointed I was when I learned the truth about Santa. And my newly acquired knowledge about babies brought a bit of disappointment concerning the moral character of adults.

We learned some of our lessons the hard way. I remember one Sunday afternoon we boys were riding young unbroken horses while Mama was away from home and Papa was sleeping. We knew we were not supposed to ride wild horses unless Papa was with us. He had told us never to do so. It wasn't that we deliberately disobeyed Papa. It was that we thought we had learned a lot since he last told us that, and perhaps the rule didn't apply any longer. And besides, we were riding a real gentle unbroken filly.

Anyway, Joel was on the horse and we were holding the reins when she went sideways and fell and rolled over on Joel. She mashed the wind out of him and left him unconscious. It looked bad to me. There he was, just lying there doing nothing. I knew Papa would be unhappy with our disobedience, but when there is something that needs to be done, you just do it. I was scared and I hated to have to face Papa but I didn't hesitate a second. I ran as fast as I could to get him. I was about 12 or 13. Was I scared? Brave? Loyal to Joel? Trustworthy? Devoted to duty? I don't really know. I only knew there was something that had to be done and my sense of duty was stronger than my fear of having to face Papa with my confession of disobedience, so I did what had to be done.

Lucky for all of us, Joel went down lengthways in a furrow between two ridges. The ridges held the horse up somewhat. Joel wasn't really hurt—just had the wind knocked out of him and it left him unconscious for a few minutes.

Along about this same time in my boyhood, I had something that one of my brothers wanted to buy from me. I don't remember what it was but I do remember I offered it to him for eight cents. He offered me a nickel for it. He had a nickel and four pennies. I finally offered to take the nickel if he would pitch the four pennies up and give me all that fell "heads." We didn't make the deal because Earl learned what I had offered to do and he shamed me scornfully. He said, "That's just the same as shooting dice or playing poker." I didn't know how to shoot dice nor play poker. I only knew that either one was a bad thing to do. I was deeply hurt, not because Earl had scolded or shamed me, but just to think that I would bring dishonor to my family by even thinking of gambling, after all the moral training my parents had given me. Also there was the element of ignorance. I hadn't realized that such an act would be gambling, and I was too proud to admit my ignorance.

Anyway, I resolved to myself then and there never to do a thing like that again as long as I lived, never to gamble in any way. But, like Adam in the garden of Eden when he blamed a woman for his disobedience, I too can say, "A woman tempted me and I did gamble." I'll tell you about it later.

This last year we were on the plains, it looked like we were sure to make good. But it seemed that fate was trying our patience. I think the devil also had a hand in the turn of events. I never did like that guy. Sometimes I think he is still after me.

Anyway in late summer Papa and the neighbors looked at our cotton crop and came to the conclusion that we couldn't keep from making 100 bales. And cotton sold that year at \$200 a bale. It looked as though the Lord had finally smiled on us as he did on Job. But I guess we hadn't suffered as much nor repented as well as Job had. When the Lord favored us with a good rain one Sunday afternoon, our neighbors saw the rain and said, "Man, that Johnson family sure must be living right. Look at the rain the Lord sent them."

But what the neighbors didn't know was that the devil had put a boll worm in each and every drop of that rain. None of us knew about the devil and his pesky worms until later.

What happened? We made 20 bales instead of 100, about enough to pay the taxes, interest, and the annual note. If the devil had left us alone, we would have had about \$16,000 left over.

So now what? Sell out, of course—sell out and get out. We sold the farm for \$25 an acre; we had paid \$18. That would have been a good profit on the place except for the fact that the improvements we had made on the place cost about as much as we made on it. So we just about broke even. But the value of land had begun to rise and we didn't know it. Before we moved off the place, even before Mama signed the deed, the farm sold again for \$10 an acre more than we got for it. When Mama learned about the last price it brought, she said, "I don't think I'll sign the deed."

Papa told her, "Oh yes you will."

Of course, Mama had not really meant what she said.

So, due to three years of drought and crop failures, we had gone broke. Then we moved to Hamlin—all of us without money, and Mama and Papa very weary. In a short three years we had gone from a

good life on the Exum farm to poverty in a rundown house in a one-horse town.

This gives you some idea of the financial state of the family at that time. This might also give you an idea of the patience of a couple who had come through this valley of gloom and destruction—came through in fairly good moral condition, and continued on to guide their children along the right path.

OKAY! Okay, so we didn't stay on the right path all the way. At least we were told which way to go. We were not all angels, but at least we tried hard at first to hide our devilish ways.

That last fall on the plains, Papa didn't have enough money to pay us kids for gathering cotton. But he promised to pay us so- much a 100 pounds and told us to keep an account of how much he owed us, and he would pay us gradually and eventually.

We each kept an account in our little books. When we boys wanted to buy or sell among ourselves, we would show the transaction in our little ledgers. Evidently some of my brothers didn't put much stock in Papa's ability to pay later, or they got a little pay from him now and then much faster than I did, or something. Anyway, after we moved to Hamlin, I still had my book which showed a balance of quite a few dollars that Papa owed me. I hadn't gotten all my money, but I hadn't needed as much as some of the others. And I thought it my duty to spend less and thereby help Papa out over a longer period of time.

Furthermore, at that early age I was getting a thrill out of watching my balance grow. I had sold quite a few items to my brothers without cash. We had simply subtracted the amount from their books and added the figures to my balance. I actually had over \$23 in my balance when one brother accused me of cheating and stealing. They could have checked up on me. I had every transaction written down. But I threw the book away rather than have my family doubt my honesty.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **ROAD WORK AT GORMAN, TEXAS**

While we had been working on the farm six days a week and resting on Sunday, there were millions in this country living in cities and working on Sunday. Then we moved to town and Sunday became a way of life for us also—but not all at once. At first our working on Sunday came gradually and very reluctantly. But many town-people had no stumps to dig up, no cotton to pick, no fields to plow, no weeds to hoe, nothing to make them tired enough during the week that they needed to rest on Sunday. So, instead of sitting and resting, they played golf on Sunday. Now, Earl became a good golf caddie. But he couldn't just caddie on week days and rest on Sundays. Golfers liked him and wanted him to caddie for them on Sundays also.

Well, the love of money may be the root of all evil, but in Earl's case it was not so much the love of it as it was the necessity of it. Earl liked to eat, so he caddied on Sundays.

At the same time, Papa got involved in trucking and there were times when his services were needed on Sundays as well as during the week. He just simply couldn't get it all done during the week. It became a real emergency when one of his customers had to have his goods hauled on Sunday so that he could begin his work on Monday morning.

We all know that it is perfectly all right to help the scriptural ox out of the ditch on Sunday. And when a trucker helps the ox out on Sunday, and receives good pay for doing it, he soon gets in the habit of wanting to help the ox out every Sunday. It even comes to the point where a man might push the ox into the ditch on Saturday in order to get to help him out on Sunday, for pay of course.

If I wanted to try to justify our working on Sundays, I might mention that it was hard to make ends meet even at that. We lived three years in Hamlin before we gave up the old kerosene lamps and moved up to electric lights. Even then it took some planning. The meter deposit was three dollars and we spent five dollars for a bunch of used insulated wire and light fixtures. It wasn't easy to get eight dollars ahead in just three short years, but we did it. We still didn't have screens on our windows, nor did we have an icebox. I took some scrap lumber and built an icebox just large enough to hold a dime's worth of ice, a pound of butter, and a quart of milk. The ice would last two days. Most of the milk stayed in the milk cooler on the back porch, with damp clothes spread over the containers. It would have cost too much to refrigerate all the milk.

When I was 13 I made the interesting discovery that a flashlight consisted of nothing more than two cells, a bulb, a container for the cells, and some kind of switch. I couldn't afford to buy a flashlight so I made me one. I used a radiator hose to put the cells in, a copper wire for a bulb holder, and I pushed the bulb down against the center post of the cell to switch the light on. I was beginning to learn a little about electricity. This was the beginning of my knowledge of how to wire our house for electric lights. Yes, I did the wiring; we couldn't afford to hire it done.

Shortly after we moved to Hamlin there was another new adventure in our lives. It involved a little detour to Gorman, Texas, to do some road work. You remember the truck that Papa let Frank use to go everywhere and haul whatever people would pay him to haul. Well, by the time we landed in Hamlin, Frank was getting tired of hauling everything for everybody. So Papa inherited one good used truck from one tired-of-trucking boy named Frank. Papa also had a friend named Marvin Hood who was building a paved road near Gorman. I think it was generally understood that Marvin could use some of us if we would come on down to his camp. We needed to work—for pay, that is—so we took the truck and an old Dodge car and went to see Marvin.

Sure enough, Marvin could use us four boys, and Papa could haul supplies in his truck. We lived in a canvas tent in a pasture about a half-mile from the rock quarry from which they were getting rock for the road. Albert became waterboy; Earl was powder monkey, in charge of all blasting. Joel operated a road grader which was pulled by horses. I fired a steam boiler and made steam for a steam drill to drill holes into the earth. And into these holes Earl would put his dynamite and blasting powder, which, when set off by a fuse and blasting cap, excavated the rocks which were crushed and then hauled and placed on the road which Joel had smoothed so perfectly with his little grader. We were doing so many things for Marvin, I wondered how he managed before we got there.

Marvin paid his hands three dollars a day and they paid him one dollar a day to eat at his cook shack. We didn't eat there; we could eat much cheaper at our tent. There were two men cooking for the crew, but they got to drinking so much and cooking so badly that Marvin was losing some of his workers. He had a problem. So Marvin came to Mama and asked her to cook for him. He hired a farm woman to help Mama and together they cooked for the men. And Marvin let our family eat at the cook shack at half price.

As usual Mama wouldn't throw out any food if it could be used in any way. She took the left-over biscuits and made coldbread pudding out of them. At first the men were reluctant to sample the dish. But after getting a taste of it, most of them asked for more—and they called it "make-'em-eat-it."

Sometimes Earl would find a can of powder that had been wet or had sweated in the can and was lumpy. He was told to pile those cans out behind the mule barn and not try to use the lumpy powder. Well now, that pile of 12 or 15 cans of blasting powder, which no one wanted, seemed to me to be an excellent source of fun, as well as research material. So, unbeknowing to all others, I toted a can of the stuff home to our tent one day. Then I decided that Papa might frown on the idea of my having 50 pounds (or maybe it was 25 pounds) of powder about our tent, especially if he found it hidden under his bed, so I thought I had better do a lot of experimenting in as short a time as possible, before anyone else came home. I felt that any one of my brothers would scold me for taking a can of powder home to play with. And I was sure he would not be able nor willing to keep such news to himself. I'd better work fast and let it remain my own little secret. After all, muzzleloading a rifle was child's play as compared to playing with 50 pounds of blasting powder. So I'd better try to get by with this powder as I had gotten away with other secret adventures—all alone. How I longed to share some of my good times with my brothers, but I didn't dare try. Such secrets can only be kept by one person. A partner would be sure to spoil things.

Sometimes a kid's reasoning without certain knowledge can lead to trouble. I reasoned that, since a big stick of wood burns slower and longer than a small stick, a large rick of powder would burn more slowly and thereby afford more pleasure and excitement. I even envisioned me walking along beside the burning powder as it wiggled and twisted here and there, as a snake would crawl across the pasture. I remembered the matches I had stood up in the sand at Grandma's, and how the flame had leaped from match to match until it reached the last one. And that's what I wanted to do with a string of powder—light it at one end and watch the flame slowly travel to the other end. I had plenty of powder so I piled it up into a rick about two inches high and as long as from here to yonder.

And that was when I learned, by experience, that big powder burns faster than little powder. When I lighted one end of the powder- snake, it blasted fire and smoke right up into my face. I fell back quickly for protection. Then I reopened my eyes just in time to see my fireball fizzle out at the far end of the rick of powder. I hardly saw any of what happened—it was all gone in two or three seconds. I was glad no one else had seen it. Needless to say, that ended my monkeying around with powder, trying to play powder monkey.

There was no one at the quarry who really knew how to blast efficiently. But then one day a man came out and showed Earl how to use electric blasting caps instead of the fuses he had been using. By drilling shallow holes, placing less explosives in each hole, and setting them off all at once, electrically, the blasting was much more efficient and a lot safer. Before that time, the custom was to set off a small blast in the bottom of a deep hole for the purpose of opening up a "pocket" large enough to hold as many as eight cans of powder and 80 sticks of dynamite. That didn't result in a lot of usable rock for the road we were building. Instead, it mostly made a big hole in the ground and sent rocks high into the air.

Earl did most of his blasting late in the afternoons after work hours when the workers were out of the quarry. When he was ready to set off a blast, he yelled, "FIRE IN THE HOLE," and everybody took cover, and the most reliable cover was a lot of distance. I saw a few rocks as large as your fist fall a half-mile away. One time a rock about the size of a basketball went so high and came down so fast that it came down through the roof of the cook shack, came on down through the ceiling, landed in a stack of metal dinner plates and took them down through the table and on down through the floor. Another time, one man got under a wagon for protection. The heavy wagon bed protected him from the falling rocks, but one huge rock rolled against a wheel and scooted the wagon sideways a couple of feet.

They told us that before we went to work there, one blast failed to go off for some reason. They waited ever so long and it still didn't go off. Then finally they cautiously ventured out from hiding and it blew up with Marvin standing almost on top of it. It must have been a small charge or it might have killed him. He said, however, it was big enough. He said he looked down on trees during his flight. I don't know, really. Of course it could be true, it happened in Texas you know.

One day a man signed on to work for Marvin, worked a couple of days, and disappeared without asking for his pay. We had not known it at the time—even the bookkeeper thought nothing of it, but when a couple of men came out a week later and arrested one of the mule-skinners, (lingo meaning mule driver) we put two and two together and came up with the answer. The man who had worked two days was an undercover agent for the F. B. I.

When arrested for manslaughter, the mule driver told the agents he had been expecting them. He had planned to work until payday and move on. They got him just before payday. He had been going to church regularly and had preached a few times in a little country church near by.

Well, we Johnsons were making money and things were looking good. But we might have suspected something would go wrong. I guess we should have moved on as the arrested man had been doing for months. But we, like he, stayed too long. Anytime our present and future looked that rosy, we might have known that financial disaster was lurking near by. The old devil was after me again. To calm our financial tempest, my family might have to throw me overboard, as the sailors did Jonah.

This time the bank went broke—the bank in which the road-building company had its money, the money which was paid to Marvin Hood month by month. He couldn't pay us. He couldn't even pay himself. Papa often paid cash out of his own pocket for supplies for Marvin. Then Marvin would repay him on payday. The bank closure caught Papa without any cash. And Marvin couldn't get any money to repay Papa. He couldn't even get a little money to help us get back to Hamlin.

We had the truck and the Dodge car. I don't know how we made it. I think we drove part way on kerosene; we could buy it for only four or five cents a gallon. And of course we arrived home hungry. Duck soup from a rusty bucket would have tasted good. After years of negotiating, Papa finally got about half the money Marvin owed him, and that included two of the wagons used for hauling the crushed rock at Gorman.

While there at Gorman, Old Scotch took sick with what was commonly known as sore mouth, and after many days of severe suffering, he finally died.

If Old Scotch had died suddenly before his period of suffering, it would have been almost like losing one of the family. He was one of the family and had been in the family longer than some of us could remember. We wouldn't have sold him for any amount of money. But, though we regarded him highly, since we had found no means of alleviating his suffering, and since he had suffered for so long, his death didn't bother us quite so much. We hated to see him go but were glad his pain had ended.

I don't really know what was done for Old Scotch during his sickness. That fell in Papa's line of duty. I would guess that he asked the advice of a druggist or an M.D., or maybe other owners of dogs. Veterinarians were practically nonexistent. If there had been one around he would have been called an animal doctor. I seriously doubt that we did much of anything for the dog which could in any way be classed as veterinary medicine, as we know it today.

All my memories of Old Scotch are pleasant ones except for those last miserable days of his life. He seemed to always be in the right place at the right time. And I don't recall that he ever once did anything wrong. There is no way of knowing how many times, if ever, he saved one of us from the poisonous bite of a rattlesnake.

On our Lamesa farm rattlesnakes were everywhere, not every day, but at one time or another. They were in pastures, in cow trails, beside cow trails, in the garden in shades of potato vines, in chicken houses, in feed barns, in the corn patch and in the watermelon patch. Wherever they were, there was a 50-50 chance Old Scotch had been there ahead of us. And when there was a snake, he often found it first.

When there was something he wanted us to know about, he barked. And the tone of his bark told us whether the something was dangerous or only a horned toad to be played with for a moment and then ignored. A cow in the yard brought a bark in a tone which seemed to say, "Come and help me, or at least come and close the gate after I drive her out." Chickens in the yard brought no bark at all. He could handle chickens alone. A skunk or a badger brought a bark from Old Scotch which told us he would like to have some of us around if only to keep him company and help him make decisions, and maybe take note of the swell job he was doing. After driving it away, he would always accept a congratulatory pat on his head, if we had one to offer. And he was most certain we would have.

Old Scotch knew things instinctively. Of course, we all know that dogs know a lot of dog things by instinct. But Old Scotch knew human things which he had never been taught. One day Papa was building fence on our Lamesa farm. We boys were in school, so Old Scotch was with Papa, also building fence and looking after Papa. As the morning warmed up, Papa pulled off his blue denim jumper and laid it down. He probably laid it on the ground, there not being many bushes in Dawson County large enough to hang a jumper up on. Anyway, when he finished doing what he was doing at that place, he started walking along the fence to his next place of work.

Then he noticed an enthusiastic whine from the dog, which was really a half-whine-half-yelp expression, but anyhow, it got Papa's attention. He looked back. The dog was sitting there pleading with Papa. He first looked at the jumper and whined, then at Papa and yelped, and wagged his tail in a manner that could mean only one thing, "You are forgetting your jumper and I don't want to stay here and watch after it. I want to go with you."

Papa went back and let him know he got the message, but that he hadn't meant to take the jumper. Then he spoke to the dog in words which he could understand real well because he had heard them often through the years, "It's all right. Leave it alone. You can go."

And with a happy little yelp which meant, "Thank you," and with an enthusiastic wag of his tail, he quickly bounced up beside his master seeking a pat of approval before going on his way out front to clear Papa's path of any and all vermin, and to warn him of any danger that might lurk in his path.

Old Scotch may not have been the fightingest dog in the world, but there is no doubt he was the whippingest. So far as I know, he whipped every dog that ever challenged him, and quite a few who came in peace with no thought of conquest. Once I saw two dogs jump him at the same time. Either one of the dogs was as large as Old Scotch, but he whipped them both and sent them scampering away. He didn't suffer a scratch. I'll admit he had a slight edge that time; he was fighting on his home ground and the cheering section was on his side.

Once a man came to see Papa about something and he allowed his dog to come along. His dog was about as large as our dog. And while the men were talking business, the two dogs went about their business of getting acquainted with each other. It seemed they were getting to be friends until the fight started. The speed with which Old Scotch struck the other dog took him by complete surprise, and he went backward and sideways, almost losing his balance.

Then almost as quickly as the fight had started, Papa brought it to a halt with the command, "Scotch, stop that!" Whether the command was "sic 'em" or "stop that," Old Scotch usually responded immediately. In this particular case, a "sic 'em" started the fight and the "stop that" ended it.

As we all know, dogs have a keen sense of hearing. They can hear sounds that we humans can't hear. And as we also know, 12-year-old boys like to see dogs fight. Show me one who doesn't and I'll help you try to find out what is wrong with the boy. I was 12 at that time.

Old Scotch was by far the easiest dog I ever saw to sic onto anything he wanted to get onto. And he usually wanted to get onto any dog that happened to be close when one of us boys said, "Sic 'em." I think maybe this was because the dog lived such a lonely life. Of course, he had us humans to keep him company, but there were no other dogs about the place to accept any of the commands to sic 'em. So he

had to be alert at all times and do all the dirty work himself. He was so accustomed to the word sic 'em, and he had become so easy on trigger, he was off and away before the full word was spoken. He didn't wait to hear the "em" part of the word, he didn't even need the "c" part, but only the "si" sound, and he only needed to hear that part in a whisper.

Now, that was all I said that day—just an almost noiseless "si"—a mere hiss of wind through my upper front teeth. And I remember, Old Scotch looked up at me as if to ask, "Did I hear what I hope I heard?"

I looked at him and winked one eye and barely nodded my head toward the other dog and smiled and very quietly—almost silently—repeated, "Si-," and in a split second he was all over the other dog like a crow on a Junebug.

After Papa had stopped the fight, Old Scotch looked at me with a question-mark expression on his face. I smiled back at him just to let him know he had not misunderstood me, and he came over to me for a pat of approval, which I gave freely.

No one had heard the "si-" except the dog and me. It would be our little secret. I certainly wouldn't tell, and he couldn't tell. I gave him a few friendly pats; he licked my hand and wagged his tail—the only way he knew how to say, "Thank you, it was fun while it lasted." Then he went back to investigating and making friends with the other dog.

## CHAPTER 12

### MY INVENTIONS AND HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

In the meantime, after we got back home to Hamlin, Papa gradually got into the trucking business. The truck replaced the horse in our lives and after a few years we sold our horses. Then Papa began to wonder if a truck would pull a trailer. He had a good wagon he didn't need, so he thought to himself, "Why not make a trailer out of a wagon?" He tried it and it worked. He cut the tongue off short, hooked it behind his truck and hauled cottonseed to the oil mill at Hamlin from gins in Hamlin and from gins in small towns near Hamlin.

While Papa was experimenting with new innovations, I was doing some experimenting on my own in my spare time. Before we got electricity in our home, I had learned that the telephone company was in the habit of throwing away dozens of old batteries from time to time. Most of them were dead, others were sick and dying, but a few of them still had a little life in them. By connecting enough live ones together, I had enough current to light flashlight bulbs.

I had brought back hundreds of feet of small insulated wire from electric blasting caps at Gorman. I strung the wire all through our house and had little night lights in all our rooms even before we got city current. Although the lights were small, they gave enough light to prevent most of the skinned shins which were usually caused by vicious chairs that jumped out and tackled a fellow as he made his way from his bed to the back door on his nightly journeys to the outhouse.

I also had an Erector Set which had a little motor that ran off the old batteries. It came in handy in a lot of my experiments. We heated a part of our house with a wood-burning heater. I didn't like to get up and build a fire on a cold morning. So I got to thinking, "Why not make my old alarm clock light my fire?" One night I rigged the thing up before I went to bed. The next morning when the alarm went off, it started the motor that struck the match that lighted the kerosene that lighted the kindling that lighted the wood that heated the room.

Well, did it work? Sure it worked, cross my heart. But it wasn't practical. I didn't expect it to be. It was more trouble to rig all that stuff up the night before, than it was to build a fire next morning and jump back into bed while the room warmed up. I just wanted to see if I could do it, and I could.

Once I hooked a bunch of those old dry cells to an auto horn and it really sounded loud in the house. Then one night while Joel was away from home, I made a pressure switch and put it under his mattress so that when he got into bed it would honk the horn under his bed. He was out with his girl and I knew he'd come in after we were all in bed, and more than likely all asleep. So I began to have second thoughts about my little scheme. Papa and Mama would be sure to frown on the idea of being waked up in the middle of the night by what would seem to be an automobile coming through our bedroom honking its horn. And I knew they would frown on me for doing it. So I got cold feet and disconnected



the thing before Joel got home.

During the 1930's many farm families had battery lights in their homes. They had "windchargers" to keep their batteries charged. The windcharger was a wind-driven generator. The more the wind blew the more it would keep their batteries charged. In 1921, when I was fifteen years old, I made the first wind-driven electric plant I ever saw or had ever heard of. I took a magneto off an old car and changed the wiring in the inside so it would put out an alternating current instead of a jump spark. It wouldn't charge a battery but it would light a flashlight bulb when the wind blew. I mounted the plant on top of our house above my room. I left the light switched on all the time. It burned day and night, if the wind blew. And the brightness of the light was a good indication of how fast the wind was blowing.

After we got city current I did further experimenting and learned more about electricity. For instance, I liked to get a little shock now and then from the city current. And I learned that I could touch the two wires just a wee bit with the tips of my thumbs and fingers and enjoy a little electrical tingle. One day I tied two metal handles onto the ends of two wires so I could get a better hold and enjoy even more shock. I already knew that a tighter grip on the handles would give me a stronger shock. But what I didn't know was that when the shock reached a certain degree of intensity, it would cause my hands to grip even harder, and I found myself unable to open my hands to free myself. Lucky for me, I had tied the wires onto the light fixture hanging in the center of the room. I couldn't open my hands, but I dropped to the floor and pulled the wires loose from the fixtures.

One day Albert found an old sewing machine motor in a trash pile in an alley. I was glad when he decided to sell it to me. That was another one of my dreams come true. I was ready to do more research and playing. The motor did a lot of things for me, but the thing that was worth the most to the family was the fly- chaser I made out of it.

In those days we Johnsons still didn't have screens on our windows and doors. We just barely had windows and doors. Anyway, I took the electric motor and mounted it on a wooden box with its shaft sticking up. Then I fastened a stick to the motor shaft and a fringed cloth to the stick so that the fringe would float three inches above the food on the dining table. When I placed this monster in the middle of Mama's table, she was not at all pleased.

You see, Mama remembered some of my earlier gadgets, one of which had blown up all over her kitchen stove, cabinet, walls and floor. Some of it even hit the ceiling. Nevertheless, by the time Mama became brave enough to come near her dining table on this particular day—the day of the fly-chaser—I had the motor in the middle of the dining table, sending the fringed cloth round and round, shooin' all the flies away. It proved to be a lifesaver. No fly ever lighted within its magic circle. Mama could place all the food on the table and feel sure that no fly would ever light on any of it.

After Mama realized the value of this latest invention, she got back on speaking terms with me. And I sort of guessed she might be happy in the thought that her little ugly duckling might just make his mark in the world after all .

Oh yes, I mentioned the blow-up in Mama's kitchen. That was quite a different story. I had gotten this toy steam engine for Christmas. To make it run I had to fill the boiler with water, light the alcohol burner under it, and then wait ten minutes for the steam to make the wheels start turning. Then about two minutes later the boiler was dry of water and the whole operation had to be done over. That amounted to too much waiting and not enough wheel turning to suit me.

I reasoned that a larger boiler wouldn't have to be filled so often, and there would be more action each time I heated it. So I put a valve stem from an inner tube in the lid of a gallon syrup bucket. And I ran a small rubber hose from the valve stem to a little pipe on the boiler of the toy steam engine. Next I filled the bucket with water and placed it on Mama's wood cookstove and waited—and waited and waited.

And that's when it happened. It blew up. The lid hit the ceiling, and water hit the four walls and everything in the kitchen. I was glad Mama wasn't in the kitchen. The noise alone was enough to scare her half out of her mind, and it brought her running in a hurry. And now let us have a moment of silence while you imagine what Mama said to me. Of course I was sorry it happened. The kitchen might never be the same again. And I was sorry to have scared her. But mostly I was afraid she wouldn't let me do experiments in her kitchen again.

After the steam cleared out of the kitchen, Mama allowed me to return to the scene just long enough to remove the "thing" to my own room. Then I found that the little rubber tube was stopped up. Steam couldn't get through it.

Oh well, air seemed to be much safer and faster anyhow. So I borrowed Papa's tire pump and

pumped air into the little toy boiler. That worked just fine. One stroke of the pump and the wheels started turning. Only trouble was, I had borrowed the tire pump without asking, and the next time Papa needed it, it was out of place and he couldn't find it. Again I was in the doghouse.

Electricity seemed to be in my life to stay. At age sixteen I owned my first electric train. It was not the steam-locomotive type, but the true original electric-type engine. I bought the train myself and it proved to be a lot of fun. By that time I had known the truth about Santa for a couple of years and I figured he wouldn't be bringing me one. So I started saving up my nickels and dimes and bought my own train. A year or so later I bought my first and only bicycle. It lasted me until I bought my first car.

By that time I had begun to believe a fellow could do about anything he set his mind to. So I gave a kid a dollar for an old one-cylinder gasoline engine with its carburetor missing. I knew I couldn't buy a carburetor for it, but I was confident enough, or foolish enough to believe I could make the thing run without one. I was right; I could and I did. That is, I made it run without a real factory-built carburetor. The one I gave it was a small tin can stuffed with rags that were saturated in gasoline. The vapor from the can was the gas that it ran on.

I made the little engine pull Mama's washing machine—which she was in the habit of making me pull. Of course it was more work keeping the engine running than it would have been just simply running the washer by hand. But it was more fun my way. And besides, I liked to do things that others couldn't do,—things some mechanics said couldn't be done.

When I got hold of an extra dime now and then, which was not needed for something else, I would go see a movie. But my slow reading caused me to miss part of the story during the old silent movie days. So I began dreaming of the time when we would be able to go to a movie and listen to the stars talk and sing. I worked the whole thing out and told my parents and some of my friends just how it would be done and how the mechanism would be set up. Some of them listened, but some of them walked away, slowly wagging their heads as if to say, "Poor Clarence, he finally flipped his flopper. He has gone plum crazy."

Three years later they came out with a stupid phonograph and tried to keep the talking on the record correlated with the picture on the screen. It was four years after I invented the talking picture that they finally put the sound on the movie film where I had put it in the first place.

I was out front on automobile generators too. In the early 1920's generators were dealing us plenty of trouble. Their commutators were the biggest headaches. By 1924 I had invented a direct-current generator without a commutator but with two collector rings instead. I even applied for a patent on my invention. But I ran out of money and had to give it up. Then 39 years later, in 1963, most all American-built cars came out with my generator on them. They are now called alternators. Of course my generator was not exactly like the alternator. We didn't have diodes in 1924. My generator didn't need diodes.

Along with my experimenting, I was reading mechanics magazines and in one of them I saw the International Correspondence School advertisement and enrolled in an electrical engineering course. I learned a lot from it but I was not financially able to buy all the things I needed to do the experiments which would have helped me learn and understand much more. Furthermore, there was not another kid in town with whom I could work and study, nor who was interested in learning about electricity with me. So, electrical engineering lost much of its charm and glamour. However, during my high school days, my classmates and teachers nicknamed me "Edison." I kept the stage lights in repair for all events. And when an office light needed attention, they sent for me. They never required me to buy a ticket to any school activity. I kept the lights working all over the building. I carried a key to the building and came and went as I pleased, day and night.

Along with my other activities, I have studied and practiced a little bit of character reading. Since my teens I have had this thing about being somewhat able to read a person's character on sight—at least I liked to try. When I was 18 I was visiting a kid in another town and he showed me a picture of his high school class, 32 kids. I looked at the picture, then I pointed to one girl and told my friend that she was the top student in his class in English. My friend was surprised but he admitted that I was correct. He became even more surprised when I picked the best math student, the most mischievous boy, the one who liked to play good clean practical jokes, the one who was the most active in the art of deceit designed to really hurt others, the best football player, best all-round athlete, and several others. After I had finished, the boy told me I got about 20 of them just right, ten partially right, and two absolutely wrong. Oh well, you can't win them all.

I have been in business off and on many years in my life and I can't remember having lost a penny on a cold check or a bad debt. I have a way of trusting people that I judge to be okay and it seems that they want to prove that I have not misjudged them.

This ability to judge rightly has helped me and others many times. One day a stranger was driving through Hamlin on his way to Bronte where he was to go to work on a ranch. He was out of money. I bought him five gallons of gas and a quart of oil. Three days later I received the money from him by mail.

Why did I trust the stranger? I don't know. He looked okay. He acted okay. He didn't ask for credit nor any other favor. Instead, he asked if he might camp out behind our service station for three or four days. My boss told him it was all right. Then when he asked to borrow a pencil and a piece of paper, I learned he was planning to write his employer a letter and ask him to send a couple of dollars for gas and oil so he could finish his trip. I bought him the gas and oil and told him to get going and get on the job. Then he offered to leave his saddle as security. I told him I didn't need security, "Just send me the money when you get it." And he did.

I've always been that way about my money. I would rather see my money used for home missions than for foreign missions. I like to see results. In the case of foreign missions, I never know how my money is being handled nor what it does for people. To be sure, this man repaid me, but if he had not, I would still prefer home missionary work. That may not be the right attitude, but it's the way I feel.

This new-fangled city living didn't take all the country out of us boys right away. We often went hiking along the creek that runs through the south end of Hamlin. One day we slipped out of our clothes and were swimming in the Orient Lake when a group of women and little kids came to fish in the lake. Boy, I thought we were in trouble for sure this time. But Joel came to the rescue. He always was a smooth talker, and this time it paid off for all of us. He yelled out to them that we were swimming without our swim suits, and if they would go back around the bend, we would be out in about three minutes and then they could come on and fish. They did and all was well.

Soon after we moved to Hamlin we owned an old Dodge car, about a 1918 model. It was probably the one we drove to Gorman, although we did own two other Dodges through the years. Anyway, this old car had so much play in the gears and the differential and the axles that you could let up slowly on the clutch, and when all the slack finally wound out of all the gears, the car would leap forward. And if the motor didn't die, you were off and going.

Our car shed opened to the alley. To get into the shed we had to drive up the alley, circle into the shed and stop the car just before it hit a solid board wall. At least it was a board wall, and we had thought it was solid until Albert proved differently. Anyhow, the wall separated the car from the back yard, which, in turn, connected with the back door of Mama's kitchen. Now, this back yard had within its boundaries a number of clotheslines, a storm cellar and a couple of huge mulberry trees, under which a dozen or so old laying hens reclined in shaded pools of dust and ashes while off duty from producing the better half of many nourishing breakfasts for a bunch of growing kids.

Well, on this particular day, Albert had some reason for wanting to go some place in that old Dodge car. It didn't have a starter; we had to crank it. Albert, being just a small boy, was not big enough to stand out in front of the bumper of the car while he applied the necessary heave and pull to roll the motor over compression. So, as usual, he was standing between the front bumper and the car when things began to happen. The old car was easy to crank. Usually just once over and the engine would start.

And so it was this time—once over and wham! Albert had forgotten to shift it out of low gear. The motor had gotten up pretty good speed by the time all the gears took up the slack and the hind wheels began to push forward. It was a good thing Albert was too little to stand in front of the bumper, it would have crushed both his legs as it went about the business of pushing the entire end out of the shed. It's a fact. The bottom of the wall held in place while all the nails pulled out along the top of the wall. The car simply laid that big solid wall flat in the back yard and then climbed on top of it. It was headed right for the storm cellar when Albert switched off the key.

Now you think I'm fibbing. You wonder, "How did Albert get there to switch off the motor?" It wasn't easy. It took a little agility and a lot of speed, and Albert proved he had plenty of both. When the car began going forward Albert went down and under it. Then in the split-second it took the car to demolish the end of the garage, Albert seized the opportunity to shoot out from under one side of the car, behind the front wheel and before the back wheel got him. Then he leaped up and jumped into the car and stopped it on top of one end of the garage, a couple of clothes line poles, and one very dead old hen. The hen, of course, was a welcome sight on the dining table at our next meal. And Albert was also a welcome sight, sitting there eating his share of the old hen, without a scratch on him.

When we moved to Hamlin the school authorities wanted to put us all back a grade or two. We didn't thrill to that idea, so Earl drove the Old Reo car and we went to Wise Chapel School a-year- and-a-half. It was only five miles and our teacher rode with us and helped pay expenses.

But this country schooling couldn't go on forever. So when we entered Hamlin school I was almost sixteen and they put me back to the seventh grade. And then at Christmas time our teacher got married and quit teaching. She was replaced by a man teacher who was not altogether outstanding in his knowledge of math. I worked some math problems he couldn't work and I taught our class at times when the problems were too difficult for him. He seemed to resent this and I am sure it was my fault. I was not well-versed in the art of diplomacy and I didn't know how to go beyond his ability without hurting his pride.

As a result, at the end of that year I learned that I was third in my class. We all felt sure a certain little girl would be first. I thought I would be second. But instead, a boy named Jack was salutatorian that year. I didn't really think any more about the matter until the next year when I learned, quite by accident, that the teacher had given the honor to Jack which was rightfully mine. I had made higher grades than he did. No, I didn't hate the teacher for having done that to me, nor did I like him for it. I reasoned that he had just made an honest mistake in figuring our grades. As I said, he was not outstanding in math.

There was only one high school teacher I didn't especially like. She taught Latin. The rule of the school was that an excused absence was not to lower a student's grade. Rather, his grade was to be averaged according to those days he was present, and the exam scores. I constantly made "A" when I was in class in spite of the fact that I missed a lot of classes while on business ventures for our class and for the school. I thought, and some other teachers thought that, if I could make "A" in class and on tests, while attending class only three-fourths of the time, I ought to have an "A" for the course. Instead, I got a "C". Except for that one course, I made B-plus and better throughout my high school years. It wasn't all that bad though, having a "C" in Latin. I knew I was an "A" student and my teacher knew I was an "A" student; I was just a little disappointed not to have an "A" on my report card so my family would know I was an "A" student.

Since we had missed so much schooling because of poverty and because of cotton harvest and because of having attended small country schools, naturally we were all put back a grade or two when we entered Hamlin school. I wasn't the only one. Joel says he was put back a grade so many times, he went through one grade three times making "As" every time. In my Freshman year, I was about the age of many of the Juniors. And because of a lack of material possessions, I found schooling less alluring than it might have been.

So, about the last of November I dropped out of high school and took a job with West Texas Utilities Co. The job title was "Night Engineer" and the salary was more than a lot of grown men made. Regardless of the title that went with my job, what I really did was make ice at the ice plant at night. Anyway, two years later, with my savings to back me up, I quit my job and reentered Hamlin High School, about the last of November.

By that late date I was a Freshman at age eighteen, finishing my freshman year at nineteen. However, I was not looked down upon, even by the so-called elite. The most respected Seniors welcomed me into their school activities. But I realized my social retardation and stood apart, by my own choice, in certain extracurricular activities.

Even after starting school three months late that fall, I still made good grades and picked up four credits, which was normal. The following summer I did some extra studying, wrote some book reports, took tests on the work, and made three extra credits. That made seven; I needed nine more to graduate. Once in awhile a good strong student was allowed to take five subjects. My record convinced the teachers that I could do even more than five. So, with their help, we persuaded the superintendent to let me take seven subjects that second year. B-plus was the lowest grade I made that year, despite the extra load. We tried to get the superintendent to let me take all nine, but he refused. I could have made it easily, but we couldn't get his permission to let me try it.

By the end of my second year I was 21 and had 14 credits. I needed two more. I enrolled again that fall, but before I got my books, Papa told me he needed another truck driver and couldn't afford to hire one and keep me in school. So I quit school and drove a truck for him.

While I was in school I was not thought of as a "book-worm," probably because I didn't spend all that much time studying. I lettered in football that second year. I also took first place in the half-mile run, shot put, discus throwing, and something else. Would you believe it: I've forgotten what the fourth event was. Along with athletics, I also took first place in declamation.

While I was a Freshman, I was assistant editor of our school paper which rated second in the state. With all four grades competing in writing "Class yell," "Class song," and designing "Class pennant," I wrote the song which won first place and designed the pennant that won first place.

We had another contest to see which class could raise the most money to pay on the doctor bill for one of our football players. We Freshmen won that contest.

In my Junior year we had a contest to determine which class could publish the best edition of our school paper. When it came our turn, we Juniors won first place and sold three times as many papers as any other class. I also painted all the posters for advertising games, plays, and other school activities. And then I placed them in store windows all over town. I was allowed to take a student with me on these poster ventures. Only one requirement, he had to have an "A" rating in his grades. And I must say, looking back from where I sit today, I can easily see how my stupidity stood out in those days; I always chose boys to go with me.

We Juniors put on a play which we presented in Hamlin and in other towns nearby. We first put the play on in Hamlin at the picture show as a dress rehearsal and we charged admission. Then we presented it again a few weeks later at the same theatre and played to a full house. Then we played it at the same place a third time by popular request. The play went over so well in Hamlin, we decided to present it in other towns around. I know we played it in Rotan and I believe the other town was Anson. The name of the play was "Clarence," and I played the title role. You may remember, Booth Tarkington was the author.

Naturally, all this publicity didn't hide me from public view. I was well known around the little town of 2,500. During that time I also worked in garages, filling stations, grocery stores, tire shops, and welding shops, besides driving a truck now and then when I was needed.

I painted all the posters for advertising the play which we put on in Hamlin and other towns around. Usually four of us Juniors went to other towns to place them in store windows. We didn't go after school; we went during school hours, and only straight "A" students could go.

One day four of us were delivering posters to Rotan—two boys and two girls. The other boy was driving and I was in the back seat with one of the girls. She was not "my" girl—just a nice respectable school girl. I don't think I even had a girl to call my own, or maybe I did. If I had one, it was one of the teachers, which was strictly against board rules, so we had to keep it secret. No student was allowed to date a teacher. Well anyway, there we were in the back seat of the car, me socially handicapped, and they having all kinds of fun teasing me about being so timid and bashful. They got a big kick out of watching the girl edge over toward me and seeing me slowly scoot away from her. I was just being cautious. How was I to know what a city girl might do to a country boy like me.

Our school athletic club was always short of money for uniforms, balls, bats, and other equipment. To help make money for the club, we sold candy in one hallway at high school. I did all the buying, keeping the records, and half the selling. Another regular job for me was making whitewash and marking off the football and baseball fields.

Now you can begin to see why I didn't have to ask permission to go and come when I needed to. It would have been a waste of time. And I just didn't have all that much time to waste. I was busy. They granted me the privilege of going without asking and I was careful not to abuse that privilege. They usually knew where I was and which student I had picked to go with me. You may also be getting the idea that I could have carried nine subjects that Junior year. I did all these extras, took seven full courses, and made "B-plus" and "A" all the way.

By this time I had begun to learn a little diplomacy which I had lacked in the seventh grade. During my Freshman year—my second one, that is—Miss Packwood was in her first year of teaching. In her history class I sat on the front row right by her desk. Four boys sat in four seats on the back row and gave her a rough time, cutting up and constantly disrupting the class. They got so bad that she actually cried at times. The boys didn't know it but I did. She tried hard to hide her frustration and emotions. But she was at a loss to know what she should do next.

I caught those four boys out at the toilet one day and had a diplomatic conference with them. I placed myself in the group of five who were dealing our teacher misery. I pleaded to them concerning our responsibility to her. "How would we like for someone to do to our sister what we are doing to this girl?"

Well sir, the results of that little conference surprised even me. Not a single one of those boys bothered that teacher another time the rest of that year. I never told Miss Packwood what had taken place, nor did I ever mention it again to the boys. Although I had not been guilty of any of the wrongdoings, in my talk with the boys, I included myself as one of them and shared the blame in order that they might listen to my argument. I was proud of the boys for listening to me and I was proud of me for having been able to influence them, and help a friend who was in trouble.

The last year Coach Hinton was at Hamlin High, Superintendent Greene asked him to come two weeks before school started and get the football boys into training. Coach asked about pay for the two weeks. Mr. Greene seemed to think the board would be glad to pay him for his time. Then he told Mr. Hinton, "If they will not pay you, you can take your pay out of the athletic fund." Mr. Hinton came early and kept his part of the bargain.

As it turned out, the board didn't pay for the two weeks. Mr. Hinton waited and waited and they still didn't pay. He was too much of a gentleman to ask for the money. He figured perhaps they would pay him at the end of the school year, but they didn't. So he took his pay out of the athletic fund as Mr. Greene suggested. And at that point some of his so-called "best friends" turned against him, telling that he stole the money and left town. It simply wasn't true. I knew about Mr. Greene's promise. There was never any reason for anyone to doubt Mr. Hinton's honesty. He was never anything less than a gentleman.

You may have the idea that I am telling you I didn't get into trouble at school. That's just not true. However, I didn't deliberately plan it. Most of my trouble was accidental. For instance, during the Christmas holidays one year, workmen revarnished the desks in the study hall. When school reopened, the varnish was dry, but you know how fresh varnish is, even after it is dry. When you sit on it for an hour your pants sort of cling to it. Well, as I have told you, we were a poor family, and I had the pants to prove it. My pants were old and thin, but there were no holes in them when I sat down. And there was only one hole when I got up an hour later—a big one. I first suspected something was wrong when I felt a breeze. I knew it for sure when I looked down and saw the seat of my pants still clinging to the new varnish.

Needless to say, that was another time I didn't ask for permission to leave the building. I backed out the door, hurried down the stairway and ran, trying not to turn my back on anyone all the way home.

While I was a Freshman in high school, one of my jobs at home was to hitch up a team of horses each day after school, drive seven miles to the Neinda gin, load a wagon with cottonseed, drive back home and leave it for Papa to unload the next day. But then one day I didn't make my regular trip.

In school that afternoon our teacher was called from the room for a long-distance phone call. She was gone a long time, and the longer she stayed away the worse things got in our room. Long before she returned kids were throwing erasers, throwing books, running around the room, fighting, and even running out one door, down the hall, and back into the room through another door.

When the teacher returned, she caught them in the act. I say "them" because I made it a point not to do anything contrary to rules. I had special privileges I didn't want to lose. I wanted to be trusted. As a matter of fact, there were two of us who did nothing wrong—Mable Hudson and I. But the teacher didn't know that. She told us she was ashamed of everyone of us. And she kept us all in an hour after school.

That was the cause of my missing my Neinda trip and that was why Papa was not at all happy. In fact he was very unhappy. He asked why I was late. I told him I had to stay in. He asked what I had done to have to stay in. I told him, "Nothing."

He was sure I was lying, because, he said, "Teachers don't keep kids in for nothing." Then he added, "I thought I had at least one boy I could trust to behave and tell the truth."

It was too late to haul cottonseed that day. I felt I had let the family down, but through no fault of my own. Or maybe it was my fault. Maybe I should have explained to the teacher, but I didn't. Nor did I explain further to Papa. He didn't seem to be in the mood for further talk from me.

My teachers knew me pretty well. A little explaining might have done the trick. They knew I had never lied to them. On the other hand, if I had explained to the teacher, and if she had not kept me in, I would have been called "teacher's pet" and she might have wound up being hated by my classmates. I found myself in an awkward situation where I didn't know what to do nor what to say. So I kept quiet and found myself being punished by the ones who meant the most to me, my teacher and my father.

Did I turn against them because they told me they were ashamed of me? Certainly not. I understood how it looked to them. They didn't ask any further questions, and I offered no further explanation. They still trusted me and I trusted them. And I didn't lose any of my special privileges at home or at school.

Throughout my school years, the first day of April was a special day for school kids. The afternoon of April Fools' Day was a period for students to have a good time. If the teachers would not allow a fun-party that afternoon, some of the pupils, if not all of them, would run away from school. This was customary, and if most of the kids ran away, it was generally understood that there would be little or no punishment.

I was only about nine years old the first time I ran away from school on April Fools' Day. Three of us boys slipped away at noon and soon after one-o'clock we saw that we were alone. We also knew we couldn't return to school because we would be punished for being late for our one-o'clock class.

We realized we were in trouble and would have to try to think of a way out. But first of all, we had to get farther away from the schoolhouse so the teacher wouldn't be able to find us with a search party. In fact, we ran so far away and spent such a miserable afternoon that we failed to see the other students going home from school. We had planned to join them and all arrive home at the same time. And after that—well, that was as far as a nine-year-old could plan. After that I had no idea how any good thing could happen to me.

But we were caught in our own trap. Since it was April Fools' afternoon, the teachers turned out school early. The other kids got home an hour earlier than usual. And what I got when I got home was no surprise. My biggest surprise was that I didn't get a whipping. Of course I got a good talking-to, but no whipping. That little experience taught me to be better organized next time before attempting mutiny in any form.

I believe the next time I ran away from school on April Fools' Day was when I was a Freshman in Hamlin High School. Now, it was such a long time ago I know I will not get every little detail exactly right, but for all practical purposes and intent, it happened about like this. We were well organized, to say the least.

It was April Fool's Day, one o'clock in the afternoon. We students were all seated in the study hall, each at his regularly assigned desk. In the parking lot out front were two trucks and a number of automobiles, all parked orderly and aimed in the direction of the Double Mountain River.

The entire student body had been warned that the school board would not tolerate running away on the first of April. Those who did would have all their grades lowered by ten points.

When the one o'clock bell rang, the study hall teacher said, "Rise and pass to your classes."

We stood up and passed all right, but not to our classrooms. We marched out of the study hall and downstairs, taking a select group of teachers with us. By the time the superintendent realized what was happening, we were all loaded into our vehicles and heading for a sandy playground in the channel of the river. The kidnapped teachers gave us very little trouble. They liked it.

We were told later that three girls showed up for class in one room. Their teacher asked, "What are you girls doing here?"

They told her they didn't want their grades to be lowered ten points.

And the teacher told them, "No one is going to knock ten points off your grades. Get on out from here and have a good time."

We were not only organized in making our get-away, we had also arranged for a little bit of entertainment by surprise. Three of us boys had made a man-size straw dummy, and while all the other students and teachers were playing in the sand down in the river, we boys secretly took our dummy up on a high cliff across the river, and there on the edge of that cliff, in plain view of the spectators below, Virgil Davis and I got into an argument which ended in a fight.

Before we took the straw dummy up on the cliff, we arranged for one boy to remain in the crowd below to call attention to our fight up on the cliff. We boxed and pushed and shoved and rolled and tumbled. Then we rolled behind some bushes to where we had the dummy hidden. And when I came back into view, I was wrestling the dummy instead of Virgil. When we rolled near the edge of the cliff, we struggled to our feet and I knocked him over the edge and he fell to the river below.

This was no big deal but it was different, and it brought a few screams from the gallery below.

By the first day of April the following year, the school board had decided that this April Fool thing had gone too far, and they convinced us kids that they meant business. We knew there was no way we could pull another stunt like we pulled the year before and get away with it. We accepted the new ruling and had no intention of causing any trouble.

However, just before the lunch hour that day I was talking with some boys and jokingly said, "We'd better not run away but when they tell us to pass to classes, we could just remain seated." I hadn't really meant it and we didn't plan action. If I had meant it, I would have suggested that we remain seated only a minute or less, just to demonstrate student solidarity, and that not in defiance, but rather

in fun.

But I underestimated the effects of my little suggestion and the solidarity of the student body. When one o'clock came and the teacher said, "Rise and pass to your classes," not one student got up. I was surprised. Something was happening here beyond any suggestion I had made.

Other teachers got together, whispered a few words in their huddle and one of them gave the order again, but still no one made a move. Then Mr. Hinton came out, spoke a few words of advice to us and asked us to go to our classes. This time three girls got up and went to class, perhaps the same three who showed up for class the year before.

By this time I had begun to feel guilty and uneasy. I didn't know who had planned all this nor whether it was the result of my suggestion, but I knew I could be held responsible because of what I had said. The thing had gotten out of hand and someone could get hurt. I knew that someone could be me. This just wasn't right, but I didn't want to be the one to spoil something someone else had planned, if indeed someone else had planned it, so I went along with the scheme.

Next, Mr. Greene called a student into his office. I don't remember who the student was, but he soon came back and took his seat with the rest of us. And again, another teacher asked us to respond, but we didn't.

Then Mr. Greene sent for me, and at that moment I guess I felt smaller than I had ever felt in my life. I think I could have crawled through the knothole in our back porch, through which I put so many calomel tablets when I was a little kid. I thought to myself, "This time they have caught me, I'm guilty, I'll be kicked out of school, and I have no idea how severely Papa will punish me this time."

But my worry had not been necessary. I learned right away that Mr. Greene and the teachers were not looking for someone to blame for this unpleasant incident, but rather, they were looking for a leader—a Moses, mind you, to lead these students out of the study hall and into the classrooms, thereby keeping us all out of serious trouble.

I went back and took my seat in the study hall. Again one of the teachers said, "Rise and pass to your classes."

And again no one moved. Then, about two seconds later, I stood up and said, "Let's all rise and go to our classes," and every student obeyed.

They just needed a leader, and I was there at the right time. They might not have followed me ten minutes earlier. And another thing they were waiting for was one of their own to lead them, so they would not have to yield to authority.

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **MY TRAVELS TO THE GULF, MCCAMEY AND DENVER**

As I look back I can easily see that all the ventures our family had been caught up in through the years added up to a lot of worry for parents with a bunch of kids to feed, shelter and educate. But to me they were stepping stones to a better future. Partly because of those experiences, I was building a confidence in myself which culminated in my being unafraid to tackle most anything—either with or without money, perhaps foolhardy at times, but nevertheless, still unafraid.

By this time I had done quite a bit of running around, but most all of it was close to home. I had never seen a desert, a big river, big mountains, nor an ocean. There were other things I wanted to see too, but at age nineteen I suddenly had this overwhelming desire to see an ocean,—not just any ocean, but rather one particular ocean, the Gulf of Mexico. Now, I knew the Gulf was not a real ocean, but I reasoned that it was big enough to please me. It must look a lot like an ocean. And since I happened to know that there was a good-looking little girl spending her vacation swimming in the Gulf that summer, I made up my mind right away that the Gulf was indeed the ocean I wanted to see.

I had this Model T—whoa, let's stop right here long enough to let the younger generations know that the Ford Model T was never called Model T until the Model A came along in 1928. Up until that time they were just plain Fords, all practically alike except in 1924 they began coming with balloon tires. And in those days all cars, regardless of brand name and year of manufacture, were black.



Anyway, getting on with my story, I had this Ford touring car and I wanted to see the ocean. It was only 350 miles to the Gulf, and it would take about four gallons of gas for each 100 miles— and gas was 9 cents a gallon—add two quarts of oil at 10 cents a quart—total one way only \$1.50. My goodness, I could drive down there and back and eat a week on five dollars. No problem, I had \$11 in my pocket. With that kind of money I could rent a cabin and have money left over for a few movie tickets at 15 cents each.

So, a day-and-a-half later I was standing there on the beach looking at that big body of water with that little body of a girl swimming in it. We had a wonderful time for a week, and my financial estimate turned out to be almost correct. To get back to Hamlin, I only needed \$1 more than I had. And that was on account of the girl's little brother. I hadn't figured there would be three of us so much of the time. But I soon learned that the third party could add up to an extra dollar in just a few days, as well as taking away a lot of the pleasure I had planned.

And so, that was another time I started home on just a little money. I knew that the girl or her father would have been glad to lend me a dollar. But I wasn't about to let them know I was that near broke. I was a big boy, an independent man, out on my own. At least that's the way I wanted it to look to them. But to me it looked altogether different.

I had \$1.20 in my pocket when I headed out for Hamlin. But I wasn't afraid; there was no anxiety. I had been in tight spots before. There was not even any hurry. I stopped along the road to pick up hitchhikers. One fellow I picked up was heading for a ranch somewhere near Mason. He rode with me a long way. His home was about six miles off the highway in wild country, and it was a hot day. I told him my money situation and he told me how he hated the thought of having to walk six miles on a hot day carrying a suitcase. I offered to drive him home for a dollar. It was a deal. I drove him right up to his house, he paid me the dollar, and I sailed right on into Hamlin without any trouble.

I think a lot of my self-confidence came from reading the Bible and one other little book. After we moved to Hamlin, someone gave me a set of little leather-backed books. They were so small four of them would fit in my shirt pocket, maybe even five or six. One was titled "As A Man Thinketh." It was my favorite. I read it through many times and kept it long after the others had disappeared one by one. It was rich food for thought and it strengthened my trust in me and in my fellow man. Its teachings helped me over many a rough spot. Wherever I was, whatever I was doing, whatever the circumstances, its philosophy made me unafraid. And being unafraid, I would tackle most anything.

For instance, there was a kid in Hamlin who had an old motorcycle he couldn't get to run. For some reason he thought I might be able to make it run, so he brought it to me to piddle with. It didn't take long for me to get the motor running. But I should have looked it over better before I tried to ride it. It proved to be quite a wreck and it had certain parts which were ready to come apart from other parts which were supposed to stay connected together.

After I started the machine, I took it out on main street and headed toward down-town Hamlin. It was going pretty good when I discovered the throttle wire had broken and the throttle insisted on remaining wide open. I tried to cut off the gasoline at the carburetor, but it was too hot to handle. By this time I was a lot closer to town than I meant to be and was traveling a lot faster than I wanted to be. I couldn't switch the thing off because it had no switch. It usually died when I closed the throttle, but this time I couldn't close the throttle.

What should I do? I could jump off and let the thing go. But then there was a good chance the machine would suffer great damage. I was certain I would suffer, and I didn't like the idea of looking at my own blood. Nor would I enjoy hurting here and there all over my body.

Quickly I thought about what made the thing go, gasoline and spark. The gasoline was beyond my control. The spark—let's see- -can't get to the spark plug wires, but I can get to the magneto. Two clips held the back end of the magneto on. Did I dare try to steer the thing with one hand at the speed I was going, while I leaned over and tried to take the mag apart with my other hand? Why not try it? If I fall, so what? I was going to fall anyway. And I just might succeed. It was my only hope, I had to succeed. So I did it. I took the mag apart and it stopped. And that's the way this motorcycle story ended, just one city block short of down-town Hamlin.

A few years later I bought myself a good used motorcycle. It was an Indian Scout and it proved to be the best little machine I could ever hope to own. It could do everything but cook. We kids had a lot of fun riding it all over Hamlin. On the paved street I had as many as six of us on it at once, one on the handle bars, two on the gas tank, me on the seat and two on behind. Sure I was in the driver's seat; it was mine wasn't it?

I well remember one time I got on the little machine and went down through San Angelo and on out

to McCamey. The trucking business was slow at that time and I wasn't especially needed at home.

It began to rain as I rode west out of San Angelo. And as I went farther west I ran onto a lot of new road construction. The road became muddy and boggy beyond description, and the rain kept falling. Of course you know you can't ride a motorcycle on slick, muddy roads, nor in water on muddy roads. But you can walk along beside it and hold it up and guide it while the motor pulls it along. That is, you can until the water gets too deep, like where it flows across the road in cement dips. That's what I was doing until I came to one such place and I knew the water was far too deep to try to cross. It was a real river of water. I doubt that an army tank could have made it across. Anyway, cars and trucks couldn't have crossed it. Come to think of it, there were no cars nor trucks on the road. I hadn't seen one during the last two or three hours. In fact, I think there was only one person on that sloppy road between San Angelo and McCamey—and he was a crazy kid on a motorcycle.

Some people might wonder why the boy didn't turn around and go back. But I knew the kid personally, and I knew he wasn't in the habit of starting something and then turning back. He never even gave it a thought that he should go back. He was headed west, and turning back wouldn't get him out west.

There was a railroad beside the highway. If I could get my cycle up on the railroad, I could cross the creek on the railroad bridge. But there was a ditch full of rushing water between me and the railroad. The banks of the ditch were steep, especially on the side next to the railroad. The water in the ditch was at least waist deep and the ditch was twice that deep. So now what do I do? There was just one thing to do, build a bridge across the ditch.

I started walking along the railroad and finally found one loose crosstie. I put it on my shoulder, carried it and placed it across the ditch. It was just long enough. But I knew I couldn't very well balance a motorcycle on one slick crosstie without another tie for me to walk on beside the machine. Again I looked all up and down the railroad but there wasn't another tie nor a piece of lumber—not even a fence post. I finally thought to myself, "So what? Let's not just stand here in the rain doing nothing. Let's try it." We did. That is, we tried it. We didn't make it, but we got half way across before I slipped and fell.

Even before I hit the water, I glanced back and saw the motorcycle leaning toward me and I thought to myself, "Boy, you better hit that water on the run or that thing is going to be right down on top of you." So I dived down stream. The rushing water helped carry me from beneath the falling motorcycle.

I struggled to my feet against the angry current, blew muddy water out of my mouth, brushed it out of my eyes and witnessed the worst setback I had suffered in my life.

The bridge was okay, but the idea that I could balance me and a motorcycle on one narrow crosstie was a complete failure. We didn't make it across the bridge and the cycle didn't stay up there on it. But I knew where my little Scout was hiding. I could see one handle bar sticking up out of the water.

There was probably no other person within forty miles, but as I stood there in that muddy water, I seemed to hear Someone shout to me, "All right Boy, don't just stand there! Get busy and get that thing out of there before it gets full of muddy water." I fought my way upstream, stumbling over the cycle on my way to the visible handle bar. I got two hands full of motorcycle and tried to stand it up on its wheels, but it wasn't easy. And even when I got it up, it was still mostly under water.

The banks of the ditch were steep and slick. It was hard for me to stand, and the swift current was not friendly. I slipped and fell a time or two. It seemed hopeless and the little Scout was so heavy. And then I seemed to hear that inner voice again, "Heave, Boy, heave! No, stupid, not back on the highway—up on the railroad! First one end, now the other end. Tumble it over, you can't mess it up any more than it is already. Okay, so you did it. Now wash your nasty self up and get out of that muddy water."

Now I was faced with still another problem, would the machine ever run again? I doubted it, not for days anyway. But it was a long way to anywhere from this place. If the motor wouldn't run, I would really be in trouble. It would be too hard to push in the mud. I had nothing to eat, there was not a house in sight, and there was certainly no place to spread a blanket to sleep through the night. So I had to try something, but what? While I was trying to find the answer to that question, I got straddle of the little Scout to sit and rest and think. Then, mostly through force of habit, and with no faith nor hope whatsoever, I gave the starter a kick. It didn't start but it sounded like it had always sounded, not bad, not full of muddy water. I figured even if it wouldn't start, another kick wouldn't harm it. So I gave it a second try. It still didn't start.

Then I remembered that there had been times under normal circumstances when it required four or five kicks to start the motor. So with that in mind, the faith and hope which I had rejected a short time

before, were feebly creeping back into my mind. And with that change in my attitude, I kicked the starting pedal the third time. Well, you can't imagine my surprise when it started and ran like a new cycle on that third try. I was thrilled and overjoyed. I had always had faith in myself, but until now I had never had that much faith in motors. After that, I felt there was no place I couldn't go with a machine like that working for me.

I crossed the big water on the railroad bridge and then got back on the muddy highway. The next time I came to a dip with a lot of water in it, I walked right through with that little Scout puffing along beside me. When water came up over the exhaust pipe, it kept puffing right along. Then water got up over the magneto, then over the spark plugs, and the motor never missed a shot. However, I watched closely to see that water didn't get into the carburetor suction. Everything else was under water and the motor still ran perfectly. She was a real little Scout. If she could have cooked, I would have married her.

But years later when I finally did get married, I could easily see that I would have gotten very little comfort from snuggling up to a wet motorcycle on a cold winter night.

The road and the rain were the same all the way to McCamey. There was an oil boom out there. Jobs were plentiful. Crime and violence were apt to show up at any time. They told me a man was shot down in the street the day before I got there. I couldn't prove it if I had wanted to. They had already carried him away, and I didn't look for the man who shot him.

I got a job with the Sun Oil Company and worked two days. The hottest sun that ever hovered over a desert came out to greet us early in the morning and remained all day. By midafternoon it was unbearable. In those two days I decided that cutting grease-wood to clear a right-of-way for a pipe line was not for me. I would much rather do carpenter work. The wage for carpenters was nine dollars a day; helpers got six dollars. I was not a carpenter, so I thought it best to tell the truth. I signed on as a helper.

They were just about to start building a bunk house when I went to work. The carpenters came to me with a problem none of them could solve. They knew how long to build the house and they knew how many windows to put in it and they knew how wide each window was, but they couldn't figure out how much space to leave between the windows. They asked me if I was good at math and could I figure it out for them. I was good, I could figure it out for them, I did figure it out for them, then we went to work on the house.

After working at that job a few days, I decided that carpentering in McCamey was not to be my vocation either. I was a home-loving boy and McCamey was not my home. A dollar a day in Hamlin appealed to me more than six dollars a day in McCamey. In the first place I didn't really want to work. I mostly wanted to run around a little, see a little of the outside world and see how other people had to work.

By this time I was running low on money and payday was a week away. I had to decide quickly whether I wanted to work here or go home. If I stayed, the company would advance me a little money for board until payday. But my real question was, did I want to work that long. I couldn't afford to get too low on money and be forced to stay until payday, if I really wanted to go home. It took about three minutes for me to make up my mind. During that three minutes I counted my money and found almost enough to take me home. My decision was final, I was going to Hamlin. It was after work hours and the office was closed. But they had my address and knew where to send my pay, come payday.

Again I counted my money. It hadn't increased at all. I couldn't get all the way home on it, but I could get a lot closer than I was at the time. It was 240 miles to Hamlin. I would have to eat at least one meal and I would have to spend a night on the road somewhere. I counted my money a third time. Would you believe it, 95 cents, that's all. It seemed mighty small and weak, considering what all I was planning for it to do for me. But there was really nothing to worry about; I had a half-tank of gas and I wouldn't need more than a quart of oil. With any luck at all I figured I ought to get close to Sweetwater before I ran out of money and gas and oil. And Sweetwater was only 45 miles from Hamlin.

It was almost sundown and I hadn't eaten since noon. Any kind of a little meal would take all of my 95 cents. So I went to a grocery store and paid a dime for two eggs. Then I went out back, cracked them one at a time and let them slide their way down. They didn't make the best tasting meal in the world, but our football coach had convinced me that it was a nourishing one.

By now it had stopped raining but the road was rough and the ruts were deep. Travel was slow on a motorcycle. It was way after dark by the time I got to Rankin, still 225 miles from Hamlin. But I didn't like to travel in the dark so I camped for the night.

I spread my blanket on the board walk by the front door of a small store and went to bed. Before sleep overtook me, I thought back on the last few days and on the beautiful night, and especially on the tomorrow I was about to experience. Could I go all day with nothing to eat? Sure I could. I had gone almost that long before without food. I knew that only one of us could afford to eat this time—either that little Indian Scout or me. This time I had to take care of her first. She would take me home, I could eat after I got there.

Next morning before the town's people began to stir, I rolled up my blanket and was on my way. In San Angelo I drained my pocketbook for gas and oil. On the road between there and Sweetwater, I drained the Scout's gas tank. I pulled into a filling station in Sweetwater with barely enough gas in my tank to wet the end of a stick. I gave the man a check for a dollar, filled up with gas and oil and got home with seventy cents in my pocket—and mighty hungry.

When I got my check for carpenter work in McCamey, I found that they paid me nine dollars a day instead of six. Maybe they paid six dollars a day to those who couldn't figure feet and inches between windows.

If you are beginning to get the idea that I was spoiled and didn't like to work, you are half right, I was spoiled. But the part about not liking to work is wrong. I liked to work; I was just choosy about the kind of work and where the work happened to be located. I had begun to realize that there was no need to go way off somewhere looking for work.

Perhaps that realization was the reason for my riding a train to Denver just to get a job washing dishes in a cafe. And a few days later I went high in the Rockies to work at a sawmill. That was knowledge working in reverse. I knew better; I just wanted to see some more of the world. In the Bible we are told to get knowledge and wisdom, then it adds, "And with all thy getting, get understanding." I suppose the understanding was the ingredient which was lacking in my getting.

Anyway, I landed at a sawmill 75 miles west of Denver, doing whatever they asked me to do. It was cold up there; man, I mean it was plenty cold! One morning it was 20 below zero, and that was two weeks before Thanksgiving. The lumber mill was in a valley between high mountains. During the three weeks I was there I saw the sun a couple of times. It didn't rise over the peaks until about nine-thirty in the morning and it set behind other peaks at four-thirty in the afternoon. We went to work before daylight and quit after dark. In the extreme cold, when the wind was calm, as I walked through the cold air, it felt like hot branding irons against my face.

One day five of us men were moving some cord wood and restacking it in another place. The foreman came and asked if any of us had ever driven a truck. I kept quiet because I had already seen the old truck and I didn't want any part of trying to drive it in the snow. It had solid rubber tires, no doors on the cab, and no antifreeze in its leaky radiator. The earth was completely covered with snow. I suppose there was earth somewhere under the snow; however, I didn't see any of it while I was there. Besides all that, there was not a level place within 50 miles. Everything was uphill, downhill, or leaning to one side or the other.

The other four men were eager to get out of the job we were doing, so each one tried to tell the foreman that he would be just the man to drive the truck. I kept my back to the foreman and kept working while he talked to the other men. I thought I might be lucky enough to escape having to drive the old truck. But no such luck. The foreman came up behind me, tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "You ever drive a truck?"

I could not tell a lie, so I told him, "A little." Then he and I went away together to one old dilapidated truck.

That was another case of my getting more understanding through experience and research, neither of which was intentional. Now, you may or may not know that, in a snowy place like that, where snow is forever, the snow in the ruts of a road is hard-packed snow, and stacked up, and the snow on either side of the ruts is loose, fluffy snow.

When driving on a muddy road, your truck is apt to slide into the ruts and you might not be able to get it out. But on a snowy road, your truck is more than apt to slide off the ruts and you might not be able to get it back up on them. And if you get your front wheels off the ruts to the right and your hind wheels off to the left, you have just about had it, especially a truck with solid rubber tires.

I was using the truck to haul crossties to the Moffat Tunnel. The ties were to be used in the railroad through the tunnel. The tunnel was eight miles long and would cut 25 miles off the railroad distance through the Rockies. The railroad which served our mill was curved one way or the other just about every foot of its entire length. A 30-car train would have three engines pulling it. And the three engines

would not all be at the front end of the train. That would have a tendency to pull the cars off the rails on sharp curves. So, the engines were placed at regular intervals between the cars. Even with all safety precautions we constantly heard of derailments and the loss of freight cars down the mountain sides. The trains had no time schedules; they got there when they could.

I signed on for that lumber mill job at an employment agency in Denver and rode a bus to the mill. Naturally I was not clothed for that cold weather. But the bookkeeper at the mill told me to go to the company store, get what I needed and have it charged. That was before I started to work. That same night, in the bunk house, one man was raving mad because they wouldn't credit him at the company store. He and I had come out on the same bus and were to begin work the next morning. I kept quiet about my credit. I didn't want him mad at me like he was at the company.

One day the foreman told me to go to the tool house and bring him a half-dozen picaroons. Now, I knew how many a half dozen was, but I didn't have the slightest idea what a picaroon looked like nor what it was used for. What's more I was too proud, or too stupid to tell him I didn't know. So I went to the tool house and looked at all the tools. I knew the names of all the tools except one. I took him six of those, hoping they were picaroons. I don't know what I would have done if there had been two kinds of tools I didn't know the names of. Anyhow, he thanked me and I went back to my other work.

In case you may not know, a picaroon is like a single-bladed ax on a regular ax handle, except most of the ax blade is cut away, leaving only a pick instead of a blade. The workman can thrust the pick into the side of a log to roll it over, or he can stab it into the end of a small log and lift the log into a desired place.

Another time, the foreman came to me and asked whether I could handle a horse. Again I could not tell a lie. However, I knew he was speaking of Old Nig, and I also knew it would be a pleasure for me to work for Old Nig.

Now, Old Nig was a black horse, and I'm not sure, but I think his color had something to do with his being named Nig. This horse had won first place in the state one year for his skill in the art of log-skidding. That alone meant that Old Nig was a horse to respect as well as to obey. I had watched a few men work with the horse but had never seen one of them stay with him for long. In fact, Old Nig changed drivers three times one day. He simply wouldn't put up with anyone who cussed him or scolded him. He knew more about the log-skidding business than most of the men he had to put up with. He didn't need anyone to drive him nor try to boss him around. Mostly what Old Nig needed was a man to work for him, to pull his single-tree back when he backed up, so he wouldn't step on it, and he needed a man to hook him onto the next log. He had no hands or he could have done it himself.

If you scolded or cussed Old Nig, he would bite you, if and when he got the chance. Or he might stomp his hind foot and switch his tail just to remind you there was fire in that end of him too. One man who worked with the horse was so afraid he might say the wrong thing to him that he put a rein on his bridle and led him around all day without saying anything to him.

So, when they put me with Old Nig, I already knew more about the horse than I did about log-skidding. We got along well together. What I didn't know about the job, he did. I just talked to Old Nig as I would talk to you; that is, I would be as kind to you as I was to Old Nig as long as you did your work as well as he did his. I didn't care whether he had a bridle on or not. I didn't need to lead him nor drive him. He knew where to go and what to do. And without a bridle, he could see better how to do his work. I would tell the horse when to back up another few inches and when to get over to the right or to the left. Principally I was his hooker-upper and his unhooker.

One day we were sorting a pile of logs, skidding the small ones over by a pile of other small ones, the medium size ones by a pile of medium ones and so on. But there was not a pile of large ones on the yard. So I hooked Old Nig to a large log and told him I'd have to find out where to put it. Then I went to the office and asked the foreman where to put the big logs. In the meantime, the horse took the log to the proper place but I didn't know it. He was already standing there waiting for me to unhook him from it. The foreman came to the door, pointed, and said, "Put it up there where Old Nig took it. He knows where."

Thanksgiving came and went, and the sawmill changed owners. The foreman told me that the new owner thought he could run the mill with fewer workers. I was laid off. However, he was sure that, if I wanted to stay around a week or two, they would need me. He also told me that, if I wanted to leave, I had better go right away because that place was often snowbound by this time of the year and there was no way out until next spring. So again I landed back in Hamlin with a little more knowledge of the outside world and perhaps just a wee bit more understanding. I got a job in Hamlin and soon paid Papa back the \$22 he had wired me for a railroad ticket home from Denver.

Papa was always kind to me in spite of all my failures and my goings and comings. I respected him for it and was proud of him. I was proud of Mama too, but there was an unspoken mutual feeling of trust and regard between Papa and me that reached beyond the bounds of a boy's expectations. The following poem which I wrote while I was in Denver, expresses, in some small measure, my feelings toward my father.

Daddy, if the Lord had made you  
A companion fit for me,  
If He'd made you noble minded,  
As I think a man should be,  
If He'd given you a courage  
And a will to fight and win,  
If He'd made your life a great one  
From beginning to the end,  
If He'd made you with integrity  
Higher than the highest star,  
Then He would have made you, Daddy,  
Just exactly as you are.

## CHAPTER 14

### HAUL MAIZE, REPAIR TRUCKS, TURN TRUCKS OVER

While I was running around I was getting a lot of experience, some knowledge, and perhaps a little wisdom. But I didn't seem to be getting rid of all my stupidity. Perhaps stupid is not the word to use here. I don't really believe I was a stupid kid. But let's just say I was a normal boy who did stupid things at times.

Anyway, when I look back on some of those things I did in my younger days, as well as some in my older days, it causes me to be a little more lenient with youngsters these days who sometimes do things without thinking. I have not always taken time to look back on my own mistakes

For instance, after I was old enough to hitch a team to a wagon and haul cottonseed from the Neinda gin to the oilmill at Hamlin, I was still not smart enough to cover up all my crazy deeds. What did I do this time? Nothing much, really.

I remember once one of my brothers and I bought a big box of matches in Neinda and lighted the weeds and grass along the fence rows from there almost to Hamlin. We would strike the matches and throw them into the grass and weeds. It's a wonder we didn't set our load of cottonseed on fire. It was after dark and the fires made beautiful fireworks. We even wondered why farmers didn't do this more often. We thought we were really doing them a favor, cleaning up their fence row. And it was a lot of fun.

"And with all thy getting, get understanding." Well, we got some understanding when a farmer drove up beside our wagon in his car, and very politely explained that he realized we boys had not thought about the fence posts we were burning and the wires we were damaging by heating them too much. Then he added that he knew our daddy, and he knew that Papa wouldn't want us to do what we were doing. Then he promised not to tell Papa, if we wouldn't set any more fires.

He was right; we hadn't thought of the damage we were doing. We were sorry, of course. And we certainly didn't want to do anything that would reflect on Papa and the family's good name. Nor did we want Papa to know what we had done. I guess he never found out or he would have said something to us about it.

While we lived in Hamlin, Papa had an old farm twelve miles northwest of town. The field was covered in Johnson grass and we tried to help the grass grow by plowing the field every year. We had a breaking plow, a mowing machine, a hay rake and a hay baler, all horse-drawn. We baled the hay and stored it to sell in winter when it would bring a better price. There was an old rundown house on the farm. I went out to plow the field at times and I slept in the house rather than drive back and forth to Hamlin. There were no near neighbors. It was way, way out, and staying there at night proved to be challenging and quite scary.

The doors of the old house were only half there—sagging, splintered, and broken, and the windows were all broken out.

Noises jumped out at me from every dark corner. The silence seemed to amplify every noise. Mice sounded like jungle beasts and packrats made loud noises like goats playing on the roof. Daybreak was always welcome, melting the darkness and pushing back the veil of fear.

The warehouse which my brother Earl still uses as a freight depot was originally built for hay storage. In haying season we baled the hay and hauled it to that hay barn. In the hay field, we usually had, among other things, canned pork and beans for dinner. Once in awhile we had pork and beans at home for a meal, but Albert said they didn't taste good unless he was sitting on a bale of hay.

Papa also had another farm twelve miles south of Hamlin, in deep shinnery sand. I'm not sure how he got hold of it nor why he owned it. I think he had to take it in on a land deal of some sort in order to get the other party to take something off his hands that he had and didn't want. Now he had a sandy farm on his hands that he couldn't use and didn't want. There wasn't much of anything of value on the land—a rundown peach orchard and a half-dugout. There was a dug well by the house four feet across and 60 feet deep. There was never any water in it, but 100 yards away out in the orchard was another well about three feet deep with water standing within a foot of the top of the ground. There was no cover over it; you just walked up and dipped a bucket of water any time you wanted it. And when you were not dipping, the cows and horses could drink from it.

In the early 1920's many of our inter-city buses were marked with well-painted names, such as MISS DALLAS or MISS ABILENE. Well, I had a Model T Ford touring car and I thought I might just as well join the parade. First I got a set of good used tires off a big Buick. They were about four sizes too big for the Ford, but I put them on anyway. And with only ten pounds of air in the tires, it rode very smoothly and it looked like a clubfooted horse.

Then I cut the top down small to cover only the back seat. And I put a windshield on the back of the front seat. That made two windshields, one in front of the driver and one in front of the passengers in the back seat. It made a beautiful limousine, with the driver sitting out in the sun and weather. To top it all off I painted her name on both front doors—MISS FORTUNE. Of course we kids had a million dollars worth of fun with it.

After we Johnsons got a little money ahead, we made some improvements on our house. For one thing, we added a long back porch, all glassed-in with windows the entire length of it. Then we added a bathroom with all the fixtures. And on the back porch we put a lavatory to wash our face and hands in, when the bathroom door happened to be locked. Sometimes we kids would come in to wash up after unloading a load of hay, and when two or three of us were using the lavatory at the same time, one of us might casually flip a few drops of water in another one's face. Now that usually called for retaliation, which took place immediately. And that in turn called for counter-retaliation with a lot more than just a few drops of water—perhaps a big handful and then a cupful.

By this time we usually heard from Mama from wherever she happened to be, as she shouted, "Stop that." And if she came out to enforce her command, she might get some of the same. Of course Mama knew what she would get into, and I really think she wanted into it. She only pretended she wanted us to stop. It made it funnier that way and it relieved her of the responsibility for having instigated the action. Mama had running water in the kitchen which was just as wet as the water we had on the porch and there was a 50-50 chance that she had some already drawn up in a stew pan. So when she said, "Stop it," she may as well have said, "Stop it after we all get wet." We usually ended up being as wet as if we had jumped in the lake, and everyone laughing.

This was the age of cars and we had our share of them through the years. The same old Dodge that ran over Albert and killed the hen for supper had a magneto that kept giving trouble, and it cost a fortune to have it repaired each time. This was before I had learned much about cars. In fact, this old car taught me a lot about other cars to come.

The car had a battery. So, I thought I could use Model T coils to make the spark and use the mag as a distributor. That would be less expensive than trying to keep the mag in repair. I got it all rigged up and it worked some, but it was not a success. The battery didn't fire the Model T coils well enough. That was another one of my ideas I flunked out on.

There was a farm family in our neighborhood by the name of Owen. And in that family was a boy named Bill. My brother Frank ran around quite a bit with Bill. Pretty soon Bill's sister, Mattie, got to running around with Frank. Bill had a younger brother named Joe, and I got to running around with Joe. To complicate things still further, Joe had a younger sister named Faye, and she got to running around with me. That seems like a lot of running around for just a few kids, but it happens that way

sometimes.

One day I was out on the farm visiting with Joe, and now and then I was glancing in the direction of Faye when Joe and I discovered Frank's trunk in Mattie's bedroom, which was quite all right since Frank and Mattie were married by this time.

Joe and I knew that Frank kept a 45 revolver in the bottom of his trunk. We also knew that Frank and Mattie were not home that day. Faye and her parents were home but they didn't know that Joe and I were prowling in Frank's trunk. We were whispering and tiptoeing.

We took the 45 and a bunch of shells and slipped off out into the pasture to shoot something. A gallon can was the only thing that would sit still for us, so we fired at it. We tried and tried but decided we must be too far away; we never did hit it. I had thought that a 45 would shoot as far as six or eight steps, but I guess not. Or it could be we missed because the gun kept kicking up at the front end every time we pulled the trigger.

Anyway, we didn't know that Frank had returned home and we were so wrapped up in our target practice that we didn't see him until he was right upon us. Then it was too late to run. And for one time in my life I couldn't think of anything to say. We just stood there in surprise, prepared for the worst. Then we got a bigger surprise. Frank walked up to us and said, "There are plenty of shells in the bottom of my trunk when you run out." And with that, he gave us a few pointers on firing a pistol and walked away.

Before Papa got his freight line from Hamlin to Stamford, he had one truck and was looking for anything to haul that would help us make a living. He took one job of hauling that shouldn't happen to a dog. There was a man buying maize heads one summer and shipping them by rail to somewhere. This was the surplus maize farmers had left from last year's crop, after they had used all they needed for feed through the winter and spring. The man bought the maize from farmers and then told us where to go pick it up. Then we hauled it from the farms and loaded it into railroad boxcars.

You may not know it, but each and every maize seed has a little stinger on it. These stingers are bad enough when you get the heads out of the field in the fall and fork them into a storage bin. In the fall you are working most of the time out in the open air. But when that feed lies in storage all winter, it dries out month after month and it collects dust from West Texas weather and from the grains themselves where mice, rats, and birds have eaten, slept and roosted. And then, when you load it into a truck, you have to get in the storage bin, under a sheet metal roof, with a blazing sun bearing down on the roof. And each little stinger on each grain is harder and more brittle than it was in the fall, and all these stingers break off the seeds more easily, more of them mix in with the dust, and they get into your eyes, your nose, down your collar and lodge in the wrinkles of your stomach, and they get in under your arms and around the tops of your shoes and they dig into your ankles. Eventually, there is not any place on your body that doesn't sting and itch. What's more, the stinging and itching goes on after a bath. Now I believe you will agree with me—it shouldn't happen to a dog. When you have a job like that, you hate it, you detest it, and you dread having to face it the next day. But you do it, and you keep on doing it until the job is finished, because you like to eat, and the job pays money and you have to earn money in order to eat.

Do you get the picture? Well, wait a minute, I'm only half through. We have yet to haul the maize to the railroad car, fork it into the car, then get into the car and pitch it all the way back to both ends and all the way to the ceiling. Did you ever work in a boxcar on a hot day in summertime? You choke on dust, you sweat, and each and every drop of sweat becomes a parking lot for dust and maize stingers that show no mercy.

Of course it helps to get home after a day of such torture and get a good bath. But some of the cars we loaded were in Roby. After a day of agony, we had to drive 22 miles over rough, crooked roads in a slow truck before we could get a bath.

In war, I have heard of torturing prisoners to get information from them. I have often wondered if they have thought of trying the maize-torture treatment.

There were other better jobs of course. One of my first jobs on Saturdays during my school years, aside from working for Papa, was in a grocery store. Mr. Gay was operating the Farm Bureau store. He offered me a job and I took it.

Come Saturday morning, Mr. Gay put me to sacking up beans, peas and potatoes in paper bags, getting them ready to sell. During the day we ran out of one item and a customer asked me where he would find another grocery store. I told him, but when the rush was over and we were alone, Mr. Gay



told me never to send a customer to our competitor. He said tell them to try the drug store up on the corner. Then he added, "And if we run out of coffee, sell them split peas."

At the end of that first Saturday Mr. Gay paid me three dollars. I told him that was twice as much as he had offered me. He said he had fired two boys he was paying \$1.50 each and that I did more work than both of them together. He paid me three dollars a day all the time I worked for him.

Another job in my younger days was working at Hudson's Filling Station for Sox and Red Hudson. The pay was ten cents an hour—keep my own time and pay myself from the cash register every Saturday night.

We did some overhauls and a lot of tune-up work. One farmer had a Model T Ford that had a weak magneto. It would run only on the battery and Fords didn't run good except on mag. He needed \$21 for a motor overhaul. But he was a poor boy and didn't have that kind of money. So I asked him if I might take a look at his coil points. He told me I couldn't do them any good, he had just come from the Ford garage where a mechanic had adjusted them. But Sox told him, "Let Clarence look at them, he won't do them any harm."

Now, the Ford mechanic only knew how to set the points for a strong magneto, and this mag was weak. I knew that a weak mag needed a weak diet, so I adjusted his points so that a weak mag would fire them. Fifteen minutes later the man drove away with his car running like a new one—on the magneto. A year later he was still running on the mag and had not had the motor overhauled. What did we charge the man? Nothing. He was a regular customer, and we did little things like that for our customers.

Speaking of repairing, one night I was driving a truck from Ft. Worth to Hamlin. The rotor in the distributor was a slip-on thing made of bakelite. I knew it was cracked but it was still working well. However, before I got home it broke into a lot of little pieces so small there was no way to use any part of it. It happened at night and caught me without a flashlight, way out in the country between towns. Working in the dark, feeling my way, I wrapped adhesive tape all over the upper end of the shaft. Then I stuck part of a safety pin through the tape to what I thought was about the right distance, and it worked. It gave no more trouble all the way home.

For some reason that same truck kept burning out bearings in the back connecting rod. Each time it happened, it cost \$26 to have a mechanic repair it. The next time it burned out, I asked Papa to let me repair it. I figured there had to be a reason for this continuing trouble, and it seemed that mechanics were not hunting the cause, but were only replacing the bearing each time. I had been thinking about the thing and I sort of figured I knew what was wrong, and I thought I knew more than the general run of mechanics. But Earl told Papa not to let me try repairing it. He said, "Clarence is not a mechanic; he can't do that job."

And Papa told him, "It looks like the ones who have been trying it are not mechanics either. At least it won't cost me \$26."

So Papa let me do the repair work, and that was the last time that bearing ever gave trouble. We drove the old truck for years and then sold it to Calvin Carriker for a farm truck. The bearing lasted the life of the truck, and unless someone looked in after the truck was junked, no one knows how I remedied the problem. I can't help it if I'm smarter than the average mechanic—and Earl.

You may think I'm bragging. Of course I'm bragging. But it's all right to brag on yourself; the Bible says so, according to a Baptist deacon I knew in Arkansas. He would quote, "Blessed is the man who tooteth his own horn, because, if a man tooteth not his own horn, lo, it shall not be tooted." And if you asked him where he finds that in the Bible, he would say, "In the book of Fizzlums."

Now, I guess you are wondering where in the Bible is this book of Fizzlums. Well, the deacon and I both knew an old man, a good man who read his Bible but didn't go to church much, and he had a very limited formal education. However, he remembered that in English spelling, Ph is pronounced like F. So when he came to Psalms in the Bible, he got a little confused and got Ph and Ps mixed up and tried to pronounce Psalms as though it were spelled Falms. Now, you've got to admit that is a hard word to pronounce. But the old man had worked on it for years and it finally became "Fizzlums". And that's where the deacon found the horn-tooting scripture.

At one time Jones County was one of the most productive cotton counties in Texas. Hamlin was in the heart of cotton country. In cotton picking time Black people came from East Texas by the hundreds to help pick the cotton. Most of them who had cars had Ford cars. Now the headlights on Fords were a constant source of trouble, especially if kids riding on the front fenders happened to accidentally kick

the wires loose from the headlights. Most mechanics wanted to repair the lighting system with a lot of new parts at a cost of maybe two dollars to four dollars. But each cottonpicker told other cottonpickers that there was a boy (me) down there at Hudson's Filling Station that would fix their lights for maybe a quarter—not over 50 cents.

And so it came to pass that, on Saturday nights a lot of lights needed fixing so that a lot of hard-working boys could do a lot of stepping out with a lot of girls. Most of them didn't need lights during the week. But Saturday was payday, time to celebrate and have a good time. And besides, the next day was Sunday, a day of rest. No one picked cotton on Sundays.

I usually made quite a few quarters on Saturday nights after my regular hours. As a matter of fact, I often made more money after my quitting time than I had made all day, because after that time, all I took in for labor was mine.

But even this filling station work wasn't all rosy. One night a burglar broke into our station. He came in through a back window and took a few little things, including some money. The next day I made a switch that would turn on a light when the window was raised, and I slept in the back room. We knew he would be frightened away by a light switching on, so I hid the bulb down in my pajamas so it would wake me up but not light up the room. The burglar came back one night and raised the window, but he didn't come in. He left the window up and ran. We didn't catch him but he stopped visiting us.

Another burglar visited me while I was working at another filling station. I was sleeping in the station, way up on top of a tire rack. The kid woke me up prying up the back window. I watched him come in and go to the cash register. He had his back to me and didn't even know I was there. I had no gun or anything, not even a ball bat. We were not expecting burglars. Rather, we offered all night emergency service and I slept there to serve anyone who was caught in an emergency.

Well, since I had no gun, I reached up on a shelf and got a bottle of shellac in each hand and told the boy to stay where he was and raise his hands. He obeyed, which was both a surprise and a relief to me. Then I climbed down, turned on all the lights inside and outside and waited for the nightwatchman to come by. The boy was about 16, and well behaved. I didn't have to capture him—didn't even touch him. We talked and he waited patiently. We learned later that he had broken into three stations that night in Hamlin and had gotten less than fifty cents, poor kid.

We were living in town but we still liked to go hunting out in the country once in awhile. One day Earl, Joel and I had been out shooting rabbits and prairie dogs with our 22 rifles. When we came back, Earl got out of the car downtown and asked Joel to take his gun in the house when we got home. His gun was the hammerless type; you couldn't easily tell when it was loaded or unloaded. When Joel carried his own gun and Earl's gun into the house, Mama said, "Oh, I'm so afraid of guns! Are you sure they are unloaded?"

Joel told her that he was sure about his own, but he didn't know about Earl's. Then he aimed Earl's at the ceiling and pulled the trigger. It shot a hole through the ceiling, and Joel turned to Mama and calmly said, "Now it's unloaded."

Do I always have to tell you what Mama said? Can't you just imagine?

Now, Joel didn't only shoot small holes through ceilings; one day he was sitting in his room with his pump shotgun lying across his lap. He had finished cleaning it and was throwing shells in and out of the barrel, distributing oil to all working parts. He must have gotten some of the oil on his thumb, because it slipped off the hammer accidentally and fired one of the shells, and it made the prettiest little round hole—about an inch across—through the inside window facing, the shiplap wallboard, the outside weatherboarding and the outside window facing. Fortunately, there was no one out in the yard at that place at that time. Joel argued that the added ventilation would contribute to his better health.

Joel also had his fling at truck driving for Papa. On one particular day he was driving on a dirt road, and I really think the road was wet and slick, but rumor has it that he just might have gone to sleep. Anyhow, his truck wound up in a ditch. It didn't roll all the way over, but it leaned over against the far bank with two wheels up in the air. His cargo was scattered along a farmer's fence and some of it went through the fence into the pasture. But Joel was lucky. The only damage suffered was loss of time, a lot of work, and one torn sack of flour.

We owned a lot of trucks through the years, but Papa's first truck, which he had let Frank have, and which Frank had let Papa have back later, was a Master by name. It really was a good truck in its day. It had no battery; a magneto fired the plugs to make the engine run and a presto gas tank on one running board furnished gas for the headlights. When night came, you pulled over and stopped, turned on the presto gas, and lighted the headlamps with a match.

Now, presto lights were not the best lights in the world. They were not so much for lighting the way to see where you were going as they were to let others see that you were coming. At today's speed it seems that presto lights might not show more than a few feet ahead. A fast driver of today might have to slow up to allow the light beams to get on out front a little way.

Anyhow, that's the way it was one night when Papa was driving and I, too young to drive, was keeping him company. We were in a little town somewhere in Texas and as you know, every little town has a river running through it, or at least a small creek. I have never been able to understand why people want to run a stream through their city. They know that when the city grows larger, the mayor will have trouble getting enough money to build bridges over it. And each and every bridge is going to be a traffic hazard. Now, this bridge in this little town was not much longer than our truck but it served its purpose; it was a hazard.

When a car with electric lights turned a corner and faced us, we were blinded and our presto lights seemed to go out altogether. They didn't even shine down as far as the road at our front wheels. Nor did they show us the bridge with its little wooden banisters. Well, I did see one banister a little—not much—but Papa didn't see it at all. He didn't even know there was a creek nor a bridge ahead of us.

As a matter of fact, Papa couldn't see the road or anything. But he figured that was not reason enough for him to stop and let the car with bright lights go by. He wasn't going more than ten miles an hour and he was reasonably certain there was nothing in the road to run over or bump into. All would be well just as soon as those bright lights got out of his eyes.

But the bridge got to us before our lights showed it to Papa, and our two right wheels didn't even touch the bridge. Our bumper took the entire banister and laid it out in the road ahead of us. Our front axle skidded all the way across the creek, riding the edge of the bridge. Our right front wheel went sailing across the stream in mid-air and rolled onto solid ground before our truck had time to turn over and fall off the bridge into the creek. So there we were, the two front wheels on solid ground, the left rear wheel on the shaky bridge, and the other rear wheel dangling in space over a creek of running water.

As we came to an abrupt stop, with the truck leaning and rocking right and left, Papa asked, "What was that?"

I told him, "You missed a bridge."

He said, "I didn't see a bridge."

By this time the car with the bright lights had gone away and we were left alone hanging over the side of a small bridge over a small stream in a small town.

The truck was leaning sharply toward my side. It had no doors, only curtains for bad weather. And since the weather was good, the curtains were stored away under the seat. Papa could get out easily on his side. I climbed out on the running board on my side, then up over the front fender, and jumped down off the front bumper. By this time our presto lights had gotten out front again and were shining their beams to show me where to jump.

We got a man to try to pull our truck off the bridge with his truck, but his truck couldn't drag ours. However, he finally got our truck off the bridge by lunging against the chain six or eight times, moving our truck a few inches each time.

Nothing was damaged except the bridge banister. We had already pitched it out of the road, so we paid the nice man for his services and drove on our way. I never did learn who repaired the banister. It couldn't have been the mayor; the town wasn't big enough for a mayor.

Joel was not alone in this business of turning trucks over. As I have just told you, Papa tried hard to turn one over into a creek, but failed. Then he got another chance some time later and made it okay. Dode and Albert also contributed their bit toward making it a family affair.

Albert was driving down a dirt road with a full load of freight. He didn't know that a rain cloud had crossed the road ahead of him, dumping its water on the road. No cars had driven over the wet road since the shower, so it didn't show to be anything but a nice dry road. But the road was slick and it came as a surprise, and Albert found his truck skidding out of control. It turned sideways and scooted until it had almost stopped, then it lay over on its side very gently, so as not to damage any of its cargo as it poured it out onto the road. The truck was not damaged either. There was only one little bit of damage. Included in his load was a small mirror which he placed on the seat beside himself for safety. It got broken.

A part of the road between Roby and Rotan was graveled, and along the graveled part were two rounding curves which were quite an improvement over the sharp turns so common in those days. You could sail right on around the curves without slowing down much, since we didn't get up an awful lot of speed any time, even on straight roads.

One day a fellow who was riding with Dode bet him he couldn't go around both curves and not get under 25 miles an hour. The bet was on—perhaps a dime or maybe a cold drink. He made it around the first curve okay, but the gravel was heavier on the second curve and the truck lost its footing, skidded, and turned over. It just lay over on its side and didn't hurt anything except maybe Dode's pride, and of course he lost his bet.

When Papa was just getting into the trucking business, he had two trucks, and one of them was a Maxwell. I think he bought out a truck line from somebody and inherited the old truck, or maybe the man gave it to him. I can't really believe Papa bought it. If he did, anything he gave for it was too much. It didn't have enough power to pull the hat off your head without getting a run on it. Anyway, one time Papa had it loaded with something and was hauling it to somewhere. Now, on this road to somewhere there was a hill he was supposed to go up. But the old Maxwell just couldn't make it up; it went as far as it could and stopped. That was when Papa learned that the brakes would hold better going forward than backward. Going backward the brakes were as weak as the motor. They simply wouldn't hold it. The brakes and the gears together wouldn't hold the Maxwell and the load. The truck, the load, and the driver all went slowly backward down the hill.

Now to keep from backing off a bluff on one side of the road, Papa steered the truck toward the mountain on the other side. When it backed up on the side of the mountain a way, it leaned so much it turned over and dumped the load right in the middle of the road.

As I said, the old Maxwell was not powerful. When you got it loaded, it would take a mile of straight level road for it to get up to 25 miles an hour. So when we got up a little speed we sure hated to have to slow down for anything.

So it was one day with Joel or Albert driving and I was co-pilot. I really believe it was Joel driving because there was a time when Albert was too little to drive, not for long, mind you, but for awhile.

Anyway we had just gotten up speed when, way down the road ahead of us, one farmer in a Ford car and another one in a wagon stopped in the road to talk with each other. They were stopped with their front ends—their vehicles that is—headed toward us and outward, one toward one ditch and the other one toward the other ditch. Their back wheels were about far enough apart for a truck to go between, or was there room? As we came nearer, it looked doubtful. But then, they could see us coming and they were still in their vehicles and ready to drive on. We thought surely one of them would drive forward a step or two and that would make plenty of room for us to go between them. There was certainly not room to go around them on either side.

With the two rigs aimed outward, they were like a big funnel, with us heading into the big end, and their two hind wheels forming the little end of the funnel. By this time it was plain to see that neither man had any intention of moving his rig. Also, by this time, other things became obvious. First, it was too late to stop; our brakes were not that good. Second, there was not room to go between them without hitting. Third, there was enough room to go between by hitting both vehicles just the right amount. So my driver said, "Hang on." Then he aimed at the center of the funnel and kept the gas feed down to the floorboard.

The fenders on the old truck, just in normal driving, flopped like a crow's wings trying to fly upstream in a sandstorm. The engine hood had the sides removed to let more air through, and the top part of the hood was tied on with haywire. Now, when our front fenders came in contact with the Ford car and the wagon wheel, they went way up and came way back down, and their flopping broke the wire that held the hood on. I thought sure the hood would blow up against the windshield, but it didn't.

The old truck had no doors, just curtains, and they were not in use. I grabbed a left hand full of windshield post, stepped my right foot out on the running board, leaned out over the hood and wrestled it back down into place. I was the main reason it didn't blow up against the windshield.

We didn't lose any speed, so by the time I got the parts of the hood back into place we were too far away to see whether the farmers were angry, disgusted, or just plain surprised—more than likely all three.

This little incident took place a couple of miles out of Stamford on our way to Hamlin. This was Earl's daily run, but on this particular day Earl had more freight than he could haul and had phoned for us to come to Stamford for the second load. Joel and I had driven over and got it.

When we got to Hamlin with our load we told Earl what had happened. And the next day, Earl was stopped and confronted by two not-so-happy farmers. They seemed to think that he was the one who had done unto them what Joel and I had done. But Earl convinced them that it couldn't have been him, he was in Hamlin at that time of the day, and he could prove it. Moreover, he drove a Dodge truck, not a Maxwell. Thanks to Earl, they never did learn who ran their little roadblock.

On another occasion, Earl and I were going back home from somewhere in an empty truck and Earl was driving. But then when he discovered a bumblebee in the cab with us, it only took Earl about two seconds to quit driving. In that two seconds he pulled the emergency brake lever back as far as he could and the ratchet held it there. Then he opened his door with his left hand, stepped his left foot out on the runningboard, his right foot shoved the brake pedal down and his right hand steered the truck while it hurried to a sliding stop. Neither of us got stung and the bee got away. But the big surprise was the sudden appearance of a whole flock of red apples rolling along the road from behind us, some of them continuing on their way down the road ahead of us.

Then suddenly there was this stranger getting out of his pickup truck—the pickup that had bumped into the back of our truck, the pickup that had been loaded with big red apples. The stranger came up to Earl and asked why he had stopped so quickly right in the middle of the road without any warning. Earl seemed to be completely out of good answers at the time. So he sort of hesitated and sheepishly looked around as if searching for some kind of an answer, and there it was as big as day—a railroad across the road in front of us with the usual sign reading, STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN. Earl pointed to the sign and told the man he was obeying the sign. The stranger calmed down, and he and his boys began picking up apples.

We would haul just about anything in those days if it wasn't against the law. One time Earl and I loaded a truck with East Texas ribbon cane molasses from a railroad car in Hamlin and helped the owner peddle it from town to town. He didn't sell it all the first day so we stayed over in Throckmorton that night. Earl and I slept in the back of the truck on the cases of molasses. We spread a couple of quilts under us and a couple over us, then we spread a tarp over the quilts and molasses and all. Next morning we also had a couple of inches of snow on top of the tarp. Rough, you say? Sure, a little, but it sure beat hauling maize all to pieces.

While the others of us were doing all this hauling, Frank had opened a garage in Hamlin and was doing mechanical work. One day Frank was going to be away and he asked me to take over for him that day. There was only one mechanical job to do, unless others showed up. It was an Overland Whippet with a loose timing chain. The loose chain had let the camshaft get out of time with the crankshaft. Frank asked me to fix it for the man.

He explained to me that the way to do the job was to take the radiator off, take the front end of the motor loose from the frame, jack up the motor, take off the timing gear cover, put the sprockets back in proper timing, and then replace all that stuff I had taken off.

Now Frank knew there was no need to tell me how to do the job. I already knew how. And he should have known that I would do it my way as soon as he was gone. His way was a long drawn-out bunch of foolishness, involving a lot of work. And that work would cost a poor man a lot of money which he didn't have. The man was a stranger to me but I knew he was poor, because he owned a Whippet. No man could own a Whippet very long and not be poor. So I did the job the easy way.

I unscrewed a small plug from the timing gear cover, stuck a screwdriver through the hole and jumped the sprockets back into proper timing. Then I screwed the plug back in and charged the man a dollar. When Frank returned, he was not at all happy with what I had done. He said, "That's not the way to time a car."

I said, "Maybe not, but it makes happy customers." And that's the one thing Frank needed a lot more of.

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **GOT MARRIED, DROVE TRUCK, FARMED, CATTLE DRIVE**

A year or two after I quite high school I got married. It was either in 1928 or 1929. The stock market crash came in one of those years and I got married in the other one. I keep getting them mixed up. I

know we got married June the second, and I believe it was in 1928.

After our honeymoon Ima and I became sadly disappointed. Things were not as we had expected them to be. For years we had been courting and seeing a lot of movies. And every love story we ever saw ended by showing the couple getting married and living happily ever after. They didn't say one single word about the husband having to drive a truck six days a week, and sometimes on Sundays, nor the wife having to wash and iron and cook and keep house. Those were our big disappointments. We got married and had to work hard ever after.

After we married Ima and I lived in Hamlin in Papa's rent house west of the truck warehouse. I was driving a truck on a daily run to Abilene and back to Hamlin. That was when I learned that a truck driver could live on two meals a day. I didn't have time to eat three meals.

The rule of command, mentioned earlier, where the oldest in the group had authority over, and the responsibility for all the younger ones, proved to be a poor ruling after kids become men. So I began to drift way from doing any and all things whatsoever Earl told me to do. After all, I was a big boy now, even big enough to drive a truck to Abilene, which was twice as far away from Hamlin as Earl drove his truck. His regular run was only to Stamford.

At times I even hauled a lot more freight than Earl did. I had to deal with people he didn't even know and I had to conform to trucking methods which he had not been exposed to. Why, I saw trucks on U.S. Highway 80 headed for California with greater loads than Earl's truck and cargo combined. I saw those same trucks return with more miles added to their speedometers in one week than Earl might drive in ten weeks. I witnessed the advent of balloon tires on front wheels of large trucks and I saw them run as many miles as heavy duty, high pressure tires had been running on front wheels, and at half the cost—this before Earl realized that balloons were even being used on trucks.

Conflict between Earl and me was inevitable. I realized that he was not just trying to shove me around—not trying to be bossy just to see if he could be. Rather he was trying to do what he thought was best for the company. But he didn't always know what was best for the company. Progress had gotten way out ahead of Earl and he had not realized it. What was good for Earl and the truck line to Stamford was not necessarily good for me and the truck line to Abilene.

So, one day I thought it was time to disobey Earl and make some decisions of my own. I fought back. I was tired of listening to him and doing all the things his way. But he didn't think it was time for me to be weaned as yet, so he fought back also.

We didn't take time to put the boxing gloves on; we just went to slugging, bare fisted. I wasn't mad at him, just tired of taking orders which didn't always fit the occasion. However, I was glad he remembered Papa's old rule of not hitting each other in the face. That could have hurt; noses bleed and teeth cost money. Our chests took a terrible beating—at least mine did. I'll admit he hurt me, and I tried to hurt him. It was not that I really wanted to hurt him, I just wanted him to get the idea that I was driving my truck and he was driving his. He was too small to drive both of them.

Finally I said, "Boy, I'm tired and sore. How about you?"

He said, "Naw, I'm not tired."

I told him, "You sure jarred me. Did I hurt you?"

Again he said, "No, I'm not hurt nor tired."

Anyway, we stopped hitting each other, We rested awhile, got us a drink of water, and went on with the business of getting our trucks and cargo ready to roll. All this took place without a cross word from either of us—and without a witness. And with no witness, I can tell it like I want to; it's my word against his.

About this time, Papa needed a good used tire for his Hupmobile. Earl was unable to find a suitable one in Stamford, so I was asked to pick up one in Abilene. And Earl warned, "Be sure you don't get a Goodrich."

Well, I looked all over Abilene and the only tire I found that I would consider buying was a Goodrich—a half inch oversize. It only cost \$4.50, so I bought it. Of course I didn't buy a Goodrich just to bug Earl, but when I showed up in Hamlin with it, you would have thought I had set fire to another keg of powder—with Earl sitting on it. He was sure the tire would break and blow out. Besides, he had told me not to get that brand.

I told him that if it blew out, I would pay for it. But it didn't blow out; it gave good service. This was

another case where I had to make a decision without Earl's presence. It proved to be a good decision. It was another step toward my independence from Earl.

During this time I'd had experience with oversize tires and low air pressure on my own car, and it worked well. I had also seen trucks running through Abilene with low pressure in front tires, and it worked there also. So, I wasn't surprised that it worked on the Hupmobile.

One year Papa bought a new Dodge truck with all four wheels and tires the same size. Up until that year they had used much smaller tires on the front wheels. But this truck had heavy-duty wheels and tires in front just like the ones on the back.

I told Papa that, if he had the money and wanted to invest in two balloon tires for the front, at \$30 each, he could save the \$60 heavy-duty tires to use on the back wheels later when needed.

Earl told Papa that I was crazy to think that a \$30 tire would run as far as a \$60 tire.

Papa listened to me and bought the balloons, and they did run as far. This pushed me a little further away from my big brother. Of course, I thought it was time he should review some facts and notice that I might have a little more sense than he was giving me credit for. If Earl had been willing to follow a leader, who knows, he and I might have worked happily together ever after.

Other problems came up in Abilene, the likes of which Earl never had to face in Stamford. One day the shipping clerk at Wm. Cameron Company told me he had a shipment of windows going to Stamford and he wondered if I wanted to haul them. I told him, "No, Earl told me to let Rountree's truck haul all shipments to Stamford."

The clerk asked, "Clarence, when are you going to stop listening to Earl and start telling Earl?"

Well, Earl was the acting manager of the truck lines—not authorized, but acting, and he had told me not to pick up any Stamford freight.

Then the clerk told me that the man in Stamford ordered the windows shipped either by Johnson or by rail. Then the clerk added, "By law we can force you to haul them, but we wouldn't do that. We'll just ship them by rail."

Now, I never did enjoy holding back when there was something to be done. I had always been a "getter." But now I was being held back by an invisible force 40 miles away, Earl. And I was beginning to feel about as useless as a knot on a stick, and I was being treated as such by big freight men who were beginning to wonder why W. F. Johnson didn't get a driver with the ability to solicit and haul freight. Competition was the name of the game and I wasn't competing.

Anyhow, in this case, if I hauled the windows, I wouldn't be competing with Rountree, it would be with the railroad. I reasoned that Earl shouldn't be opposed to that. But my Stamford freight had to go by way of Hamlin, and Earl would have to take it from Hamlin to Stamford the following morning.

I made my decision, loaded the windows, and took them to Hamlin. But Earl was very unhappy with me. He was never one to calmly ask, "Why?"—and then listen to reason. He had one uncompromising attitude, "I told you what to do. You must do it."

Naturally, Earl was upset toward his little brother. He even refused to haul the windows, and went to Stamford without them. Finally, after two or three phone calls from the consignee to Wm. Cameron Company and then to Papa, Earl delivered the windows, reluctantly and under protest, and only at Papa's order. And Papa told me to get all the Stamford freight I could, and he told Earl to deliver whatever I brought to him.

Although Papa was owner of the truck lines and was supposed to be in full command, Earl had ways of making life miserable for both Papa and me. And as time went by, our relationship didn't improve.

Remember now, this is my version. If Earl were writing this, I'm sure it would read differently. And actually, it wasn't all that bad. Earl was a good boy, and he still is. He's my brother. I loved him then, and I still love him. That was a long time ago. I don't hold any of this against him. I'd do anything I could for him. And I don't think he holds anything against me, except maybe my writing about it like this. But then, we are big boys now and we probably don't have more than forty years left to enjoy living and reminiscing. Why not enjoy it while we can?

I was a Jonah to Earl and perhaps to Papa also. At any rate, Papa found a way to throw me overboard. In 1931 he asked me if I would like to farm. He said he would invest money in a farm for me like he had

invested in a truck for each of the other boys and I could pay him rent from the farm.

I agreed and he made a down payment on a farm nine miles southwest of Roscoe, Texas. That is where Ima and I lived during the year of 1932, and that is where we lived when Dennis, our first born, came to live with us.

But the national economy was such that many farmers lost their farms to mortgage holders. By the end of 1932 the Federal Land Bank had repossessed more farms than they knew what to do with. I was told that they were begging farmers to hold onto their farms without making their annual payments—pay only the interest and let the principal wait until they were able to pay. By this time Papa could buy better farms for less money than he still owed on this one. So he let it go back to the mortgage holder.

At the beginning of 1933 we moved onto Uncle Jim Johnson's farm at Royston, 14 miles west of Hamlin. He offered to sell me the place for five thousand dollars, with nothing down and nothing per year except the interest until I was able to pay some on the principal. I turned it down. During the depression of the 1930s there were a good many years that the farm didn't make enough to feed our family and pay the interest.

Then soon after we moved to Royston, Papa came to me and told me that he would have to sell the plow-tools and horses to me "Because," he said, "They keep hounding me and won't leave me alone as long as I try to help you as I am helping the others." He didn't tell me who "they" were and I didn't ask him; I didn't even care who they were.

The 1930s hit most all of us pretty hard, including those who were still in the trucking business. I knew men with families drawing wages of less than two dollars a day. When I was building a tractor, I hired a man, who was a good welder and mechanic, for 50 cents a day plus a hamburger for lunch. The burger cost me a dime. Those were the good old days. It was a wonderful depression but I'm glad it's over.

Dennis was eight months old when we moved to the Royston farm. The farm had been neglected for years and things were quite run- down—fences, barn, the house, everything.

My youngest brother lived with us three months after we moved to Royston. He and I would take our 22 rifles and go out after the milk cows in the afternoon, and it was a common thing for each of us to kill from three to ten rabbits each day. Our pasture had the smell of dead rabbits for three months.

Rattlesnakes were also plentiful on our farm during warm weather. We even killed one in our back room—that is, Ima did, with a 22 rifle. And when Anita was two years old, Ima and I were out early one morning milking cows and when Anita woke up she came out to join us. Ima picked her up and carried her back to the house, and there under the icebox, right by the door through which Anita had passed, was a rattlesnake.

Big rats and mice had their heyday the first few months we lived there. Rats would often wake us up at night gnawing holes up through the floor in our house. We managed to catch those in the house in traps, but those under the house sometimes kept us awake gnawing. I got out of bed one night and poured carbolic acid around a hole where one had been gnawing up through the floor. Later that same night one woke me up again and I found the hole large enough for a rat to come through, and I found the rat in the house feeling very sick—from acid poisoning.

We often saw mice run from furniture to furniture or peep out from their hiding places. Many times I carried my rifle to the dining table with me and also placed it by my side when I sat down to read. If a mouse hesitated just a moment he was apt to find himself to be a dead duck. One more little bullet hole added to the big holes in the floor didn't mean a thing in that house. Of course, as we continued living there we made some improvements and it became quite comfortable.

When Dennis was two years old, just about a month before Anita was born, Ima, Dennis, my brother, my brother's wife, and I all went to the Rocky Mountains sightseeing. We were driving my old Dodge sedan that wouldn't stay in high gear, leastwise it wouldn't voluntarily. We had to prop the gearshift lever in high with a forked mesquite limb about a foot long.

There in the Rockies one afternoon we had left Cripple Creek and were driving down Phantom Canyon when night overtook us. But before night had come on so strongly, we had gotten a good view of the canyon. On one side of our car we could see straight down hundreds of feet, and on the other side the mountain was straight up just about as far. And every few miles the road crossed to the other side of the deep gorge over dilapidated bridges with big holes in their floors. Most of the bridges had been patched with boards running lengthways. And some of the patch-boards had holes in them also, and some of them were broken and split up. Others had come un-nailed and were loose and out of place.



Once we came to an abrupt stop on a bridge when a front wheel pushed one end of a board down through a big hole and kicked the other end up against our differential. We had to back up and detour around loose boards and big holes in the floor of the bridge,—all this at night, high above the floor of the gorge below. They condemned the bridges and closed the road soon after we made that trip. As a matter of fact, ours may have been the last car over it before they closed it.

We didn't have much time nor money for such trips. We were too busy farming and raising cattle. The pasture on our Royston farm was a mile and a half long, and when Dennis was three years old he often went with me to drive the milk cows home in the afternoons. He usually walked all the way there and half way back. Then he would ride my back the rest of the way home. Just as my father and I did a lot of things together when I was a small boy, so did my children and I do a lot of things together

While we lived on the Royston farm, Ima was telling me about the death of a kinsman at Gordon. Ima didn't attend the funeral but many of her people did. Families had gathered from far and near to pay their respects and to attend the funeral the next day. The house where visiting was taking place that night had no electric lights but was lighted instead by kerosene lamps. Ima's sister, Mary Beth, was five years old at the time, and when one of the men struck a match to light his pipe, she said, "Ooooooh! Don't it get light when you strike a match."

The story is told that just before it got dark that night, one woman, perhaps an Aunt Minnie or an Aunt Hattie,—she was blessed with an oversupply of aunts by both names—anyhow, one of the women went out on the back porch and, looking toward the outhouse, said, "I want to get a good view of that outhouse before dark. I have an idea I'll have to make a beeline for it before morning and it's going to be dark."

Well by midnight all were bedded down, on beds, on cots, on pallets, in hallways and in corners. Then for the next three or four hours all was relatively quiet except for snoring and other occasional noises made unintentionally.

Then there was the movement of a person—perhaps a woman—maybe the same woman who took a good look across the back yard just before dark. It was dark in the house now, and she couldn't be seen, but her movement could be followed by your ears as the floor squeaked and groaned under her weight, as she tiptoed between the pallets and through the hall door, getting faster now as she neared the back porch, and still faster as she left the porch and crossed the back yard. Then suddenly and without warning there was the noise of a heavy soft object against a clothes line, followed by the noise of the same soft object as it fell flat on the ground. And then, after a moment of silence, there came the voice of a woman sitting on the ground and saying, "Oh well, I wouldn't have made it anyway."

I have a lot of memories of things that happened at Royston when our kids were growing up. I was working on the windmill down in the field one day, about a half-mile from our house. I needed a wrench from home and I needed Ima to help me a little. It was getting late and I wanted to keep working, so I sent Dennis and Anita in the car to get Ima and the wrench. I told Dennis not to try to turn the corner up by the barn, but to switch off the motor there and walk to the house and tell Ima what I needed. I put the two kids in the front seat of the car, then I put the car in low gear, got it started toward home, and then I got out.

Dennis was upwards of five years old, at least past four. He could drive the car by getting up in the seat on his knees. All he had to do was guide it and switch off the motor when he got to where he was going. But Dennis thought he was smarter than I was. He still thinks that at times even now. I can't seem to convince him otherwise.

Anyway, he thought he could turn the corner by the barn, and he almost did. But he sideswiped a fence, taking a post or two with him until the car got so involved in the barbed wire it couldn't go any further and the motor died.

The little wreck scared both of the kids. They got out of the car and went to the house, Dennis crying and Anita trying to tell Ima what had happened. Ima was about as upset as a wet hen in a rainstorm as Anita told her, "Car run in pense." Ima was still upset when she drove the car back to the windmill. She seemed to think I had done something wrong. How was I to know that Dennis wasn't as smart as I had been at his age? My goodness, I was planting with a two-row planter before that age. Was Ima going to admit that her son wasn't as smart as his pa?

I had always wanted to become a school teacher. I thought I had the ability to teach kids a lot of things. At times it seemed hopeless but I kept trying and some of my ideas worked. When Dennis was about four, Ima saw him reach up under a car fender, break off a chunk of dried mud and start eating it. She scolded him and told him to stop it. But after Ima went in the house I took Dennis around the other side of the car, where Ima couldn't see us from her kitchen window, and showed him a lot of good

lumps of dried mud and I told him he could eat all he wanted. He ate a little and quit, and we never caught him eating any dirt after that.

During the 1930s most of my brothers and sisters were married and had kids of their own and we often took our little children and all went to visit Papa and Mama on Sundays. During those visits, many times my brothers would go away to do their thing and I would be left in the house with Mama and Papa and a bunch of sisters and sisters-in-law. Then when Papa would leave to go play golf, which I didn't have enough money to do, I would find myself with a house full of women.

So one day Mama asked me why I didn't go on out with the other boys. She said, "There must be something wrong with you. You just can't get along with your brothers." Well, I got out all right as she suggested, and I found them out in the freight warehouse, drinking beer and shooting dice. If I'd had a dollar, I guess I might have been out shooting golf with Papa. But all I had was 18 cents, so I asked if I could get in their game.

They let me in and I soon had \$1.50. I decided this game was more interesting than I had thought. At this rate thought I might really learn to like it. Then after playing quite awhile they planned to stop the game at a certain time, and since I was not "hooked" on the game as yet, I began trying to lose back down to my original 18 cents.

But I wasn't that lucky. I kept winning now and then and when the game ended, I still had 98 cents. I took my 18 cents and left the 80 cents lying there. I told them I was only playing for fun, it was their money. But they said they were playing for keeps and didn't take it.

Later that day some of the smaller grandkids were playing in the warehouse and took the 80 pennies into the house and showed them to their Grandma.

Meanwhile, my brothers had gone some place in their cars and I went back in the house. Mama was afraid the little ones had gotten into Earl's desk out in the warehouse and had taken his money. She asked me if I knew about the money. I told her, "Yes, I won it in a crap game with my brothers, and I tried to give it back but they left it on the loading dock."

Mama asked, "Is that what they do on Sunday afternoons?"

I told her, "Yes, that and drink beer."

She was horrified as she asked, "Why haven't you told me this before?"

I told her, "Because you never asked me before."

She said, "Well, don't you ever do that again."

I said, "Okay, I won't unless you tell me to again."

I often wondered if some of my brothers sort of hated me because I wouldn't drink and gamble with them. It wasn't that I thought I was too good to do those things. I just didn't enjoy doing them and didn't want to. I didn't hate them for doing what they did, so why should they cast me out for not joining them?

A little note here, Joel was working in Stamford in a drygoods store in those days. He wasn't included with us in these gambling and drinking affairs. Now, I only gambled one time and I didn't drink their beer. I tried it one time and couldn't stand the stuff. I was sick with influenza and they told me it would be good for me. I took two swallows and decided to leave off drinking and keep the flu.

But now back to the farm at Royston. Most people think of cattle drives as something that happened long ago; and that's mostly true. But soon after we moved to Royston, I got Lester Whitley to help me drive a little herd of cows to Carriker's farm in Kent County. Lester would ride Old Nancy and I would ride Old Buck. We would carry a bite to eat for lunch, but there was no need to go to a lot of trouble and try to take everything as though we were heading up the trail to Abilene, Kansas, like back in 1885. After all, we wouldn't be far away by nightfall, and my brother would have all day to put a few things in my car and drive out to find us about sundown. He would need to bring us something to drink, something to eat, something to sleep on and some horse feed and a rope or two.

Lester and I got an early start and had the cows headed in the right direction when we learned that we had one old Jersey cow that thought she was a racehorse. Right away she started running straight up the road ahead of all the others. And she kept right on trotting until one of us got ahead of her and brought her back. We could see we really needed three horses, one for that old trotter and two for the rest of the herd. But we had to get by with one for her and one for the others. We thought surely she would settle down after awhile but she didn't. It was the same thing all day long, one of us behind to

drive and one in front to hold her back.

Sundown found us about where we had planned to be. There was a place where the fence was set quite a way back from the road, embracing an extra two or three acres of Johnson grass and weeds and a puddle of water, all within the right-of-way. So we turned the cattle into that little pocket and held them there while they grazed and settled down.

If it had not been for that one old cantankerous Jersey cow, our entire day would have been dull and uneventful. There wouldn't have been anything of value to mention in our story during that day. Without that cow, our story could just as well have started after we got them bedded down for the night.

We could have begun our story with,—We waited and we waited. It got dark, and we still waited for my little brother to drive up in the car, but he didn't. We had no horse feed, so we didn't feed our horses. We had only one rope, so we staked Old Buck out and hoped that Old Nancy would stay with him through the night. She was tired from the day's work and fortunately she didn't try to leave. Nor did the Jersey cow give any further trouble. I know she was tired. There is no way a cow can run as far as she had run that day and not be tired.

We had gathered firewood before dark and our fire was warm and friendly in the cool of the darkness. It seemed that we should be eating something in the light of the campfire, but there was nothing to eat. I kept thinking that perhaps my brother would show up yet. Maybe he had car trouble. Any one of a dozen things could have happened to delay him.

Now, when a man is hungry, he can take a drink of water and go to sleep in a warm bed and forget his hunger until morning. But we had no water and no warm bed, and the night was too cold to sleep without cover. We built a large fire but it cooked us on one side while the other side froze. And I've got to tell you, saddles make very poor pillows. In the movies I have seen cowboys use saddles for pillows, but this was no movie, this was for real. And furthermore, I was no cowboy, just a poor farmer trying to pick up an extra dollar to keep body and soul together while fighting my way through a wicked depression.

Again it looked as if the devil was after me for sure. But I didn't really think he would stoop so low as to get my own blood brother to help him. I didn't see how the devil could do this to me, after all the things I had done for him. Just the thought of some of the things I had done for him caused my spine to tingle, and I moved a little closer to the fire. I wondered whether it was the chill of the night, my fear of the darkness, or the thoughts of my past that made me shiver and move closer. Anyway the night was totally dark and cold and damp, and I was completely miserable. In such misery the one best thing I could wish for was daybreak, and when it finally began to push the black out of the eastern sky, it was a welcome sight, and I was glad.

We saddled up early and pushed on. Before noon we left the highway and funneled the herd through a gate and out into open ranch pasture. Still the Jersey cow simply refused to stay with the others. On the highway she could only go forward between the fences, but here in the pasture she could go all directions. When we came to the next ranch house, we borrowed a corral long enough to catch the cow and put one end of a rope around her horns and the other end around the neck of a large Hereford cow. That ended our trouble with the Jersey cow. Things went so smoothly after that, we could hardly believe it.

When we got to the nearest corner of the Carriker pasture, it was still a long way to the gate that opened into the pasture. We were tired, sleepy, hungry, thirsty, weary, and almost entirely angry at one little brother who had contributed so much to our misery. So instead of making the long drive to the gate, we took wires loose from the fence posts, tied the bottom wires down, propped the top ones up, and drove the herd through the fence and into the pasture. This ended our drive, but there was still one little chore to do.

I wanted to cut the rope between the Jersey cow and the Hereford cow and let them run free. The terrain was rough and almost completely covered with trees and cedar bushes. I prepared my catch rope and made one desperate attempt to rope one of the cows. I threw the loop and it went over one horn of the Hereford. I knew the herd would vanish into the brush before I could get ready and try again. So I jumped to the ground and tried to flip the rope around the other horn also. I had hoped to delay them long enough to rush in and cut the rope between them. But I had no such luck. My throw rope came off the one horn and they quickly disappeared into the thick brush. They were all gone, vanished into the bushes.

I looked for Old Buck and he was gone too. Then I looked for Lester and he was nowhere in sight. I called to him and he came riding up out of the brush. I asked if he had seen Old Buck. He hadn't, but he

rode off to find him. We found Old Buck working alone and holding back a bunch of cows that were trying to run away. There were two ways for the herd to escape. Lester had gone one way and had tried to hold the cows back, but had failed. Old Buck had gone the other way alone and had cut off the escape route of the other half of the herd. Not a single cow had gotten by him, but the two cows we wanted had escaped down the way Lester had gone. I could write a book telling about the splendid work Old Buck did for me while we were together.

Anyway, we fastened the fence wires back in place and were riding toward home when night overtook us out on the highway. After dark some men from our community drove by in their car, recognized us, offered to take us home and we accepted. We still had only one rope, so we staked out Old Buck as we had done the night before and hoped that Nancy would stay with him one more night.

Needless to say, when I got home I ate everything I could get my hands on. I was hungry enough to eat anything that wouldn't fight back and couldn't outrun me. And my bed was so much better than the one that had tortured me the night before.

Early the next day when we returned to get our horses, Old Nancy was not there. We searched for her but in vain. We returned to the area every day for a week looking for horse tracks either in the lane or in the pastures on both sides of the highway. But we found no clue whatsoever as to where she had gone. Then finally a thought came to me. Down in the valley of Texas there was a woman I had heard on radio—I believe her name was Ethel Duncan—who claimed to have aided many people in locating lost articles. If you would send her a dollar she would answer three questions for you. I knew it would be worth a dollar to me to have her answer just one question. So we went to the telegraph office in Rotan and I wrote my question on a telegram form, "Where can I find my lost saddle mare?" The telegraph operator read the question, looked at me, and shook his head just a little, as if to say, "There's one born every minute." But money talks, and since I had the dollar to send to Ethel and enough left over to pay the man for sending it to her at McAllen, he took my money and sent the question and the dollar.

About an hour later the following message came over the wire, "In my opinion your mare is grazing along the right-of-way of the railroad which runs into Rotan from Nugent, about three miles from home."

The railroad ran beside the County road all the way to my home in Royston. It would be easy to look for the mare, and we did look all the way home. But there was nothing, no horse, no cow, no sign of any animal of any kind, except maybe a few jackrabbits. There were not even any horse tracks.

Well that was the last straw. As far as I was concerned, the mare was gone for good. I gave up. I had spent too much time away from my farming already. There was work to be done and I had better get with it. I knew we would miss Old Nancy, but we could live without her.

Then at home, while I was getting ready to get back to plowing, some thoughts were running through my mind. I read the telegram again. ". . .along the railroad which runs into Rotan from Nugent." I knew it didn't run from Nugent, but then it did run to Rotan. I couldn't see anything wrong with that. But wait— something still wasn't clear. I was trying to figure whether there was something I was overlooking. I read a little further, ". . .about three miles from home, "THAT'S IT, HOME. Where was my home? Was it Royston? Was it my house? Come to think of it, neither of those places was mentioned in my telegram to Ethel, Rotan was the only place mentioned. That had to be it, three miles from Rotan. That would be about nine miles from my home.

I got back in my car and drove almost to Rotan. When I thought Rotan was still about three miles away, I pulled up to a farm house and asked a farmer whether he had seen a stray mare.

"How long she been gone?" the farmer asked.

"One week today," I answered.

"Nope, haven't seen her. Got one been here two weeks; couldn't be yorn."

"Mind if I see her?"

"Nope, she's out in the lot with the other horses."

We walked to the horse lot and I looked.

"That's her all right," I told him.

"How long you say she's been gone?"

"One week today."

"Seems like she's been here a lot longer'n that. No, guess not,—today's Wednesday ain't it? Yep, yep, that's right, she come last Wednesday. That's the day I drove into town. She was here when I got back."

I changed the subject, anxious to check on Miss Duncan's accuracy. I asked the man,

"How far is it to Rotan?"

"Three-and-a-half miles."

"Do you happen to know where that little mare was about an hour- and-a-half ago?"

"Yep, she was down in the back of the pasture."

"Which way does your pasture run from here?"

"Down that way toward town."

"How big is your pasture; how far is it to the back side?"

"A half-mile."

"Do you remember if the mare was near the railroad fence, or out in the other side of the pasture?"

"Yep, she was agin the railroad. But why all these questions?"

Then I told him the whole story—the cattle drive, the lack of a rope to tie the mare, our week of searching, the telegram, and I let him read the reply. After he finished reading it he said,

"That's right, she was three miles from Rotan by the railroad."

So we finally got the mare back and we were happy about that. Now there is still the question as to why my brother didn't bring the things we needed. He had a simple answer: He didn't want to. No further explanation, no apology, no feeling of guilt, no regrets—just simply didn't want to.

## CHAPTER 16

### AT ROYSTON UNTIL WORLD WAR II

During the 17 years we lived on the farm at Royston there were a number of other stories, some good, and some not so good.

Wes Kennedy and his family lived about a mile northeast of Royston and they had three big dogs that had the bad habit of chasing automobiles and barking and snapping at the front wheels. The dogs chased the family car the same as they did strange cars which passed by along the road. Wes tried every way he knew to break the dogs from the bad habit, but every effort had failed.

Now the story goes that one member of the Royston Spit-and- Whittle Club suggested that he tie a burlap bag to the spokes of his front wheels. As the dogs snapped at the wheels, they were supposed to get their teeth caught in the burlap, this would hurt their teeth and break them from chasing cars.

They say Wes was anxious to try it, so he tied a potato sack to one front wheel and drove right on home. As usual the three dogs came out to meet him, growling and snapping at the turning wheels, and the scheme really worked. The dog that snapped the spinning sack never chased another car as long as he lived—which was about five seconds. You see, dogs with broken necks seldom chase cars. Oh well, they still had two big dogs and that was enough for the whole family.

Wes and his wife also had quite a few boys and girls, a lot of little ones and at least one big one—a girl. I was told that there was a difference of opinion as to just how big the girl really was. Wes thought of her as just a little girl, but she thought she was big enough to go with the boys. And her mother, having been a girl once herself, sort of agreed with the girl. Since her dad objected so vigorously, the girl, with the aid of her mother, devised a little scheme which was designed to satisfy the girl and yet not be too painful to her father, especially since he was not to know what was taking place. Anyway, the way I heard it, the kids were hoeing cotton one particular afternoon—who knows how many kids,

maybe eight, maybe ten, anyway enough that one girl more or less would hardly be noticed by a father who was often busy at some other job which in most cases was easier than hoeing cotton.

The cotton rows butted up against a county road about a half-mile from the house. And in the weeds along the road ditch was a perfect place for the girl to hide a paper bag full of her clean clothes. And after sundown was a perfect time for her to exchange her hoe for that bag of clothes. So, when the other kids put down their hoes for the night, Wes didn't count kids and didn't notice that the big girl was missing. She had hoed to the far end of the rows and had not returned with the others on that last round after sundown.

Meanwhile, the girl's prince charming didn't carry her away on his white steed, but rather in his black Model A Ford. She kept her date with her boy and then spent the night with her girl friend. Next morning the girl, dressed again in her work clothes, picked up her hoe at the far end of the cotton rows and joined her brothers and sisters in the field on their first round of hoeing. No one ever told her dad about the incident, so he lived happily ever after.

In those days, when I wasn't too busy farming, I earned a little money at other things. I did road work for Fisher County quite a few months one year. One day I was hauling caliche in the county truck to fill in holes in the road by a bridge. When I was hauling my last load for the day, I was not in any particular hurry, so I stopped by my home to let Dennis and Anita go with me. I wanted them to get a lot of experience at a lot of different things, as I had done when I was a boy. I didn't want them to grow up in ignorance. There were times, I'm sure, Ima wondered whether I wanted them to grow up at all. Well this was one of those occasions. I was glad Ima wasn't along.

The kids played around while I unloaded the truck. And after I had finished my work, I took one of the sideboards from the truck, which was a two-by-eight twelve feet long, and I placed it across the buttment of the bridge. With me on one end and the kids on the other, I could see-saw them up and down and they could splash their feet in the water. What could be more fun to a three-year-old and a five-year-old? We had fun and all went well until time to load up and go home.

Dennis was out on the end of the board and I told him to sit still and let Anita get up first and come to me out on the road, then it would be his turn. Well, Anita got up and was walking toward me when Dennis decided he wanted to be first. Nothing I could do or say would make him change his mind. I just couldn't get him to sit that extra few seconds. He got to his feet and tried to pass Anita on the eight-inch board. And of course, since Dennis was biggest, Anita went off into the water—head first. I couldn't turn loose of the board quickly and jump in after her; I had to hold on while Dennis came on out and got off the board. By this time Anita had come up again and I lowered the board to her. She crawled upon it and came out with mud in both hands and was laughing. Excitedly she said, "Daddy, me pick up mud mit me hands."

It was not the time of year to go swimming because the weather and water were both too cold. But inside the truck cab, with the glasses up, it was hot. So I put Anita up in the seat with all her clothes off and she was comfortable right away. Her clothes dried out before we got home and we put them back on her. I sort of hoped that Ima wouldn't have to know about the accident, but do you think Anita could keep it secret? Goodness no! She had to go and tell Ima the whole story, in her own small way.

I worked off-and-on for Calvin Carriker all the years we lived at Royston. Along with his farming he also operated a grocery store, a filling station, and the post office. Ed Lewis worked full time for Calvin for years, and at one time was driving a stripped down Model T Ford, and there was something wrong with the T which Ed had not been able to remedy. At slow speed it skipped on one cylinder; at high speed it ran okay. When I speak of high and low speeds, I'm speaking in the neighborhood of, "Under ten miles an hour it skipped and over fifteen it didn't."

One day after a rain, Calvin asked me why didn't I help Ed, and the two of us get the old car to running better, since it was too wet to work in the field. I asked Ed what all he had done to the motor, and after he told me, I told him it had a broken piston. But Ed said he had looked at the pistons when he had the head off grinding the valves, and the pistons were okay.

I told him, "Okay, let's run through it once more. You have put in new plugs, timer, manifold, gaskets, and ground the valves. You have replaced everything that could cause it to skip on one cylinder except a bad piston."

Then Calvin said to me, "Why don't you take the piston out while Ed gets a piston from somewhere?"

Looking at the pistons from the top, Ed couldn't see the broken piston, but when we took it out, we found it broken on one side all the way from the bottom up to the top ring groove. We replaced that one

bad piston and the old car ran okay.

There were other troubles with automobiles in those days. Today some of us older people are inclined to talk about the good old days and tell of how we were born during the horse-and-buggy days and how we lived through the Model T era, the Great Depression of the 1930s and into the Jet Age. However, most of us have failed to inform the younger generations about the "broken-fender" age and the "drain-your-car-every-night" era. These two periods overlapped to a considerable degree and ran concurrently much of the time.

That was when car fenders were bolted to the running board at one end and the other end of the fender was allowed to vibrate and flop up and down—especially on rough roads, and there were no smooth ones. The constant flopping caused the fenders to begin to break directly above each wheel. This called for a welding job to repair the break. Then a few weeks later the fender was beginning to break again in the same place. And this called for yet another repair job, and this went on and on throughout the entire life of the car. It happened to all cars alike—the Essex, the Nash, the Whippet, and even the Hupmobile.

This broken-fender age lasted from about 1928 until the late 1950s, and for me it extended into the 1960s because the only cars I could afford were old and well used and the fenders had been repaired by any number of other previous owners.

Why didn't fenders break before 1928? A number of reasons. They were much smaller and lighter, and therefore they didn't flop and bend and break. Furthermore, cars were slower, and many of them didn't last long enough to run far enough to break their fenders. The fenders outlasted many of the motors

Now, concerning the drain-your-car-every-cold-night age. Wood alcohol was about the only antifreeze we had, and it would boil away easily. Also it would evaporate and it was expensive. Furthermore, after making a long drive or pulling a heavy load, you never knew whether you still had enough alcohol to protect your motor from a freeze-up. Nor did we have efficient weather forecasts telling us just how cold it was going to get before morning. Therefore, most of us didn't use alcohol. We just used water and drained it out in cold weather.

So, all cars had a handy little faucet under the radiator. And most cars had another faucet on one side of the motor. Together they made it real easy to drain the water out. By raising one side of the engine hood, I could lean across the fender and reach both faucets easily, even in the dark, as I often did.

On one particular winter night, it was about midnight when a norther hit and woke me up. I knew I should have drained the car before I went to bed. But being a gambler at heart, as well as being lazy all over, I took a chance—and lost. And with a fresh norther roaring outside, there was just one thing to do, go drain the car. So, clothed in my shorts and my house shoes, and hidden behind a cloak of darkness, I hurried out to drain the car. I quickly raised one side of the hood, leaned across the cold fender, and in a jiffy I had both faucets open.

Then as I raised my weight off the fender, a sharp pain in the skin of my stomach reminded me that I was living in the age of broken fenders. When I leaned across the fender, my weight had caused the crack in the fender to open, and as I lifted my weight the fender bit me right in the stomach. I had to push my weight back down on the fender and hold its mouth open with my hands while I carefully removed my stomach.

Despite the mechanical problems we had suffered during the 1920s, by the early 1930s the automobile was a proven necessity and the farm tractor was beginning to crowd in and push the horse off the farm. So I decided to cash in on my horses before the price fell.

In the spring of 1934, when a lot of farmers were buying horses for the coming farming season, I sold all my work horses. Now, I didn't have a tractor and I couldn't afford to buy one, but I figured I could build one. I had never seen a home-made tractor—never even heard of one. But now that I had sold all my horses, I was left with no choice except to build one.

Again it was a matter of trusting my own judgment and going out on my own. Again there was no turning back; I had to go forward. I used a truck differential and a car motor. And by the time I got it all together and put plows on it, my cost was \$250. I have seen tractors that others have built since then, and I helped neighbors build a few, but that first one I built beat them all. I farmed with it two years, then sold it for as much as it had cost me, and then I bought a used Farmall.

While I was dealing with horses and tractors, our kids were making history on their own. They had this little white mama dog that had never had pups and they had an old mama cat that had come from no-telling-where, and she had stopped over at our place long enough to give birth to three kittens. But

while her kittens were still suckling, the old cat up and died. And the next thing we knew that little dog had adopted those three kittens and was letting them nurse. We never did know whether they got any milk for their effort, but they really put forth the effort. I had never heard of a dog being that friendly with any member of the cat family.

During the lean years, when I had time to work for the other fellow a little, I wasn't content to hoe or drive his tractor for a dollar a day. Instead, I was always looking for a way to make money easier and faster. Now, running a row binder didn't necessarily make money easier, but it made it quite a bit faster.

One fall I took my row binder and car and tractor and Ima, and we all went out and made \$300 in a single month, cutting feed for neighbors. That was clear money above all operating expenses, car expenses, binder repairs, and a babysitter at home for Dennis and Anita.

Now you may think I'm a male chauvinist, listing Ima along with my other property that I took. But I didn't mean it that way. I simply meant to list her with the items I took. You see, I had to take her, she wouldn't go voluntarily.

During that month, we slept in a bed on top of our car. We had all the tools we needed for repairing the binder right in the middle of any field. And we always had plenty of hot bath water right from the tractor radiator. It was clean water—we put in fresh clear water daily.

We also found other ways to pick up a few extra dollars. When World War II was in full swing and scrap metal was bringing a good price, we took a few loads of scrap to Sweetwater and sold it. While unloading there one day, I noticed an old Buick car in the scrap pile. I looked it over, and the more I looked at it the better it looked to me. Finally I paid the man \$30 for it, pumped up the tires, put in a one-dollar battery and drove it home. It proved to be one of the best running cars I had ever owned. We drove it two years and then swapped it off for a \$45 milk cow.

It seems that about half the years we lived at Royston were dry years and that about half of every wet year was dry. So there were a lot of dry times when I was not farming because there was no farming to be done. On one of those occasions I rented an old blacksmith shop at Royston—nothing in it, just four walls and a roof. I think I paid two dollars a month for the use of it, which was all it was worth, considering the sandy dirt floor that came with it, and with no windows for light. It had big doors at one end for cars to come through, some of which I repaired and some I wrecked out and sold for parts. In addition, I stocked and sold a few new parts too.

Wes Kennedy came into my shop one day and showed me some auto light bulbs he had bought at Sweetwater at 20 cents each. And he added, "Some places get 35 cents for them."

I showed him the same kind of bulbs in my shelves which I was selling at 15 cents. He looked at them and said, "I didn't know you sold light bulbs. You mean you sell them for 15 cents?"

I told him, "Yes, they cost me 8 cents, and I've got to make a little profit on them to stay in business."

Of course, we laughed at Wes, and he laughed with us, for thinking he had found such a big bargain at Sweetwater, and had overlooked a bigger bargain right at home.

This shop work went on for about three months. Then one day it rained and I closed up shop and went back to farming. Instead of working at a dollar a day, I cleared about \$3 a day in the shop.

## **CHAPTER 17**

### **WORLD WAR II WAS ON—WE WENT TO CALIFORNIA**

Well, the Great Depression was not something we would want to live through again, but all in all it wasn't so bad. We were broke, but then, so were our neighbors. We had plenty to eat and wear—and we had each other. The lean years seemed to bring us even closer together; we had to stay together, we didn't have enough money to go our separate ways. And of course we had our children.

Dennis was ten and Anita was eight when Larry became one of the family in 1942. And then when he was six weeks old, the little tyke almost left us for good. He was one sick little baby. We took him to a chiropractor who gave him adjustments and told us to feed him goat's milk. I drove all over the country



looking for a goat that was giving milk. After finding one I kept looking for more goats that would be giving milk after the first one stopped. It took awhile, but then I found a man with a whole herd of goats. He didn't need them because he was going to war, so we bought all twelve of them.

When we sold out a year later and went to California to get into war work, we bought goat's milk on the way out there and for eight months after we got there. In El Paso we bought milk from a man who owned a herd of registered goats. He sold goats for as much as \$80 each. The ones we had at Royston were of the \$4 variety. I was glad the El Paso milk wasn't registered; we couldn't have afforded it.

Bill Carriker, a neighbor at Royston, said Larry was sure going to be mad when he grew up and learned that his mama had been a goat.

When our two oldest kids were little bitty kids, and we had this two-holer off down there under the shade of a mesquite tree, Ima said to me one day, "I wish you would go down there and peep and see what those kids are doing. They've been in there a long time. No telling what they're doing in there."

I peeped, all right, and found them just sitting there, doing their thing and talking with each other.

As our country got deeper into World War II, the quality of kerosene went way down. It didn't burn well enough in our Servel refrigerator to make the box cold, and it left a lot of soot on the wick. So I mixed white gasoline with the kerosene to bring the quality back up. I told my neighbors the good news but they were afraid to mix the gasoline in. So they suffered with warm refrigerators while we enjoyed cold luxury. Again I was out front, but my neighbors thought I was crazy.

We heated our Royston home with oil. It was much more convenient than wood. And although we had plenty of wood, the oil proved to be cheaper than hauling and bothering with the wood.

We had an oil heating stove that heated all four rooms of our house. It would burn used lube oil with just a little kerosene mixed with it. Some filling stations in Hamlin saved their used oil for us. We lighted our heater in the fall and didn't shut it off until spring. I kept an expense account one winter and our entire fuel bill was \$12.

By 1940 the price of cream was up and a year later it was up even more. We had a lot of cows that gave a little milk each, and we already had a cream separator. So we bought a gasoline engine to run the separator and I started milking the cows and selling cream. That paid so well that we started feeding the cows more and selling more cream. Our cream was bringing three dollars a day and we were feeding the skim milk to hogs that were gaining two dollars a day. Oh boy! The depression seemed to be over for us. But it turned out that this business had another side to it. The work was killing us.

I sat there milking by hand three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon, and the weather was hot. By the time I had milked those twenty cows, I could almost swim in my own sweat. When I walked I could hear it squash in my shoes; and I smelled so bad I had to bathe before the tractor would let me get close to it. There was only one good thing about it; it beat maize hauling ten to one.

While I was milking one cow, Anita was feeding the next one and getting her ready to be milked, Dennis was carrying milk to the house and pouring it into the separator which was being driven by the gasoline engine, and Ima was filling in here and there and keeping house and seeing after Larry.

The kids always wanted me to milk Old Pet last. They could ride her out of the pen and up by the house as she went on her way to the field to graze. They got a free ride home and Old Pet didn't mind. She wouldn't pitch nor run, but just walk as though there were no kids around.

But there was one day Anita fell off Old Pet. They were riding the cow in the cow lot after a rain and the lot was boggy and messy. Dennis was in front and Anita was on behind him. The cow started under a low shed and Dennis realized that he would be dragged off it he didn't do something. There was no way to stop the cow nor turn her, so Dennis did something all right. He grabbed hold of a joist above his head to avoid being dragged off into the filth below. Meantime, since Anita was behind Dennis, she couldn't reach anything to hold onto, so she was forced off backward and landed in a sitting position, momentarily, until she lost her balance and fell backward in six inches of cow-lot slush.

Guess what Ima thought when Anita got to the house. She could hardly recognize her little girl, but she could tell where her little girl had been. The evidence was not all on her back. She had to roll over on her stomach to get up and out, so her front and her long hair had quite a bit of evidence on them also.

Experimenting had taught us that cows would do almost as well grazing sudan grass a couple of

hours in the morning and a couple of hours in the afternoon, as they would if they grazed all day, and the grazing would last twice as long. So when the weather was dry and grazing was scarce, we would drive the cows out and close the gate after a couple of hours grazing each morning. Then we would turn them back in at four o'clock in the afternoon. But this presented a problem. We were not always home at four in the afternoon. What could we do about that? Let the alarm clock turn them in, of course. And that is what we did. I rigged it up and it worked perfectly. It opened the gate a lot better than it built the fire in the wood heater many years before.

We had no electricity on the farm until 1949. Before that time rural electricity was only a promise of better things to come. Sometimes the summer heat teamed up with the lack of a breeze to make the weather almost unbearable. But since I wasn't very well known in Washington at that time, and since I wasn't personally acquainted with my congressmen, I didn't ask them for an air conditioning unit. Instead, I did what I could on my own. I took the gas engine from the cream separator and put it on an oil drum outside one window. Then I put a large fan blade on the shaft, aimed it toward a window, cranked it up and let it blow air through the window and all through the house. It was far short of air conditioning like we have today, but it was a lifesaver sometimes, and it wasn't inflationary.

Now, all this hard work, dry weather, inconveniences, and low farm wages got us to wondering if we might be missing something. So in the fall of 1943 we toyed with the idea of getting into war work. Later the toying became a definite plan which led to the purchase of a travel trailer. In November we stored our furniture, left our farm machinery for Earl to sell, and headed for California. We knew some folks who had gone to California from Royston and they told us to come on out, the wages were fine. We called it war work, but its purpose was twofold, to help produce the weapons of war and to help the Clarence Johnsons make more money faster. But getting into war work wasn't all that easy.

Before I could work at any job I had to get a release from farming, because farming was an essential industry in the total effort toward winning the war. I went to the Sweetwater Employment Agency Office and they couldn't give me a release. They sent me to the Abilene office, and Abilene didn't have the authority to grant me a release either. They told me I would have to go to the Sweetwater office. I told them that Sweetwater had sent me to Abilene. Then they told me I would have to go to Dallas.

But I didn't go to Dallas, I went home. I figured that Dallas might send me to Chicago and Chicago might send me to Washington, and I didn't want to go to Washington. I kept hoping someone would send me to Los Angeles, because that's where I wanted to go. But they didn't. So we got ready and headed for California anyway. Crazy, you say? Sure, most of my friends thought so, too. But I knew what I was doing. I was backing my judgment and going out on my own again, like building a tractor, like repairing a motor bearing, like not letting Federal Offices shove me around.

Every town of any size had an Employment Agency. Every Agency had the authority to grant a permit to work. All I needed was to qualify for a permit. They called the permit an availability slip. And without the slip, no one could hire me. They didn't want people switching from job to job. They wanted all of us to stay put and produce goods to win the war. Now, I was producing about enough on the farm to feed my family. And I figured most any of my neighbors could make the old farm produce that much while I was away. That's one reason we headed west.

We stopped somewhere west of Hamlin and east of California and I applied for a permit. They handed me a form and I filled it out. But, since I was a farmer, they couldn't release me and give me a work slip. So, what now, go back? Certainly not. California was west and that's where we were going. We never could get there by turning back.

So we drove on westward and I tried another office. I filled out a form just like the one before, only this time I knew not to be a farmer. This time I was a welder, self employed. Now, actually that was no fib. Many of my friends back home would tell you I was a better welder than I was a farmer. In fact, I was better at a lot of things than I was at farming. I was a lousy farmer.

Welding rated high in war work, so I had no trouble getting the work slip this time. Now we could go on to California without looking for Employment Agencies.

At Vega Aircraft in Burbank they wanted me to build boxes. But welding paid more money, so I went to an employment agency looking for a welding job. They said they had no welding jobs open at present, I would have to wait until one opened up. I asked if I could go on out to Vega and build boxes, but they told me welding was a much higher skill and I would not be allowed to work below my highest skill. Then I asked the man, "What do I do while I am waiting, starve to death?" He didn't know about that, but he knew I could not take the box-building job. And that's when I told him, "That's what you think, you just come along with me and watch me." I went out to Vega the next day and signed up and went to work.

At Royston labor was a dollar a day, out here I was making \$12.35 a day. Then after a few days, Ima told me I would have to take off from work and help her get the kids started in school. I told her that if she couldn't do that without me, we didn't have any business in California.

After thinking it over a few days, we decided that Ima and the kids might be a lot better off back home in Texas. So, I quit my job and asked for my availability slip, but they wouldn't give it to me. So I took my family to Texas without it. Lucky for me, I had a pocket full of gasoline ration coupons left over from farming, and I knew how to get another work slip. I was still a welder and had not been employed in war work as a welder. When I applied again for an availability slip, I didn't have to tell a fib, I only withheld some of the truth.

I left Ima and the kiddos at Hamlin and I drove on to Orange, Texas, to work at ship building. I signed on as a welder and of course they took my availability slip. Then after that, the welding foreman told me they didn't need welders, and I learned that I would have to work at common labor at about half the pay. I told them, "No, thanks. How do I get out of this place?" The gates were locked and I couldn't get out to go to the office until noon. That was fine with me. I had my work badge on and I could go anywhere I wanted to. I made like a VIP and had a holiday. I figured no one would stop me, and even if they did, they couldn't fire me because I wasn't working. I made a two-hour tour of the shipyard, saw everything and answered to no one.

At noon I went back to the office where they had fibbed to me and asked for my availability slip, but they wouldn't return it. I asked, "Where is the next man higher up?" They showed me his office and I told him my story. But he was not impressed and he could not return my slip either. Then I asked him who was the top man. By this time I was tired of going up step by step. He told me and I went to see him and told him the same story. It was easy to tell by now, I had it memorized word for word. I told the same story and got the same results. Finally I told him, "It looks like you fellows want my slip more than I do. Okay, you can keep it. I'm going to California and go to work at a better job." He warned me that I would get into trouble and couldn't get a job without the slip. But I told him to just come along and watch me, I'd show him.

I drove back through Hamlin and took Ima and the kids to San Angelo. They stayed there with Ima's folks and I went to California alone.

At the employment office in California, I told the lady I didn't want to get into trouble, so I wanted to tell her the whole story and then ask her what I should do. She told me that wouldn't be necessary, and added, "Texas and California are two different countries; I'll give you another slip. We need you out here." I took the slip—my third one—and went back to work at the same job at Vega, through the same office where they kept my first slip when I quit and went back to Texas. I gave them this new slip and I guess they were happy, now they had two of my slips. Anyway, I went back to building boxes for them.

All that running around had cost me quite a bit of money. I needed to make up for some of the loss so I worked ten hours a day at my regular job, got off at five in the afternoon, ate supper at the company cafe, drove seven miles and went to work at another plant that belonged to the same company. This second job paid time-and-a-half, and I could work an hour or all night, they didn't care which. The work was there to be done and laborers were scarce. I usually worked until ten o'clock and got to bed by eleven, so I wouldn't lose too much sleep. However, on Saturdays I worked all night.

Then one day I got this telegram from Ima that read something like this, "Can you meet me at the Union Depot on Thursday, March 19th at 5:45?"

Well, on my way down to my other place of work I had noticed a telegraph office. So I stopped in one afternoon and sent Ima a reply. After all, she had asked a question; the least I could do was to answer it. But I didn't see any need to send her a long message. I figured we could talk with each other after she got to California.

Now, if her telegram had said, "Meet me at a certain place at a certain time on a certain day, I could have replied, "Okay." But since she put it in the form of a question, I replied, "Yes."

I wrote her name at the top of the form, my name at the bottom, and handed it to the man behind the Counter. He looked at it, and then he read it, which didn't take long, and turned to me and asked, "Is this all?"

I told him, "Yes, that's enough."

And it proved to be plenty because, on that appointed day at the appointed hour and at the appointed place, here came that woman with those three kiddos, and they all looked mighty good to me.

I don't think I ever got around to telling Ima how proud I was of her for having learned so fast. Only three short months before, she couldn't take three kids to school a few miles away in Burbank. Now she had learned how to take those same three kids halfway across this big nation of ours.

When they returned to Burbank, Larry was just a bit over a year old and mighty spoiled. Remember, he had been sick when he was very young, and I have yet to see a sick little baby who doesn't become spoiled. He would cry at the drop of a hat, and when it was time for him to sleep, Ima would have to rock him to sleep. He had no intention of going to sleep without being rocked. Then she would try to get him down on the bed without waking him. She failed more times than not. And after each failure the rocking had to be done all over again.

Larry also gave Ima trouble in other ways. When supper was ready, she had trouble getting him to come in and eat. And when she finally got him in, he would fuss and cry while she washed his hands and face and got his food from the stove to his plate. Then they would have another fuss-and-cry battle at bedtime. She could never get him to go to bed without crying and having to be rocked.

Then Ima went to work at Lockheed Aircraft during the summer. Her hours were from four until midnight. So it became my job to get Larry in, get him to eat, and get him to bed. Now, I had heard that, in order to train a dog, you have to know more than the dog. And I figured the same was true with training little boys. And I also figured I was smarter than most any little kid 18 months old. So the first thing I did was shift most of the responsibility to Larry. I didn't try to get him in, I didn't try to get him to eat, and I didn't try to get him to go to bed. I reasoned that he would come in when he wanted to, eat when he was hungry, and sleep when he was sleepy. In short, I left him alone.

We lived in a trailer park. And when all the other kids were called in at night, Larry found no pleasure in playing alone, so he came in out of the dark. And he didn't fuss while I put his food on his plate. I knew when he was coming in for supper. I could hear all the other kids going home, and I had his supper on his plate ready for him when he got there. When he came in through the door. I would wipe his hands and face with a wet cloth. Usually I was through with that little chore before he had time to cry. Then I would tell him to climb up there and eat it. That is, I told him the first day; after that he didn't have to be told. He ate like a horse because by that late hour he was half starved.

At bedtime Anita and Dennis would go to bed in our trailer, and Larry and I would be left alone in our cabin. I knew what was coming next so I was prepared. I beat him to the punch, so there was no fussing at bedtime either. And not one time did I ever have to rock him to sleep or tell him it was time to go to bed.

Larry had a regular baby bed and he also had this habit of never going to sleep without his bottle. Even when Larry woke up during the night, Ima would have to get up and get his bottle and then try to rock him back to sleep. But when Ima started working at Lockheed, we stopped all that monkey business.

I put a pull-chain switch in the light fixture in the middle of the ceiling. Then I put a long pull-cord that would hang loosely across Larry's bed and I tied it to the far corner of his bed. He could reach the cord easily while lying on his back in bed. Then I put two of his bottles in two corners of his bed, down by the mattress so they couldn't fall out or turn over. One was for going to sleep and the other was for going back to sleep after he woke up during the night.

He must have been fascinated by the newness of the whole thing because he listened well as I explained it all to him and showed him just how to reach up and turn out the light before he finished his bottle, and how to wave his hand sideways to find the light cord in the dark, how to get his second bottle when his first one ran empty, and how to be quiet and not wake me up.

After that first night I would merely say something like, "Goodnight, Larry, I'm going to sleep. You can go to bed when you want to." Most of the time I went to sleep while he was still playing in the floor. I often woke up with him lying in his bed nursing his bottle with the light on, but not one time did I ever wake up to find the light on after he had gone to sleep. And he never cried.

Larry was 18 months old in May. When he made up his mind to go some place, he didn't fool around. He didn't walk, he ran. He learned to run about the same time he learned to walk. At our trailer court he was known as Cyclone Johnson.

During the summer of 1944, by correspondence, we made a deal with Uncle Jim to buy the Royston farm from him. So we began thinking about when we should be getting back to Texas. Benny Carriker was living on the farm at that time and when I let him know that we were buying the farm, he wrote that he wanted to move to town by the first of September and we could move onto the place at that time. So we loaded up and moved back to Texas in the latter part of August. But we didn't hurry right

straight back to Royston.

We reasoned that we might never be in that part of the country again and I wanted to see a part of Death Valley. I had read quite a bit about it and it fascinated me. So we drove about three hundred miles out of our way that trip just to see the valley. But when we came near it, we learned that the touring season in Death Valley was in winter time. In August it was really a valley of death and almost void of people, especially tourists—and more especially, during the war. Okay, so I goofed again.

At least we were not bothered with traffic. And since we were about the only ones using the road, and since there were some long downhill slopes, and since Dennis had his bicycle in our trailer, he wanted to ride it down at least one of those long slopes. So we got his bicycle out and he got on it and he must have coasted for miles, I don't know how far. We saw one highway sign that read, "Next seven miles downhill."

Then coming up out of Panamint Valley our car had a vaporlock in the gas line. I could blow hard into the gas tank and blow gas into the carburetor. Then the motor would start but by the time it got the car and trailer going up the hill, the carburetor would be empty again.

Now, we had quite a few tools in the car and I always carried some emergency repair parts. A good supply of survival items was a "must" with me. I was sure I would need them some day. And this looked like a good place to use some of them. We drilled a hole in the gas tank cap, cut a valve stem out of an old inner tube and fitted it into the hole. Then Dennis sat in the back seat with a tire pump, pumping air through a long hose into the stem in the gas cap. He pumped and I drove. We came right on up out of the valley without any more trouble. After we reached the top, he quit pumping and we had no more vapor lock. This goes to show why I never throw anything away. Even today I still carry a good supply of old tire tubes, valve stems, lengths of rubber hose, and plenty of hay wire.

We stopped for gas at Stovepipe Wells and the man there seemed to think we would make it okay. The temperature was only 113 degrees. I've seen it hotter than that in Phoenix and they thought nothing of it.

We arrived at Royston only to find that Benny Carriker had changed his mind. He wanted to stay on the farm until the first of the year, and of course we couldn't move in. So, now what? It would be four months before we could get possession of the farm. So we moved in with Mama and Papa in Hamlin and I looked for a job. I thought just about anything would do for four months. I signed on at the Gyp Mill and went to work making wall boards. I worked just one day at the mill, the hardest work I had done in years.

When the alarm clock sounded the next morning, it was raining all over the place. It took me about five seconds to decide what to do. Of course I had been thinking quite a bit about it before. The rain merely pushed me over the line of decision.

The road was not paved from Hamlin to the mill. It would be a mess every time it rained. What's more, the work there was four times as hard as building boxes in California. So I shut off the alarm and rolled over to go back to sleep. Ima asked me what I was going to do. I told her I was going to get some sleep and then go to California. And as usual she thought I was crazy.

Well, I sort of agreed with Ima, but not altogether. This job would just barely pay for rent and groceries. Out west we could live on half my salary and save the other half. So, Burbank, we're coming again. But this time I had an additional problem.

For the first time, I was about out of gasoline ration coupons. And when I went to the ration board in Hamlin, the lady told me I would have to work at least six months before I could get gas coupons to go somewhere else. I was in trouble and I could see that I was going to have trouble convincing her. But I told her the whole story. I really spread it on thick and made it sound rather pitiful—at least I thought I did. I told her I knew I was needed on the farm here, but the other man had changed his mind and I couldn't get on the farm. It was not my planning nor my fault that I couldn't move onto the farm. I couldn't help it. And now I was needed in war work in Burbank.

After all my pleading she had the same answer, "No gas coupons."

Well, I could see that I was getting nowhere with the lady. I figured I had to change my approach or I would never get to Burbank. So I stopped begging and pleading with her, and with a little more firmness in my voice, I said, "Now look, Lady, I'm going to California and I am going to get gas coupons one way or another, and however I get them, it is going to take the same amount of gas to make the trip, and if you will just issue me the coupons it will save me an awful lot of trouble and I will get on out there faster and get on the job sooner."

Well, I could hardly believe my ears. She asked me how much gas I needed. I told her and she gave me the coupons. We were on our way west again.

If all Americans had helped out as much as I did during the war, I know we would have lost to the enemy.

Ima cried off and on all the way out there this trip. It had been hard to find a place to live the first time. She just knew we couldn't find a place this time. And it proved to be just that way—that is, for average people. But I wasn't going to settle for being just average. I knew there was a place for us to live somewhere in California. I simply had to get busy and find it.

When we finally got to California, we heard the same story everywhere we tried, "No vacancy." Real estate firms gave us the same answer. But I reasoned that, if you go fishing and don't catch a fish the first hour, you don't just lie down and cry; you fish some more. There's got to be a fish somewhere in the lake. You just go find him.

After a few hours of the same kind of disappointment a realtor had a listing, "Garage apartment for rent."

The lady asked, "Do you have children?"

I replied, "Yes, three."

"Sorry, no children allowed."

"Would you give me the address?"

"There's no need, no children allowed."

"Would you just give me the address and let the owner tell us, 'No children allowed'?"

By this time I knew she was anxious to get rid of me, so she gave me the address. It proved to be quite near, so we drove out to the place and talked with the woman about twenty minutes. Then we parked our trailer beside the apartment and moved in. Then Ima really cried, but for a different reason. She was so happy. This proved to be the best place we had ever lived while in California. And our landlady was a queen.

I went back on the same job, building boxes. Vega had sold out to Lockheed but the change was not noticeable. Lockheed was looking forward to the time when the war would be ended and the company would have to operate with more efficiency. They encouraged employees to submit ideas that might save the company money and speed up work. If an idea was good enough to be adopted and put into use, they would pay for it. I submitted a few ideas, some good, some bad. In all they paid \$72 for my ideas.

Much of the time I was at Lockheed I worked in a department where we coated aircraft parts with oil and other coatings for their protection against rust and salt water. The oil was heated before it was applied to the parts. Then when it cooled it became a tough, durable coating. Electric heating units heated the oil, and it got to where the units were not working right. So I asked the electricians to remedy the problem. They mostly ignored my request. After all, who was I, certainly not a bigshot. They didn't have to obey my request. They treated me as though I were a rug for them to wipe their feet on. And after having trodden me under foot they walked away in a manner altogether unmannerly in the eyes of a Texas farmer. I don't think they were really a bad sort, maybe just native Californians acting natural. And maybe they were not quite at home when dealing with a Texas farmer who was also acting natural.

Now, I thought I could repair the heating units, but I knew that a country boy like me might get into trouble with the union if I did anything except just what my card said I could do. So, one day when no one was looking, I repaired the units and got the thing to working like it should work. Then in about three weeks the unfriendly pair of electricians came and notified me that they were ready to repair my hot-oil bathtub. When I told them it had been repaired, they were surprised. They didn't know there were other repairmen around. They asked who did it and I told them. But they didn't believe me. They left quietly, acting as though they thought I was pulling their leg.

One month the box-building crew was packing airplane nosecones for shipment. They had two men, each working ten hours a day, sawing plywood lumber into oddly shaped pieces to fit snugly against the fragile parts to protect against breakage. I was working in the hot-oil department and I had improved the efficiency of the department to the point where my job was easy and I had a lot of time to loaf.

Many of the boards the men were sawing were inaccurate and had to be thrown away as scrap lumber. I recognized their problem and set about to find a solution. Then, working in my spare time one afternoon, I built a jig, made of plywood and fitted onto a sawtable, that enabled me to saw out the pieces accurately and fast.

The next day I used two hours of my spare time and sawed more pieces than the other two men had been sawing in 20 man-hours. Not only that, my pieces fitted better and there were none to throw away. From then on, I sawed out all the pieces in my spare time, and the two sawmen went back to packing nosecones.

One of the Lockheed supervisors saw a lot of the little efficiencies in my work and he told me that, after the war, if I would team up with him, we could make a million dollars. He said that with my brain and his "gab" we could improve the efficiency of factories all over America.

For an example, they gave me charge of the hot-oil department which had been keeping two men busy. I soon had it so I could handle it alone. Then I made more improvements and could loaf half the time. When I took over the job of sawing the plywood pieces, I was doing the work that four men had been doing, and still had time to loaf and see who else needed help. Lockheed was paying me \$12 a day and I was saving them the other \$36 a day.

During those four months that fall, there was an awareness in the back of my mind that the day was coming when we would need gas to get back to Texas in December. I had saved all the coupons I could, but it looked as though we might be about 25 gallons short. And since I hadn't worked six months at this job, I knew I wouldn't be able to get coupons this time. So, I asked my straw-boss, "Don't you have a gasoline camp stove up overhead in your garage?"

He said, "Sure have. You can use it any time you want to."

I said, "I don't want to use it, just want to borrow it."

We left it up in his garage. But now that I had one, I went to the ration board and applied for gasoline coupons for it. The lady at the board told me she thought 50 gallons would last six months and she issued me coupons for that amount. And so, in just a few minutes I walked out of there a lot happier than I was when I walked in.

Now we had plenty of coupons to take us to Texas. But we still had a little problem. The coupons each called for two gallons and each one had "stove" printed across the front. Some service station workers might frown on the idea of pumping stove gas into Buick automobiles. So we bought our stove gas in five gallon cans and then poured it into the Buick's tank after we got away from the station. The Buick liked it. It didn't know the difference.

Now, you can be sure I didn't enjoy doing these little things which were maybe just a little bit outside the rigid rules laid down by Washington. Of course I didn't. And I'm sure Moses didn't enjoy seeing the waters of the Red Sea close in and engulf thousands of Pharaoh's soldiers. But we both did what we had to do. I was crossing a Red Sea 1200 miles across—and I made it, just as he made it. I'll admit there's one little difference here, God told Moses to do what he did. I'm not quite sure God was the one who told me to do what I did. Maybe the devil made me do it.

Anyway, we got back to the Royston farm that last time and stayed until we moved to Arkansas five years later. It was the first of the year of 1945 and Uncle Jim had not yet started to have the papers fixed up for me to buy the farm. I asked him to go ahead and get the abstract in shape for me as agreed. But three months later he still had not begun. It looked as though he had decided not to let me have it. I couldn't buy it without his cooperation. So I finally made a deal with him to operate the farm on a percentage basis.

## **CHAPTER 18**

### **BACK AT ROYSTON, WORKED AT GIN AND FOR NEIGHBORS**

Throughout all these years, as our children were growing up, we tried to train them to work out their own problems, answer their own questions, and make their own decisions. One Sunday afternoon when the Willinghams were visiting us, Mary and Anita came skipping around the house to ask me if they

could go to Hamlin in our car and get some ice to make ice cream. Anita was probably fifteen years old and Mary fourteen. I asked Anita if she had a driver's license. Of course she didn't have, but she could drive on back streets and be okay. Then I asked her, "And where is the ice plant?"

"It's on Main street, but we could walk and carry the ice to a back street."

"It's 14 miles there and 14 back. You still think it's all right?"

"Sure, that's not far."

"What if you have a flat? Can you put the spare on?"

"Oooh, I hadn't thought of that. We better not try it."

Now, if Anita had known at that time about the traveling I had done alone when I was not much older than 15, I think she might have argued that Hamlin was not nearly as far away as McCamey or the Gulf of Mexico or Denver. And if she had brought up that argument, I think I would have handed her the keys and said, "Good luck Be careful."

At that age Anita hadn't yet mastered the art of arguing. But she was willing and practicing. Dennis was going to town one night to a show or something and he asked Anita if she wanted to go. But she said, "No, Vera and Coy are coming over here tonight and I want to stay home and listen to Vera and Daddy argue."

She listened well and learned fast. I don't believe I have won an argument with her since that time.

There was always something happening on the farm, some good, some bad. One year weaning pigs got so cheap that I couldn't resist the urge to buy some of them and let them run wild about the place. At the Abilene auction sale, I bid on a bunch of the prettiest little black pigs I ever saw. They were selling by the pound. I usually bought the ones that sold by the head, because I didn't have much idea how much a pig would weigh out. But this bunch only cost \$1.16 each. There were eight in the bunch. I took them home and turned them loose. Then I bought others from time to time, and we soon had lots of pigs running all over the place. Of course, when they got older, we put them in pens.

Ima ran over one of our pigs in her car one day and killed him. He was about a 25-pounder. We butchered him and he made such good eating, we decided that was a good size to butcher next time.

When Max Carriker learned that we had all those pigs running around the place, he asked about letting him take some of them and sell them. He had a Model A coupe with a pig box in the back end. We told him to come any time and take all he wanted. He sold them at five dollars each and paid me three dollars for the ones he sold. He brought back the ones he didn't sell each day and turned them loose again. He and I both picked up a few dollars on my cheap pigs. Our neighbors didn't know that the pig market had hit bottom.

A neighbor boy and Dennis were out in our pasture one day with their 22 rifles, hunting rabbits and snakes and whatever. After hunting for hours, they came running to the house all excited and out of breath, and told us they had killed something, they didn't know what it was, but wanted us to come quickly. We went and found that they had killed a bobcat. He was the first one we had seen or heard of in that part of the country, and it was the first one the boys had ever seen.

They had been up on Cedar Knob Mountain looking around, and there was that bobcat 12 or 14 feet directly below them, lying in the shade on a ledge. Apparently the cat didn't see the boys. They stepped back quickly and planned their strategy. One boy had a pump-gun, the other one a single shot. They planned to advance quietly to the spot above the cat, take good aim and both begin firing. The boy with the single shot gun carried an extra shell in his hand ready to reload as quickly as possible. Then they walked slowly to their vantage point and carried out their mission.

By the time the boy with the single shot gun had reloaded and fired his second shell, the other boy had emptied the magazine on his gun—all 15 shells, and the bobcat lay very dead. But they didn't know what it was that they had killed, so they didn't go near it, but ran home for help.

We skinned the cat to get his pelt, and would you believe it, we found two bullet holes—and only two—in his head, and none anywhere else. We believe that the boys killed him with their first two shots and missed him completely with all the others.

We lived on that farm 17 years, and if we had lived there 50 more, I believe something new would have happened the last day we lived there, as well as each and every week during that time.

One fall I got a job helping at the Royston gin. I had my welding torch and all my tools in a closed-in



trailer. When I wasn't helping gin cotton I was repairing gin machinery. One Saturday they put me to helping load bales of cotton on trucks to be hauled to the Hamlin Compress. The trucks were large truck and trailer jobs. We stood up one layer of bales on the truck, then we stood up another layer of bales on the first layer. Then we placed another layer lying down on top of those two layers. Now, doing all that purely by main strength and awkwardness took a lot of energy and manpower. By the end of the day I was possessed with a lot of awkwardness, and all my manpower was gone. So I used my head.

At the close of work that Saturday, I took all my tools home, and Sunday after church I built an A-frame on the back of my tractor, tall enough to lift bales of cotton three-layers high up on a truck. The tractor motor did all the work. No man ever had to lift another bale of cotton as long as I worked there. The men laughed at me for being so lazy. After that they said, "Give Johnson the hard jobs, he'll make them easy."

Along with all our work, we had our share of fun. Clarence Clark was a farmer who lived about a mile from the Royston store, and he loved a good joke as much as or more than the next fellow. And he also liked to play practical jokes on other people. Nor did he seem to mind if one of his jokes backfired right in his face.

One day a bunch of us were sitting around outside the store waiting for the mail to run—gabbing and "spittin and whittlin," when a man drove up with a fairly good-looking used, wooden icebox in his pick-up. Clark didn't move from his sitting position, but asked the stranger, in a loud voice, "How much for the icebox?"

The man said, "I'll take ten dollars for it."

Now Clarence didn't need the icebox—he didn't even want it. He had one just like it, only better. So, his idea was to play around with the stranger awhile, exchange a few words, sort of horse-trade with him a bit, and then let him go on his way with his icebox.

He reasoned that if he offered anywhere near \$10, the stranger might accept his offer and he would be stuck with a box he didn't want and wished he didn't have. But by any standard, no horse-trader is going to sell anything for half what he's asking for it—leastwise, not without coming down slowly, a step at a time. So, Clark thought five dollars would be a safe offer. So, when the man said, "I'll take ten dollars for it," Clark didn't hesitate to say, "I'll give you five."

Nor did the stranger hesitate to say, "I'll take it."

Clark said, "You'll have to deliver it."

"Sure will. Where to?"

"About a mile. Follow me."

Clark drove his car and the man followed in his pick-up. As the man backed up to the back porch, Mrs. Clark came out of the kitchen and asked, "What have we got here?"

Her husband said, "We've got an icebox."

"We don't need it. We've got one icebox."

"You're wrong, woman, we've got two iceboxes."

I don't know what they ever did with the old box, but I'm sure he didn't let it bother him in the least.

At the Royston gin, the house in which we stored our cotton was about 30 or 40 steps away from the office building. The door leading into the cotton house was on the far side, away from the office. The door opened to the outside, and the V-space behind the open door made a nice little outhouse for men, who, for any reason at all, preferred not to walk the long distance to the two-holer when all they wanted to do was stand and drain a load of water against the cotton house wall.

One day I was up in a farmer's trailer unloading his cotton into the cotton house when Clarence Clark came out from the office and stood half hidden, his front half that is, behind the aforementioned door, and began his little chore of getting rid of excess waste water. Whereupon, I seized the opportunity to play a practical joke on this practical jokester, Mr. Clark.

I went to the back of the trailer, leaned out over the tailgate so I could see around the corner of the cotton house and, looking toward the office, I said in a loud voice, "No, ma'am, he's not here now, but he was here a few minutes ago."

Of course, I was only pretending. There wasn't a woman within a half-mile. But, you know, my

performance did exactly what I had hoped it would do, only more so. In a fraction of a second, Clark had put away his drainer before he had time to stop the flow of water. I could tell by the way he stepped out from his hiding place that dampness was already down beyond his socks and into at least one shoe. Then in about three seconds, when he realized what I had done to him, he looked up at me and said, "Johnson, I'll kill you for that." But he didn't. And I'm sure he felt better when he got home and got a bath and put on dry clothes.

Now, changing the subject, Anita came home from School one day and asked, "Daddy, why is it that, when kids at school tell a joke or a story, the goofy guy in the story is always named Clarence?" You know, I couldn't think of a good answer to give her, and I still can't.

During those years on the Royston farm, we witnessed the advent of cattle auction sales in our part of the country, and of course they led to other little happenings. I might as well tell about one or two of them right about here.

From our home it was only 30 miles to Sweetwater and 50 miles to Abilene. Those two cities together had at least three cattle sales a week. I was sitting at one of those sales one day, waiting for the cows to start selling, when they began selling a lot of odds-and-ends prior to selling the cattle.

There are times when these odds-and-ends can defy the imagination. Some of the items I have seen sell at such times were old saddles, new saddles, lariat ropes, milk goats, six bantam hens with matching rooster, three quart-bottles of screw worm medicine, a set of badly used harness, four weaning size hound pups, and many others.

Well, on this particular day, I was just sitting there being bored when suddenly here comes a sorrel saddle horse for sale. The bidding got off to a slow start and didn't speed up an awful lot. This gave me time to start thinking, but I started in the wrong direction. True, he was a good-looking animal—beautiful, not a blemish on him, tall and strong, just the horse for me.

Now, what I should have been thinking was, "If he's all that good, why isn't he bringing more money? Why aren't more men bidding on him?" I think I figured out the answers just about the time I made the final bid on the old horse. I think everyone there that day, except me, knew the horse, had owned him a week or two and had brought him back to sell to somebody like me, someone who had not owned him and didn't know about him. In fact, I sold him the following week. Only I didn't take him back to the sale, I sold him to a cow-buyer who didn't know him. And he took him back to the sale a week later.

Anyway, the bidding had only reached \$20 when I offered \$22.50. But just as I announced my bid, something told me I shouldn't have. And since no one would raise my bid to \$25, nor to \$24— not even to \$23, I found myself with a horse I wasn't quite sure I wanted. I really think the owner had bid the \$20 and waited for a sucker like me to raise his bid.

But at home the next day, Dennis rode the horse over to a neighbor's place and came back with a good report. He said the horse was lively, spirited, and altogether well behaved. I was beginning to feel better about my purchase, until a few days later when Anita tried the new horse.

Now, I'm not altogether sure she really wanted to ride the horse. It might have been my idea, or maybe it was Dennis' idea. One thing I do know for certain, it wasn't Ima's idea. However, there Anita was, up on the horse in our front yard, when the wind began flopping her neck scarf. And that was when the old horse began to come unwound.

I was holding the reins and managing to keep his front end fairly quiet and close to the ground, but his hind end kept bouncing up and down, getting higher and higher until Anita landed on the ground right by his front feet. That's when we learned that anything waving or flopping drove the horse crazy and made him pitch. He was not a flag-waving patriotic horse.

The man I sold the horse to learned the same thing the hard way when his hat almost blew off and he reached up quickly to grab it. He said he barely managed to stay on top, but got off as soon as the horse stopped bucking, and walked him to the barn. Next day he took the horse to the cow sale and auctioned him off.

Fortunately, Anita's fall off the horse didn't hurt her, but it sure scared Ima. And now, 40 years later, she still tells people how foolish I was for letting Anita get on the horse. But I say, "Why shouldn't she have ridden any horse she wanted to? After all, she was thirteen years old, and has been riding horses and cows for twelve years."

Ima insisted that she was going to rear her children correctly— protect them, see after them, teach them good manners, good moral standards and religious ethics. And the thought of all this brings to memory the time Anita was three years old, went to sleep in church one night, fell off the seat and

broke her collar bone. Now, the way I see it, the moral to all this is, ride more bucking horses and stay away from church. At least, if your pastor can't keep you awake during his talk, sit on the floor.

There seemed to be no end to new experiences and challenges. When I was working at Carriker's river farm, one afternoon at quitting time, Calvin told me to let Dennis saddle old Pony Boy the next morning and ride him over to the river farm.

I asked, "Why not haul him in my trailer as I come to work?"

Calvin said, "He has never been in a trailer, can't get him in one."

It was a six-mile trip and I saw no need for the horse to have to go that far on foot when he could just as well ride. So, next morning I hauled him over in my trailer and Calvin was surprised. He wondered how I loaded the horse.

I told him it was fairly easy. First I tried leading him into the trailer just as I would any horse. He was almost through the loading chute when he decided to retreat. In fact, he retreated all the way back down the chute and out into the corral. Then I said to him, "Okay old boy, since you like to back so well, just go ahead and back."

I backed him across the lot until his tail hit the fence on the other side of the lot. By this time he seemed to be getting the "hang" of it and didn't seem to mind backing up. So I backed him along the fence all the way around to the loading chute, then up through the chute and into the trailer, and closed the tailgate. The entire operation didn't take more than a couple of minutes, and it saved Old Pony Boy a long, hard journey on foot. I really believe he enjoyed the ride, though he never mentioned it to me.

It seems like I mentioned before, that I had never lost a penny on a bad debt. However, there might have been a time or two when I almost did, but it was when I was farming, and not while I was in business.

Yes, this happened at Royston. Hobb Reed and Hester Hammitt each owed me two dollars. Hobb had promised to pay me his two dollars as soon as he got out his first bale of cotton. Well, he got out his first bale, then his second bale, and still hadn't made a move toward paying me. So one day, in the store, back by the post office, I asked him about it. He said, "Johnson, I'm not going to pay you until Hester pays you."

I asked him, "What if I told Bill Carriker I wasn't going to pay my grocery bill until everyone else paid him?" Then I added, "And besides, you promised to pay me when you got out your first bale of cotton, and you didn't."

Hobb asked, "Johnson, are you calling me a liar?"

I said, "Call it whatever you like, you promised to pay me and you didn't."

Then he told me, "Johnson, come outside here, I'll just whip you."

And I said, "Okay, but remember, after you whip me, you still owe me two dollars."

Then suddenly, he became calm again as he said, "Come over here to the cash register, I'll just pay you."

Thank goodness we didn't go outside while he was in a bad mood. He was a lot bigger than I was and he might have half killed me.

While we lived at Royston, Papa had an old Chevrolet car that he was through with and he wanted to give it to Dennis. It was an old, old car, just had a seat and a pick-up bed, no cab at all, tires not worth 50 cents each, all leaking, radiator leaking, using oil, dripping oil, and no license plates. And besides all that, Dennis didn't have a driver's license. I didn't want Dennis to own the old car. But I saw later that I had made a mistake, and told the family so.

Looking back, I can see why I should have allowed Dennis to own the old car. But at the time, I reasoned: Dennis couldn't repair a flat, I would have to do it. With no license, he could only drive it out in the pasture. Thorns would puncture his tires. We had no money to waste on the old car. We had a car and two pick-ups, and Dennis had not shown any inclination toward repairing nor maintaining the ones we had. Besides, one neighbor boy had an old car like that, and one day he was driving down the road and the motor fell out. No kidding, the front end of the motor dropped down and stuck in the ground.

But who knows, this old car might have been just the thing to spark Dennis' enthusiasm and spur him

on, all the way up to greasy hands and skinned knuckles. And it might have built up his confidence in himself. Anyway, I regret very much that I didn't allow him to own the old car and play with it. Some of my kinfolks thought I was sort of, if not altogether, cruel to the boy. They convinced me but it was too late. The damage had been done, never to be undone.

Years later, after I had made a lot of changes in my way of thinking, and had repented for many of my shortcomings, there came a time when a daughter of one of those same kinfolks wanted to own a saddle horse in the city where they lived. And there was a time when it looked as though the girl was fighting a losing battle with her mother, who was not altogether in favor of her owning the horse in town. The mother was finally getting a look at a situation similar to the one I had years ago, but from a different viewpoint—viewing her own pocketbook instead of mine. I sent word to the mother not to be cruel to her daughter as I had been to Dennis. I told her, "By all means, let the girl have the horse, regardless of the cost." The girl got the horse all right, but he cost a fortune in trouble, money and inconvenience.

During those last years we lived at Royston, Calvin Carriker built a new house at his River Farm and wanted to put a butane log in the fireplace. But he was unable to find an artificial log that would burn butane, they all burned natural gas. He searched everywhere, and finally brought home a gas log and asked me to change it over to burn butane. I worked on it in my spare time for several days, as well as some time that was not spare. I even went to junk yards and got parts that I had to drill and shape and alter until they would do what I wanted them to do.

After a good many days, I had it burning pretty good. Calvin stopped by the shop one day and left his wife, Nell, sitting in the car. Then, when he saw how well the log was burning, he called her to come and see it. She came in, looked at it and asked, "Calvin, is that the log you bought at Rotan?"

He told her it was, and she said, "Calvin, didn't you tell Clarence that the factory man said they hadn't been able to make a log that would burn butane successfully?"

Calvin said, "No, if I had told him that, he might not have fixed it. He didn't know it couldn't be done."

I remember one day one of Calvin's bulls got through the fence and into the pasture west of his barn. He saddled a horse and went into the neighbor's pasture after him. Well, he came back telling Max and me about a rattlesnake he had seen, but couldn't find anything to kill it with. He wanted the three of us to go hunt the snake and kill it. Max took a 22 rifle and Calvin and I each took a hoe.

It was early spring and the snakes had begun to come out of their dens in the heat of the day. The grass was short but we took no chances. We walked side by side, very slowly, and watched closely. We soon found our first snake, lying at the mouth of a hole, which was about like a hole a badger might have dug. We stopped and stood motionless, whispering plans of what we should do—or at least try to do. We decided that Max was to shoot the snake, and in case he missed, Calvin and I would cut him to pieces with our hoes. Our idea was to hurry and try to keep him from escaping into the hole. Well, we got all set, Max slowly raised his gun, aimed, and fired.

We still don't know whether or not Max hit the snake. We do know, however, that the snake went into the hole, along with four or five or six others. Who knows how many? It all happened so fast. We just stood there—frozen in our tracks, trembling, scared and surprised. We had not seen any except the one snake lying near the opening of the den. We quickly looked down around our feet to see whether there might be others that we had not seen. If there happened to be one behind me that wanted to get into that hole, I sure wanted to jump aside and let him go by.

It was some time before we regained our composure. We were well aware that we must be more cautious and watch more closely than we had been. Then we walked forward, more slowly, closer together, almost stumbling over each other. We walked about 100 yards, moved over a way and took another swath coming back the same 100 yards—and killed 27 rattlesnakes. There were others, to be sure, but we had had enough for one day. And somehow, hunting rattlers was not as alluring as it had been an hour before. We planned to go back some day, but we just never did get around to it.

All my life I have seen cattle round-ups, but people always seem to do things the hard way. And that wasn't for me. A cattle round-up at our Royston farm was unlike any other round-up in the world, so far as I know. We had saddle horses but we hardly needed them. Our cows were in the habit of coming into the feed-lot to eat bundled feed. By simply closing the gate behind them, the round-up was ended. The work we had to do next would take a little more time than the rounding up did. But it was easier and faster than any system I have ever seen.

At least once each year, we had to brand all the new calves, those we had bought as well as those we had raised. We had to reduce the little bull calves to steers, vaccinate all young cattle against blackleg,

both young and old had to be vaccinated against some other disease—I have forgotten what it was called, and I'll bet a quarter we farmers didn't call it by the same name that veterinarians called it. And finally, all calves that had not been dehorned had to have their horns cut off. I remember one time we had 25 cows, a large bull, and 55 calves to work. That meant 135 vaccine shots, 30 to be branded, about 20 to be dehorned, and maybe 15 little bull calves to be worked on.

Anita was big enough to keep a fire going and to keep branding irons hot and to hand them through the fence to me. Dennis was big enough to help drive the cattle into the stanchion, hand the vaccinating needles to me, bring in more cattle from the feed lot, and turn out the ones we were through with. I was big enough to catch the cattle in the stanchion, vaccinate in the shoulder with one needle, in the hip with another, brand a Lazy-J on the left hip, cut off their horns, and work the little bull calves.

We never fooled around with a chute because we found that cattle were reluctant to enter a chute. That would be too slow and too much work. Instead, we used a stanchion that was installed permanently between two small pens. It opened large enough for the largest bull to go through and it closed small enough to hold the smallest calf. And it wasn't all that expensive. It probably cost me \$1 for second-hand lumber and 50 cents for a rope to pull the top ends of the bars together.

It was easy to get the cows to go through the stanchion since it formed a gate between the two pens. Our milk cows passed through it every day. Most any cow or calf would be glad to go from one pen to another, especially if there were some cows in the other pen.

The system was fast, and by far the easiest I have ever worked with. We three did the 80 cattle one morning but finished a little late for dinner. We sat down to a one-o'clock meal instead of a twelve-o'clock meal.

I mentioned before that we sometimes cut feed for the public. At first, Ima went along to drive the car. But later on, I build an iron "basket" at the back bumper of the car to carry the front wheels of the tractor. Then I could drive the car and trail the tractor and the binder, and Ima could stay home. One patch of feed was 50 miles away in Kent County. Where the road was so sandy that the car couldn't pull the tractor and binder, I would crank the tractor motor and let the tractor push, with no driver on it. And we learned that low air pressure in the auto tires would allow it to go most anywhere in sand. We parked that Buick on top of nearly every sand hill in Carriker's big sand field.

When the binder needed a repair job underneath, we threw a chain over the top of the binder and hooked one end to the frame and the other end to the tractor. Just a little pull with the tractor would roll the binder over for easy access to the underside.

By the end of World War II, our old coal oil cookstove was pretty well rusted out and was looking like a reject from a junk heap. Ima was looking forward to something better. In fact, she knew exactly what that something was, a new butane range. She and I went to Stamford one day to inquire as to whether we would be able to get a butane tank and how much it might cost. We got this information from the appliance dealer. He could sell us the butane and tank, but we might have to wait a year for a permit to buy a stove. He told us we might go to the ration board and find out. Now, I knew we couldn't get a permit from the Stamford board, because that was in Jones County and we lived in Fisher County.

The ration board was only a short distance away, so I went over to ask a question or two. But the woman in charge ignored my questions and, very undiplomatically, ordered me to, "Sit over at that table and fill out this form."

I filled out the form and presented it to the not-so-friendly woman. She looked it over, mumbled a few words, which I couldn't understand, placed another paper before me and said, "Sign here."

I still wondered how long I might have to wait for the lady to answer a simple question or two but by this time I was afraid to ask. I sure didn't want to make her mad, she might never answer my questions. So, when she told me to sign, I lost no time in signing the paper. I didn't know what I was signing and I didn't much care. I only hoped that she would answer my questions when I got through signing all the forms she kept handing me.

When I finally got through signing all the papers and gave them back to her, she still wouldn't talk to me, but she gave me a certificate which would allow an appliance dealer to sell me a butane cook stove without either of us being subject to confinement in a Federal Penal Institution.

I went back and showed the certificate to the appliance dealer, and he was really surprised as he asked, "How did you get that? I have customers who have been waiting a year for one and are still waiting. Some of them would be glad to pay you \$100 for it."

I told him I just filled out some papers, and the nice lady gave it to me.

There was no need to lie in filling out the forms. I told the truth all the way. One question I had to answer was, "Where do you live?"

My answer was, "On a farm near Hamlin."

If it had asked, "In which county do you live?" I would still be waiting for the certificate. The lady and Hamlin were both in Jones County. I lived in Fisher County.

## CHAPTER 19

### TOUR PIKE'S PEAK, MOVED TO ARKANSAS, WENT TO COLLEGE

As you know, Frank was the oldest in our family, and when I was growing up, he was away from home a lot. I had long since become accustomed to his being away from home. He even went to college awhile, I believe it was Denton State. But he didn't go very long. I didn't know whether he quit because of a lack of finances or because of a lack of interest and drive. I was the only other one of us who ever left home to work or run around— except Joel. He went as far as Stamford and worked there for years in a drygoods store. And later, of course, he had his portable skating rink and he took it from here to there. Then he settled down with it in Brownwood.

My working away from home never amounted to much. However, I wouldn't take a pretty penny for the educational benefits I gained from my traveling around. It increased my desire for more learning, and it gave me confidence in my ability to do more things. It made me more mobile and took away my fear of strange places.

In fact, I thought so much of my education gained through travel that I wanted us to travel a lot with our children. But we were poor and couldn't travel first class, which would have pleased some members of my family. As for me, I would have been glad to travel second class or third class rather than not travel at all. As is evident, I have roughed it much of my life. Later, when I wanted to travel with our kids, I would have gotten a lot of pleasure from roughing it again, going places and seeing things, camping out, and visiting the wild. Some of our traveling proved to be a big failure because some of the family didn't especially care to put up with some of the roughing they had to go through with at times.

For instance, we drove up Pike's Peak once in our Dodge Command car. There was nothing wrong with the car. It was built capable of traveling across the Sahara Desert trouble-free. It was Army surplus, four-wheel drive and as solid as they come. Many cars get too hot climbing the Peak, but this one didn't, although it was in the heat of summer. It had an army canvas top and curtains to match. But since it was beautiful weather, we had the curtains packed away under the back seat. And although it was summertime at the foot of the mountain, it was not summer on top.

The weather on Pike's Peak can change from sunshine to snow and from snow to sleet quicker than perhaps anywhere else in these United States. And the sky can pour out the abundance of her elements faster than is sometimes enjoyable to those upon whom she so recently spread her sunshine. And that is just what she did to us that day. Her elements were in the form of rain, snow, and large sleet. The sleet was sort of a cross between pure white sleet and large, soft hail.

Now, the road up Pike's Peak is, for the most part, void of suitable parking places, even for emergencies. And all this sleet and ice falling suddenly out of the sky did create an emergency. However, before we arrived at an emergency parking place, Ima was very unhappily sitting in a puddle of snow and sleet and ice that had fallen into the front seat and had worked its way down to the back side of her lap.

When we found a little place to pull over and stop, we put up the curtains. But Ima's unhappiness remained with her much longer than I had hoped it would. The truth is, she carried a large portion of it, as well as a little bit of dampness, all the way back down the mountain to Colorado Springs. And there, we found the same type of slush curb to curb four inches deep.

I never quite forgave the weather for that little stunt it pulled on us. It was a long time before I could get the family to go with me again anywhere outside our home county.

Time not only "waits for no man," it seems to go faster and faster. We were getting older and our kids were growing up. Dennis finished high school in Hamlin in June of 1949. In the fall of that same year he

began to hear advertisements on radio about cheap farm land in Arkansas, and he sent for a catalog of listings. When it arrived, I had to admit there were some interesting bargains offered in it. The more Dennis read the catalog and listened to the radio, the more he was convinced that out there somewhere in this big country of ours, there was something we had been missing. Then one day he said to me, "Daddy, let's go look at some of these places. All we are doing here is working ourselves to death and getting nowhere."

We talked it over and I agreed that, if it suited the rest of the family, we would go look. Dennis and I went first, not to buy, but only to shop around. We went to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and looked all the way from 60 miles north of there to 60 miles south of there. We liked what we saw and the prices were right. Then we returned home, and Ima and I went to Arkansas, this time not just looking; we were buying. After looking a few days, we found and bought a small farm three miles south of Mansfield.

We moved onto the place in the early spring of 1950. Anita stayed with the Tarlington Willingham family to finish out her Sophomore year in Hamlin High School. She joined us that summer and spent her Junior year in Mansfield High School. Then she did some special work during the next summer and, in the fall of 1951, instead of entering Mansfield High as a Senior, she entered the University of Arkansas as a Freshman.

Three years later Dennis also entered the University as a Freshman. Then three years after that, Dennis and Anita both came to me and told me it was my time next. They promised to see me through. They would handle the finances; it would be up to me to make my grades.

One of my dreams when I was 20 years old, was to finish high school, go to college, and become a school teacher. It was 31 years later that my three children decided it was time for me to realize that dream. At first I argued against the idea, half-heartedly, but was pleased when they insisted. And I must admit that I have thoroughly enjoyed the good life which they have afforded me, beginning with those first days of college in 1957. By that time Dennis was a college Senior, Anita was teaching in college, and Larry was a high school Freshman.

Oh yes, I even enjoyed the struggle during those early college days, even when it became doubtful that I would make passing grades in one or two subjects. The challenges encountered there and afterward have renewed within me the will to work for something better, and a desire to better understand why I work at all.

Early in my college days I realized that I must make some changes in my way of thinking toward others, and my attitude toward some of my ideals, which I had cultivated since early childhood. I saw a need for conformity in certain cases, rather than uncompromising individualism, so long as it didn't interfere with my integrity. Such a change didn't come easily; I am still trying, but old habits from the past keep causing me to backslide at times.

However, I think my greatest change is one that can not be seen by others—an inner feeling of well-being that tells me, "Don't worry about your past mistakes. You can not go back and correct them. And you will make other mistakes tomorrow. Mistakes are a part of the natural order of human living. Have a good day today and be content with whatever tomorrow may bring."

I spent three regular school years and three summers in college, and enjoyed every minute of it. I was on the honor roll half the time. I also did a little teaching in General Shop in Junior High Training School. One day when the Professor had to be away, I even took it upon myself to break one of his rules and allow the boys to make knives. I told him about it when he returned, and I told him why I did it. He agreed that it was a good idea.

Then I served one semester as student teacher in a college machine shop course, ranked highest in my class in economics, first in woodshop class, second in machine shop, and made "C" in United States History without having to study it. After all, I remembered most of it from having lived through so much of it. I cheated on two exams, just a little, not even enough for my conscience to bother me, caught two professors cheating on my exams—cheating in my favor, to help me make passing grades.

During my first two semesters, it seemed that I got very little help from my teachers. There I was, an old man sitting in class with a group of 20-year-old boys and girls. It seemed that the teachers had the idea that I would drop out as soon as the going got tough, so why should they waste time on me?

Then when they saw I was there to stay, they seemed to want to help me get on through. From then on, things got easier. Finally I graduated and went out to face the same world that I had been facing for 55 years, only this time I had the diploma which caused adults to look up to me and kids to look down on me.

My first year of teaching was in a 21-teacher school in Farmington, Arkansas. Enough interesting

things took place there that year to fill a good size book.

In September of 1961 I began teaching 6th grade in an Indian School on the Navaho Indian Reservation near Winslow, Arizona. I taught there at Leupp just six weeks. Then I resigned my position and moved to San Angelo, Texas, because of Ima's health. There I spent my first year teaching Wood Shop at Lee Junior High School. And I taught nine years in Special Education.

At age 65 San Angelo Schools retired me. I could have gone on and taught in some other town, but who wants to teach when he can retire and loaf? Not me. So, I retired and loafed. Ima and I bought a travel trailer and did more than our share of traveling the next two-and-a-half years. In fact, we traveled so much that the nation began to run short of gasoline. It doubled in price and we thought we ought to slow down and let some others do some traveling also. Now, all I have to do is sit around and write and let you know what I have been doing these past 72 years.

Since I have retired, I have a lot of time to loaf and sit and think. At first it hurt my conscience to loaf; I had to force myself to sit down, and I still find it difficult to think. But I am having a wonderful time since I have learned to look at life from a different angle.

When I was young my parents took me to Sunday School and Church. They taught me that it was good to keep the Sabbath, respect the preacher, honor my father and my mother, and be kind to others. I knew I was good because I did all those things.

But, as I became older, I began to feel that something was wrong. Life was passing me by. Church had lost its charm. When the preacher preached hellfire and brimstone to sinners, I felt left out. I knew he wasn't preaching to me because I was good, and had been all my life. I put my dollar in the collection plate only to feel that I had been cheated—not getting my money's worth, always listening to sermons preached to bad people.

But now I'm happy again. I have changed my entire life style— what I do, what I think, and what I say. Now I make it a point to insult someone, cheat someone, lie to someone, be mean to someone at least once each week. Now the preacher is back on speaking terms with me. He preaches directly to me every Sunday. I give my dollar to the church and come away with the feeling that I have gotten more than my money's worth. It's a good feeling.

## **EPILOGUE**

Clarence Johnson — January 11, 1906 — November 9, 1994

Clarence Johnson died quietly in his sleep at daybreak on November 9, 1994. He had been ill for about three months. He was 88 years old.

This book was scanned and edited by David Larry Johnson in loving memory of his Dad.

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