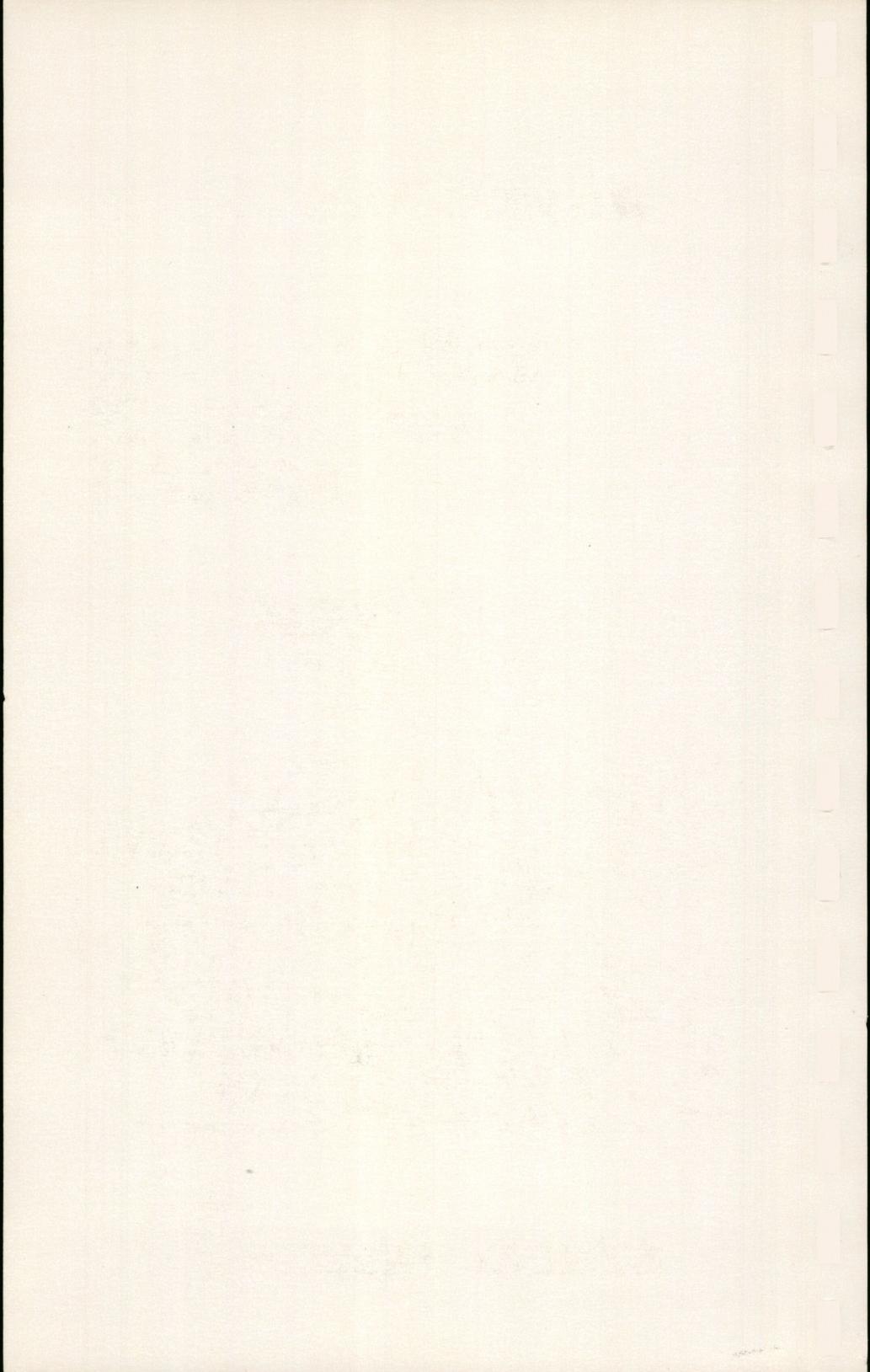


**IF YOU THINK TV IS BAD FOR KIDS**

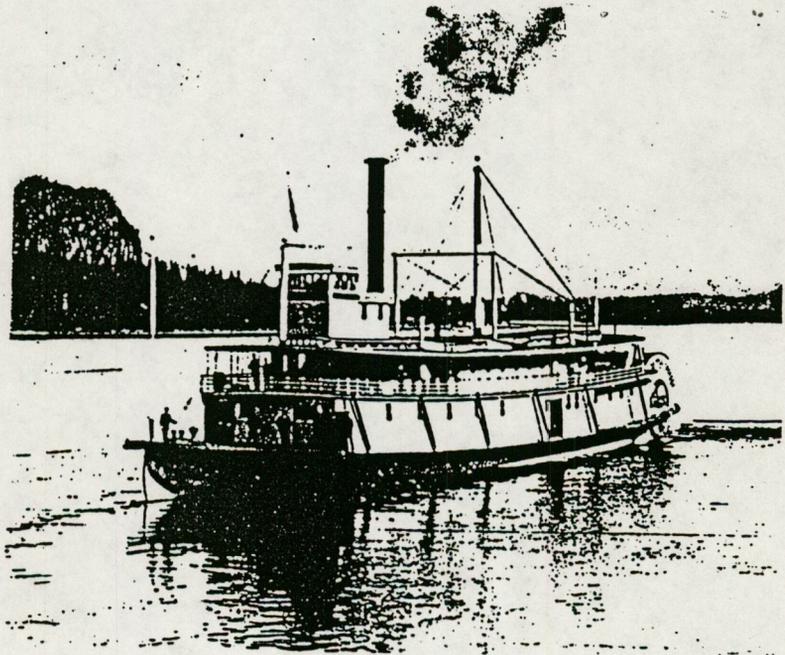
**YOU SHOULD'VE  
GROWN UP IN  
LINNTON**

**(c) 1993 Mel Rees**

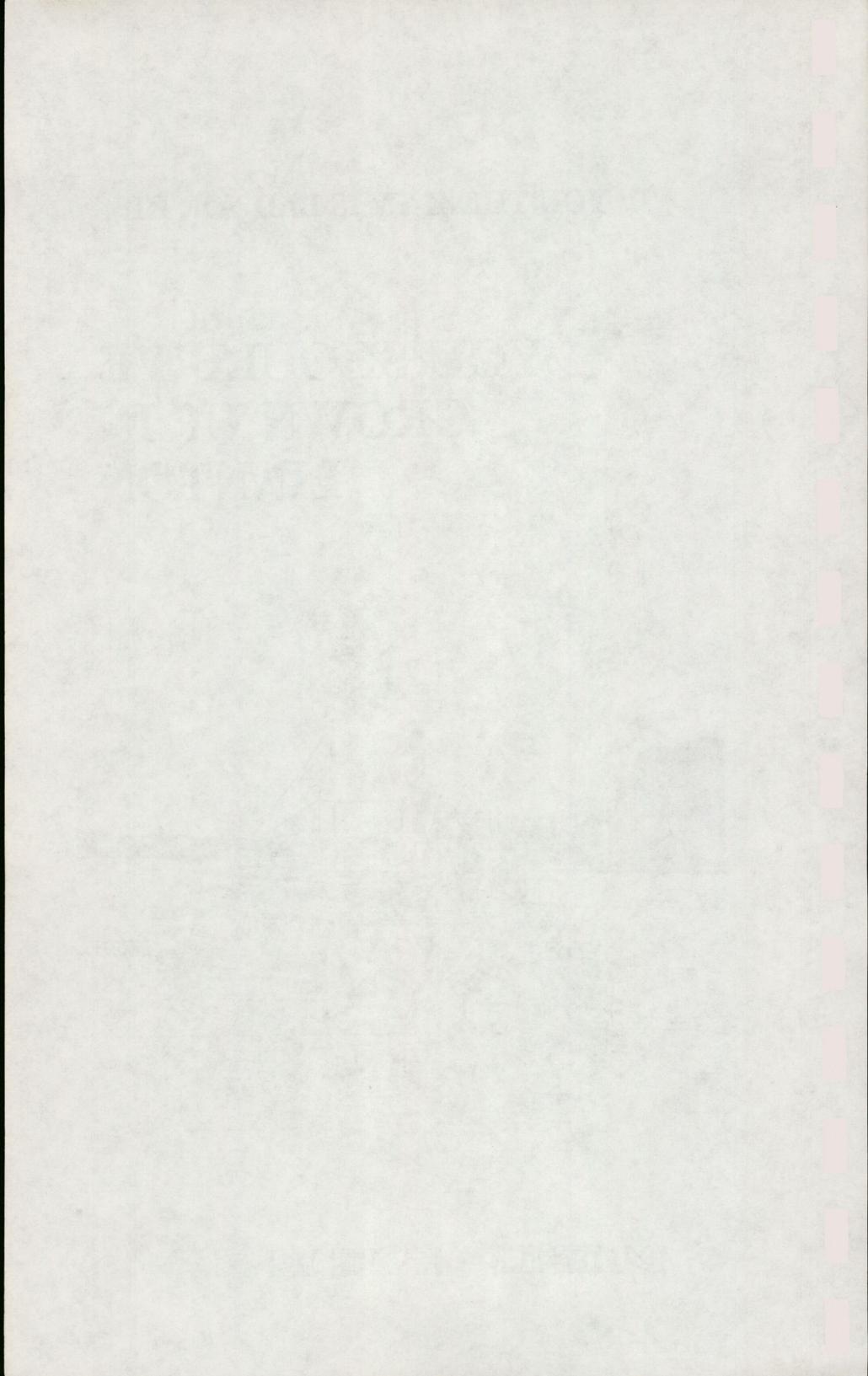


IF YOU THINK TV IS BAD FOR KIDS

YOU SHOULD'VE  
GROWN UP IN  
LINNTON

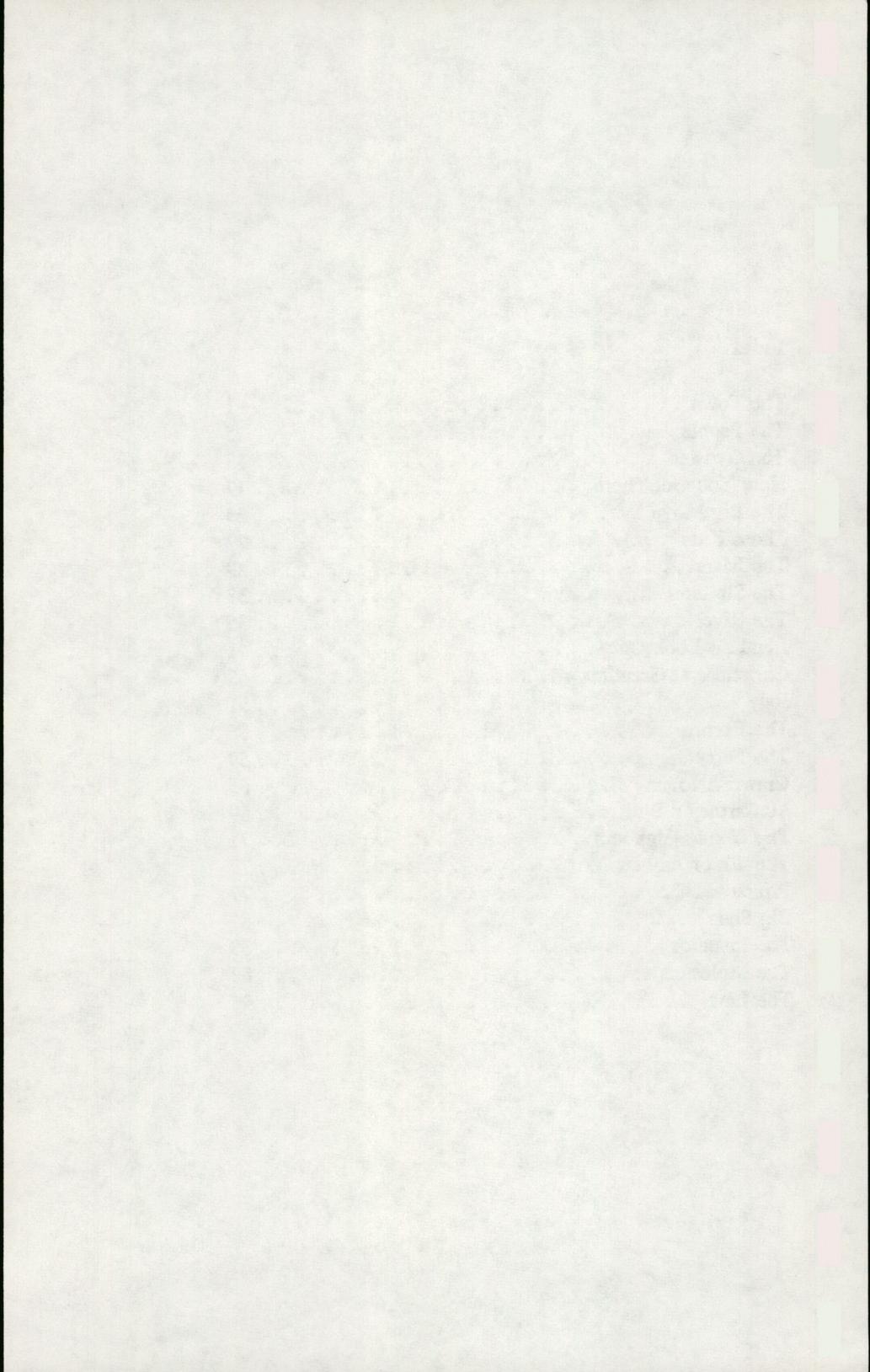


MEL REES



## Index

The Town .....	1
The People .....	5
The Gypsies .....	13
How You Got There .....	17
The Big Move .....	23
Those Kids .....	27
The Island .....	29
The Stutterer .....	33
The River .....	35
J and J - Look Out .....	41
Christmas at Grandma's .....	45
Joey .....	51
The Berries .....	55
The Ferry .....	59
Crawfish Johnny .....	65
McCartney's Bull .....	69
The Good Neighbors .....	71
The 4th of July .....	73
Prince .....	77
Big Shep .....	81
The Inventor .....	83
The Molesters .....	87
The Law .....	91

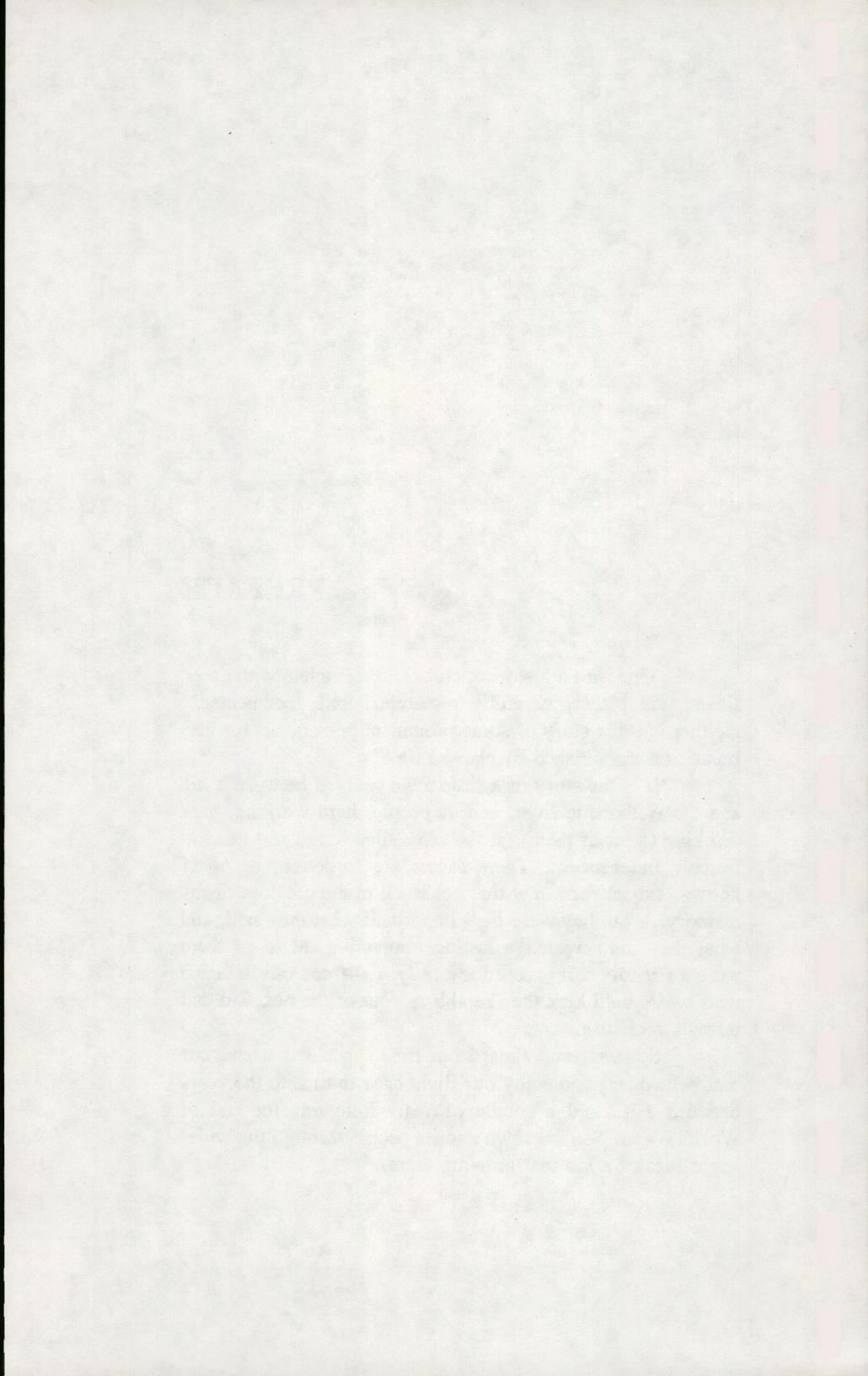


## PREFACE

This isn't a historical chronicle, complete with dates, times, and places, carefully researched and documented. Neither is it the story of some prominent person, his (or her) reputation embellished by elapsed time.

It is the story of a little town wedged between a hill and the Willamette river, and its people: hard working, hard drinking (a lot of them), at the same time rough and gently-fiercely independent. Their names are forgotten, or never known, except for a few that got stuck in the crevices of my memory. Who they were isn't important; what they said, and what they did, created a lasting impression. Most of them were a friendly sort except for a testy, red-faced old Irishman who swore he'd kick the "bejabbers" out of the next kid that threw a rock at his cat.

So, welcome aboard our time capsule. Fasten your seat belt, relax, and enjoy our flight back in time to the years between 1912 and a couple of years following the end of World War I. See the town and its people through the wide-angle eyes of a kid that grew up there.



## THE TOWN

I suppose Linnton was like a thousand other mill towns in the timber country of the Pacific Northwest, no better--no worse. There were three mills, seven saloons, a general store, a bank, and a butcher shop. If there was a barber shop, I don't remember it. My mother took care of this ritual. "Respectable kids didn't go around with long hair," she explained. Hence, the frequent appearance of clipper, scissors and comb. "After all," she would say, "What would people think?" This requirement seemed to govern much of what we looked like and did.

The town didn't have much room to breathe, let alone stretch. The mills, and some oil storage tanks took up most of the flat land between the mountain and the river. (It was probably a high hill, but it always looked like a mountain to me) So, there were little, unpainted, clapboard shacks, and a few honest-to-goodness houses, huddled in between the mills, the business places, and the river. The rest had to cling to the hillside. And, that's the only place the town could grow--up hill. I could never forget all the stairs going up to those houses. How could I? I delivered milk after school, and had to run up and down them. Just for fun, I used to count them, but always stopped when I got to a hundred. It's hard to say one-hundred-one, one-hundred-two when a fellow is out of breath.

My uncles built many of these houses, and they were very nice. Their Norwegian father taught them that anything worth doing was worth doing well. The lesson must have stuck. For, even today (after more than 80 years of watching the river go by), they don't look their age--maybe a bit old fashioned.

As one would expect, most of them were made of wood, being close to the lumber mills--except the bank, of

## The Town - 2

course. It was built of hand-hewn, stone blocks. Gave it a solid, safe look--impressive too. Most places had fenced yards. These must have been for decoration rather than protection--they were too easy to jump over.

The mills were the heartbeat of the town. With their low, incessant rumble they never let it go to sleep. It was like a symphony--more like a calliope: steam whistles screeching: cut-off saws squealing; the pop-pop-popety-pop of the carriage exhausts. The main whistle that signalled the start of the first shift--noon--and quitting time must have been a monster, at least it sounded like one, rolling up and down the streets. The silence that followed its fading echo, made the town skip a beat.

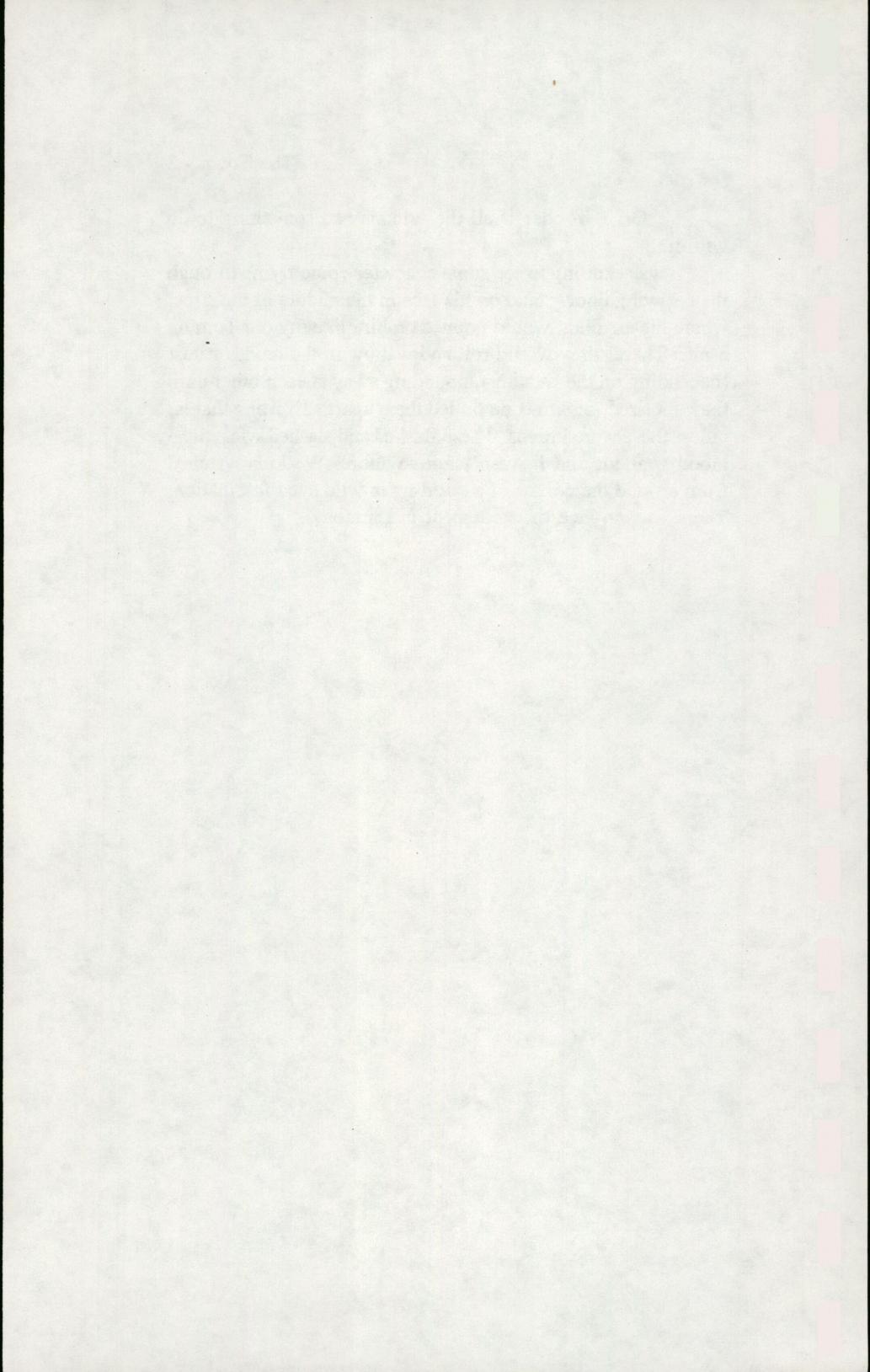
Then, there was that other whistle. . .the one no one wanted to hear. . .the one they blew when there was an accident. High pitched, shrill--terrifying--it's measured cadence screamed at you, twisted your innards. Your blood stopped flowing. Everything stopped flowing. Women stopped kneading bread, washing clothes, or whatever they were doing (and they were always busy doing something); the grocer stopped counting out change; the banker's pen hesitated over his ledger: the butcher's cleaver paused in mid air.

Everyone froze, wondering. Who is it this time? Is it my brother? Is it my man? Then, like leaves shoved along by a sudden gust of wind, they would collect at the main gate, to either sigh in relief, or bury their heads in their hands--sobbing uncontrollably. The fear of that whistle, like a leaden, rain-soaked cloud hung over everyone's head every day--all day. . .waiting. . .waiting.

But, life did go on; people did die or get killed (often); people were married; babies were born; kids played in the dusty streets, ogled the candy in the General Store (cost a nickel for a striped bag full, but who had a nickel?)--went to school--and fought. That was the easiest thing to find in town--a fight. Maybe it was because they were so common, the kids just looked at them as a way of life.

Or, I wonder if all the saloons had something to do with it.

It was exciting to see some character come flying through the bat-wing doors, land on his face in the middle of the street where his assailant would pounce on him like my old Tom on a rat. There, they would roll and wallow in the mud, or dust (depending on the weather), pounding away at each other until they got tired, or someone pulled them apart. Exciting that is, unless there were knives. These flashed and slashed wickedly-- blood spurted, and it wasn't fun anymore. We kids watched from around the corner of a building in wild eyed fascination. There was no lack of excitement in Linnton.



## THE PEOPLE

Every town has its characters; Linnton had a full quota. One of these was my Uncle Joe. He owned the only fancy place right in the middle of town. He always kept his house and picket fence painted white with green trim and took particular pride in his yard and garden. Every Halloween he'd go into orbit when some pranksters routinely laid his little outhouse on its side. It was as pretty as it was functional with vents of a moon and stars cut neatly just under the eaves. Whoever upended it evidently wasn't impressed with Uncle's artistry. He didn't consider them pranksters. "Hoodlums! Vandals!" he'd shout. These were some of his the more charitable epithets.

We'd hear him swear he'd tan, or otherwise preserve their blasted hides, if he ever caught them. He never did, even though he lay in his upstairs hallway all one Halloween night with a shotgun loaded with buckshot. He'd fix them, he said. Sometime during the night he must have dozed--when he woke up, the little white house was resting peaceably on its side. Everyone detoured around Uncle's place for some time, at least until he simmered down and stowed his hardware.

The schoolboard chairman is the one who should have been upset: he had a better reason. Irritated at having the school's impressive 4-holer upended night-after-Halloween-night, he took an unusual precaution--he sat inside, and waited. Not for long. Without any warning, over she went--door down and him inside!

A neighbor, a half-mile away, let his cat out for the night. Just as he was closing the door, he thought he heard a cry for help--from the direction of the schoolhouse. But that couldn't be, for school was out--at least it was supposed to be. Investigating, he found the hapless chairman, head sticking out of one of the holes, calling down the wrath of all the gods on

the "bums who did this."

The scene was just too funny. The would-be rescuer couldn't keep from laughing. He laughed so hard, he fell down and started beating the ground with his fists. This infuriated the man in the hole, who re-directed his wrath to include one more "bum". The fellow tried to lift the building, but it was too heavy; and he had to go for help. This only added to the problem. To put it in the reportorial style then in vogue, "a good time was had by all."

The town fathers, or whoever was in charge of such things, didn't pay much attention to these minor incidents; they were too occupied with the logistics involved in returning the long park benches back to earth from their perches on the tops of the light poles. They were heavy, slatted seats with cast iron ends, another in the middle. Unfortunately, those who placed them in such elevated positions with such ease (and no equipment), never came forward to share their expertise with the men who had to take them down. . .they never caught those "bums" either.

Linnton was about as cosmopolitan as a small town can be without the capacity for expansion and the industries to fuel it. Because the payroll was derived almost entirely from the mills, large numbers of unskilled immigrants settled there, forming within the community, little colonies of foreigners with their life-styles, dress, and customs. There were Japanese, Chinese, Hindus, Austrians, Italians, and Greeks. The Swedes and Norwegians were scattered among the hodge-podge who considered themselves Americans.

Most of the foreigners were new arrivals to the States. My dad explained that one of the men, who could talk English, would contract with the mills for so many workers. Then he would hire these nationals and act as their foreman--for a percentage of their wages, of course. All orders from the main bosses filtered down through these foremen.

In this sense, Linnton was a little United Nations. Mostly these people lived to themselves, in the life style of the countries from which they came. They followed the same

customs; ate the same foods.

They were shy, but friendly and seemed to enjoy inviting the "milk boy" (me) to try some of their native dishes. Thus, as a kid of seven or eight, I developed a taste for international cuisine.

Quite often as I passed the Japanese settlement in the evening, the door would be open to their communal bath house. I could see them: men, women, and children up to their chins in a mammoth hot tub, looking like boiled lobsters. They would wave, laugh, and motion for me to join them, but from the cloud of steam coming out the door, I thought this was one foreign luxury that was too hot to sample.

People often referred to these people as Wops, Chinks, Japs, Bohunks, etc.(not to their faces, of course--unless they were mad). I always wondered about the Bohunks? I knew who they were, but when I'd ask someone where they came from, the answer would be "Oh, you know," and spread their hands. I didn't know. Europe, maybe.

Come to think about it, there weren't any blacks. I don't know why; there was every other color. Probably just as well, for we kids were afraid of black people. This could have been because of the story Uncle Dick used to tell us about the time he hiked 15 miles to Portland from his dad's farm in Cornelius Pass, to spend the Fourth of July. He said his dad wanted him to have a good time, so he gave him 15 cents for spending money.

He was walking down Front Street and saw a black man. "Hello Mr. Nigger," he said. He was just a big gawky, farm boy--he wasn't trying to be smart--just friendly. The big black carefully selected a handful of shirt and jacket, lifted him up to eye level, pulled him nose-close, and snarled,

"Boy! Yo ev'a call me nigga again 'n Awl cut yo liva out 'n make yo eat it--piece by lil piece!"

So--we kids, not having any spare parts and not wanting surgery at such a tender age, became very scarce whenever we saw a Negro. (With all the black friends I have today, it seems strange. Strange.)

Some of the people in town were Americans, at least, that's what they called themselves. Then, we'd find out they weren't born here either. So I guess we kids were the only Americans around, except the Indians, but we didn't see many of these. This seems odd, for Sauvies Island was the council grounds for all the Northwest Indians. And that was only a couple of miles down the river.

While most of the citizens were laborers, Linnton had its merchants, a lawyer, one doctor, a banker, and a full compliment of bartenders. They needed these for it was a thirsty town.

There was one general store that carried most everything from candles to can openers. It was owned by a skinny man by the name of Shelk. I remember the pink sleeve holders and the straw hat. Must have been appropriate head gear for grocers; he wore it summer and winter. I don't think they had sales in those days, but we weren't interested in anything but the glass-cased candy counter anyway.

Just down the street was the bank with Mr. Mann looking very businesslike in his suit, white shirt and tie--and gold-rimmed spectacles. We didn't see him very often for he mostly stayed inside and we stayed outside.

A couple of doorways farther on was the butcher shop. Mr. McCartney, the butcher, could really wake up the town when some stray dog went into his establishment soliciting a contribution. He would come out, a step or two behind the miscreant, swinging whatever came to hand, broom, knife, or cleaver--mustache in full bristle--bellowing like a bull. We kids would follow the dog down the closest alley, and stay hid until the air turned from purple to blue again.

The doctor? (Wasn't his name Browse?) I always thought he was extra friendly to us kids. I don't know if he just liked us, or it was good for business. He drove one of the few automobiles in town, beautiful machine with brass headlights, and real leather seats.

The bartenders? I never got close enough to most of

them to learn whether they were friendly or not. I did deliver a bottle of milk inside one saloon; put it on the bottom step leading up to the apartment above. So, I got to see the inside, and the regular customers. Some of them I knew, because I delivered milk to their houses.

One night, one of the bar bums tried to give me a drink of something. When I thanked him and tried to leave, he grabbed me by the arm and said. "You're going to drink this, or else." Mr. Grim (isn't that a great name for a bartender--but it really was--maybe it was Grimm) reached across the bar, grabbed him by the shoulder and snapped, "Leave the kid alone." He did. So, I guess some bartenders are friendly.

We pretty well detoured their places, however, for a fellow never knew when, or what, might come flying through their swinging doors on one of their toes. Once you saw the glare in their eyes, as they dusted off their knuckles, you weren't too eager to find out if they were friendly or not.

The one person in town, however, that impressed me the most, was the whittler. That's all the name I know. That's what I called him. He kinda reminded me of the picture of Lincoln, hanging on the wall at school--stubby beard, big adams apple, and lanky-tall. I could spot him a block away as he stopped to talk with some of his cronies. If I wasn't on an errand, or something, I would get as close as possible to watch him carve a little figurine from a piece of stick he picked up.

First, he would use the big blade of his knife to square it; then, carefully inspect it, as he turned it slowly around. With the little blade he would start carving. It was always the figure of a lady.

His hands were as big as hams, but they were as deft as surgeons fingers, as the chips flew. In minutes I could see the shape of the head: hair, ears, eyes, nose, and mouth. A snip here and there seemed to satisfy him, as he held it up from time to time to check his progress. Next would come the neck, then the full breasts. If the conversation lasted long

enough, the navel, hips, and legs would appear. Finally--the feet (if time wasn't running out) But, I always dreaded what I knew was going to happen just as soon as the talk ended. He would take one look at his creation, then there would be four snips of the super-sharp little blade: head, waist, thighs, and feet. And. . .he would scuff what remained of that beautiful little figurine in the dust with his toe, as he snapped his knife shut and strode away.

How I wanted one of those. I would keep my eyes on the figure, and my ears on the talk, trying to determine the "cut off" point. At the critical moment of parting, my hand would be reaching for his sleeve, my mouth forming the word "Mister". But, I never touched him, and the word never came out--until it was too late.

I still wonder why I didn't say, Mister, could I please have that? He might have given it to me, but in those days, kids were taught to be seen, not heard--and besides--there was a good chance of a scowl, or beat it kid, or a boot-in-the-butt. So, I watched. . .and wished.

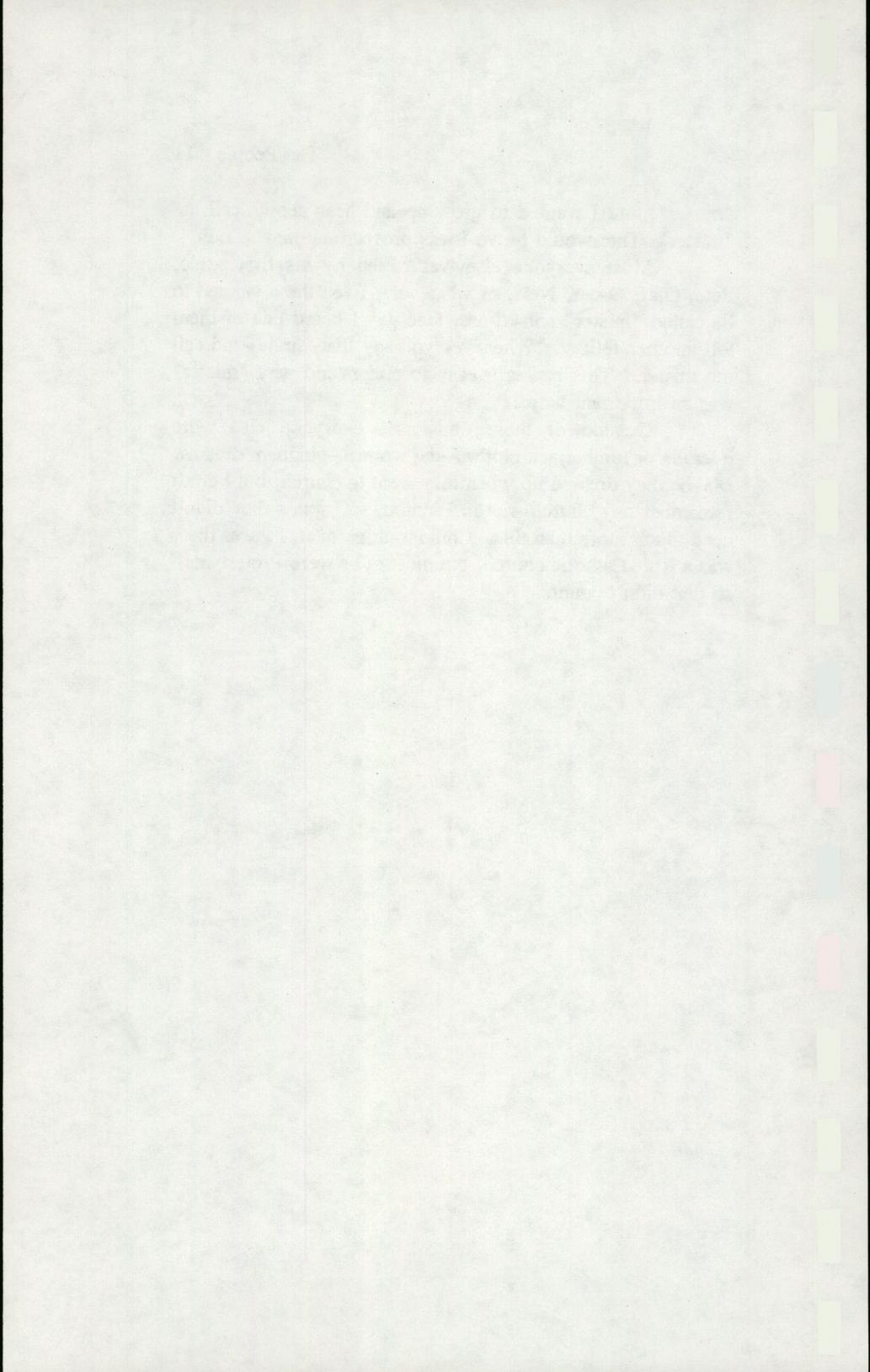
I don't know if anyone thought about it, or not--that is about poverty, for everyone was poor. Except, possibly, the banker (everyone called him "mister"); maybe the grocer (but he always wore an apron, which didn't make him look too prosperous). Of course there were the mill owners. I suppose they lived in Portland, but that was a long ways away (must have been all of ten miles). Come to think of it, one of them did build a beautiful home on the hill that overlooked the old West Oregon Mill. Possibly I remember him, or rather his wife, because, she gave me a beautiful, hand-knit scarf and mittens for Christmas one year.

Why they were called Mister Clark, or Mister Wilson, or Mister Mann, I don't know, unless, they were important people, and--rich. But, my dad always spoke respectfully about them. (I know now that this was a good idea for he was a millwright in Mister Clark's and Mister Wilson's mill.) "It always pays to be respectful"--so my mother said. The important thing I remember is that word

"mister", and I wanted to grow up and hear people call me "mister". That would prove I was prosperous--maybe rich.

Most everyone else was called by his first name, Pete, Olaf, Oscar, Nels, or whatever. Even these wanted to be called "mister" sometimes. One day I heard one of them tell another fellow, "Whenever you say that--smile--and call me mister." This makes it easy to understand why "mister" was an important word.

Outside of these "misters", everyone else wore overalls or lumberjack clothes--the women--gingham dresses. Maybe they dressed up when they went to church, but I don't remember any church--not in Linnton, so I guess they didn't need much more than this. Come to think of it, I guess there was a little Catholic church, but most of us were Protestants--so that didn't count.



## THE GYPSIES

Although they didn't live in the area, and only camped in the field just south of town for a few days when they were passing through, the Gypsies have to be included with the people who made life interesting. Where they came from, or where they were going, we never knew. Two, three, or four wagons would come down the road, and the word went out: The Gypsies are in town.

"The men, I remember, were dark skinned, with big, black mustaches. Some of them wore scarfs on their heads and had rings in their ears. The women wore long, colorful dresses and usually rode in the back of the covered wagons. The kids were always playing on the sides of the road. Unfair as it may have been, there was instant apprehension when the Gypsies were in the area. People said that everything that wasn't nailed down, locked up, or buried was subject to immediate removal. Even pocket money wasn't safe--especially if one were foolish enough to have his fortune told. That's what people said--that's what we kids believed.

My one experience with Gypsies, taught me to leave them alone, even if my inclinations were otherwise.

Although we lived on a hill, our pasture was down by the river--all 15 acres. Our stock preferred it: the grass was so green, and there was plenty of water (there ought to be, it bordered the river). There were cottonwood trees for shade where they could lounge during mid-day, chewing their cuds. Every morning, after milking, we would drive them down to the pasture, where they would spend the day until milking time in the evening. Going from the barn to the pasture, we had to drive the cattle along the railroad track for about a hundred yards. We timed this to the train schedule and

always hoped an extra wouldn't come rocketing through.

One evening, about dusk, my father sent me back down to the pasture to find a heifer that hadn't come in with the herd. To get there from our house, I had to go down a trail to the electric tracks, down another trail to the highway, down another trail to the steam line tracks, and another short one to the pasture fence.

Just as I started to cross the highway, I saw two Gypsy wagons, down the road, plodding along in the direction of Linnton. There were some boys and girls loitering behind, chasing each other, throwing rocks over the bank. I didn't think much about it, until a boy, about my age, threatened to shoot me with his BB gun. I thought he was playing until I felt the BB hit my leg. It stung. He jacked another pellet in the gun and shot me a second time. This was one time too many.

I had a 6-foot blacksnake (whip), coiled around my neck. My cowboy grandfather gave it to me for my birthday. It had a thong to go around the wrist, a foot-long hardwood handle, and a lash that tapered to a 6 inch tip of rawhide. I had practiced endless hours snapping the heads from dandelions, as well as, everything else in reach.

I took after this kid. I'd teach him to shoot people in the legs, or anywhere else. (That's one lesson that almost back-fired)

He took off for the wagons, yelling bloody murder. I took off after him. It was no contest. The little snake uncoiled, and popped him on the calf of the leg. His squeal went up at least three octaves. He got his first lesson in gun safety. He'd remember this one. So would I.

Men erupted from the wagons. I ran (flew) back and down the trail to the pasture. My only safety was in getting to one of the many thickets that grew near the river. Fortunately it was getting dark.

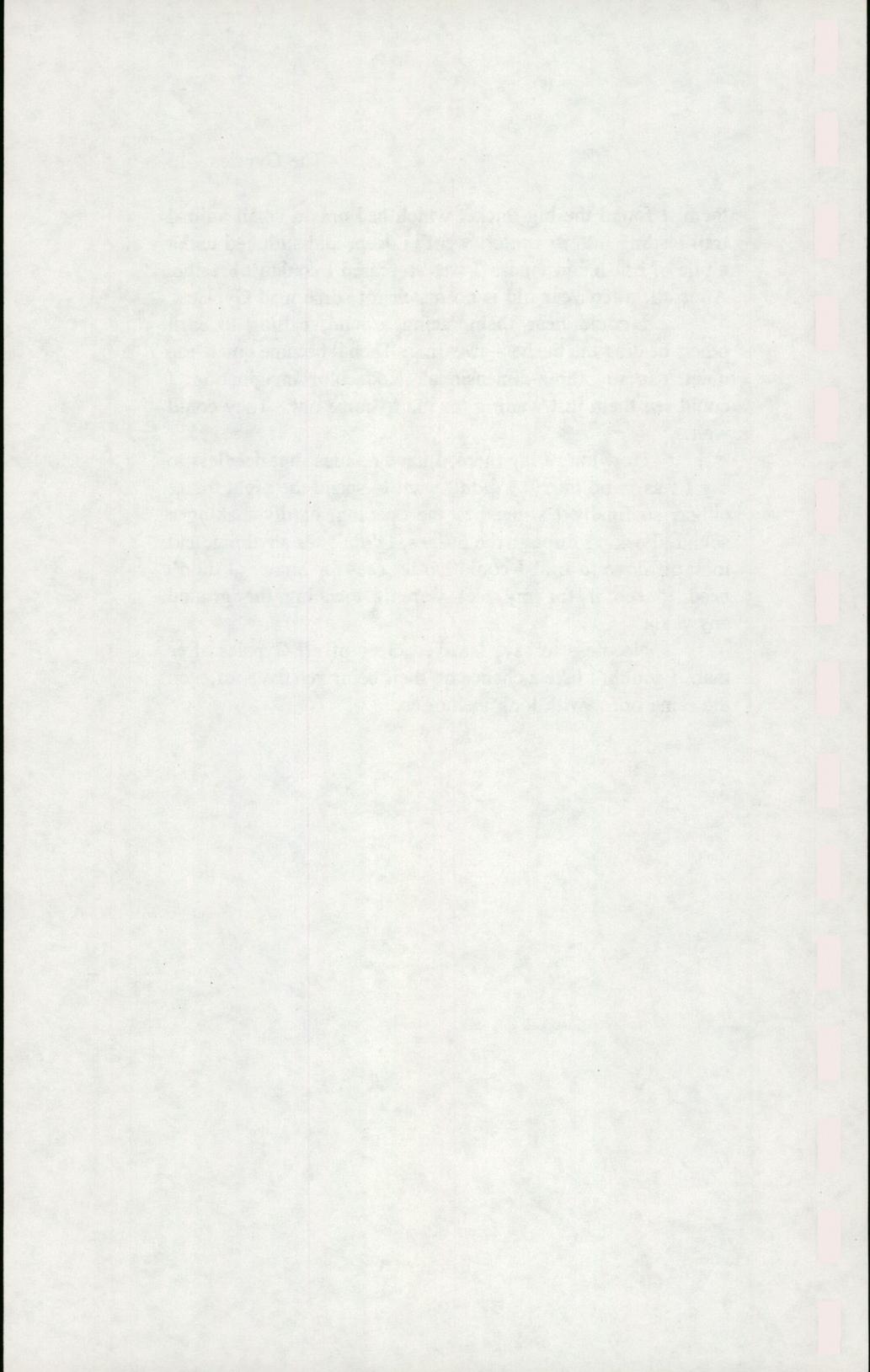
After leaping across the tracks and the pasture fence, I ran behind the first thicket, which shielded me as I crouched low and ran as if the devil was after me--there were six of

them! I found the big thicket which had only a small animal trail leading into its center; went in deep, and slithered under a pile of brush and vines. I was so scared I couldn't breathe. After all, a ten year old is no match for some mad Gypsies.

I could hear them racing around, calling to each other, beating the bushes--swearing. Then it became quiet--too quiet. In my three-dimensional, Kodacolor imagination, I could see them just waiting for me to come out. They could wait.

How long I lay there, I have no idea, but needless to say I was in no hurry. I didn't want to spend the night there, either, so finally I slipped to the opening, hardly making a sound. Peeking through the bushes, I didn't see anything, and took off down a trail I could hardly see--for home. I didn't need to see it for my feet weren't touching the ground anyway.

Needless to say, I stayed clear of *all* Gypsies after that. I couldn't take a chance on their being relatives, or even the same ones, with long memories.



## HOW YOU GOT THERE

Linnton was certainly not isolated. Besides the road which went through town on the way to Astoria, there was the river with its busy boats. Then there was an electric line that originated in Portland, ran down-river to Burlington, curved its way through Cornelius Pass, terminating its run in North Plains. A steam train: the S P & S (Spokane, Portland, & Seattle) ran from Portland to Seaside. It didn't do much for Linnton, except haul freight in and lumber out--the passenger trains didn't even slow down let alone stop. They ignored the little town as if it was in the way--didn't belong there--or was trespassing on their right of way.

Automobiles weren't common, nor popular. There were a few, enough to be an oddity. They were open-air, noisy, clanking contraptions that backfired frequently, making horses run away. They were undependable, hard to start, or starting when they weren't supposed to, breaking people's arms. Tires were always going flat.

Someone did start a jitney service to Portland (my grandmother called them "yitneys"), but it was an on-again-off-again operation. Horses were *the* accepted transportation. You could depend on them, even if they took a chunk out of your shoulder, now and then, or ran away. At least they knew the way home. This proved to be a distinct advantage for those who lingered a bit too long at one of the pleasure emporiums.

I liked the cars. On Sundays, when the city-folks would come out into the country for a spin, I would race with them. My horse, Prince, could beat them anytime, which didn't make the owners very happy. The men wore long, ankle-length coats called "dusters". (The roads, being what they were, and with open cars, one can understand the name) The style of the day, dictated that if you were a driver, you

wear goggles and leather gauntlets, that reached to the elbows.

The women also wore "dusters" for the same reasons. They wore wide-brimmed hats with veils tied under their chins. Usually they sat in the back seat (probably the genesis of the back-seat-driver). Now and then, one of them would assume copilot status--some even learned to drive (my mother did).

Through the process of evolution, the cars eventually developed windshields, tops, and eventually side-curtains, which kept some of the rain outside, but not all of it.

Wrecks were common, whether from speed, or spirits, we never knew. They were usually blamed on the former, but, looking back, I suspect the latter, because few of them could exceed 15 mph. One curve, about a mile north of the old Montgomery Ward store, claimed so many lives, that it was referred to as DEAD MAN'S CURVE. There was such a howl about it, that the county straightened it. Most cars, today, would probably slow to 50!

My dad finally succumbed to social (or personal) pressure and bought a black Dodge touring car (that's the kind you used for touring). We had to part with our pacer, Rex, and the shiny, black buggy with the red pen stripes. The car was faster, but not nearly as elegant.

The electric train provided one diversion. Beside carrying passengers; it passed over some very, high, wooden trestles--some of them on curves. It was real scary looking down between the ties to the bottom of the canyon. It was scarier to be out in the middle of one of them and hear the train whistle coming around the bend.

I still get the shakes when I remember the time I was halfway across a really high one, and knew from the loudness of the whistle, I could never beat the train to the other side.

Fortunately (for me), we kids had been playing on that trestle a few days earlier, and, on a dare, I climbed over the edge and crouched on one of the 12- by 12-'s supporting the road bed. Now, I *had* to do it, and it was no dare.

Clinging to one of those timbers while a train roars a few inches above your head isn't an experience I highly recommend, but it was better than jumping out into space, or getting run over.

We weren't supposed to be on the trestle--so the sign said--but it was easier to get to the other side of the canyon that way than climbing down the mountain and back up the other side. I still wonder how we ever lived long enough to get on the tax roles.

My cousin, Carl, (a couple of years older, but not a tad wiser), got hold of one of those big, brass railroad keys--the kind that unlocks the switching lever. (He was always coming up with things he had no business coming up with) One day, he had a colossal idea: push a little hand-car, abandoned by a work crew, back up the track, and coast down onto the siding. Coasting was no problem for everything was downhill for at least five miles. Although the car didn't have brakes, there was a square hole in the deck, just in front of one of the rear wheels--a stick jammed through that hole could put pressure on the wheel--stopping it.

The other problem: meeting trains, was solved by the company going belly-up the year before. The only possibility of disaster lay with an occasional freight train, but they only came by--maybe once in two or three weeks. And besides, they were so slow you could hear them coming a long ways away.

It was so much fun, we kept pushing the little hand-car farther and farther and farther up the tracks, to get a longer run.

Then one day we were merrily coasting along when we heard the whistle. Some ninny had scheduled an unscheduled excursion train over *our* tracks. We barely made it to the siding. Carl jumped off into the ditch, picked himself up, raced for the switch, and just got it turned when the train came rocking around the curve.

The motorman waved as he passed--he didn't know

what we knew! O-o-o-o-o-ou-u-u-u-whee!-e-e-e-e! And, whee!!

But, our railroading career ended one day, when we decided to push the little car all the way to the tunnel that goes through the hill separating Cornelius Pass and North Plains. The tunnel must be half mile long, or more. We were almost to the North Plains end, when we started our run. *This* would be a ride to end all rides--it very nearly was.

Back in the tunnel, the track was fairly flat and we had to push the car to get started. We jumped aboard without realizing the little brake stick had jiggled off. When we reached for it to slow the car for a high trestle on a curve--it was gone! We were going too fast. If there had been a panic button, we would have shoved it through the floor. There was nothing to do but hang on--and hope. The little car tried its best to get airborne. The wheels ground, scraped, and screeched against the rails. Fortunately, this was the worst curve; now all we had to worry about was how to stop it on the siding.

When we left the main track and careened onto the siding. I had had enough of this high speed ride.

"I'm going to jump." I shouted, over the clattering of the wheels.

"Don't jump! Hang on! yelled Carl.

Hang on, my eye! I knew there was a sloping barrier at the end of the siding that would only be a launching pad; and I wasn't suited for space travel.

Whether it was the speed that blurred my vision and made the ferns along side the track, look thick, and cushioney, or whether they really were; I didn't take time to investigate--I bailed out (or off). When I stopped rolling at the bottom of a gully, I felt around to see if there were any parts missing, or misplaced. All my exposed surfaces looked like I had spent a leisurely afternoon in a cage of wildcats. Carl jumped farther down the track--the little car jumped the barrier and came to rest in the bottom of a canyon near an abandoned shack.

Some future explorer, discovering this little car, no doubt thought it was the sole means of transportation for the former resident, who had parked it there. I never told how it got there, and wouldn't now, except the statute of limitations ran out years ago.

As I said, the steam train didn't do much for Linnton, except add to the noise and pollution as it belched its way through, without even slowing down.

We would catch glimpses of people, either looking out the windows, or eating in the dining car, as the whistle, and bell swept the track ahead. City Slickers, or Sports is what the mill-town people called them--they had enough money to go to the beach for the weekend. No one I knew had enough money to go to the beach. Sunday, was a re-run. . .the other way.

The train did keep us in touch with the world, sort of. Whether the newspapers flew out the open windows by themselves, or some one threw them out, I don't know, but every Sunday, there would be the current issues of the Oregonian and the Oregon Journal scattered along the tracks.

I especially liked the pictures. I remember the big spreads depicting the heavyweight fights of Jack Johnson, Jess Willard, and Jack Dempsey. I would gather these up and take them home for the rest of the family to see. So, you see, we weren't completely isolated even if we didn't take a daily paper, or have a radio, or TV. Gossip supplied all the local news, and even the 6 o'clock evening news would have had a hard time competing with it.

The train didn't always have a festive look. Sometimes it resembled a slaughterhouse, decorated as it was with pieces of cows and horses, that had strayed onto the tracks. It made hamburger out of a couple of our best cows, and although the company reimbursed us for them, we hated to lose them. S P & S must have figured their reputation for being on time was more important than a few horses and cows.

[The page contains extremely faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the document. The text is arranged in several paragraphs across the page.]

## THE BIG MOVE

When I was six years old (plus or minus), we moved down river a mile and a half to a house my dad built in a new development named, Harborton. It was a bench on the side of a hill directly across from the point of Sauvies Island. We had a front-porch view of all the river traffic: tugs, stern-wheelers, freighters--even an occasional battleship. On a clear day, we could see four great, snow-capped mountains: Hood, Adams, St. Helens, and Rainier.

(Possibly I should explain that "my" world wasn't limited to the half-mile river and hill that was Linnton. Mine extended from St. Johns to the Burlington area.

Long before I joined the family, my grandfather had moved from Portland to a farm in Cornelius Pass. Some years after he passed away, my grandmother built a house just above ours in Harborton. I also had two uncles who had houses there; so we weren't short of family. One uncle still lived in "The Pass". The distances, in miles, weren't far, but to a kid, it was a continent. For instance, I always thought it was a long way from Linnton to Portland. Fifteen years later I came back from California and thought I would drive down to the old homestead for a "look see"--I hardly got out of low gear before I was there. Possibly it would still seem a long way if a person had to go by horse, or bicycle. . . or walk.

Our new home was a kid's paradise. There was a river to fish in, a mountain back of the house to climb, hills covered with wild flowers: trillium, wild roses, tiger lilies, and if you hiked back far enough, you could find delicate, little pale-white Indian pipes, growing from rotted logs. The fields were carpeted with johnny-jump-ups, and daisies.

Best of all was the creek (crick, we called it). It tumbled its carefree way over boulders, gently stroking the

## The Big Move - 24

sword ferns that lined its banks. It had foot-long, native trout, black salamanders, red devils--and ouch! crawfish. I spent hours trying to make friends with them.

One day, one of the more adventuresome (or hungry), snatched a piece of bread I had tossed on the surface. His success, triggered a swirl of flashing tails until every piece was gone.

Finally, after infinite patience (mine), they became so bold (or tame), they would take the bread out of my fingers. Soon, whenever I appeared, my shadow rang the dinner bell. What fun I had stroking their backs with my fingers.

Then, one black day (a day of infamy, if there ever was one), I was skipping over the rocks to my pool when I spied two fellows sneaking through the woods. They were laughing. I wasn't, for I soon found out that my "friends" were in their creels. Aren't there justifiable circumstances for homicide? I sat down on a rock and bawled. That's right--bawled. And I wasn't ashamed.

My dad still worked at the lumber mill, and although we no longer lived in town, we did our shopping there, went to the doctor, and visited relatives--so Linnton was our town. Then we got into the cow business.

I don't know if people get into the cow business, or cows get into the people business. It seemed that after we got those cows, with their rambunctious offspring, they called all the shots. It was either time to milk them, or feed them, or take them to pasture, or bring them back to the barn so we could milk, feed, pasture. . . . A fellow couldn't go visiting, or to a picnic (proper like), because of those bovines. Couldn't go until mid-morning, had to come back by mid-afternoon; prime time was always theirs. And--besides--they gave milk--buckets of the stuff. What do you do with it? Sell it, of course. And that's how the whole family was squirted into the dairy business.

Squirted is the right word, for that's how we got it out of them: squirt by squirt. You see, there weren't any milking machines in those days, at least we didn't have any--

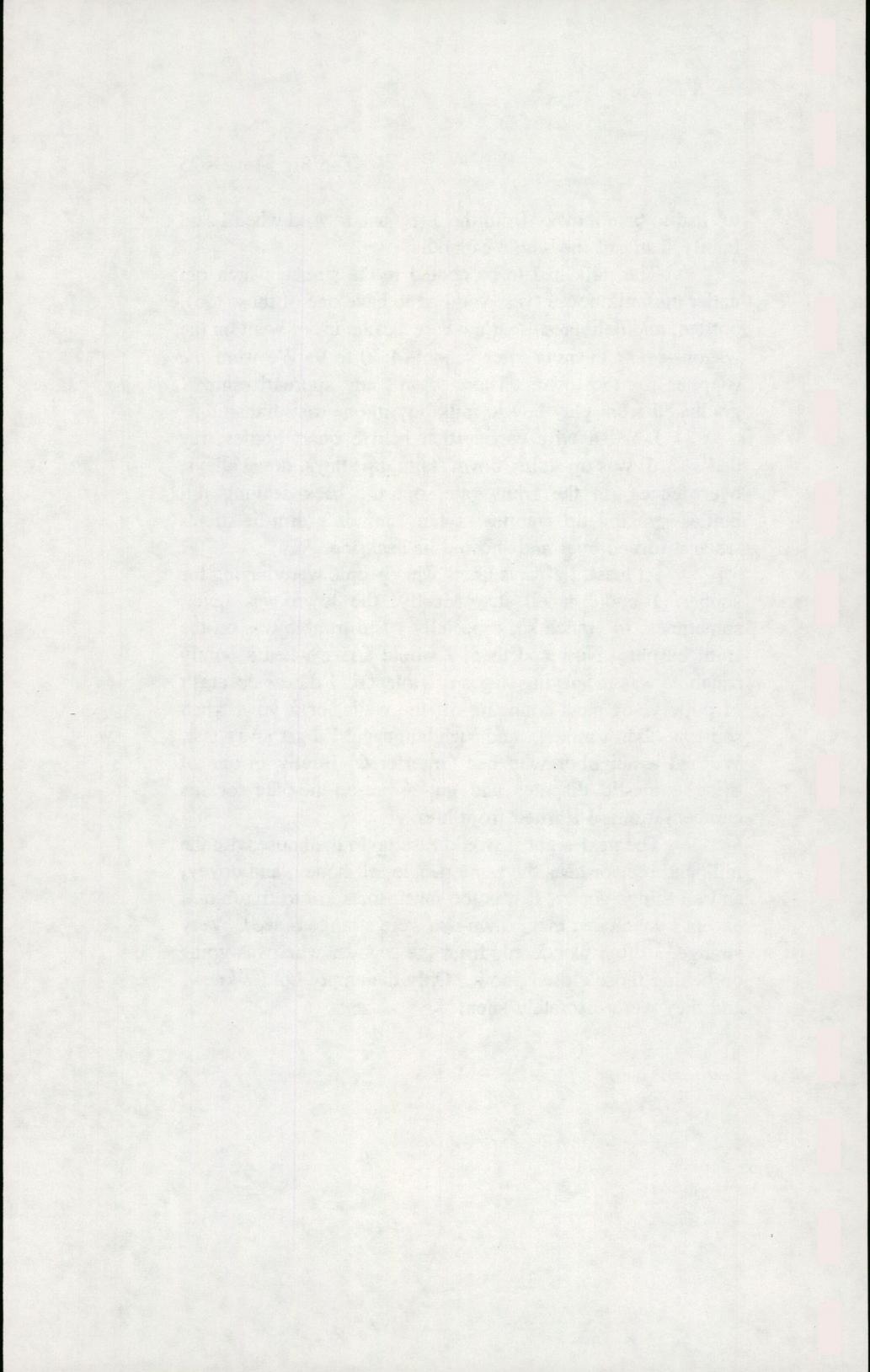
we had to take it away from them--by hand. And when I said family, I meant the whole caboodle.

The milk had to be cooled in the stream which ran under the milk house (yes, you had to have one of those too), bottled, and delivered--that's where I came in, or went on the wagon--every evening after school--4:30 to 9. We were *the* supplier for the town. There wasn't any apprenticeship; I graduated from play boy to milk boy in one easy transition.

I had a wire carrier that held 6 quart bottles; my dad's--8. It was up stairs, down stairs, up alleys, down alleys, over fences, in the front gate, out the back--leaving full bottles--picking up empties. I ran Linnton's dim-lit streets when it turned over and showed its backside.

At least, I always knew what people were having for supper: I could smell it. Mostly, the town was quiet, sometimes, too much so, especially when trouble was on the front burner. Now and then, I would arrive when a family squabble was in varying stages of violence. I'd hear the crash of pottery, or pans bouncing off the walls, or a yowl when someone didn't miss. . .and such language! I'd get away fast. We had a neighbor who had "interfered" briefly in one of these domestic disputes and got a pot-on-the-pate for his compensation. I learned from him.

The next night, I would ease up to the house with the milk and see, or hear the same people, all honey, and dovey, and all things gooey. It was too much for a kid to figure out, except I concluded that grown-ups were strange indeed. Very strange. I often wondered, from the sounds, what was going on behind those closed doors. Only the empty bottles knew, and they were discretely silent.



## THOSE KIDS

We weren't super-kids. We were just patched-overall-wearing kids. (We called them overHalls) When we went to school we had to wear knickers, long stockings (I hated them)--and a cap. Another thing I hated about school was shoes. All summer we went bare-foot, but when school started, it was shoes again. They were either stiff or uncomfortable, or both. (I still wonder why a person has to wear shoes to learn something)

We worked, played, fought, swam, fished, climbed trees, dug holes in banks, played marbles and peg down. We were family-oriented kids; we carried our share of the fortunes, or misfortunes of the family on our shoulders, even if they weren't very big.

A child psychologist told me this was very bad--it would mark the child for life. Maybe so. But, we learned (about the time we traded the white squares for a pair of pants), that money doesn't grow on trees, even the ones you can't climb. Everyone has to carry his own weight. Life has more downs than ups; more tears than laughs. We found out that money and satisfaction and accomplishment are the result of work--whatever it may be--that a job well done makes a fellow feel good--real good.

None of the kids, I knew, had an allowance. We did our jobs because they needed to be done and our parents saw that we did them. We didn't get callouses on our bellies lying around watching TV--there wasn't any. We could get callouses on our backsides, if sunset caught us without our chores done. There weren't any child labor laws that I knew of, and no one to enforce them, if there were. So we profited by the skills we developed, and the creative thought we had to

use to get out of sticky situations; the result was a pride of self-dependence.

I used to think kids were different in those days, that they were put together a little better--maybe out of better stuff. A trip to Alaska changed my mind.

On one of the islands out of Ketchikan, I saw a 10-year-old running a D-7 Caterpillar, dragging logs, thicker than he was high, over unbelievable terrain--while his dad set the "chokers". "He can run it better than I can," prided his dad. But his pride in no way matched that of Billy, working the controls, pushing pedals, sitting on the edge of the seat so he could reach them.

Down on the beach of another island, I saw another kid (eleven or twelve) running a big Letourneau front-end loader as easily as most kids ride a bicycle. The wheels, alone were a foot higher than his head. Someone forgot to tell him that this was man's work, that it was too much for a kid.

The difference was that they had parents that believed in the work ethic; gave them the opportunity to develop their talents and skills--and saw that they did it. We had the same legacy.

As a result, we learned to be self-reliant, self-dependent. We had to be. We couldn't dial 9-1-1!), or cry "mama" every time we got into a jam. We had to find our own way out. Every problem evolved into a valuable lesson. Once learned--the hard way--it wasn't easily forgotten. Now you've met the kids I grew up with.

## THE ISLAND

Sauvies Island, shaped like a whale swimming upstream between the two big rivers and the Willamette slough, has always had a close relationship with the people of Linnton and its environs. It was always referred to, not by its official name, but simply "The Island." No one asked which or what island.

An old timer told me it was the traditional council grounds for the Northwest Indians. One of the first things I remember was a tepee pitched on the point. It was a sort of Switzerland, where personal and tribal blood-feuds, were laid aside by some long-ago unwritten law. Easily accessible to the tribes of the northwest by the rivers which flowed to and around it, one can understand this choice of a meeting place. An abundance of fish and game added to its attraction as a convention site where the people could visit, buy, and trade.

Now it is connected to the mainland by a bridge north of Linnton; When I lived there the only route to "the Island" was by the ferry at Burlington. (You could row across, if you had a boat) It was interesting, during the salmon season, to see the ferryman trolling a lure behind the ferry. Sometimes the crossing was delayed temporarily while he landed a big chinook, or steelhead. No one seemed to mind the delay; it was an added crossing attraction.

To us kids, the island was a vacation spot, although we were never there longer than a day at a time. The Gilbert river, which ran into Sturgeon Lake, was full of the biggest crappies one could imagine. Rather than the bait-size caught today, these would top the scales at 2 pounds or better. These were big fish to us. We'd sit along the bank watching our bobbers--then bob. ..bob. . .bob. . .bob--and down she'd go. Wow-e-e-e-e!

Besides the fishing, the island was the refueling stop for sky-darkening flocks of ducks and geese that comprised the Pacific flyway. The greater Canada goose (honkers), Brant (their smaller cousins, Snow geese and Grey geese (speckled bellies), accompanied the squadrons of Mallards, Pin Tails, Teal, Redheads, Widgeon, as well as, any number of other varieties that signed up for the California\Mexico tour.

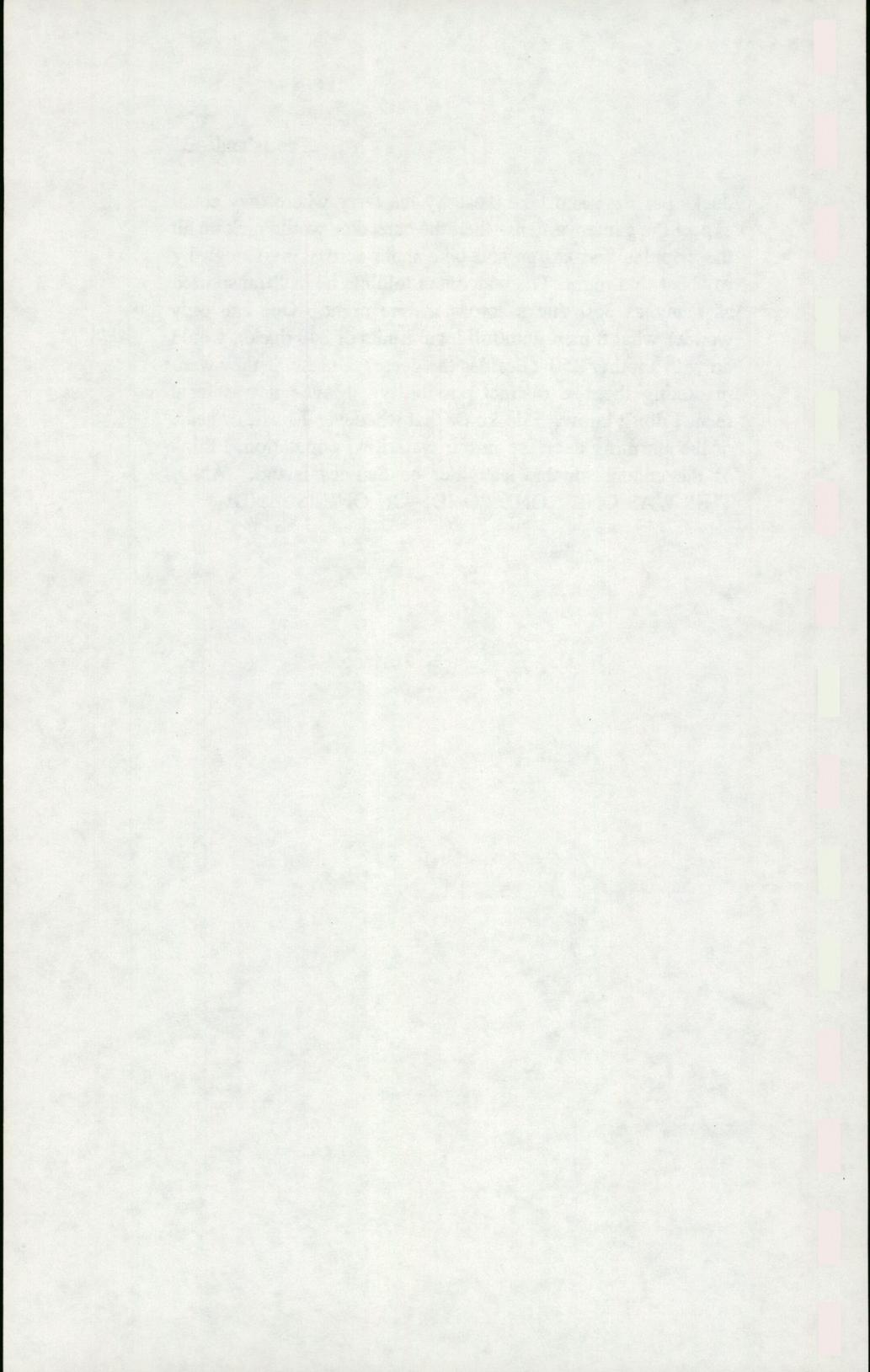
Obviously, the hunting was phenomenal. We kids didn't get in on this for none of our fathers hunted--they were too busy trying to scratch out a living. However, when we were over there fishing, one of the hunting-lodge caretakers would let us take a look at some of the duck ponds--private hunting preserves that dotted the island.

One sticks out in my memory. It was man-made--a perfect oval with four shooting blinds situated so the guns could cover every foot of the pond. These blinds were the ultimate in outdoor comfort. (Roughing it, I suppose they called it) They were wooden sided, concealed by brush and cattails. The hunters (there were two to the blind), had a raised seat under a sloping roof, where it was nice and dry--and warm, with a kerosene heater. There were racks for guns and shells. They could watch the sky and lake through scattered branches on a drop-door facing the lake. When they were ready to shoot, the hunters stepped down, flipped a lever, and the drop-door would swing down, giving them an obstructed view.

The ducks never had a chance. The water was maintained at exactly the right depth. Little square stakes with white tops were placed at exact yardage distances from each blind. The hunter only had to glance down to the stake in relation to the birds, and he knew the exact distance. Add to this, two sure-fire factors: first, they fed the lake with tons of grain before and during the hunting season, and second, they used live decoys to call the ducks. It is little wonder that some of them used small bore guns (28 ga. and .410's). It must have been like shooting chickens in the chicken pen.

The hunters would shoot their limit, which was 30

ducks per day, and take these by the ferry where they could expect the game wardens--then the caretaker would pick up all the cripples and extras and take them across the slough by rowboat that night. The watchman told me he had transported as many as 350 ducks across in one night. One can only wonder what 8 men with full legal limits of 240 ducks, would do with another 350. (Besides the geese) Unless. . .they were marketing them--a distinct possibility. Maybe it was legal then, I don't know. I do know that whenever I read, or hear, of the alarming decrease in our waterfowl population, I think of the unconscionable slaughter on Sauvies Island. AND, THIS WAS ONLY ONE POND!--ON ONE ISLAND!



## THE STUTTERER

Everyone who knew the island at all, remembers the stutterer. I first heard about the poor fellow from my mother. When they were kids, they went to the Holbrook school (just below Burlington). My mother and any of her brothers that could be spared from the ranch for a month or two in wintertime, hiked the two miles down the canyon road. With all the rain and frost and snow, that was a hard way to get an education. A nice, warm schoolbus would have been a real luxury.

My mother felt so sorry for Jim (she was always feeling sorry for someone), that I grew up feeling sorry for the poor kid who stuttered so badly, before I ever saw him. (I was pretty mad at the teacher too.)

My mother said, the teacher didn't believe his problem was a physical one, and determined to break him of his "bad habit". He tried so hard to repeat what she'd tell him, that his face would twist into all kinds of shapes, and get beet red. . .it was no use. Then, she would whack the back of his hands with a ruler, and start all over. Nothing she tried did any good, he stuttered worse when he was upset.

I remember the first time I saw him. My dad and I rode over to his farm (on the Island) to buy a cow he had for sale. We tied our horses to a post, and were walking up to the house when he came out. "Hello Jim," my dad said.

His face twisted into the weirdest contortions, as he began, "Heh-heh-heh-heh-h-h-h-h--followed by a string of profanity--then, as normal as could be, he said, "Hello Earl." I laughed right out loud. I couldn't help it. My dad shoved me behind him. I jammed my hand over my mouth until I almost choked. I had to get away from there. I stumbled over

to the corral and rubbed a heifer's nose.

Every time he tried to talk, it was always the same: a long burst of the first sound he wanted say--then the profanity--then the words would tumble out.

The next time I saw him was years later. He was leaning on a crutch, his hair, snowy white. I stopped at his house to ask permission to hunt ducks on his farm. In spite of the heroic efforts of his grade-school teacher, he still stuttered just like I remembered. I could understand why my mother felt sorry for him--I did too. I didn't laugh this time.

## THE RIVER

The river never seemed to reject those unfortunates who were knocked in the head, or otherwise done in, and rolled into its icy embrace. There was always room for one more. It also spawned its share of scoundrels. There is something about big rivers, boats, and docks that seems to breed or attract rats and bad men. The Willamette had its share. Most of them lived so close to the edge of the law that only a step in either direction made the difference. Jones was one of these.

Legally, he netted salmon; illegally, in the dark expanse of the river, he "pulled" other fishermen's nets. His legal activities always explained the fish in his possession. He was a character spelled with a capital "K". We kids thought he was terrific.

He lived (?) in a little patch-work houseboat, with a crooked smoke pipe, and a couple of sooty windows. It was anchored in a swirling eddy, just behind the rip-rap barrier that extended from the bank on the mainland to the island.

These log and stone barriers stretched out from each side of the slough to almost the middle. At this point they were secured to a cluster of pilings, driven into the river bed, bound together by cables. A piling was anchored on each side of an open channel. This left a small passageway for traffic in the middle of the stream. (Someone said it was to hold back some of the downstream flow to keep the channel in the main Willamette deeper.) Maybe so.

The fast current flowing through this gap, formed big eddies behind these obstructions. According to its mood, the river could move in great, lazy swirls, or spawn monster whirlpools that made awful, sucking sounds as they spiraled

downward. Our neighbors, the Millers, who lived on the other side of Newbury Road lost four sons. One boy fell in, the others tried to save him--the whirlpools got them all.

Jones had his houseboat right in the middle of *the big eddy*. That's what we called it. It was always chewing away at the high bank trying to reach a giant cottonwood tree growing there. His little float turned round and round with the currents, and didn't seem to mind the whirlpools. He used his skiff to come ashore.

No one knew where he came from; one morning he was just there. His skin was like tanned leather, whether from soot, sun, or a combination of both, I don't know. Unshaven (most of the time), brown stained teeth (a few snags); he mumbled and grunted on each side of the stem of a smelly pipe and looked like the kind of person you wouldn't ask questions like: who, why, when, where, or how.

He had two fingers missing from his left hand. I was curious, but not curious enough to ask. Not him.

Many years later, I was reminiscing about people I knew back there. I mentioned Jones to an old river rat (that's what he called himself), who had retired in Portland. He was a living miracle; most of his breed didn't he lived long enough to retire.

"Did you know him," I asked.

"I knew him, the scrongy bugger."

"Do you know how he lost those two fingers.

"Shore do. I shot 'em off with my 30/30." I could tell he still enjoyed the memory. He added. "It was right in the middle of the *run*, and my net was set in a prime spot, but it was comin' up purty light every night. So I staked out one night, and jes about daylight I see this boat driftin' into one of my buoys. It was him alright, the thievin' b\_\_\_\_\_d. I waited until he pulled one fish out, and was reaching for another--then I let 'im have it. I taught him to keep his stinkin' paws off'n my nets!"

Comparing dates, I figured this must have been about

the time his houseboat showed up on the big eddy that summer morning, smoke drifting down the river from its crooked stovepipe..

Although he looked mean, and smelled worse; we kids liked him. He would come over to the bank and take us out in his skiff so we could fish from the deck that went all around his shack. Once in awhile, as we were doing the chores, my dad would say, "I smell Jones coming." The smell of his malodorous pipe, riding the breeze up the draw from the river, would precede him by five/ten minutes, (I always thought it was trying to get away from him) He'd talk to my dad for awhile, buy a bottle of milk and follow his pipe back to the river. Milk must have been a special treat--he didn't come that often.

The river seemed to mother a lot of these men who made an easy living catching the fish it provided so generously. They changed locations when the spirit moved them, or someone made staying where they were unhealthy. Beside the great migratory fish runs, there were big bass, crappies, carp, catfish, sunfish--and crawdads. We little kids started fishing for sunfish when we were five or six, then as we grew older (and bigger), graduated to crappies, and bass.

You can't imagine the amount of fish that were in that river. On a summer evening, when the moon brushed a long silver path on the water, the fish would jump and splash, leaping high and come crashing down with a "splat" I could hear from my perch on the railing of our front porch. And we lived a half mile away. I could have watched them all night, or until the moon tired of all the commotion, or my mother brought down the curtain on this river ballet, and hustled me off to bed. It was a good thing it was summertime, and school was out--I'd have never made it.

Sometimes, when we kids were down fishing, which was most of the time during vacation; some fishermen would take a skiff across the slough to the island, where they could seine a shallow lake for carp minnows. When they came back, they would take all the small ones for their live bait

buckets--and give the big ones to us.

We'd put one of these oversized carp minnows on a hook and drop it over the high bank into the big eddy. More times, than not, something would almost jerk the rods from our hands. We would hang on for dear life, and pull as hard as we could. Then we would catch a glimpse of a great curving silver side, just before the rod flew to pieces, leaving us with the handle. (They weren't much good to begin with--just stuff people gave us that they didn't want) "I almost got 'im!" we'd yell--but we never did. But we kept trying.

Fishermen would anchor their boats to the piling in the center of the river where the current through the gap gave plenty of action to their lures. This had to be the ultimate in salmon fishing. All the upstream migrants had to pass through that narrow opening, right by their flashing baits. I don't remember them using rods. They used heavy, braided hand lines with gaudy airplane spinners. It really didn't make much difference what they used--there were that many fish.

As I recall, the fellows with the carp minnows were fishing for big bass. And the bass in those days were big. How big? Relax. You wouldn't believe it anyway.

Beside the fish, the river was the artery that provided other forms of nourishment for Portland, as well as, all the little towns squatted on its banks. Indispensable to all this activity were the tug boats. There were little ones, big ones, and all sizes in between. One of their jobs was to nurse the big ocean liners around the river: turning them, berthing them, and getting them headed in the right direction downstream. They were always tooting for something, or at something. They made up in noise what they lacked in size.

They snorted up and down the river pulling barges, or long booms of logs. I never did figure out why they didn't leave the logs downstream--downstream; and the logs upstream--upstream. Just creating jobs I guess.

The most colorful boats (to me) were the stern-wheelers. They hauled freight and people from The Dalles to Astoria, making frequent stops along the way. I had my first

ride going to visit my grandparents who lived about 6 miles up in the hills back of Carrolls Point, on the Columbia. How I loved to watch their great, wooden paddle wheels digging into the river. After that trip, I'd get goose bumps whenever I'd hear their throaty whistles echoing from the hills announcing their arrival at some bank-side dock.

They all had names, but the only one I remember was the IONE. The reason I remember this one, is because of a lanky, rugged, raw-boned fellow, who worked on the county road for my uncle Oscar. Every time this particular boat would go by, he would drawl, "There goes the boat *Ione*." There would be a smidgeon of a smile and a squint in the corners of his eyes. The other fellows would grin. I thought he really did own the boat, and couldn't understand why he was pushing rocks around when he could be cruising up and down the river on *his* boat.

The saga of the river wouldn't be complete without the ingenuity of Mary. She was black haired, black eyed--beautiful (to me). When she took a notion to visit one of her friends, who lived on a houseboat in Portland, she would swim out to one of the ubiquitous log rafts, and enjoy a leisurely trip upstream.

When it was opposite her friend's house--she swam ashore.

She kept extra clothes there, so she could go shopping, or do whatever girls do. When she wanted to return home, she caught a downstream boom. After all these years, it finally makes sense why they pulled those logs up and down the river: so Mary could go to Portland.

[The page contains extremely faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the document. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.]

## J AND J - LOOK OUT!

About a quarter mile upstream from Jones'shanty, was a fancy float owned by a fisherman named Johnson--maybe Jensen. His cabin with a boat shed on the same float, was anchored offshore with a long, two-plank-wide walkway leading up to the bank. He had, beside a skiff, a powerful launch which he used to tow the float when he moved. Everything was neat, clean, and painted, in direct contrast to Jones' place, where nothing was. But, he was an unfriendly old buzzard.

Because he was moored right alongside our pasture, I would, on occasion, walk down the river bank looking for a stray cow. He would yell at me, "Get out of here kid! Scram!" I scrambled.

There was bad blood between Jones and old what's-his-name, according to the "River Rumor Gazette". It was supposed to have started on another section of the river. (Maybe Jones was pulling the wrong net again) As far as we could see, they pretty much stayed out of each other's way, until that day. Seems funny, that a skinny kid could light the fuse.

I was chasing a heifer down the bank. Ever chase a heifer? God never made a more obstinate beast. Just about the time you think you have one headed in the right direction, she'll throw her tail in the air and race back to where the whole thing started, and you have to do it all over again.

Finally I had this bovine walking along, headed for the gate. She'd slowed down considerably from from all the running. She was tired. I know I was. We came abreast of old Mr. Nasty-To-Boys place, and he called up from his float, "Hey kid. Wanta see the big salmon I just caught."

His sudden friendliness caught me off guard, and looking at a super-big fish was kid's bait, if I ever heard of any. I forgot the heifer, trotted down the walkway to the deck and followed him to the boat house. He unlocked the door and pulled it toward him--from left to right.

"Where is it," I asked.

"In there. Go on in." I stepped into the dim interior where his launch was tied. The door slammed behind me and I heard the lock snap shut.

"What're you doing!. Let me out! LET ME OUT OF HERE!" *Please* let me out." I was scared stiff.

I heard a devilish laugh, and he said, "I'll fix you. I'll teach you to come over here spying for Jones."

"I'm not spying," I pleaded, "please let me out." He started telling me all the terrible things he was going to do to me: I'd never see my folks again; nobody would ever know what happened to me. I was frantic.

I quit begging and started looking for some way to escape. The launch fit so tightly I couldn't get into the water to swim out. There weren't any windows I could break. The door was my only hope, but how to get it open--with it locked--and him stalking around outside. Then, I had an idea. I'd *make* him open that door.

In the dim light coming through the cracks of the doors, I saw a salmon net hanging from wooden pegs on the side wall. It was folded back and forth the entire width of the shed. Knowing how fishermen prize their nets I felt this was my only chance.

I got out my jack knife. It was really sharp. My dad always felt every boy should have a real, good knife--and real sharp. He said that it was the dull knife that cut you. Like, he always kept the guns in the house loaded; he said it was the unloaded ones that caused the problems. So we learned to leave them alone--they were loaded!

Stretching to my full height, I grabbed the top of the net with my left hand and made one long swipe, from top to

bottom. That beautiful knife slid through the folds of that net, like it was hot butter. The point scraping down the wall caught his attention.

He shouted, "What're you doing? You little \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
Now *he* sounded panicky.

"I just cut your salmon net in two," I shouted back.

Swearing, like only a irate fisherman can, I heard him stomp toward the door. I crouched just inside. Waiting. I heard the rasp of the key, the lock snap open. Just as the door opened a crack, I slammed into it with my shoulder. Caught off balance, the door sent him sprawling on the deck--I shot by him. He made one swipe at my legs as I raced for the walkway. Before he could shift into high, I was flying down the river bank, yelling bloody murder.

Halfway to Jones place, I saw him jump from his skiff, and come running in my direction with a long, wicked-looking fish knife clutched in his hand. Fortunate for me, he had heard the yelling, and was coming to investigate.

"Are you alright, kid?" he asked, taking me by the shoulder, a look of real concern in his eyes. At that moment, mean looking and smelly, he looked like an angel to me (he was, an avenging one.)

"What'd he do?"

Scared out of my wits and breathless, I blurted, "H-h-h-he locked me in his boat house--b-b-b-but I got out--I cut his salmon net in two." Jones let out a guffaw, and gave me a whack on the shoulder, then gentle shoved me in the direction of home. "Beat it home now," he said, "I'll take care of him." I "beat" it home--I didn't wait to see *how*.

The window in front of our kitchen sink looked out on the rivers and the island. My mother could keep track of all the goings-on and still do her work--and there were lots of going's-on. This morning I heard her exclaim, "Oh, my! Oh, my!" which was about as profane as she ever got, except for "My goodness". I ran out to see what the "Oh, my's" were all

about. She was staring at the river, wringing a dish towel with her hands.

There were two rowboats in the middle of the river with two fellows swinging at each other with their oars. They'd drift a part, get back together and start this batting practice again. It wasn't difficult to know who they were, I knew their boats that well. Finally, Jones hit Johnson with a specially good wallop; he lost his balance and landed flat on his back in the water.

When he surfaced, Jones was waiting. He grabbed him and shoved him back under. He held him there so long, I was sure he was going to drown him. Then, he would raise him up, hold him for a minute or two, then shove him under again. This brought a lot more "Oh, my's" from my mother. "He's going to drown him," she said. And, it certainly looked like it. Finally Jones hauled in the limp form of Johnson, rowed over to the other boat which was drifting away and rolled him in. The last we saw was Johnson's boat drifting sideways downstream--with him inside.

Later in the afternoon, we spotted him slowly rowing back upstream. The next morning he was gone--the whole spread--and we never saw him again. Like Jones promised--he "fixed him."

## CHRISTMAS AT GRANDMA'S

As a kid, growing up, I wasn't concerned about Santa Claus: who he was; where he came from; or where he went. That he came every Christmas Eve--usually on time--was sufficient. Other things: trains, trucks, bats and balls, candy canes, bananas, and pineapple (a once-a-year treat, and all we could eat) were more important. The fact that some adult came late for the Christmas Eve party, didn't even arouse my curiosity. There was always too much excitement for me to care--or wonder. I suppose if it hadn't been for a near disaster, I might have never cared, nor known.

Our clan consisting of an wide assortment of uncles, aunts, and cousins, along with grandparents and other kin used to congregate at some relative's house for the annual Yuletide celebration. It had to be big, there were that many. The favorite for the kids, of course, was Grandma's house: a yellow, two-story rambling place sitting on a little bench overlooking a valley nestled in the hills in Cornelius Pass. Down below was a stream skirting the meadow where the Chinook salmon used to spawn. Today it's just a trickle, because all the big trees are gone. She was the grandma who said, "Yo" for Joe; and "Yelly" for Jelly.

Because she had nine children (all out of the nest by this time) there was plenty of room for all the grown-ups. We kids bedded down in the sweet clover hay in the big barn. Sealy nor Simmons ever came close to making a mattress this good. (The city kids loved it) This particular Christmas was going to be the greatest (so the grown-ups said), because even the relatives who had migrated as far away as San Francisco and Los Angeles were going to be there.

Two days before, and far enough in advance to help in the preparations, they began to arrive. Most of us came by horse and buggy. We drove down from Linnton. The California relatives, traveling by train, had to be met at the old Union Station in Portland. It must have been at least twelve miles to the ranch which made it about a three hour trip for the horses and the fringe-topped hack.

Even my other grandma and grandpa, who lived in Washington on the lower Columbia River were coming. They came by stern-wheeler boat, of course, and although grandma arrived early one afternoon, she said grandpa had been detained and would come later.

My cousins who came from California looked around at the fields and trees, and wondered what we did for excitement out here in the sticks--sort of uppish-like. But we were too young to wonder what they meant, or kid-like, we played and forgot about it.

Two nights before Christmas the snow laid a fleecy blanket over the tall fir trees and the fields of the valley. The willows along the creek, hung their icy fingers almost to the water's edge. The deep snow made this the perfect Christmas.

The first one who shook the sleep from his eyes the next morning shouted, "Snow!" This brought an instant reaction. We grabbed the sleds and toboggan hanging on the wagon-shed wall and raced for the hill that swept down beside Grandma's house.

Breakfast? Who had time for breakfast! We raced each other to the top, squealed and yelled as we flew through the sprays of snow down to where the hill ended in the creek.

And, that's where some of our folks ended up too, after we begged them to join us, and they got to going so fast they couldn't stop and splashed into a big, icy pond. Nobody got hurt--fortunately--it didn't even dampen their spirits as they laughed all the way to the house--and dry clothes.

There was plenty going on. The women were busy in the kitchen filling the whole house with mouth-watering smells. The men spent a lot of time down at the barns caring

for the stock, or just "shooting the breeze". A couple of them were having target practice. Three or four took their shotguns and dogs and hunted for native pheasants along the brushy fence rows. Just for fun, I suppose. We didn't need pheasants; there was already so much food that if we had stayed to eat it all, we would have been there till the 4th of July! We kids, like all kids, generally got in the way, but nobody seemed to mind--this was Christmas--normal behavior wasn't the norm.

The big event of the day before Christmas was the cutting, setting, and trimming of the huge Christmas tree. Accompanied by a flock of yelling, laughing kids, the men went deep into the woods to get just the *right* tree. This wouldn't be one of those little six-foot, nursery reared kind people use today. No-Siree!

This had to be a special tree for this special Christmas--wild, huge, and beautiful. The one finally selected, after a unanimous vote, had to have six feet cut from the top so it would match the 12 foot ceiling in the corner of Grandma's big living room. They tied ropes to the trunk and we kids were the "mules". What fun we had slipping and sliding, dragging that big tree out of the forest.

Once the tree was in place, it was time for the decorating. The girls, and some of us boys, had spent the previous evening making long strings of popcorn and cranberries. These had to be draped all over the big fir, along with boxes and boxes of ornaments, tinsel, and ribbons.

The final decoration was the candles. Little candle holders with spring clips underneath were fastened to the boughs of the tree. The candles: red, green, blue, and yellow were placed in these little holders. What a sight they were.

They would be lighted just before Santa arrived that night. Today, when everyone is so fire conscious, a fire marshal would have needed a triple-by-pass. Imagine--dozens of burning candles in the pitchy branches of a fir tree--in a

house. But this was Christmas and bad things don't happen on Christmas.

The most important part, of course, was the presents--loads of them. They were hung all over the tree--as many as it would hold--the rest stacked underneath. What fun it was to see our names on the packages and try to guess what was inside. That great big one, in the corner, had to be a wagon. The long one must be a doll. But, what could be in that big square one just under the corner, near the wall? Whoever said anticipation is greater than realization, must have been kid sometime.

I almost forgot the stockings. Because, the bigger the stocking, the more it would hold, Aunt Bell's supply soon ran out, and some of us, at least, had to settle for some of lesser dimensions.

Somehow, we survived the-day-before-Christmas. Somehow, we managed to eat our suppers, although we suddenly lost our appetites. Somehow, we got into our best clothes for Christmas Eve. Of course we dressed up for Christmas; everyone did. This was *the* big event of the year. As daylight faded we kept watching the big, old grandfather clock in the hallway. Cousin Alvin said it must need winding; it was running so slow.

The evening brought clusters of stars towing a white-gold moon that traced tree-shadows across the valley. The icy breeze crusted the snow with diamonds that twinkled and glittered, flashed and sparkled in the bright moonlight.

We watched from the windows--and listened. Listened for the sleigh bells that would tell us Santa Claus was coming. The boys laughed, the girls giggled, and the old folks smiled at each other. Grandma said, "The kids can hardly wait."

Then we heard them. Faintly. Didn't we? Yes, there they were again. Then everyone heard them. Sleigh bells! The little kids ran to their folks to hide; others would take a peak out the window, run back, take another peak, run back--

bumping into each other--jumping up and down--squealing. The bells jingled louder and louder. Uncle Bill opened the door and shouted "Here comes Santa now!" Everybody raced to the windows. Sure enough! Seated on a sleigh, pulled by two jet-black horses, steam puffing from their nostrils, was Santa Claus! . . .and right on time. No matter that he didn't have reindeer--no time to wonder; He was here!

As Santa shouted, "Whoa! Whoa!", he jumped from the sleigh; tossed a bulging bag over his shoulder and chuckled, "Ho-Ho-Ho", Where's all the good boys and girls I heard were here?"

"Here we are Santa," we shouted as he tugged his big bag through the open doorway.

At the first sound of the bells, some of the men started lighting the candles; now the tree was a blaze of flickering candlelight. Santa started calling off names and passing out presents from his huge sack. When it was empty, he tossed it aside and began taking those from the tree. Because some of them were so high, someone brought a ladder. Up, up he climbed "Ho-Ho-ing" all the time.

He was reaching for a package near the top of the tree, when the cotton on his sleeve suit brushed a candle and caught fire. He slapped at it with his big, red mitten, but it just seemed to explode. Soon the front of his suit was afire.

Some men grabbed him, as he stumbled down the ladder, and rushed him outside to roll in the snow, while others got pails of water from the kitchen to douse the fire on the tree. The celebration turned into bedlam with people screaming, and rushing around.

Finally, the fire was out and they brought Santa back inside covered with snow, his pretty red coat and trousers singed and blackened by ashes, otherwise he was OK--that was only thing that counted.

Christmas at Grandma's - 50

But, in all the commotion, he had lost his hat and beard. We kids, stood around in shock--looked at each other; then almost on cue, we shouted,

"That isn't Santa Claus. . .IT'S GRANDPA!

## JOEY

Joey was a pest, at least that's what his brother and I thought. His mother wouldn't let Timmy go fishing with me unless we took his little brother along. We had more important things to do than wet-nurse a five-year-old. But maybe she wanted a little peace and quiet, and if you knew Joey, that was a distinct possibility.

So, mumbling and grumbling we would gather up our rods, cans of worms--and Joey--and head for the river.

It must have been almost a mile to the bottoms--all down hill. Of course, on the return home, it was all up hill. We'd shove, nudge, and drag him along. One thing you could say for the little tramp--he tried. He'd move his fat, little legs as fast as he could. Another thing, he didn't whimper, or cry, just huff, puff and try to keep up.

The bottoms was a big pasture. It was covered with lush, green grass and knee-high weeds with big yellow flowers. The river reached in here and there with little sloughs, like fingers. These had bass and crappie and sunfish and bullheads.

We'd toss our lines out with a cork bobber, stick the end of the pole in the mud bank and wait for something to bite. We didn't have much trouble here with Joey for he found plenty to keep himself interested, and he couldn't get into much trouble with us watching.

But now and then, we'd get so interested in fishing we'd forget about him and he'd wander off. We'd race around until we found him and warn him of all the terrible things we were going to do to him if he did it again, but he "did it again"--often--hence the our opinion of him as a "pest".

One day we caught some minnows and thought of the fun we could have using these for bait for some salmon that stopped in the Big Eddy trying to find their way past the

breakwater barrier to the opening in mid-stream. We came to the grassy bank above the eddy. It was at least six feet above the water, straight up and down but sloped down toward the jetty--on the river side--where it was level with the water.

We warned Joey to stay away from the bank and showed him the big whirl-pools circling round and round. He found a frog to play with. We settled down to the business of catching a "big one" and forgot about him.

We cast our lines into the eddy. Our bobbers would go round and round, get sucked under by a whirl-pool, then the river would spit them out. This was fishing!

I had just lost a big fish (too big a mouth for my little hooks) and went back for another minnow when I heard a loud gasp. Rushing to the edge I saw Joey going round and round in a whirl-pool. When we weren't looking, he got too close to the edge and fell in. He was still close to the bank, But there was no way we could reach him from there.

I screamed, "Timmy! Joey's in the river!"

Whether from desperation, or inspiration, I don't know, but I threw my line out where Joey was and the hook caught in his shirt. I yelled to Timmy to do the same thing and after two or three casts his hook caught.

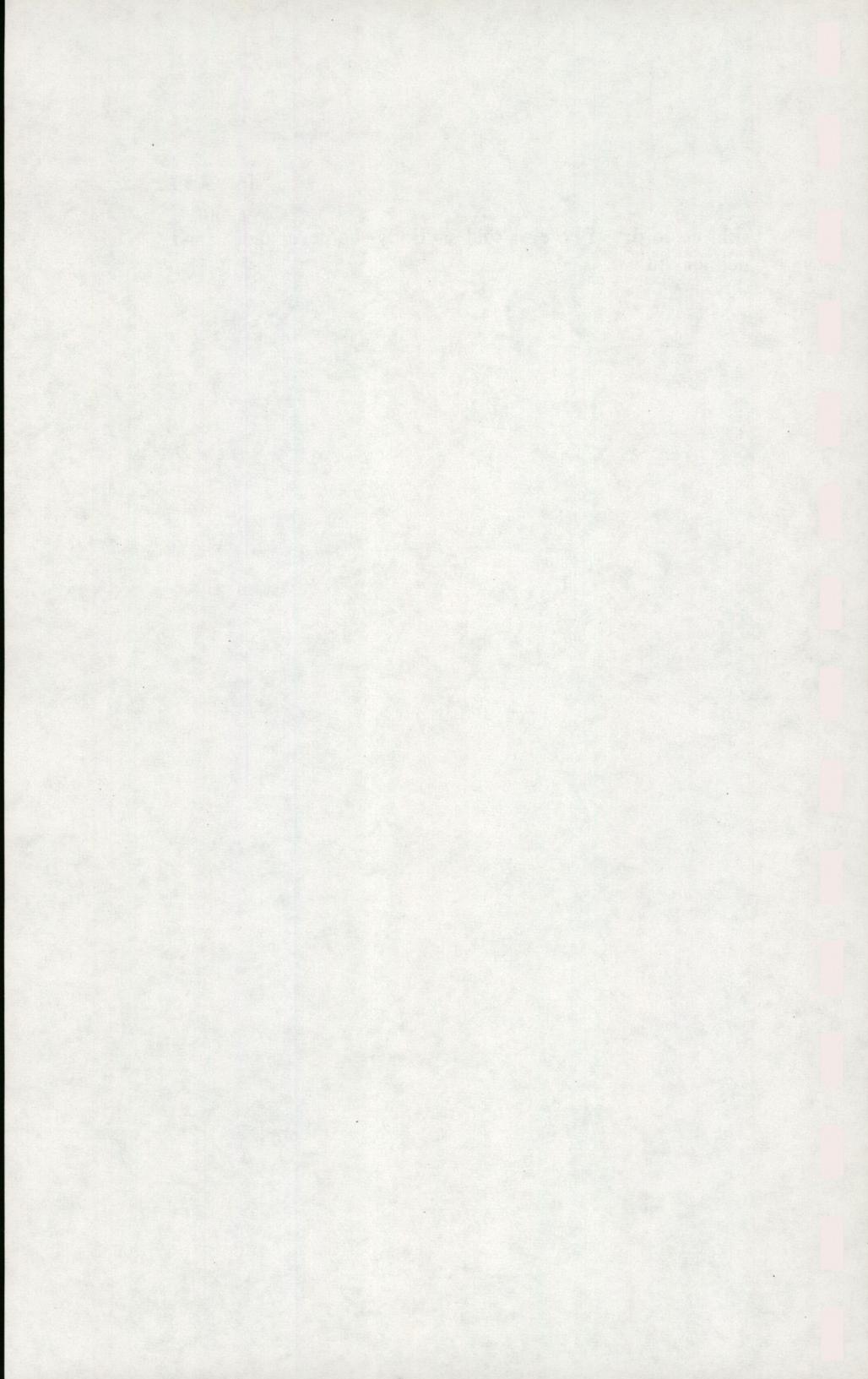
Between us we carefully tugged against the strong current. We were afraid our lines would break. About the time we were beginning to think it was no use, the current shifted and Joey slid from the edge of the whirl-pool into quiet water. As fast as we could we towed him to the level spot where we grabbed him and dragged him up on the bank.

We didn't know anything about CPR. We just knew that if you want to get water out of a bottle, you turn it upside down, so we grabbed him by the heels and turned him upside down. Out came the water, a lot of it. He coughed and chocked, but suddenly started to cry. That was the most beautiful sound I ever heard. Boy, were we relieved. If that kid had drowned, we'd have never got to go fishing again.

We stripped off his clothes; hung them on the bushes to dry, and must have convinced him we would also hang his

Joey - 53

skin up to dry if he ever told anybody--he never did. . .and  
neither did we.



## THE BERRIES

Nobody I knew raised blackberries. They raised strawberries and raspberries for canning, but why raise blackberries when there were so many growing wild. Of course we kids knew where there were whole hillsides of wild strawberries. The largest ones were about as big as a thumb nail, but most were small and sweet as sugar.

Then there were thimble berries (not very good), salmon berries (worse), black caps (good but seedy), and the little Oregon blackberry (SUPERB). In fact there has never been such a berry. Most people today don't know what they are; those that do, call them Cascades. We just called them black berries. When we talked of going berry picking--that's all we were after.

The very best berry fields were old logged-off sections of land after a forest fire had gone through. After about two years--it could be a bonanza. The location of a favorite berry field was the best kept secret in town. When we went berry picking we always started off in the wrong direction in case someone was looking. We'd double back when we were far enough away to throw off the snoopy neighbors..

Quite often we would go out in the late afternoon, pick some berries before dark, have a campfire supper, roll up in our blankets (this was BSB-before sleeping bags), then get up real early to finish our picking before it got too hot. Our clothes would be stained blue/black, as were also our hands, and faces. We'd pick and eat at the same time--and were they good.

One evening, just as the sun was disappearing behind the mountain, I was hurrying back to camp when I chanced on a giant fir tree that had fallen, its jagged roots splayed at crazy angles. There was a big hole where it had stood. I stopped to

look down into it and could hardly believe my eyes. The biggest berries I had ever seen were hanging like a blanket on the vines that grew on the sides of the crater.

The sky was just showing streaks of crimson the next morning when I arrived at my berry gold mine. As soon as I could see a berry I climbed down into the hole and started picking with both hands. This was no time for eating.

I was just reaching for the last berries when I heard a car coming up the old logging road. I ducked down behind a big root. The car stopped and I heard some people laughing as they got their pails and headed in my direction. One of them said, "Just wait until you see the berries behind that old tree: you aren't going to believe it." Well, they didn't have to believe anything, for the berries were in my bucket. Life is full of disappointments. They say the early bird gets the worm, but in this case it was the berries.

During berry season, my mother was kept busy canning. Really wasn't much fun, I guess, because there wasn't any air conditioning, and the old wood stove could really heat things up in July. Every year she canned over one hundred quarts, and made gallons of jam for yum, yum sandwiches. To complete the job she'd fill extra jars with berries just for pies.

Pies? In comparison, an Oregon blackberry pie with genuine cream (so thick you had to spoon it off the top of the pan), makes every other pie seem like an alibi. (I always feel sorry for the kids today who are raised on this synthetic goo that passes for cream, even if it says "Extra Creamy".)

The berries weren't very large and grew in the most inaccessible places-- that's where the big ones were. Unless-- you paid a fisherman to take you across the slough to Sauvies Island. (I hear the newscasters pronounce this (SAWvies), but none of us would have known what they were talking about-- we called it "SOves" with a big O.

One day, the smelly, old fisherman, Jones, took my mother, grandmother, and me cross the slough to pick berries. We had three great big milk pails. They must have held three

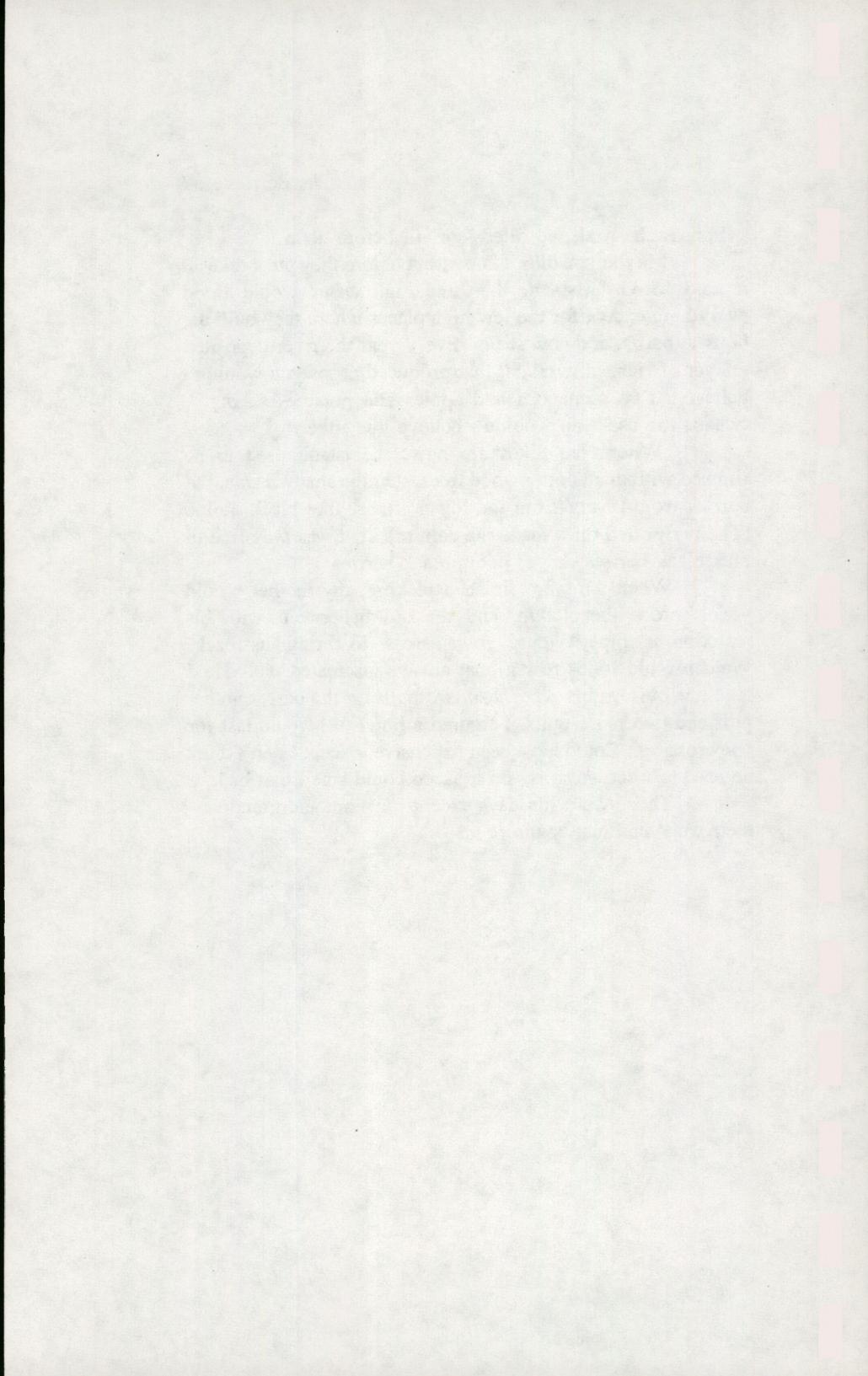
gallons each. And, we filled 'em all, before noon..

Maybe you didn't know, but before they put a dike all around "Soves" Island, the June high water would flood everything except for the few high places where they built the houses, barns, and cow sheds. Every year the river deposited a layer of rich, alluvial silt that produced crops you wouldn't believe. I've seen corn and apples and potatoes so big. . .what's the use--you wouldn't believe this either.

Where the dikes are now, the island used to be rimmed with giant cottonwood trees. On the shady inside, the berries would hang from the lower limbs, like black quilts. (The unripe red ones made the pattern) That was *the* place to pick black berries, huge, juicy, black berries.

When we were finished picking, my mother would yodel across the slough, and the old fisherman, with his malodorous pipe, would row across to bring us back. Watching old Jones row a boat always fascinated me. He'd take one puff on his pipe, then two pulls on the oars, another puff and two more pulls. I figured a bowl-full would last for one crossing. Could have been expensive, except I don't think he used tobacco anyway--no tobacco could smell that bad.

Those were fun days except for mom and grandma--their work had just begun.



## THE FERRY

I attended a private school in St. Johns, so my horizons extended beyond those of the kids who went to the public school in Linnton. Each day I took the electric train to Whitwood Court, a little community just below the present St. John's bridge, crossed the river on the double-ended ferry, hiked up the hill, and through the center of town. What sights, sounds, and smells this trip provided.

On the St. John's side, near the ferry slip, was a big steel mill. How I loved to peak around the corner of the big, open door and watch them pour the red-hot metal into the molds. Looked scary though, with all the smoke and sparks. But what really interested me was the huge pile of bright, yellow sulphur just to one side. I wished I had a chunk, but don't know what I would have done with it. It was just pretty. That's all.

Then there was the blacksmith.

(Possibly I should explain that there was usually some waiting time between ferries, which gave us kids ample time to explore--sometimes get into trouble.)

I don't know if it was the blacksmith shop or the blacksmith that fascinated me the most. I would stand in the open door and watch him work. He was a bear of a man. He wore a leather apron, tied around his waist by a leather thong--but no shirt--summer, or winter. (Now the bear part) He--didn't need a shirt, he already had one--like a bear. He had the thickest, blackest hair I have ever seen on a man. It covered his chest, back and arms. You couldn't even see his skin.

He was BIG. He would invite me to come inside where we could see the glowing forge, and watch him make

## The Ferry - 60

the sparks shower from the white-hot metal, as he hammered away. His booming laugh accompanied the fancy rhythms he beat out on the anvil. As we clapped our hands in time, he'd laugh louder. Sometimes, one of the sparks would lodge in the hair on his chest. He'd slap it out like it didn't mean anything. We loved the blacksmith. This was our favorite stop on the way home from school.

The ferry had character. It was a double-ended boat with a ramp on each end so it didn't have to turn around to dock when it discharged vehicles and passengers. It had a traffic deck on either side of the super-structure in the middle--the cabins were on the outside. The steam engines below deck were fired by slab wood from the mills. When the wagons of slab came aboard, all the traffic was shunted to the opposite side, which created a traffic jam, even back there. How we loved to look down the stair-well and watch the stokers feed four-foot slab wood in the hungry mouths of those roaring boilers.

There were two wheel-houses. The captain could steer from either end. Once he let me help him turn the big wheel, help steer the boat. I suppose it was against the rules to have a kid in the pilot house; he probably looked down and saw how much I wanted to ride up there--just once.

The buggies, wagons, and/or automobiles would go either right, or left at the direction of the deckhands. This helped to balance the ferry. There was a chain across, behind the ramp, and people were supposed to wait until the chain dropped before getting off. Some folks didn't, if they were in a hurry. One day a fellow slipped just as he jumped and fell in the river. What a commotion that caused. They got him out, but he certainly didn't look like he was ready to go to the office.

I don't think anyone ever thought of trying to hi-jack the ferry. There were times when the passengers would get an extra ride down the river when it hit a floating log and the rudder broke. It would take a while before a tug could catch

it. It never happened when I was on it, but always wished it would.

The ramp leading up the hill on the Whitwood Court side was so steep, the early Model T's, with their gravity flow fuel systems, had to turn around and back up.

Speaking of hills, nothing I have experienced ever equalled the bob-sled ride down the big one on the St. John's side, after we had a big snow and the hill got icy-slick..

It began at the brick fire house/police station, (it's still there) ran down the long hill, across a little level area, and up a ramp to the lumber deck of a sawmill. The owners thoughtfully moved the lumber for this event so the sled could be stopped before it shot into the river. For a repeat run, a Model T towed it back to the top of the hill by some back streets.

It seemed there were more severe winters then, and usually there was enough snow to inaugurate the "Burlington Hill Run". It became a yearly event until. . .but I suppose all good things eventually come to an end.

The sled was a long affair: a big sled in front, with ropes for steering, and another sled in the rear, connected to the front one by a long plank. It usually carried 10 people (kids and adults). The speed it generated on that icy incline was awesome. I don't know how anyone survived the run except for the fact that they were jammed together with their arms wrapped around each other's legs.

When everyone was aboard, someone would yell, "Here we go!". . .and away we went, yelling and screaming all the way to the bottom. If I was lucky, they would be ready for a run just as I came from school. Believe me, it was a fast way to get down to the ferry.

Like I said, this was a regular winter feature (if we had snow) until it all came to a grisly end one day when some jerk (who should have known better) picked the wrong time to cross the road at the bottom of the hill in his old beat-up jalopy. The sled caught him in the middle. It totaled both him and the car besides a lot of the riders. I don't remember the

## The Ferry - 62

number of casualties, but there were plenty. This was the final curtain for the St. John's version of the winter Olympics.

When I look back, I can see that we never lacked for excitement even with our limited potential. Maybe it's the creative use a person makes of what is available that makes life interesting--and exciting. Riding the ferry as often as I did (twice each day), was bound to produce its own, sometimes grisly, brand of excitement.

One morning as we neared the St. Johns side, we saw two men approaching the shore in a row-boat. One was rowing, the other holding a dog chain looped around the neck of a man who had drowned. They towed him ashore right alongside the ferry slip. Possibly he looked larger than he actually was because he was so horribly bloated. He was color-coordinated: blue overalls, blue shirt, a dark-blue lump on his forehead--but no shoes.

Quite often we would read or hear of someone knocking someone in the head and dumping them in the river--he was probably one of these. One of the fellows standing by me at the rail said it took nine days for a body to float to the surface. He had been in the river a long time.

Some one must have phoned ahead, for waiting on the river bank was a horse-drawn hearse, an undertaker, and his assistant. The hearse was shiny black pulled by two, matched, bay horses. It had glass windows on both sides and in the back door. The driver's seat was up high, with a silver, ornamental lamp on either side.

They took out a big wicker basket, placed it close to the water's edge and laid the lid off to one side. It was lined with a white sheet. I thought what a shame it was to get that sheet dirty, for the man they were going to put in it was muddy and soggy wet.

After the boat touched shore, the men pulled the poor fellow up on the sand, said something to the undertaker I couldn't hear, got back in the boat and rowed back upstream. The undertaker stood at the victim's head, his assistant at his feet. I heard the undertaker say, "Grab hold of his feet." The

assistant leaned forward--took one look--fainted, and tumbled right into the basket.

The undertaker straightened up, put his hands on his hips, and said one word, "Hell." Obviously disgusted, he leaned down and unceremoniously dumped his helper out on the ground. (Some helper) He looked around, spied me, and said, "Hey kid. Give me a hand."

I wasn't all that eager to get involved but I had been taught to obey, and the tone of the undertaker's voice strongly suggested I do just that. I took hold of the muddy heels and helped put the drowned man in the basket. The undertaker put the cover back on; I helped him lift it into the hearse. He thanked me, started to walk around to the driver's side, stopped, looked back at his (still out) assistant. He picked him up, like sack of grain, and shoved him in on top the basket. He closed the doors, climbed up to his seat, picked up the reins, and drove away, slowly shaking his head. I often wonder what the assistant thought when he woke up and found himself inside the hearse. I don't remember what excuse I gave the teacher that day for being late.

Things weren't always gory around the river; sometimes they were funny--even hilarious, like the time of the blooper launch.

World War I caught America with a desperate need for ships of all kinds. A wooden ship yard was constructed just below the ferry crossing named: Grant, Smith, Porter, Guthrie. I recall there were 6 "ways", ("a tilted framework of timbers within which a boat could be constructed, and launched into the river." I got this out of the dictionary)

There was fierce competition between the crews of these ways to see who could build and launch a boat in the shortest possible time. A huge bonus for the winning crew was the prize. These must have been powerful motivators, for it was amazing how fast they could build a boat. Even more amazing because much of the work was done by hand.

Launching day was always a thrill, and our teacher would let us out early, so we could get a good spot to see the

show--and it was a real show. Crowds would line both sides of the river.

As launch-time approached, the excitement would build. Some important person, chosen for the honor, would try to crack the hull with a bottle of champagne, then a whistle would blow an ear-splitting blast. This was the signal for the men with big mallets, to knock the last remaining "chocks" away, letting the boat slide down the ways into the river--stern first.

The forward deck would always be crowded with dignitaries. (That's what they called them. Kids weren't dignitaries.) They had the thrill of riding the boat into the water. They probably enjoyed the publicity, and all the cheering and whistle blowing as well. There were "catch boats" stationed on each side of the launch path, with long ropes to slow and stop the boat, about mid-stream. At least that's where it was supposed to stop.

One day the launch went smoothly; the big ship slid into the river, sending up a huge sheet of water. Suddenly, the cheering died--something was wrong--the boat wasn't slowing down. Something slipped, or someone goofed, because the boat sailed right across the river, and stuck its tail up on the bank on the other side. Now, that was exciting.

Another day. The superintendent of one of the ways, was so excited that his crew had broken the record, and won the grand prize; he let out a big yell, threw his hat into the air, jumped up on the well-greased slide the ship had just left smoking hot, and was "launched" into the river on his backside! One never knew when one of these added attractions would occur; they weren't listed in the advanced billing. So, it paid not to miss a single one. I wonder what kids do today for thrills? Must be dullsville.

## CRAWFISH JOHNNY

Crawfish Johnny, with his heavy German accent, lived a couple hundred yards downstream from the big eddy. His float was a long series of houses and sheds. His business was crawfish.

These succulent crustaceans were so abundant before the river was polluted with everything from the effluent from the tanneries to city sewage, they provided an important fishery. There were restaurants in Portland, whose specialty was crawfish. I remember one: The CRAWFISH HOUSE. Johnny was a major supplier.

I don't know how or where he set his traps. The only thing I remember were the live boxes, made of wooden slats, that he kept tied to the side of his houseboat. Each box was about four feet long by two and a half feet wide by 18 inches deep. There was a hinged door in the top. All the crawfish were kept alive until sold. Although all of them were big, there was an occasional grandpa (or grandma) that was a monster.

When a buyer came along Johnny didn't bother to pick them up by grabbing them just behind the pincers (the safe way); he'd scoop them out with both hands, and shake off the ones that grabbed him. When this happened, he'd always say something, but I didn't understand German. I gathered it was some word which my mother wouldn't approve.

There was a cottonwood grove between Johnny's place and the S P & S tracks, where he placed about a dozen long picnic tables. Occasionally, some of his friends from Portland (always men) would come down for a crawfish feed, or a drinking bout, or a song fest--most likely all three. How I looked forward to these unscheduled events.

When the singing started (you were stone deaf if you couldn't hear it), my folks would let me slip down the trail through the woods to the railroad tracks, where I would sit on the outside rail--to watch and listen. They would eat, drink, and sing--song after rollicking song rolling out of that grove riding the gentle breeze from the river. Their big steins waved at arm's length as they kept time with the sway and beat of an accordion. (I get goose bumps just remembering) I stayed up late those nights. Even after I climbed back up the hill and went to bed those booming, boisterous songs would go round and round in my head.

Johnny was one of our friendly neighbors, some weren't. He'd let us fish from his float. Now and then he would pull a big crawfish out of the box for us to hold and look at.

I guess he had a wife. One day I saw someone peeking out the window, but the curtain closed so quickly I couldn't be sure. If he had a wife, she must have been shy for she never came outside--not when we were there.

My folks liked Johnny; everybody liked Johnny--even my dog Ring.

Ring was a collie/shepherd mix with a white scruff around his neck. He took a special liking to Johnny and Johnny to him. Maybe it was because Johnny called out "Rrrrrrring Boy" every time he saw him. That extra roll to his name--gave it some class. Couldn't have been the snack Johnny always had in his pocket.

There was such a steep incline going from the river bottom to the highway, that Johnny had a plank road made of 2 by 4's, laid edgewise. It was his private road.

One lazy summer afternoon I was lying on the grassy bank below the house watching the boats on the river. Ring was stretched out beside me. Hearing Johnny's "Giddy-up" I looked down and saw his team and wagon starting up the plank road. At the top a fellow had just parked his touring car, blocking the road. When Johnny got to the car, I could see, and faintly hear snatches of the conversation between them.

Johnny asked him to move the car, so he could get out. The fellow must have been an ornery cuss, for he told Johnny he could do a lot of things, and go to some warm places--but he wasn't going to move. Johnny stood up and yelled, "Get der vagon off der road yet!"

About this time, the woman, who had been sitting in the car, got out and begged the man to move. He yelled at her to get back in the car and shut up.

I don't know what flipped the guy, but before you could say scat, or whatever you say under such circumstances; this joker reaches in the car, comes out with a long knife, lunges for the wagon, and takes a swipe at Johnny who had just sat down again.

Johnny dodged the first blow, slid over to the opposite side to avoid the next one, jumped out, and tried to get away. Over the wagon, around the wagon, first one way, than the other--all the time I could see that knife flashing in the sunlight. Johnny lost a knuckle when his hand got in the way of his face--a gash across an ear when he didn't duck soon enough--his jacket looked like ribbons.

I was so busy watching the fight, I didn't realize Ring was gone until I saw him streak around the wagon. Johnny slipped, stumbled, and landed on his face. The fellow sprang forward, raised his arm, and it looked like he was going to sink the blade in Johnny's back. At that moment Ring's teeth clamped down on his arm. The knife dropped from his fingers and he let out a yell you could have heard from Linnton to Scarpoose.

This gave Johnny time to pick himself up, climb into the wagon, and grab a board lying in the back. Ring had let go the fellow's arm when he dropped the knife, and just as he strained up, clutching his arm, Johnny put a permanent crease in his hair. End of fight.

By this time my dad, who heard the ruckus, was running down the trail--me behind. Dad got the fellow's license number, told him he was going to report him to the authorities, then turned to give first aid to Johnny--he needed

it. The other fellow was bleeding like a stuck pig. His wife wrapped a big towel around his head and they drove down the road--she was doing the driving.

Later that afternoon, we were down at our garage on the highway, fixing a flat tire. My mother looked down the road and saw their car returning. "Let's go, " she begged my dad. That fellow is liable to remember that you interfered. Maybe he'll cause more trouble." I loved my dad. He wasn't a big man, but he never lacked guts. Picking up a tire iron, he said, "Let him stop. I'll give him a headache on the other side." They didn't stop. I can still see him hanging on to one of the roof supports, his head bandaged like a mummy--his face white as blackboard chalk. He wasn't in any mood nor condition to cause any more trouble.

I wonder if he learned that you don't block people's driveways, and if by chance you do, you move on peacefully when asked to. But, I wonder if people like that ever learn.

How times have changed. Today, he'd probably hire some shyster to sue us for not having our dog on a leash!

Ring now had hero status. Every time Johnny saw him after that, he would call out, "Rrrrrring! Rrrrrring Boy! You "safet" my life." And the dog would stand up, put his paws on Johnny's shoulders; his big brown eyes would seem to say, "I know. I know. Pay me."

Strange. He never did that to anyone else--not even me.

## MCCARTNEY'S BULL

Ring got into bullfighting when most pups were chasing balls--or their tails. He probably felt this was more exciting than herding cows--more in keeping with his talents. It did demonstrate courage and intelligence. It all began down in the pasture when McCartney's bull caught me half way between the fence, and the trees which grew on the river bank. If it hadn't been for Ring, I wouldn't be writing this.

Mr. McCartney, who owned the butcher shop in town, had a pasture adjoining ours. He had a mean bull (Durham, I think he was), that a neighbor said had killed one of his hired hands, and put another in the hospital. The bull's reputation kept us kids out of his pasture, even though there was an abandoned houseboat on the shore where the fishing was fantastic for bluegills and crappie.

Because of the ebb and flow of the early June runoffs, there were channels cut in the sandy soil of the pasture. When the river ran normal again, these would dry out and lush grass would grow on their sides and bottom. Some of them were quite deep and held little ponds of water long after everything else was dry. I always looked in these depressions, when hunting for strays: heifers or cows.

There was one, unusually deep, about half-way between the railroad fence and the river. Ring, pup like, was racing around chasing grasshoppers, dragon flies, or anything else that popped up. When I went over to the edge of one of these gullies to see if the cow I was hunting, was down there feeding, I looked straight into the glassy, bulging eyes of McCartney's bull. He had breached the fence and was enjoying the greener grass on our side. I don't know which of us was the more surprised.

McCartney's Bull - 70

After this informal introduction, he let out a big bellow and pawed the ground, throwing clouds of dirt over his back. I pawed dirt too, in the direction of some leaning cottonwoods growing near the river. They were my only chance. They leaned because they had been bent, when young, by the river currents. We kids used to run up them and catch hold of one of the lower branches just for fun. This wouldn't be for fun.

Too bad someone couldn't have timed this race for I am sure, at the time, it would have been a world record. One glance back over my shoulder, however, told me that the bull would beat it. I'd never make it to the trees.

About the time I could almost feel his breath singeing my backside, I reached the first leaning Cottonwood, ran up the trunk, and grabbed a limb. I turned to see why the bull hadn't caught me, and there he was going round and round, like a merry-go-round. Ring's teeth were clamped to his ear. I don't know how he hung on. The bull was spinning him horizontal like he was going to toss him out of the county. When I could catch my breath again, I whistled. Ring let go, and bloodied the bull's heels all the way out of our pasture. He was going so fast when he got to the fence, he didn't look for the hole he made coming in--just made a new one.

I am sure I owed Ring my life, and he never let me forget it. From that time on, whether I had a sandwich, an apple, or a piece of candy, he'd nuzzle my hand with his wet nose, and I'd remember--and share.

His action in that emergency showed his intelligence, and uncanny ability to reason. It was the only time Ring ever grabbed an animal by the ear--he was always a "heeler".

## THE GOOD NEIGHBORS

Traveling west out of Linnton (just past a little fast-food place) there is a gable-roofed 4-plex: two apartments upstairs--two, down. The couples who moved into the upstairs apartments soon after it was built (over seventy years ago) were the friendliest people. The men worked at the West Oregon mill. The women kept house.

One of the men worked in the office--the other was a foreman. The bookkeeper's wife was a flaming redhead--the other lady had hair that reminded me of the color and sheen of a crow in the bright sunlight. They were beautiful.

I saw them down in the market one time. The redhead wore a bright, green dress; the black haired one--purple. At the time I thought they added some color to a town as drab as its muddy streets and weathered store fronts.

Almost every evening I would see them in their apartments, because, although each of them took a quart of milk each day; they usually wanted some of our thick, rich cream for their coffee. When they answered my knock, I would ask, "half pint, or one pint?". They would invite me to step inside while they checked their iceboxes. This gave me a chance to see how they lived.

Invariably both couples would be in one or the other of their apartments, playing cards. If I got there early enough, sometimes I would see them eating together. I thought they were the nicest people--never a harsh word or a cross look. Always smiling at each other.

One year winter seemed reluctant to leave. Summer had to push spring out of the way. When I found notes in the empty bottles, ordering a pint of milk instead of a quart each day, I wondered. Then, I suddenly realized, that, although I had seen the men playing cards, their wives weren't around.

Possibly, I reasoned, they were on a trip, or visiting relatives. There were any number of possibilities. I was curious, but knew it would be impolite to ask. I still wondered why they stayed away so long?

Two months passed. One evening, to my surprise and relief, they were back. They must have heard my steps on the stairs for they were both waiting so they could change their orders back to one quart each per day. But, what happened? My face must have been one big question mark, because, the lady who had lived in the left apartment, was in the doorway of the right one. And, the lady who lived in the right one, was in the left one. I stood there looking at first one, then the other. They laughed. (I forgot to ask about the cream)

Their husbands joined them in enjoying my confusion. Then, one of them explained they had gotten divorces and remarried--*to each others partners!*

As far as I could see, everything went on just like it had before; they ate together; played cards together; went shopping together. I'm sure it was legal and I guess it was alright--but to me it seemed strange--almost funny. Of course this only supported my preformed conclusion that sometimes older folks are very peculiar people, at least they do some strange things--things hard for a kid to understand.

## THE 4th OF JULY

To my knowledge, Linnton never mounted any 4th of July offensive, there were too many people to whom the 4th wouldn't have meant anything except a lot of noise--and there was plenty of that. The loungers in front of Shelk's store, used to toss whole packages of lighted firecrackers into the street just to see my dog Coalie (the one somebody poisoned before I got Ring), tear them to pieces. At the first bang, he would catapult into the middle, teeth bared, snapping right and left until the last one exploded. It must have been fun, for the game never ended until we called him home, or they ran out of firecrackers.

I don't think anybody cared, one way or another, about a local celebration, because, everyone that could ride, hop, walk, or crawl went to St. Helens. Now that was a celebration. They hung the WELCOME banner out to dry, but it never did.

If there was anything, the Fourth-of-July committee forgot, I can't imagine what it was. There was fun for everyone: free flags; free barbecue (all day); free lemonade for the kids; a carnival, races, and THE BATTLE ROYAL. One word would characterize the whole show: **NOISE!** Firecrackers crackled, side-winders screeched, torpedoes banged. And, to complete the assault on the ear drums there was the Baaaaa-room! of the anvil. That's right--anvil.

Some enterprising soul (or slightly deaf) came up with the super-noise-maker. He filled the little square hole in the top of an anvil (the place where a cutting tool fits), with gun powder. Then, with some help, placed another anvil upside down on this one. The result could only be measured on the Richter scale. All day long it would rattle the windows. . . and people's brains. They timed it so well, that when it was about

## The 4th of July - 74

to go off, people would start plugging their ears with their fingers.

Another noise-maker was the torpedo. It was a round, red-paper-covered ball, about an inch in diameter, which exploded when it was thrown down on the pavement. Someone bounced one too close to a passing car and the tire blew out. (Tires in those days were always looking for an excuse to blow out anyway). This added to the prearranged festivities. The car's owner leaped out sans his holiday spirit, but sputtered out like a damp fuse, when everyone cheered as though it was funny. It was. To me.

Then, there were the races. They had some formula for separating the boys into heats: age, height, weight (or something). The winners of each heat would race for the big prize: \$3.50 (I question whether some of today's mega-buck athletes would have thought this much of a prize, but to us kids, it was a fortune.

I won my heat and beat out another kid by a foot for the big prize. . .in my dress shoes!

My mother wouldn't let me wear tennis shoes, said they were bad for the feet. (She was very health conscious) But her conscience hurt her when she saw me having to race in my Sunday-go-to-meeting dress shoes--on that hard pavement. I used the prize money to buy some tennis shoes.

*The* major event of the day was the battle royal: THE BIGGEST FIGHT OF THE CENTURY. (So the billing said)

This climaxed the days festivities. It was held on a big barge anchored in the river, just far enough away, so the crowds perched on the high banks would have a clear view of the atrocities. The barge was bare, except for the capstans, one on each of its four sides.

The gladiators were loggers--20 of them, with a referee. The last one left on the barge would receive a pair of Bergman's Best Logger Boots. What did they cost then? Thirty dollars I think.

Now these loggers weren't the let-the-chain-saw-do-

the-work variety one sees swaggering out of the woods today, red suspenders, saw pad on their shoulders--these were loggers. They were huge brutes who could pull a crosscut saw all day, or swing an axe, eat a platter of steaks, finish it off with a whole pie--and bellow, "where's the food?"

They lined up on the barge, bare to the waist, slugged pants, and calked boots. The announcer introduced them, the town they represented (there was a lot of civic pride in those days); what they weighed, and any other useless information he could come up with, to build anticipation and excitement, as well as, delay the mayhem that was to follow. Why he did this, I don't know for, there was a surplus of anticipation as evidenced by the cheering and betting among the spectators. He finally got around to the rules: THERE WEREN'T ANY!

Two men manned each of four row boats--one on each side of the barge--to pick up survivors (if any). The referee blew his whistle and the fight was on. It was incredible.

They slugged, kicked, butted, and battered each other. The crowd roared every time a loser was heaved overboard to land on his back, or belly, or elsewhere, in the frigid waters of the Columbia. It was a weld of toe-to-toe slug-fests, and gang wars. They hammered, kicked, butted, elbowed and stomped.

Finally, there were only two contestants left. This was a battle royal--a fight to the finish. They were giants, evenly matched. Their blows echoed from the high banks.

When it seemed like the fight would end in a draw, one of them started a hay-maker from the tops of his calked boots, that caught his opponent flush on the chin. He went down like an old growth fir, as the crowd howled, "T-I-M-B-E-R! The big lumberjack unceremoniously grabbed his slumbering opponent by the heels, dragged him to the edge of the barge and rolled him over the side. The crowd collapsed in hysterics.

The winner stood bent over, arms hanging down like

The 4th of July - 76

a great ape, his chest heaving as he sucked in great gulps of air. The referee reached for his arm to raise it in victory, when the fellow suddenly straightened up, and hit him so hard he bounced two/three times on the deck of the barge. The crowd gasped.

Shaking his head trying to evict the spider that had built a web in his brain, the official picked himself up, ducked another round-house, feinted--right--left, measured this big bruiser and decked him with a right hand that caught him right on the button! He grabbed him by the heels, dragged him to the edge--rolled him into the river. The crowd went insane.

The chant built into a crescendo: **"GIVE 'IM THE BOOTS! GIVE 'IM THE BOOTS! GIVE 'IM THE BOOTS!"**

And the official who had climbed on the barge to award the grand prize--gave the referee the Bergman boots!

## PRINCE

Prince, the flea-bitten-grey saddle horse, would have ended up as dog chow, if there had been any market. But, the dogs didn't have gourmet meals those days, they ate table scraps--just what was left over after the humans were through. The horse trader just added him to the lot of horses he had for sale; he wasn't worth anything anyway--so stiff he could barely move. My uncle Tom bought the horses--Prince was a bonus. Some bonus.

How he ended up in our barn, I'll never know--some deal my dad got into with uncle (if I were to guess). What happened to Prince would have done-in another animal, but he wasn't just another animal. He was royalty.

Prince grew up on a cattle ranch in Eastern Oregon. He was so fast his owner entered him in the cow pony race at the Pendleton Round Up one year. He won by four lengths. The next year, as defending champion, he won again. Then, some gamblers bought him, hitched him to a buggy, got "stoned", and drove him until he dropped. When he could stagger to the next farm, they sold him for five bucks. The rancher tossed him in with the lot of horses he sold a trader one day. My uncle bought him from the trader.

Dad put him in the big pasture. There was no danger of him running away, he could hardly walk, let alone run. Each evening, dad would take a pail of hot, sudsy water and give him a rub down. He stood patiently as dad would massage his hips and legs. Within six months he was well again, and what a sight it was to see him eating up the meadow with his hoofs, head high, neck arched, tail flying in the wind--snorting through his pink nostrils.

One day dad said, "That's your horse." He got a little English saddle somewhere, shortened the stirrups to fit a six-

year-old's legs, boosted me aboard, and cautioned me not to gallop, just trot.

Prince didn't trot—he floated. It was so much fun, I decided to let him lope, kinda-easy-like. (We were out of sight of the house. He seemed to want to anyway) When the lope turned into a gallop, I got scared--so I yelled, Whoa! He whoa---d! He had been trained as a roping horse. and he could stop on a dime and give you nine cents change. I flew over his head and plowed a little furrow with my nose in the meadow grass.

I felt around to see if anything was missing, or had jarred loose--then looked back at him. I didn't know that horses could look surprised, but he did. He stood there, his ears were tilted forward looking down at me like he couldn't believe what happened.

He followed me over to a bank so I could get on again. We tried it once more with the same results. I wasn't about to give up on this galloping bit; it was too much fun. The third time, I remembered to hang onto the back of the saddle when I said, Whoa! It worked. I stayed on. We galloped a lot before my dad happened to see me one day. He asked me how long I had been doing this. I told him the truth. He laughed. I guess he must have been a kid one day too.

The first time we suspected that Prince had unusual intelligence, or I suppose you could call it horse-sense, was when we were bringing some cows in from a distant pasture. Some of the more frisky would try to leave the herd. Prince would be after them in a flash, give them a nip on the rump, and swing them back into line. It wasn't too long before he had the entire herd well trained. All I had to do was ride and watch.

Then one hot summer day we looked down at the pasture by the river and there was Prince lying on the edge of the slough, his body completely submerged, his head on the bank. He had figured out how to beat the summer's heat.

But his intelligence was exhibited in another way which irritated my father no end. I guess I was to blame. I found it was more fun to ride bareback, than on a hard saddle. Now we were both free. As we raced across the fields and through the woods I could feel the pull and thrust of his muscles. Prince responded so well to knee pressure, or hand pressure on his neck, that I dispensed with the bridle also. This created a dislike for bridles and saddles in his mind, so when dad wanted to ride him; he couldn't catch him, because he knew dad would saddle him and put a bit in his teeth.

If I was home there was no problem: a whistle from me was all that was required; I could catch him for dad. But when I was in school. . .none of the other horses were fast enough to could catch him. Needless to say, dad was furious-accused me of being half Indian, the way I rode and all.

But, Prince really exhibited his intelligence when we were launched into the dairy business. He was drafted to pull the white milk wagon in which we delivered milk. Not that he minded, he always seemed willing enough. Possibly, it gave him an opportunity to see the sights of the town, a relief from the dull life on the farm.

We soon learned that, after a couple of stops at the same place, he stopped on his own at that identical spot each evening. It wasn't long before we woke up to the fact that he knew the route as well as we did. As we ran from house to house, leaving bottles of milk, and picking up empties, we were amazed to see Prince and the wagon following us along the street. Imagine our surprise one evening, when he took the wagon down to the end of the street, turned around, and was waiting for us when we finished the other side.

Before long, we tied up the reins when we began our deliveries, and didn't pick them up until we were ready to head for home. He negotiated the whole town without missing a stop. If we no longer delivered milk to a house, he would still stop, and look around at us to see if we had forgotten. It usually took a couple of these, before he remembered not to stop anymore.

One fellow who heard the stories about Prince, didn't believe them. Dad invited him to go with us one night, sit in the wagon, and watch. He told folks later, "I saw it, but I still don't believe it."

My uncle liked fast horses and it irritated him no end because Prince could outrun anything he had. Very often he would announce that *now* he had a horse that could beat old Prince. My cousin Carl and I would walk the horses down the county road about a half mile, then race them back to where my folks and uncle were watching.

We'd start out easy like. Prince would match the new horse stride for stride. When we were in a full gallop I would run my hand up his neck, and coax, "Come on Prince. Come on boy." Where he got the extra burst of speed I don't know, but he'd would lay his ears back and fairly fly. Uncle would just stand there shaking his head in disbelief. He never found a horse that could beat "old Prince."

What a knight's horse he would have made. He was fearless. One evening there was a switch engine blocking the crossing in town. Prince kept easing forward until he could sniff this noisy monster. About that time the fireman released a blast of exhaust steam that completely engulfed him. He never flinched.

After my years with Prince, every other horse was like comparing clods to diamonds--flashlights to sunbeams. I never saw another horse I really wanted. The let down would have been too great. I was a lucky kid. I had two marvelous pals--a great dog and a great horse.

## BIG SHEP

One event that never failed to interest and amaze the locals that loitered on main street, holding up the light poles, chewing toothpicks, and cluttering the sidewalk with their incessant whittling, was the big dog that made daily trips to the meat market.

In the days before freezers, it was difficult to keep meat in the home, so, people would buy only what they needed for the next meal, or at most the day. Somehow one woman had trained her shepherd to carry a list to the butcher shop, and bring the package of meat home. After delivering the meat, the dog would return to the shop and the butcher would give him a juicy bone--his pay for the delivery service.

One day as Big Shep left the butcher shop with his package, he was set upon by some dogs that had been loafing with their owners. Their barking attracted the rest of the dogs in the neighborhood, until a whole pack of them were trying to tear that package from his teeth. He ran as fast as he could, head held high, trying to protect the meat--the pack snapping, and tearing away at his sides. Blood streaks stained his tawny coat, but still he raced for home.

As he entered his yard, the pack stopped; he leaped through the door his owner had just opened, on hearing all the barking outside. Dropping the mangled package on the floor, the big dog ran out and raced for town--not for his bone--not this time. He methodically "cleaned up" on every dog he saw. The little ones, he shook till their teeth rattled--the big ones, he almost killed.

When some of the owners grabbed clubs and were going to stop him--others stopped them (almost causing a free-for-all.) "Leave him alone," they threatened, "they had it coming. Big Shep got a bone with lots of meat left on it that day. The butcher who was watching from his shop, saw to that.

Big Shep - 82

From then on, he could trot to the butcher shop with his order, and take the package of meat home without any interference. Some thought he walked a bit slower, his head a bit higher. . .after all, he was the CHAMP.

## THE INVENTOR

Every evening when I delivered milk to an old mill-hand who lived down near the river, I would see him working at his table in the orange glow of a kerosene lamp. He would invite me in; I would watch for a few minutes as he worked on a little model he was making. This was to be his passport to freedom. No more of this ten-hour dragging wet-heavy timbers from a green chain, no more one-room shack with one-course meals cooked on a little trash burner--batching. Not when his patent came through. And this was the model. Now it was taking shape as he carefully cut and fitted pieces of cardboard, sticks and wire.

The way he explained it made sense. The cars of that time didn't have dimmers on their headlights; the glare made it almost impossible for an approaching driver to see the road. His invention would solve this problem, probably save a lot of lives too.

It consisted of a metal bar across the top of the headlights with a round metal hood over each light. There was another bar extending from this one to the inside of the automobile. All the driver had to do was move a little lever forward, and presto--the metal hoods tilted downward throwing the beams toward the road. Pull back on the lever--you had bright lights again.

His enthusiasm rubbed off on me and every new addition to the little model was a mutual victory. He was counting (I with him) the days when he could shed this mill life, and live off his royalties.

As the model neared completion, he became more interested in the marketing aspect, so he subscribed to *The Inventor's Magazine*. It listed all the places interested in such things, even offered a special service to "new" inventors, promising to market their ideas. (for a fee of course) Then

there was a special section that showed pictures of inventors and their inventions that had already hit the big time--along with the unbelievable money they were making. Every evening, as I brought his quart of milk, he would bring me up to date on his latest research. And, the little model only needed a little touch-up to be complete.

Then one rainy evening I tapped on his door. He called, "Come in", but somehow it didn't sound like Gus. It didn't have the usual, jovial ring I was accustomed to. There he sat by his little stove, looking like he had lost *all* his friends, not just the best one.

"What's the matter Gus," I asked. "Are you sick? Did something happen?" He certainly looked like it. He didn't answer, just pointed to a copy of the latest Inventor's Magazine lying on the table. It was open to one of the back pages, the ones where all the successful inventors were listed. There it was. (I couldn't believe it) There was Gus' invention for headlight dimmers already patented by someone else. It had the fellow's picture too.

Back to the green chain.

That night I learned about dreams. Bright, beautiful, flimsy, transparent dreams. . .zero! I could sympathize with him, kid-like, for hadn't I suffered my set-back in this dream business? What about the affair I had with the farmer's wife?

The Farmer's Wife was a magazine, printed in Minnesota, I think. Somewhere I saw a copy and in it was this contest involving the shetland ponies--three of them. It was a simple subscription contest. Anyone could enter. You got so many points for each subscription and these doubled, tripled, or quadrupled for the two/three/four year kind. Although I had my horse Prince, I still wanted one of those cute little shetlands. So I sent in my application for the solicitor's kit. It came: order blanks, sample copies of past issues, an official badge with my name on it--even some sales tips. I was catapulted into the magazine business with a one-cent stamp.

How I worked. Every spare hour, rain or shine, saw me trotting from one house to the next, showing my magazine-appealing for subscribers. I was spurred on my way by frequent, personal (?) memos from the publisher saying, "I was leading the pack," or "almost in the lead", or "just a few more and you're over the top."

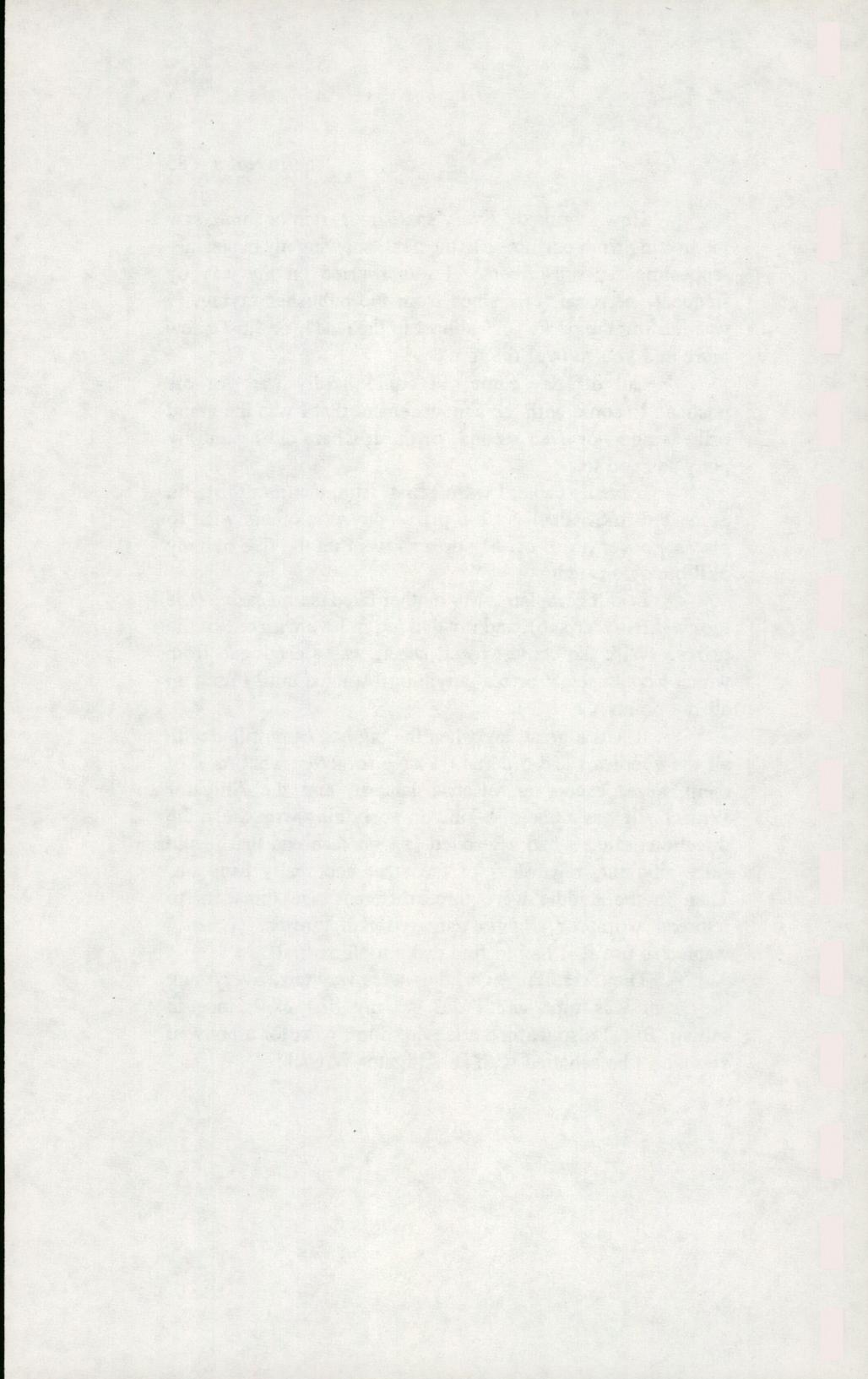
Cut off day came. I could hardly wait for the postman to come with the announcement that I was the grand prize winner--or even second, or third; where did I want my pony shipped to.

It finally came. I wasn't first, fifth, tenth, or thirtieth. Some kid in St. Paul got the prize pony, the others went to places I never heard of. My dreams went up the flue like my mill-buddy's patent.

I can't complain. My mother liked the magazine (she took a three-year sub), and my dad fell in love with one of the prizes. With the contest result sheet, was a catalogue from which I could select prizes--anything I wanted until I used up all my points.

It was a great day when the big box came filled with all the goodies I had ordered. I have forgotten what most of them were, except an electric lantern, and the Alligator Wrench. It was a one-of-a-kind do-everything-wrench, so the directions said. It had a serrated jaw on each end that would seize any nut, regardless of the size, and really hang on. Then in the middle were three different size threaders to rethread worn, or slightly damaged bolt threads. (When I wanted to use it, I had to find dad's toolbox first).

They were fair. Oh, they *were* very fair. Everything they sent was tops--and I did get my first experience in selling. But, I also learned a lesson: don't wish for a pony, if you won't be satisfied with an Alligator Wrench!



## THE MOLESTERS

Back there, we had our share of kidnapers (snatching kids for circuses I was told), and child molesters.

My mother warned me of some of the tricks these vermin used, such as: luring a kid into a car (don't get in); or putting something in candy to knock him out (don't eat it).

I met the candy-bit maneuver in the station in Whitwood Court one afternoon where I was waiting for the electric car to take me home from school. It was a combination depot-restaurant-bar place where we kids could wait in nasty weather.

A lady and a man approached me. The lady handed me a partially filled bag of candy with the invitation, "Here boy. You can have the rest of these; candy makes my head ache."

I thanked her (as I'd been taught), took the bag and edged toward the door--kind of easy like. I remembered what my mother said about doped candy.

Once outside, I ran around the corner, and hid behind a shed where they couldn't see me. I took out a piece. It was a caramel. I carefully tried to pull it apart, first one side, than another. It didn't come apart. The second one also seemed alright. But the third one came apart and a single drop of clear liquid ran out of a little hole in the center. Now, I knew! It was just like my mom had said.

I stayed out of sight until the train squealed to a stop then ran for the motorman's cab. (He used to let me ride up there with him. It was fun watching him run the train with one hand on the brass power lever, and the other on the black brake handle.) He saw me running and opened the door so I could climb inside out of the rain.

Just as I reached for the hand-rail, the woman appeared from somewhere, grabbed my arm (hard) and said, "Did you eat that candy?" I tried to jerk away. She shook me. I hung on to the rail for dear-life.

"What's the matter, lady?" asked the motorman, leaning out of the cab.

"Nothing, nothing, I'm just having a little trouble with my boy." Her voice was syrupy.

"Take your hands off him!" the trainman warned. From the sound of his voice he wasn't fooling. "That's not *your* boy!" He started to get out of the cab--she let go--I bounded up the steps.

After I told him what happened, he said I was a smart kid--that made me feel real good.

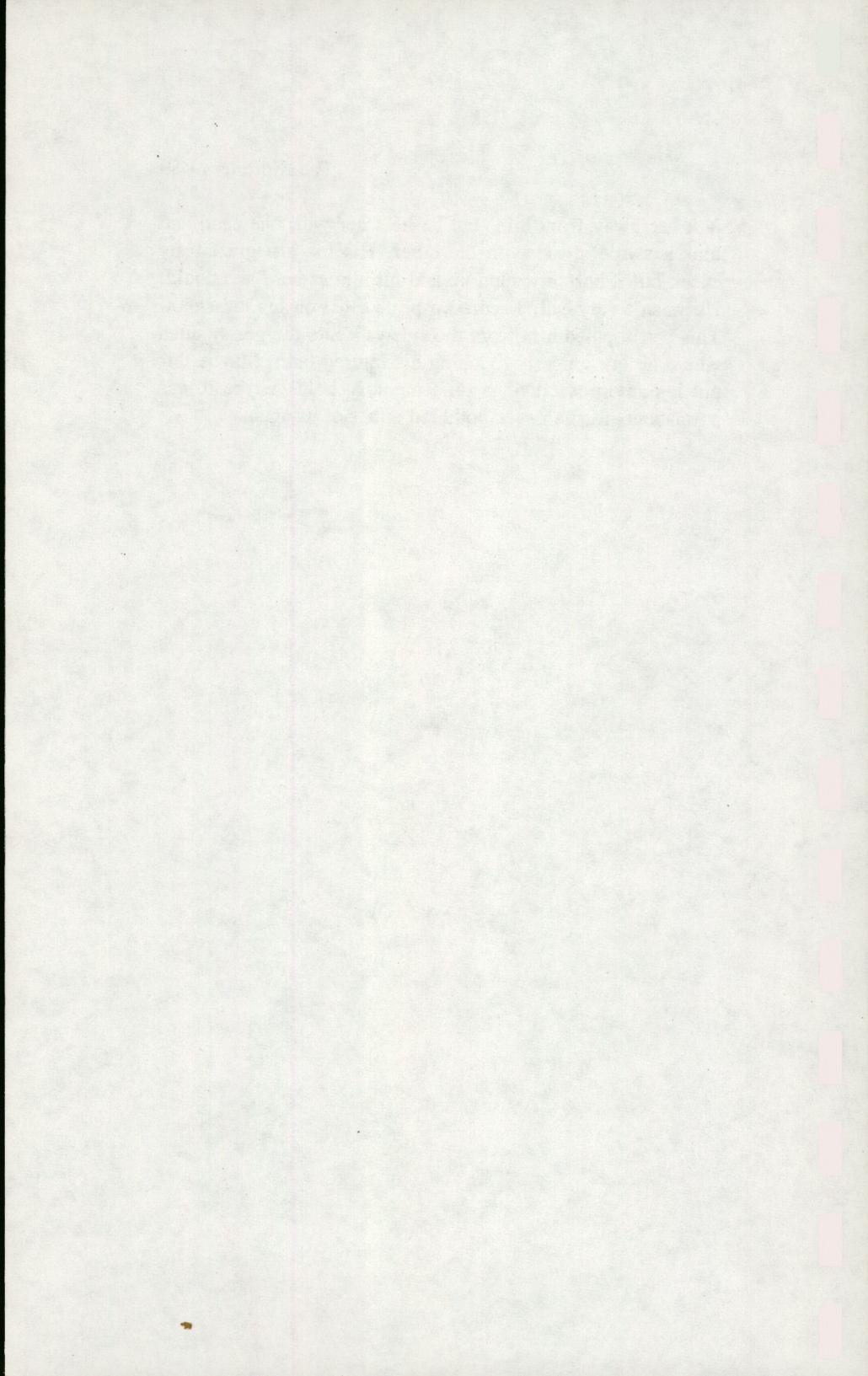
But, the child molester?

He was the town drunk, that is he was always drunk, not occasionally like some of the others. Short, ragged, dirty, he used to stagger up and down the street. Somebody said he was a swamper in a saloon. I guess that's how he could stay drunk. That's how he was paid. Occasionally his wanderings took him a little way out of town. I always stayed clear of him, which wasn't too hard, although, one time he wanted to show me something and I got close enough for him to grab me. I jerked away. After that I crossed the street when I saw him coming.

This morning I was on my way to school and just as I came over a little rise in the road, I saw this old buzzard grab little Mary as she tried to pass him on the sidewalk. She was a pretty little girl with golden ringlets hanging down to her shoulders. Always had a red ribbon tied on top. She must have been in the first or second grade. She was screaming and begging, "Please let me go," and trying to get away. He was trying to kiss her. To me this was especially revolting for he had a yellowish, tobacco-stained, scraggly mustache, and a breath that my mom could have used for oven cleaner.

I ran as fast as I could, grabbed her arm and tried to

jerk her away from him, but he held her with one hand and took a swipe at me with the other. His fist just grazed my cheek but it hurt. I wound up and hit him as hard as I could. He wasn't very tall. I scored a perfect ten on his red snoot. This belt toppled him from the sidewalk into the grassy ditch where he lay gingerly touching his injured bulb. Maybe this put his amorous cravings on temporary hold--maybe it was permanent--for he never bothered either of us again.



## THE LAW

At home, my dad was *the* law. The big, black Colt he kept under his pillow, insured that everything in and around our home was safe from invaders. This was our castle. What a comforting, quieting affect we enjoyed, as kids, to know that "dad will take care of it." It being anything that threatened our safety.

We didn't have the ubiquitous lawyer-syndrome, where everybody sues everybody for everything, and anything. I'm afraid if we had, some of these shysters would have met speedy, if not poetic justice. Crooks didn't have rights--convicts couldn't sue the state. Maybe our brand of justice didn't follow the exact rules of juris-prudence, but it was fast, fair (mostly), and final. The crook that invaded your premises was on his own--what happened to him was legal, because he shouldn't have been there in the first place. He was a trespasser. Trespassers didn't have rights.

If Linnton had a resident policeman, I never knew it. I would see a Portland cop now and then--a whole carload when the town erupted, as it did on occasion. Like the time when some fellows from the Austrian house broke into the liquor car, parked on the siding, and fortified by its contents, began to dismantle the place. Strangely enough, a person could feel the tension in the air before it erupted. People that weren't involved, went indoors, pulled the blinds, and waited until it was over.

That night there was only one cop patrolling the streets. (The name Young seems to fit. Anyway, some years later I saw his picture in the Police Gazette while I was waiting for a haircut. He was the new world's pistol champion). Even when the town was about to come to a boil,

the milk had to be delivered. I'd see this policeman and he'd say, "Hello kid" and let me go on with my work.

But this night. I was just coming out of the yard across from the Austrian House, when he came by, heading in that direction. He gave me the usual "Hello kid" greeting, then said, "You'd better leave this area, I'm afraid there might be trouble and I don't want you to get hurt." I went as far as the first light pole, and peaked around it to see what was going to happen.

His revolver was in his hand as he approached the front steps. He knocked on the door and it was opened by the boss Austrian (the foreman), with a broken half an oar in his hands. He was so big, he blocked the doorway. The cop told him to drop the club, and come along peacefully. The fellow raised the oar and took a step forward. The policeman stepped back, made an imaginary line on the porch with his toe, and warned him not to cross that line. With a bellow, the fellow charged--the bullet slammed into his chest.

I had seen men stabbed, clubbed, and lying with their guts hanging out beside the railroad tracks--but I had never seen anyone shot before. The slug stopped him, like he had run into a wall, he stiffened, stretched upward, then folded like a damp rag. I got out of there fast.

Someone must have phoned for a back-up; about a hour later it showed up--a whole carload of law. There were cops all over town, rounding up the trouble makers--hauling them away in other cars that kept arriving.

Later that night as I made my last delivery, at the doctor's house, he asked me if I would like to see the man who had been shot. He was lying propped up on some pillows. His breath was raspy. The doctor raised the bandage slightly so I could see the little, round, blue hole in his right chest. He died at three in the morning. I had seen my first shooting.

But, even the law couldn't handle what happened, when a situation at the Hindu House blew up.

The story I got from a lot of people (in bits and

pieces) was this. Back in India, a man killed another man, then to keep from being killed by one of the relatives, he left the country. He found his way to Western Oregon, and a job in Linnton. He could take a deep breath now, for no one knew where he was, not even his relatives. They'd never find him here.

All the men, who lived in Hindu House, ate at the same long table in the kitchen. They would attack stacks of, what looked like tortillas, (about the same texture). There were a lot of things they wrapped up in the flat cakes--most of them too hot for my taste. The flat cakes had to be hot to be good. When they got cold, the cook gave them to me and I took them home for the chickens. They didn't seem to mind the rock-like texture.

On this wild night, the day shift had just come in. They gathered around the long tables, laughing, talking, and eating. One of them looked up to see, directly across the table--his avenger from India, who had just arrived. Dinner came to an abrupt end. They didn't even wait for the desert.

Leaping from the tables, they took sides, grabbed knives from the kitchen, axes, clubs, and anything else that they could find--and went to work on each other. By the time the cops got there, it was all over: three dead, one dying, one without an arm, one minus a leg. The story I got was in bits and pieces--I saw some of the pieces.

The injured were hauled off to the hospitals in Portland and that wasn't a fast trip. The rest went back to work. The town settled down again with little more concern than if someone had left the back door open, and the night breeze had crept in.

I lost three milk customers.

So, if you still think TV is bad for kids. . .

**YOU NEVER GREW UP IN LINNTON.**

#####

