Fern; the Memories of a Handicapped Girl in Turn of the Century Southern California

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DESTINY'S CALL

A POEM BY FRANCES (FERN) ELIZABETH BREWER

FERN

THE MEMORIES OF A HANDICAPPED GIRL IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

THE RANCH:

In the Spring of 1895, when I was four years old, Iven Benbow Hobson, my papa, traded a farm near Bakersfield for a ranch up in the mountains and moved his wife, Bertha Amanda Hobson, with their children, Ralph, Birdie, Myrtle, Iven Jr., Fern (that's me), and Sadie up to the place. The ranch was at the foot of Piute Mountain, and Erskine Creek ran through the property, so it was called the Erskine Creek Ranch. Our brand was the OV, after the former owner, Mr. O. Veach.

When we arrived, I remember that Mr. Veach had a covered wagon, it was called a conestoga, parked under the tree. Iven and I climbed up in the tree and slid down onto the top of the cover of the wagon, and as we jumped up and down the coach rocked wildly back and forth. It was surely fun, but Mr. Veach caught us at it. Need I say he was a trifle irritated? I think he could have skinned us alive! About a week after we arrived he packed up his personal belongings and loaded them into that small covered wagon and drove away. Now the ranch, the OV branding iron, and everything that we could see belonged to us!

The ranch was in two parcels that were always referred to as the upper ranch and the lower ranch. The buildings were on the lower ranch. First there was the low rambling ranch-house in which we lived. The rooms I remember best are the living room and the kitchen. The living room was big and long and had a large fireplace at one end with old fashioned comfortable, high-backed rocking chairs beside it. The organ, upon which Mother used to play church

hymns, was near one corner, and a chesterfield, settees and some more armchairs were at the other end. There was plenty of room even when Mother set up the quilting frame.

The house had a large kitchen. The wood-burning range and the wood box were in the corner at one end, and the sink, drain boards and cupboards were in the opposite corner with a work-table in the middle. The long dining table had benches at the sides and an armchair at each end. It would seat twelve to fourteen people without crowding.

A long porch extended across the front of the house with one door into the kitchen and another into the living room. There was no railing on the porch so the outer edge was often used as a seating place when we were outside. A large steel triangle hung on the end of the kitchen side of the porch and the iron bar with which to beat it hung near it on the wall. Whenever we heard the pleasant jangle of the beaten triangle we all came running because we knew a meal was about to be served. Beside the iron bar hung an old cow's horn that had been scraped with a piece of broken glass and polished, and then had the tip cut off leaving a small hole in the end. When Mother wanted us children she would blow on this horn and we could hear it as far as a mile away.

The well and windmill were near the corner of the kitchen with a water tank up on a tower beside it. The water tank housed a primitive bathtub, and stationary washtubs were installed in the room below.

Two huge oak trees grew in front of the house. At the foot of one of them was a large granite stone that the Indians had at one time ground their corn upon. It half-circled the tree in an angular sort of fashion. We children used it as a bench, four or five of us would sit upon it and crack nuts while watching the older ones play games, or while resting from our own. Sometimes we could also smell goodies baking in the kitchen!

There were a few Indians still in the hills but we were told they were friendly. By friendly it was meant that they would not harm us. We seldom saw any of them because they usually saw us first and would hide, but they still made us feel somewhat uneasy.

The road passed the house in front of the two big trees. Beyond the road the trees and shrubs had been cleared off, making a large, bare flat place where we found plenty of room for games or foot-racing. At the outer edge of the cleared space the trees grew thickly down a steep bank about one hundred and fifty yards toward the beautiful creek.

On the other side of the creek Mount Laura rose like a dome one-half a mile almost straight up. The top was just a few yards across and as flat as a table-top. Willows grew all along the creek, beyond these grew oak trees, scrub oak, mountain laurel, manzanita and other shrubs. Higher up the mountainside were tall pine trees that grew big cones filled with delicious pine nuts. We liked to eat the nuts if we could find them before the squirrels did.

Above the green belt of the pines this huge cone shaped mountain raised its bare gray rocky head. A wooded canyon led away to the right of it and our large, flat grain fields were to the left.

Across the road and to the right, or east, of the house stood the old weather-beaten blacksmith shop. It was open on the front side and was shaded by a big oak tree. This was a place of mystery and excitement. There was the glowing forge in which metal was heated and then lifted out with large tongs and promptly beaten into the desired shapes while the red sparks flew in all directions. Sometimes I was allowed to pump the bellows that blew the fire into a white heat, and when the iron was ready to work I was sent scampering to safety while the metal was pounded into shape. There were two oak trees in front of the blacksmith shop also, and when they were shoeing horses, my brother and I would climb up in one of them where we really had ringside seats--and sometimes things were wildly exciting.

The corral for the cows and their milking shed was attached to the right side of the blacksmith shop eastward, and the cow corral was next on the downward slope of the hill. There were never fewer than three cows kept on the home ranch for milking. Three were needed to keep us supplied with milk, cream, butter and cheese the year around because each cow takes a vacation from the production line for a certain time before her calf was born each year. It was Ralph's job to feed and milk the cows. Ralph was my older brother and was about thirteen years old at the time.

West of the shop there were three more great tall oak trees. The tallest one had been trimmed so that a swing could be made from a very high branch. This was for the older children. In the tree beside it a swing was hung from a lower branch for us small fry.

Down the hill from the swings was the chicken house and the chicken pens. Mother kept white leghorns because they were good layers and plymouth rocks because they made better mothers and were heavy chickens and much better for cooking.

A small spring bubbled out of the rocks near the side of the blacksmith shop, down the slope a little way from the big tree. This spring was very handy for us children for we could drink right from the little stream as it flowed from the pipe wedged in the rock--and was that cold spring water good! Ralph got tired of carrying water to the chickens so he built a V shaped trough and pegged it to the sloping ground and thus carried the water from the spring right through the chicken yard.

The big hay barn and the horse corrals were on a hillside just above the creek and some little distance west of the ranch house. Across the road from the barn was an alfalfa field for the cows, and between that and the house was the family orchard. It may have consisted of two, three, or maybe five acres, it looked small to me but an orchard of any size would have looked small, situated at the foot of a mile-high mountain, and old Piute peak was all of that. There were apples, cherries, pears, peaches, plums, prunes and apricots, early and late varieties and

several trees of each kind, as enough fruit had to be home canned, in season, to last for a whole year. There were also berry patches for jams and jellies.

Around the house were tall shrubs, rose bushes, gorgeous lavender-colored lilacs and beautiful white ones. A snowball shrub as high as the eaves of the house, was the first one we had seen and we were enchanted with the great white clusters that were just about the size of a baseball and as round.

Yellow roses grew in great masses along the fence. Hollyhocks and bachelor buttons grew here and there too. A bridal wreath bush grew in one corner of the yard with great long white plumes of blossoms gracefully leaning this way and that.

Along the side fence a long row of sunflowers reared heads as large as dinner plates, their centers filled with black and white striped seeds surrounded by a golden halo of bright yellow petals. These were raised for the seed, which made good chicken feed, but we liked them too, and many of them found their way into our pockets. Red roses grew against the house, and a grape-arbor covered the path from the kitchen to the back of the house where the springhouse sat over a ditch that had water flowing in it down toward the orchard. The springhouse was where the milk, cream, cheeses, butter, fruit-butters and fresh meats and other perishable foods were kept. The little stream flowing underneath kept the food cool. Beside it two or three planks were laid as a walkway across the ditch. The windmill and tank were near the springhouse.

The bathhouse and the smokehouse were nearby. There was an old wood burning range in the bathhouse on which water was heated in wash boilers and then dipped from the boilers into a tub made from galvanized sheet iron that had been constructed in our own blacksmith shop. It was fitted with a piece of pipe that carried the water outside, when you were through with it, into a ditch for irrigation. This was the only bathtub in that part of the country for a long time.

The smokehouse, where Papa cured hams, bacon and other meats, was on the far side of the ditch, as were the two outhouses. To the left was a barbed-wire-fenced alfalfa field that was used as a pasture for the horses and cows. Behind this was the slope of a wooded mountain a mile high. That was where we used our sleds in the winter time.

OUR FAMILY:

My father was tall, large and strong, had sparkling blue eyes and sandy hair and mustache. He was about thirty-four and only slightly damaged in looks. A few years before, when he was a stranger to California's hot San Joaquin central valley, he was with a grain harvesting gang out near Tulare Lake. They cut the grain and thrashed it, and sacked the wheat and baled the straw. One night a horse ate the top of his straw hat. There wasn't another to be had but there was a woolen tam-o-shanter there and Papa sewed that on the top of his hat to protect his head. It

didn't, and the heat scalded all of the hair roots. The hair under his hat all fell out in one week, never to return, leaving him as bald as Guy Kibbie.

When he came home from this trip, he later told us, he made Mother swear that she knew him and that he was her husband before he dared take his hat off because once, when she was running her fingers through his thick hair she had said, "There is one thing sure, I will never have a bald headed husband. If there is anything I dislike it is a bald headed man."

Mother looked up from her sewing and they smiled at each other then Mother said to us, "When you love someone it does not make any difference when something happens to them."

Mother was of medium height and had big gray eyes and dark brown curly hair. Sometimes the girls would brush her hair into long shining curls like she had worn in a picture when she was eight. We thought it was very pretty but she said it made her feel silly.

Ralph was my older brother. Birdie and Myrtle were next, then Iven, my second brother and pal, then me. I was about four and Sadie, the baby, was about two.

Uncle Newton, my Father's brother was a bachelor. He and Papa built a cabin for him about half a mile away on the lower slope of mount Piute.

It was Uncle Newton who volunteered to keep the ranch in firewood. He would take a man with him and drive off to bring in fallen trees from the mountains. These were hauled into the wood lot where they were cut up into firewood later.

Uncle Newt would haul in several loads then they would saw the big logs into stove wood length with a long two-man saw. Then Uncle Newt would lift the smaller logs onto a sawbuck, a wooden rack for holding them, and put his foot on them to hold them still while he sawed them with a bucksaw, a smaller saw to be used by one man. This was when Iven and I liked to go out to the wood lot because Uncle Newt would let us sit on the logs while he sawed. It was almost like riding a horse, which we pretended it was. As each cut was finished we had to dismount and help him move the log forward, then we mounted again for another ride.

Ralph had to help split the wood and stack it neatly in ricks. He and Iven had to keep all the woodboxes filled every day. I didn't have to help but I usually did because Iven could not play with me while they were empty. Birdie and Myrtle had to help Mother with the cooking and the housework and do all of the dishes. This kept them pretty busy because there was a lot of cooking to do.

Oscar Mays, formerly a cabinet-maker and upholsterer who now owned an antimony mine and a smelter somewhere near, roomed and boarded with us. He had the first music box we ever heard.

He would bring it out to the living room and play it for us sometimes. It had a crank on one side which he would turn for a long time before he started it, then it would play a dozen or more tunes before it ran down and stopped. It sounded just like the music boxes do now.

BOWS AND ARROWS:

Oscar brought hardwood shoots in from the mountains and seasoned them. Then he made fine bows and arrows for the boys. He made a crossbow for me, thinking it would be easier for me to aim since it was shaped like a rifle with a bow fastened across the end of the barrel. To cock it, one pulled the string back over a pin and fastened to the trigger. The arrow was laid in a groove on the top of the barrel. I would point the gun and pull the trigger. The flight of the arrow would be fairly true. The crossbow was very clumsy to carry about though, so I coaxed him to make my bow "just like the boys" -- besides I didn't like the boys calling me a sissy. A crossbow was a girl's bow.

We practiced by the hour and thought we were really good. One day while Ivan and a visiting boy were shoot at targets I was sent out to empty the dustpan. Seeing me, one of them said, "Hold out the dustpan while we shoot it."

I was afraid and said, "No."

"Aw-w-w-w go on."

"No."

"Go, hold it out."

"No."

"Go on, why we could hit a target like that twice as far away as you are."

"Uh uh."

"Go on, we won't hurt you."

"Uh uh."

"I'll bet you're afraid."

"I am not, I just don't want to."

They began a sing-song. "Fern is a scaredy-cat. Fern is a scaredy-cat. Fern is a scaredy-cat," and then,

"If you don't hold it out we will shoot at you!"

Now I was really scared! I was too far from the house to call Mother or the girls, and my pal had joined forces with the enemy. I thought they really meant it so I slowly drew the dustpan from behind me and, with my heart racing like mad, held it out rigidly to one side, knowing any movement on my part would interfere with their aim.

Both of them shot--one of them missed, and other arrow hit me just below my lower lip. The arrows were tin-tipped so they would stick into a tree or a post and it went right through my lip and lodged between the roots of my lower front teeth.

They rushed up and pulled the arrow out and tried to comfort me, telling me they had not meant to hurt me, and begged me not to tell Mother.

I ran in, howling for first-aid, and justice!

It was pointed out to us that I would have been blinded for life if the arrow had struck me in the eye, or even killed if it had hit me in certain places in the body. It was a lesson we never forgot!

We learned that bows and arrows such as we used were weapons, and if we were to use them we must be just as careful as the men were with their guns.

PETS:

There were many beautiful tree squirrels running all over the mountains but none around the ranch-house, so Papa showed Ralph how to make a Figure 4 trap to set for them. First, he said, "You must prepare a cage for them."

"Can't I catch them now and keep them in a box until I can build a cage?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Well Son, they are little wild creatures and they will be badly scared, they will need a place to hide so they will feel safe. They will also need room to run around or they would soon grow weak."

"All right Pa, how shall I build one?"

"Well," said Papa, "You could build a screen cage about six feet long by three feet across and four feet high. In the back at the top you could put a row of small wooden boxes, with a hole cut in the front of each box."

Uncle Newt said, "I will bring in a small tree trunk with a branch that will reach up in front of the boxes. Then the squirrels can run up the tree trunk and along the branch, dart into one of those dark holes and feel at home."

Oscar said, "If you will build the cage, Ralph, I will make a revolving drum and fasten it to the cage for them to exercise on."

When the cage was finished Ralph set out to catch the squirrels. He went over near Uncle Newt's cabin and set his trap there.

First he put a box upside-down on the ground, then set the baited figure-4 and raised one end of the box and balanced it on the top of the figure-4 with the bait under the box. When a squirrel went under the box and touched the bait, the figure-4 fell apart and the box fell down trapping the squirrel without hurting it.

A figure-4 was three slender pieces of wood of three different lengths, notched so as to fit together just like the figure-4, only the cross stick was the longest, and was sharpened on the end so it could be thrust into the bait, it was used as a trigger. These, and the box completed the trap.

Hearing the trap fall, Ralph would come out of the brush, catch the squirrel and put it into a smaller box and set the trap again. He brought in five or six and we made pets of them.

It was fun watching them run about their cage and up and down their little tree. The exerciser Oscar had made was shaped like a drum set on edge. A rod through the center of it held it to the end of the big cage. When a squirrel went in and began to run in it, the drum-like cage began to spin. They seemed to like that. One or another of them kept it spinning much of the time.

They became very tame. When they raised their young, the cage was lifted up and fastened to one of the great oak trees and the doors were left open so they were free to run about. We kept food and water near so they would not go away into the woods again.

The big Indian-stone, as we called it, was a favorite place with all of us, especially when we rated a between-meal snack, or lacking that we always had a pocket full of nuts, sunflower seeds or some pieces of jerky. As we sat there the squirrels would come scampering down the trunk of the big tree behind us demanding their share. They could be coaxed to take it from our fingers but they much preferred to have us toss them something.

We could not encourage them to be too trusting because, either the cats or the dog, Rover, would kill them if they could be caught.

Rover had been born on the ranch and left with us by Mr. Veach, the former owner.

There are many cats needed on a ranch such as this, to keep the number of field mice, gophers and chipmunks under some degree of control. We had about twelve or fourteen cats on Erskine Creek. They were all hunters except Tom who was the house cat. Tom kept the mice out of the house.

Tom was cared for and fed just as you care for a house cat in your city home, but the hunters were kept at the barn--that is, they were fed there, but only milk, all of the fresh, warm milk they could drink was poured into pans for them before the milk-pails were brought into the house. They chose such places for shelter as best suited their fancy. This left them half wild and made them very good hunters since they must forage for their own meat.

We used to play with the kittens but as they grew bigger and became hunters they became too rough to be played with. Sadie was especially fond of the young cats.

Baby chicks and turkeys had to be protected from the cats. This was one reason Mother preferred barred rocks, as Plymouth Rocks were commonly called, for setting hens. A barred Rock would fight off the cats and never lose a chick.

SUPPLIES:

Soon after we settled in at the ranch, Papa took a big wagon and a four-horse team and went to Bakersfield to lay in a supply of food. He bought burlap sacks of sugar, beans, potatoes, "dry" or yellow onions, and what seemed like a ton of flour! He also got big barrels of pickles and olives, tea that came in a foot-square tin box, and raw coffee beans, also in burlap sacks. There was a crate of boxes of wooden matches too, as well as other staples in large quantities. Most of these were stored in a cellar under the kitchen.

JACK AND PINTO:

After being away for several days, as he was nearing home, Papa rode ahead on his horse to greet us, leaving the other men to drive the wagon in, and also to bring a herd of horses through.

We were all out on the porch. Papa sat me beside him on the edge of the porch and told me some horses would soon be driven by on the way to the upper ranch. The upper ranch was about two miles east of the home ranch.
Papa told me to watch closely and let him know if I saw a horse I wanted, because if I did, then I could have it "for my very own!" I nearly burst from pure excitement!

Soon they came -- bay horses, white horses, sorrels, buckskins and chestnuts. They were fine, big, high-spirited horses with shining coats, and they pranced as they passed by. I wondered how I was to know which one I should like.

Several times, Papa said, "Don't be in a hurry Honey. Take your time. I want you to see them all before you tell me which one you want." I was not comforted though, and I felt frustrated when the herd began to thin out and still I could not say “this one” or “that.”

I was about to ask Papa to choose one for me, when, almost at the last came a little brown and white spotted pinto pony colt, about a year old, racing along with mane and tail flying, trying to catch up with the bigger horses.

I let out a squeal, jumped down off the porch, and started pounding my father on his knee, shouting, "Papa! Papa! That's the one I want, that's the one I want!"

Then Papa let out his big, hearty, booming laugh and said, "I thought you would find one you wanted!" Of course he knew that little pinto would be the one I would want.

He said, "What do you want to call your little pony?"

Right off the bat, I couldn't think of a thing so I said, "Papa, you help me."
He said, "Maud?"

I said, “No, that’s silly!”

"Susie?

"No."

"Spotty?"

"Umm . . . no."

"Lady?"

"No."

"Well then, how about Pinto?"

"That's it Papa, I'll call her Pinto!"

That was how this dancing, prancing, high-stepping little beauty became my very own.

At the very end of the grand horse-procession, a little brown burro trotted along very unwillingly. Papa left him at the ranch for us kids to play with. He was an utterly useless creature but cute as a bug's ear, gentle as a lamb and smart as a fox. He could outsmart us on

any deal, so we called him Foxy. He would never go anywhere unless he wanted to but just the same he was loads of fun.

At the time Papa bought the horses, the man that sold them to him told him there had been another colt a year older than Pinto, who was a perfect match for her, but he had sold it before the new colt was born. Papa set out to find the man and see for himself. In a few months he came home leading Jack, Pinto's brother and as the man said, a perfect match for Pinto; a perfectly matched team.

That evening he took me on his knee and said, "Sunshine," his pet name for me, "I want to make a deal with you. You saw Jack, the colt I brought home today and you see he looks almost exactly like Pinto. He is Pinto's brother and I bought him so they will never be separated again. When they grow up I will make a team of them."

My Father was well known as a rather shrewd horse trader. He really knew horses and it was seldom anyone ever put anything over on him in a horse deal, and I knew he was leading up to a trade for Pinto. I thought of all the horses I had seen go by that day and I knew there wasn't one I would trade my pretty pony for. I wasn't going to be soft-soaped into making any trade I did not want by any old slick horse-trader, even if it was my Father!

I slid down off his lap and stood as tall as I could before him and asked, "Pinto is my very own isn't she?"

"Yes she is."

"I can do anything I want with her, can't I?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't want to trade, Papa."

"Not even for Mousie?"

"No."

Mousie was Jack and Pinto's mother and a children's pony if there ever was one. We would put a blanket on her and fasten it in place with a circingle, which had loops to hold on to and loops for the feet of children too small to ride a saddle. Then any one of the three of us could pile on and she would take us anywhere we wanted to go. We loved her very much. Mousie had everything but beauty, she was a dull blue-gray, that is where she got her name. She could not compete with her two beautiful colts, who, by the way, inherited none of her gentle nature.

"Well then," said Papa, "there is another proposition I want to talk over with you."

I climbed hack up in his lap and asked, "What is it Papa?"

"Well, now that Jack and Pinto are a team, we can't separate them -- and you own Pinto and Jack is mine. A team should be owned by one person, don't you think? Now this is my proposition: Suppose I sell Jack to you in this way. They are colts and have to run in the pasture for a couple of years more before they can be used. You do not have a pasture and cannot break horses, so, I will pasture them and when they are old enough I will break them to ride and to drive for you, and as payment for this, and for Jack, you will let me use them when I need them, okay? What about it, is it a deal?"

I was more than a little puzzled about this deal, it looked like Papa was getting rooked, but he made it "seem" as if I were doing my share, so I said, "Gee! Papa, sure it's a deal!"

FLAG-RAISING ON THE FOURTH OF JULY:

The house had been built opposite Mount Laura, which was across Erskine Creek and back a short distance. The small mountain was cone-shaped, tall and slender, rocky and barren, and had a small, flat top. The rim was streaked with white, and it is now called Lime Peak.

Papa had brought home a huge flag, such as you see on the tops of big buildings in big towns and this was to be raised on the little flat top of mount Laura.

A picnic was planned. The girls cooked and baked for two or three days preparing for this outing.

There was great excitement, now that preparations were actually under way, however, my excitement was drowned in tears, for I was to be left with Mother and the baby. Though nothing was said about my handicap, I was "too young" to climb the peak.

Papa, Uncle Newton, Oscar Mays, and the two oldest boys, Ralph and Waldo, took axes with them and on the way up selected a tall, straight pine and cut and trimmed it. They carried it to the foot of the rocky cliff and lifted it with ropes to the top.

The flag was nailed to the pole. The pole was raised and the base wedged in a cleft in the rock. Many heavy stones were then stacked against its base so it could not slip or be blown down in a storm. I sat on the edge of the kitchen porch and watched them through Mother's field glasses. They did not seem to be very far away. Papa took his telescope and I could see different ones take the telescope and look down at the ranch and at me. Sometimes one of them would wave a white cloth at me and I ran into the kitchen, grabbed a dish-towel and waved it back to them.

Papa told the boys how Betsy Ross made the first flag, and about the Declaration of Independence, then they saluted the flag and ran to start their picnic. They were really hungry by that time!

I only saw one or two of them once or twice after that as they were a half a mile above me and could only be seen when they approached the edge.

About four o'clock they all came trudging in, tired and sunburned, but happy and ready to set about the evening chores.

We were all delighted with our flag raising. After every heavy storm we always rushed out to see if our flag was still there. Sometimes it clung wetly to the pole but as soon as it dried it stretched out proudly against the sky. Never was it even once overcome by the elements.

Though the storms were never able to tear our flag away, the end would be whipped raw and the edge gradually frayed, by the end of the year it began to have a somewhat stubby appearance. So, the Fourth of July Picnic became a yearly event and was referred to as flag-raising day. After climbing the mountain, building a fire and having their lunch, Ralph would climb the pole, carefully remove the flag that had served us so faithfully for a year, and nail up a new one. Then they made a ceremony of burning the old flag. With the unfurling of the beautiful colors of the new flag, a new year began for us.

Whenever we stepped outside and lifted our eyes to the skyline, there was Old Glory proudly floating in the breeze. The flag flying atop Mount Laura, and seen against the green of a pine-forested mountain beyond was a beautiful sight! I shall never forget it.

OUR SCHOOL:

Our little mountain valley would have been a hooky-player's paradise. There was no school!

The nearest school was in Havilah, a very small country town, twenty miles away, which then served as the county seat. Twenty miles does not sound like much now, but at that time the time for the journey, with a loaded wagon, over the so-called roads -- that were really just wagon trails, took from five o'clock in the morning until about eight o'clock at night!

Only those who could afford to board their children with some family in Havilah could send them to school. Merton, a local mine owner's son was the only boy going to school when we came.

There had not been enough children in the entire valley to constitute a school district, until now. A petition was written up and Papa started out on horseback to canvass the valley. He promised the ranchers that he would donate the land and build a schoolhouse if they would sign the petition and list the number of their children who could attend.

With our four older children added to those living in the valley they still lacked three, so Papa went to see Merton's father and persuaded him to bring Merton home to attend the new school, and "borrowed" the son of an old friend, Waldo Crooks, and brought him home to live with us and attend the school. He also sent me to school at four years of age. The petition was sent in, and Erskine Creek was declared a school district and a teacher appointed.

Down beyond the barn, across the creek, about a half-mile away, there was another little valley where grain was planted, and at the south-western corner of the grain field about two acres of land were cleared. There were two big oak trees to furnish shade there. Papa brought in lumber, and with the help of Oscar Mays, who also was a finish-carpenter, set about building a one-room country school.

As soon as the building was finished Oscar began making desks and seats. There were two rows of desks. Each was wide enough for two children, with inkwells and a shelf for books.

The teacher's desk was on a raised platform one step up from the floor of the rest of the room, and an upholstered armchair was provided.

Papa had to go to Bakersfield, one hundred miles away, for the finished lumber for the desks. This was a two-week's trip! He also brought the blackboards, erasers, chalk and other school supplies including a set of large maps. A well was dug in the schoolyard and the yard leveled for games and ball-playing. The two big oak trees growing near the school had tables and benches placed in their shade.

A fence had been built around the whole two acres and everything was ready. Well -- not quite. Uncle Newt took a team and went up the mountainside to the pine belt and cut a big pine tree, trimmed the trunk and snaked it down the hill and along the creek to the ford west of the big hay barn. To the left of the ford, he dragged one end of the log across the stream and firmly anchored both ends. The then trimmed the top flat with an ax and cut a step in the big end of the log and the bridge was finished. We children loved it!

In the fall Papa went to Bakersfield to bring Miss Merrit, an elderly maiden lady, back to be our teacher. He gave her a list of the pupils and their grades and asked her to select everything that would be needed for each one of them for the entire year.

So, when they arrived, there came many big packing cases of new school-books, including high-school, tablets, slates, boxes of pencils, pens, slate pencils, quart bottles of ink and two small ink wells for each desk. There were rulers and erasers and so very many interesting things, and a maple-wood pointer for the teacher.

I loved going to school. I think mainly because we took sack-lunches. Sandwiches were a novelty! Chipped beef was bought in round tin cans ten or twelve inches in diameter, and

topped with tight-fitting lids. Graham Crackers came in wooden boxes two feet wide, three feet long and eighteen inches high! These and other goodies were used only for school lunches.

Myrtle shared the first desk on the right-hand side of the room with me. When I got tired I would crawl inside the desk and take a nap. I was not officially in the first grade until my third year. I think I still remember just about everything in that first-year Reader!

The stories started out with Henny Penny, Chicken Little, and The Little Red Hen. They continued with The Cat and the Fiddle, and The Owl and the Pussycat, then advanced to The Tortoise and the Hare, Ready Fox and others. These stories were based on the viewpoint of the world in which little ones dwell. For instance; The Cat and the Fiddle went like this:

Hi diddle-diddle the cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

This was printed on a two-page spread of a beautifully colored landscape. In the left foreground, a large grey cat stood upright playing on a fiddle. High up in the sky above was a full moon, and a brown cow was posed in the midst of a leap. Again in the foreground, and little white dog was watching, and on the right, a dish was running away with a spoon.

The children know the stories were not “for real” and the lessons became a game! Learning was exciting and fun!

Miss Merrit lived with us. She had to because there was no place else to live. Needless to say, with Miss Merrit living with us needed homework was never neglected!

There was one thing in which our teacher rated better than your city teachers. Papa provided an upholstered chair for her desk at school. He had no such tender compassion for the rest of us. I can still remember how hard those benches were, but even this small luxury for her finally furnished a means for the older boys to carry out one of their meanest jokes. After two or three years there was a loose tack or two on one side of the chair seat, so the boys stuffed a dead mouse in an old sardine can and pried up the loose fabric and wedged the sardine can in between the springs, then put the tacks back in place.

The teacher first began sniffing suspiciously. Then she began searching vainly.
She finally began standing beside an open window to teach. By this time she thought it must be some dead animal under the floor so she called in Oscar Mays to ferret out the scent. Oscar finally found it, but no one could find out how that poor mouse got himself in such a situation!

OUR DAILY LIFE:

Waldo Crooks and Ralph became great pals. They did everything together. They milked the three cows, and among other things they kept the wood-box filled in the kitchen, and for the fireplace in the living-room. Birdie and Myrtle helped with the cooking and did the dishes. Everyone works on a ranch. My heart swelled with pride when Mother handed me a small basket with a handle and allowed me to go with her and help gather eggs in the early evening.

That first year Iven and I stayed pretty close to the home buildings. The next spring, however, we were allowed to investigate the woods a bit. Hand in hand we set out to explore the world we lived in.

Before we were allowed to go exploring though, a horn was made for us so we could call for help if we needed it. The horn was like the one that hung on the kitchen porch for Mother's use.

A dirty old shell from a cow's horn was scrubbed then scraped with pieces of broken glass until it looked creamy and shining. Then the tip was sawed off, leaving a tiny hole in the small end. It was blown the same as a bugle and could be heard for a mile in the stillness of the mountains.

Papa cautioned us never to blow it unless there was a real need because, should we do so, every man on the place would immediately drop whatever he was doing and start searching for us. We were told the story of the little shepherd boy who shouted, "Wolf! Wolf!" in the night, and when everyone came out with their guns to kill the wolves, he laughed and said it was a joke. He did this a couple of times. Then one night the wolves really did come, and when he shouted, "Wolf, Wolf!" everyone said, "It is just another joke," and went to sleep again, and the wolves ate up all the sheep.

Then, said Papa, "If you fool the men a time or two, maybe they would not come when you really needed them!"

Iven was told he must always look out for his little sister, and with the exception of that little incident with the arrows he was always my champion and protector. He was as ready to fight any and every danger that might threaten me as were those knights of old that we read about.

A cord was fastened to the horn and was worn over the shoulder like Daniel Boone wore his powder horn. Iven wore the horn and it was a great comfort to us for our hair fairly stood on end from fear, when we thought of the Indians who might be lurking near!

In our wandering excursions we found many arrowheads. Indians once lived in our valley and hunted in the rugged mountains. A short way upstream there was a big, flat rock, sort of bluish in color and of a texture as smooth as glass. We loved to play there. Here the Indians had ground their grains and spices. There were numerous places where depressions had been worn in the rock, about a foot wide and one-and-a-half-foot long where corn and wheat had been

ground into meal and flour. There were also many potholes, which had been used as mortars for grinding spices and other small amounts of food and medicine.

It is a family legend, handed down from generation to generation, that four Hobson brothers came to America with William Penn, and that William Penn gave one of them a small, steel treasure chest. In time this chest came to my father and in it he kept his treasures. The canvas bag that held the family collection of arrowheads was kept in this chest in honor of the people who lived by the bow and the arrow.

Iven and I loved to wander up and down the creek. It was not big enough to be TOO dangerous, yet big enough to furnish many a thrill. There were cascades, rapids, and dreamy placid pools, and stretches were it gently murmured as it lazily slid past rocks that made splendid stepping-stones when we wished to cross over.

There were many places where the water ran under big rocks, or under the roots of a large tree where, if you lie quietly for a few minutes, you could see the big mountain trout darting about. Ivan liked go fish. I did not like him to fish but I would be content just to lie near him and watch the birds and listen to them sing, or watch the squirrels and listen to their chatter. There is so much of lively interest in the wilds if one will be still enough so the little wild creatures forget you are there.

THE COYOTE LESSON:

Once, we wandered up the canyon east of Mount Laura and came upon one of Ralph's traps. A coyote was caught by one paw.

We looked at him curiously, then I said, "Let's run back and have Ralph bring his gun and kill it."

"No," said Ivan, "I will kill him with rocks."

"You can't do it."

"I can so, and we will take him home with us."

"No, let's tell Ralph."

"I can throw straight, look!"

He did hit the coyote, and it slunk back away from us.

We gathered up a pile of rocks and then we started throwing them. Most of them missed, but finally one hit him hard enough to make him mad and he lunged at us, growling. We had followed him up a little as he retreated as far as the chain on the trap would let him go, and when he charged he would have reached us if we had not run. Boy, were we scared! I never saw anything so terrifying as that snarling open mouth, with fangs bared, coming right at us. We did not stop running until we seemed to taste blood and even then we only slowed down a little!

Ralph took his rifle and went up the canyon and shot the coyote. We had to stay at the ranch and received two lectures; one on cruelty to animals and the other on personal danger. They could have saved their breath on both counts. We could not have been hired to go near another trapped animal!

JERKY:

People lived off the land in the old days, and we did too. Wild game was plentiful though. It did take effort to keep meat on the table but Papa liked hunting. From one hunting trip he returned with a bear. Much of the meat was made into jerky. When stripped of fat the meat was cut into thin, narrow strips. Each strip was generously salted and peppered (peppered to keep off the flies), then carefully laid across a wire clothesline to dry.

Jerky is dry, hard, and sometimes stringy. I was at the age when two or three front teeth were missing and I couldn't bite off a piece of like the others did. I chewed one end of a strip until it was partly softened, then gripped it with my teeth while holding it in my left hand and cut off a bit with a pair of scissors. Once when the scissors snapped shut they slit the tip of my tongue. Wow! Did learn fast to select a strip of jerky that hand been cut across the grain of the meat? You bet I did! The pepper burned your mouth good! The salt healed your wounds so you could tackle another piece of jerky the next day!

MOUNT WHITNEY:

In the summer of 1896 Professor Purpose, a biologist, came to the Erskine Creek Ranch on his way to Mount Whitney.

Professor Purpose hired my father as a guide. Papa was a good hunter, and a good fisherman, and a good camp cook. When they arrived at what Papa called a lake they made their camp.

Papa caught excellent trout in the lake. Professor Purpose found them to be an unfamiliar species and sent some to Washington D.C. and was informed that these were the first of that type to be discovered in America. They called them "Golden Trout." Hatcheries were put in and the Golden Trout were planted in many streams and lakes. Papa was so fascinated by Mount Whitney that he took mother, who was not well, and five months pregnant, with him on a trip

up to the mountain. They started in a spring-wagon with a bed for mother and drove the wagon as far as they could. Then they rode horseback the rest of the way. He got mother to within 250 feet of the place where the monument now stands on the top.

They camped at the lake just below the summit for two or three weeks while mother rested before returning home. She must have needed the rest, for she was stronger and better when they got back. When the child was born on December 28, 1896, they named him Phillip Whitney. The name "Phillip" came from mother's maiden name, "Phillips" and Whitney in memory of their trip.

QUAIL:

In spite of the apparent disregard of the laws protecting wild animals, let me say in defense of the old-timers, they were also instrumental in bringing new types of game into California, such as when Papa moved the family up to Oregon State in 1888.

They stayed only about three months. It rained every day they were there and Papa said they never saw the sunshine but once. Mother couldn't take it so they moved back down to San Jose, California. They made the journey by boat back then.

Before they left Oregon, Papa trapped a number of quail and brought them to California with him. He raised the quails on his ranch for two years, then turned them loose. In the fall the quail and their young returned to the ranch. Papa fed and sheltered them through the winter. When the flocks went out the next year they did not come back, but they did multiply and spread throughout California.

HOME-MADE MATTRESSES:

On the ranch everything that could be made there was made right there. There was always someone working about the place. I was too little to do housework, so I followed the men around. They were always kind to me. They let me help and made me feel that I was growing up.

The first year there we made new mattresses for all the beds. There were bolts of mattress-ticking, rolls of cotton batting, bales of excelsior, needles ten inches long, balls of strong twine and boxes of cloth-covered metal buttons.

The women made the ticking into covers for the mattresses. Oscar set up a workbench on a pair of carpenter's sawhorses, then cut and prepared the filling for each mattress. They were made with a layer of cotton, a layer of excelsior and another layer of cotton. Each layer was four inches thick, six feet long and the width of the bed. These were compressed by hand while an eight-inch deep cover was stretched over it smoothly. The end was sewn and the mattress was ready for tacking.

The mattress then was placed on an improvised wooden frame that held it up by the edges. Oscar Mays thrust the long needle, threaded with twine, straight down through the mattress. I helped Oscar by lying on the ground below and pulling the needle through. Then I threaded on a cloth-covered metal button, and returned the needle through the mattress one-half inch from the place it came through. Oscar put on another button, cinched it down to six inches and tied it off. Tacks were made at four-inch intervals, in alternating rows, and the mattress became firm and comfortable.

In the winter feather mattresses were added to the beds. A feather mattress, when shaken up and beat down and leveled with a broom handle, was a foot thick. The beds, when carefully made over a feather mattress and covered with a spread and pillow shams, were very beautiful. But, woe betide the child that laid a hand on a feather-bed! The damage could not be repaired without taking the bedding all off, even the sheets or sheet blankets, and shaking up the mattress and starting all over again.

Feather mattresses were made from the down and small feathers of wild ducks and geese. Men hunted ducks among the tules that grew in swamps. Geese were shot from the air as they flew over while migrating. It sometimes took years to accumulate feather enough for a pillow. A pair of feather pillows was greatly prized by young couples as wedding gifts.

SEARS AND ROEBUCK CATALOGS:

I remember seeing Sears and Roebuck Catalogues on the Ranch. The local Sears manager told me they started business in 1604, in Chicago, Illinois. There were no retail stores such as we now have. They were strictly a mail-order house and all orders had to be sent to Chicago, which is still their headquarters.

It is quite possible that much of the merchandise that came in bolts, rolls, bales, boxes and case-lots may have from Sears. There saw only one article that I remember the price of, and I can’t imagine why. Levis were fifty cents a pair.

In the 1890’s, old timers never wasted anything. Well, no offense to Sears, but last years catalogues always ended up on a string hung up in the outhouses.

LEATHER:

Leather was made on the ranch. The first year deer hides were tanned. Some were made in to soft leather while others were tanned with the hair still on. When they came out of the tanning fluid, they were stretched and nailed on a board wall to dry. The men and boys liked them for bedside rugs. The hide of the bear Papa got had been tanned with the hair on and made

in to a rug that was used in front of the fireplace. The boys liked to lounge on it there in the evenings. I didn't though. It still didn't smell too good, close up like that.

Steer hides were also tanned into leather, which has many uses on a ranch. Hides were put in tanning fluid in a barrel down by the barn, I think. I don't know exactly because that was one place where the men could work without me tagging along. One could hardly breathe down there because of the smell!

A DEER HUNTING LESSON:

Hunting was a challenge in the old days, and men risked their lives to bring in food. Some animals, when cornered or wounded, would turn on the hunter and fight. It would be a fight to the death of one or the other, quite frequently, that of the hunter. My father had one such encounter.

Papa was a big man. He weighed about 190 pounds. One time as he was hunting alongside a river, he shot a big buck and it fell down right in its tracks and didn't move. Papa laid his rifle down and walked over to look at it. Suddenly the buck jumped up and charged him! Man and beast wrestled and fought, each fighting for his life. The only thing Papa could do was to throw his weight between the buck's wide-spreading horns. His shot had only broken a hind leg.

Papa had to hold onto the horns for dear life! If the buck got away from him he'd be defenseless. They struggled all over the bank and finally fell into the river. Then Papa's dog entered the battle. The dog saw the buck's broken leg and wrestled from that end. When the deer began to weaken from loss of blood, pain, and his valiant struggle, Papa managed to get one hand loose, get his pocket knife out, open it with his teeth, and then reached down and killed it.

Papa said he learned a lesson he never forgot. "Never lay your gun down until you make sure your prey is dead!"

The antlers were magnificent! I have never seen their equal. Papa had them mounted on a redwood plaque and they were always on display, usually in the living room, wherever we lived….a trophy won in mortal combat!

THE GAME WARDEN:

I must admit, in the early days mountain men were as bad about hunting deer out of season as moonshiners were said to be about hiding stills. However, they never killed a doe, never wasted any meat, and they never killed for sport. They hunted only to keep meat on the table for their families.

There were game wardens around, but they were rather understanding men. Once a game warden asked my father if he could bring his wife up to stay for a few weeks with us. She was not well and he thought a few weeks in the mountains would help her.

Papa said, "Of course! Bring her right up, she is welcome." In the course of the day Papa handed the man a shotgun and they went out walking on the ranch, vying in marksmanship by flushing out small game. When the contest became exciting, Papa circled around and flushed out a covey of quail. Both men raised their guns, but Papa didn't fire.

When the quail fell, Papa said, "There, that is what I have been waiting for." The man began cursing and exclaimed, "Look, Hobson! Look what you made me do!"

Papa said, "The ranch is not yet stocked with cattle. Your wife will have to eat venison while she's here. I had to know you wouldn't turn me in."

The game warden replied, "Hobson, the deer that are here are born on your ranch, they live on your range and they are just as much yours as if they were cattle."

During school vacation the last year we were on the ranch, my father and Iven went down to visit friends in Bakersfield. While there, another friend who lived in the Cuyama Valley took Iven home with him for a visit. While he was there the men took rifles and rode away to go hunting. They wouldn't let Iven go, he was just a kid.

After they were gone, Iven found an old shotgun in the barn. He loaded it with a slug and went out on foot. He found and shot a deer, and the men came back empty-handed. He finally convinced them that he had shot a deer, and they went out and brought it in. Unfortunately, deer were out of season at that time. As the men said, Iven was just a kid.

This was his very first deer and he wanted Papa to have some of it. He heavily wrapped a piece of meat, the upper half of a hind leg, and put it in a barley sack and asked a man who was riding to Bakersfield, to take the sack to Papa.

The man, who happened to be a game warden, rode up to the house, handed the sack to Papa, and said, "Your boy sent you this. Looking at his eager face I couldn't refuse, but Hobson, if you ever tell me what's in that sack, so help me, I'll beat you to death!"

After leaving Erskine Creek, never again did my father or Iven Jr. kill a deer out of season, or take more than the two that were allowed. And never did they ever hunt deer on any land that was not their own. Papa and the boys had a timber claim in northern California where deer were plentiful. They sometime shot a deer from the cabin, but usually they rode horses when hunting. They seldom returned without their limit for all hands.

Papa and Mother's fiftieth wedding anniversary was October 26, 1931. Papa arranged to have a venison dinner served at a restaurant in Antioch, California. The owner closed the door to the public and enjoyed the celebration with them. There were thirty-five members of the family present.

SHOEING HORSES:

There was a grindstone near the blacksmith shop. The stone was about four inches wide and about two feet in diameter. It was mounted in a hardwood frame with a seat and two narrow boards about two-and-a-half feet long on which to press your feet to keep the grindstone turning. There was even a rod on which to hang a can with a small hole in the bottom to keep water dripping on the stone when in use. I loved to turn the grindstone while the men were sharpening axes, knives or other tools. It was still there about thirty years ago when I was there last, about 1955. It was unmistakably the same, but the stone had a crack in it.

I was not allowed in the blacksmith shop because of danger from flying sparks from the forge, or from hot iron being pounded into shape on the anvil. But I spent hours watching the blacksmith make horseshoes and shoeing the horses. I practically had a ringside seat atop the woodpile, in the shade of a big oak tree.

The blacksmith picked up a horse's hoof, held it between his knees, and pinched off the edges of the hoof with a tool made for that purpose, carefully cleaned the sole of the hoof and around the frog in the middle, and shaped it with a big rasp file. He did this with each hoof.

Then he took a straight rod of iron and heated it in the forge, bent and hammered it into shape and cooled it in a bucket of water which steamed and boiled. He tried it on for size and fit, heated it again, and hammered it some more. When he knew it fit properly he heated it again and burned it onto the hoof. The horse didn't flinch, but I sure did!

When he finished working on them, the horses' hooves looked neat and trim. I thought the horse even walked a little proud afterward.

The woodpile was a sort of helter-skelter pile of ten-foot logs. It took two men to move a log across a pair of sawhorses. Then I was cut into stove-wood lengths with a two-man saw such as woodsmen use.

Ralph and Waldo stacked the split wood into ricks. Each rick held a cord of wood. Many cords were stacked before winter set in.

LAYING AN EGG:

Did you ever see a hen lay an egg? Well I did. I was in my favorite place on the woodpile and I heard a slight moaning sound. A Rhode Island Red hen had made her nest deep under the

pile of logs. I thought she was acting strangely, so I watched her. She strained and strained. She tried to scratch her nest into a more comfortable shape and strained some more. She got up and complained and scolded, but went back to the nest to strain again. This went on for fully half an hour before she finally was able to lay that egg! If anyone thinks the price of eggs too high, he, or she, should be a hen just long enough to lay an egg, and their sense of values would certainly change!

PREPARING FOR WINTER:

Late Fall, when the nights were cold and before the first snow, was the time for preparing meat for winter. Butchering was done across the road from the house and in front of the blacksmith shop. This was an exciting time, for all of the activity was at the ranch house, therefore even we kids were a part of it.

HOG BUTCHERING:

After a hog had been scalded and the hair scraped off, it was pulled up under a limb of the oak tree. Then it was cut open to clean the inside. The meat was washed and drawn up higher so wild animals could not reach it, and left to chill and harden in the cold night air.

The next morning everyone was busy. Papa cut the meat. Hams had strings tied through the end of the hock, lean side-meat had strings tied in one end, and both were hung in the smokehouse, from which smoke was already rising. The fatter side-meat was made into salt pork.

The meat set aside for sausage had the fat cut away and the lean meat put through the meat grinder. Papa mixed in the seasonings and the sausage was formed into large thick patties and fried. The fried meat was then placed in layers in a heavily glazed crock about a foot-and-a-half wide, and two feet deep. Each layer was covered with the hot grease in which it had been fried. When the crock was full it was set aside and a heavy piece of sterile cloth was tied over it. Another crock was set up to continue operations.

The fat was diced and fried until it was crisp and brown. The hot lard was poured into ten-gallon tins with tight fitting lids. The cracklings were drained and stored for making cornbread.

The grease that would have otherwise been wasted was heated to separate it from the residue and made into soft-soap for the laundry.

The hearts were yummy when stuffed and baked with bread dressing. The kidneys made excellent kidney stew. And the livers? Well, every body knows what to do with liver. It’s a health-food. Every liver that was brought into the house was eaten. Maybe that’s why the old timers were so healthy.

SNOW:

Then came the snow. I had never seen snow and I was enchanted. The large soft flakes that were falling around me seemed as if they were falling from fairyland! The snow was so clean and pure! The folks filled glasses with packed snow, added sugar, cream, and Sarsaparilla, and we all had delicious ice cream! The snow fell until it was three feet deep!

CHRISTMAS!

Christmas was in the offing. Mystery and excitement prevailed! The day before Christmas Papa and the boys brought in a pine tree ten feet tall and set it up in a corner near the fireplace. Ceilings were always twelve feet high in the old days. Old timers thought lower ceilings were unhealthful. (They could have been right.)

We children were allowed to stay up late Christmas Eve. Papa and Oscar popped corn over coals in the fireplace. Mother and Miss Merritt helped us string the popcorn on white thread into long strands.

Cranberries were also strung. These looked like pretty red beads. The tree was trimmed with the red and white strands, and "Stocking were hung by the chimney with care, for we knew that Santa would soon be there." Then quickly we scampered away to our rooms, for Santa would not come "'twas said, 'Til children were fast asleep in bed."

We awoke before dawn. Santa Claus had been here! The tree was laden with gifts! The unwrapped gifts made a colorful display. More were piled on the floor. A row of sleds leaned against the wall. When the gifts were handed out we each had a sled, a warm winter jacket or coat, a knitted cap and mittens, boots, shoes and stockings, and even a pair of canvas leggings which had a strap under the instep and lacing up the side. Also, each had a stocking that bulged with goodies and surprises, and was topped with a shining red apple.

We were all thrilled and happy! We were equipped to enjoy the outdoors during the cold winter weather, and there were games to keep us busy when the weather kept us home.

After the breakfast dishes were done, Papa took us out to teach us how to manage our sleds. Pulling our sleds along, it was necessary to follow the road up the canyon about the distance of a block. There, a wagon trail crossed the ditch that carried water down in back of the house and onward to the orchard. About a hundred yards farther past the wagon trail, by the side of the sled runway, was Uncle Newton's cabin. The older ones hurried ahead and waited for us there. The runway was a strip of hard-packed snow about twenty feet wide that lay in a straight line up the slope from Uncle Newt's cabin for more than a quarter of a mile.

Iven and I lagged behind because we couldn't keep up. Papa carried my small sled and walked slowly along with us. Besides, Iven had trouble getting his sled to follow his erratic path, but it was his sled, and he didn't want any help.

When we arrived, the lessons began. The sleds were hard to steer. We couldn't turn them like turning a horse's head or spinning a steering wheel, but we did learn, though I don't remember how it was done. It was great fun!

After a while the older ones became more confident and went quite a way up the runway and came whizzing past with a momentum that carried them beyond the slope and halfway to the ditch. Iven and I dragged our little sleds up about a hundred yards from the bottom and came down more slowly, but even so it seemed that we were flying!

When we could manage without him, Papa sat on the porch with Uncle Newton and they watched us toil up the hill and slide gleefully down until we were exhausted. When we were too tired to make another trip, we left the sleds at the cabin for future use, and took the short cut home through the pasture.

The tree had been stripped of trimming and taken away. The strings of popcorn were piled high in a milk pan in the kitchen. We were allowed to cut the threads and eat the popcorn. The cranberries were not in sight. Quite likely they were served as cranberry sauce with the dinner. I was so filled with the exciting events of the day, I have no recollection of the dinner.

The Christmas Season on the Erskine Creek Ranch was a joyously happy time. My father and mother made it so. For one thing Papa was home in the wintertime. He was a large, tall man, stronger then most men, but gentle and kind. He told us many little stories to make us laugh and sang funny little songs for our amusement. He took the time to play with us younger ones until we could hold our own in games with the older children. Mother made our young days an exile from grief, and father filled them full of fun.

EVENINGS:

Evenings were special on the Ranch. The family sat around the living room. It was a time for quiet and conversation. The women liked small rocking chairs, the men their favorite armchairs and the boys curled up on the bearskin rug in front of the fireplace. The men often told interesting stories.

Women never sat with idle hands. They sewed pieces into quilt blocks or they sat knitting, crocheting or embroidering, anything that could be done leisurely while listening and talking.

I learned early to sew strips together, right side to right side, to be made into rugs and rolled them into balls. The ends were pinned and they were put in a sack. When the sack was

full they would be braided and sewn into bedside rugs for the women and girls. We loved those evenings! There was a peaceful togetherness that is lacking in the present age.

MILKING THE COW:

I frequently watched Ralph and Waldo milk the cows. They became expert and could make the pails ring from the force of the stream of milk. One of the cats would come and meow for milk. Either one of the boys could aim and squirt a stream of milk into the cats open mouth as far away as five or six feet. She would swallow the milk, lick her face clean and meow for more. They showed me how to milk and let me try once or twice. I could squeeze out a small stream of milk, but I had never milked a cow.

There came a day, I don't know how it happened, but it did, that there was no one home to milk the cow. As a result, Mother was going to do it. Now, Mother was a lady, a musician and an artist. It was not seemly that she should go out through the dirty corral and milk the cow.

I told Mother I could milk the cow. She didn't believe I could, but finally let me take the pail out to try. Well, I tried, and I did! It was hard work. The pail of milk got heavy and kept slipping between my knees and I had to use one hand to hold it steady. About that time the cow kicked me over and I spilled most of the milk. I covered the spilled milk with chall from the yard, finished stripping the cow, and with about two quarts of milk I very reluctantly went back to the house. I was too humiliated to let Mama know what had happened. I squirmed under her questioning, but I never did tell her.

MY HANDICAP:

Wherever we are, whoever we are, if we have a physical handicap, some day we will have to face up to the inevitable results.

On the Fourth of July, 1898, Papa and Oscar and the older children prepared to climb Mount Laura. This time they took Sadie with them even though she was only five years old. I was six-and-a-half years old, and they left me home with mother and the baby. It broke my heart, for now I knew it was not because I was too little, as they had said before.

I sat on the edge of the porch and watched them climb the mountain. Iven had been told, "Boys don't cry." Well, he was my pal and if he couldn't cry, neither would I. But this day I wept. I wept for the years ahead. Years in which there would be many times I would be left behind. I brought out a big dish towel to mop up my tears, and it was needed, every inch of it.

At seventeen months of age a farm accident had crushed my right foot and it had been cut off just above the ankle.

We were on a farm near Bakersfield in a neighborhood called the Weed Patch. Among many other things he raised, Papa raised guinea fowl. Early in my fourth year Papa got my first wooden leg. The leg was so tiny they couldn't put in an ankle joint, and the leg was too long, so I wouldn't outgrow it as soon as I otherwise would. As a result, I often stumbled and fell.

Papa liked to sing us funny songs. The songs weren't really funny, it was just the way Papa sang them that made them so. One that was popular in the late 1880's was an Irish ditty about Dan McGinty. It went somewhat like this:

Sunday morning just at nine,
Dan McGinty dressed so fine,
Stood atop a high stone wall.

Then down went McGinty,
To the bottom of the sea,
Dressed in his best suit of clothes.

And he must be rather wet,
For we haven't seen him yet,
Dressed in his best suit of clothes.

Whenever I fell, Papa would say, "Down went McGinty!" as he rushed to pick me up. One day when I fell, I jumped up and said, "Down went Papa's guinea!" and that tickled his funny bone.

When I was about thirteen, when we were living in Santa Cruz, we went to Soquel to visit the Taylors. The three Taylor girls were getting ready to go to a dance a few miles up the canyon, so we went with them.

A young man, possibly nineteen years old, came over and talked with me for a long time. He wanted to teach me to dance and finally I tried. We were doing very well when Papa danced up. Over the head of his partner he said, "Papa's little guinea has caught a beau!" Well! "Papa's little guinea" flew the coop! I marched off the dance floor and wouldn't try to dance again. The young man sat and talked with me until we left.

Papa was always a great one to tease us kids.

I had never walked until shortly before we moved to Erskine Creek. That is one reason why my first year there was so joyful. I could walk! I could go places and see things for the first time in my life!

Now I had outgrown the little wooden leg and had been on crutches for about six months. Even so I could still go everywhere. I could even outrun Iven, who was nearly three years older!

I could climb rocks Iven couldn't climb, using my crutch as a ladder. I knew I could climb that mountain. I just knew I could! But they wouldn't let me even try. That's what hurt.

That shocking day I vowed to myself that I would fight my handicap in every way I could! I would walk as well as others did! I would never let anyone do anything for me that I could do for myself! In spite of the odds, I determined to be independent!

The family had their lunch on top of Mount Laura, and the usual flag-raising ceremony, followed by talks about presidents Lincoln and Washington and early American history. When they came back I hid out because I ashamed of being weak enough to cry.

Everything was plentiful at our place except "hard cash." That's why Papa so often worked away from home. It was the only way to get hard cash. Papa had explained to me, when I had to go on crutches, that he did not feel he could take things that were needed from the rest of the family to buy another leg for me, at the time. That was alright with me. I didn't want the others deprived of anything because of me.

In those days men bought whiskey in small bottles, called flasks, which were shaped to fit easily in a hip pocket. When empty they were thrown away by the roadside. Each flask was worth five cents. Papa stopped and picked up every flask he saw and put it in a sack. When he was coming home, he cashed them in and brought the money to me and let me keep it to buy another leg. I put the money in one of my black lisle stockings and hid it away. The little hoard was growing. At six years of age I looked forward happily to the future.

At eighty-seven years I still walk, but not so well. I can make like a staggering drunk without trying, though I only drink well-water! (I wonder what's wrong with the water here? It must be potent!)

If anyone sees me suddenly squat and throw up my arms as if I was trying to take off like a bird into the "wild blue yonder," I'm not. I'm just trying to keep "Papa's little guinea" from coming another cropper! At eighty-seven years I still look forward happily to the future life.

MORNINGS:

The men worked hard and long on the Erskine Creek Ranch. Papa always got up before daybreak and built fires in the kitchen range and fireplace before going outside so that Mama and us girls could dress in comfort. Women and girls wore nightgowns made with a yoke and sleeves, and a full gathered bodice that came almost to the floor. We could draw our arms out of the sleeves and dress inside our gowns in privacy even though we were all in the living room in front of the fireplace.

The long kitchen range sat like an island across one corner of the kitchen near the door to the porch. Its corners were over a foot from the wall so I liked to get behind it and dress there. It was the warmest spot in the house!

The men fed, curried and brushed the horses, and fed the pigs. The boys fed the cows and chickens. They milked the cows, strained the milk into pans in the cooler-house, washed the milk out of the pails and strainers, and brought them in the house for further cleansing. When they came in for breakfast they were always hungry!

Mother was a good cook, and she taught the girls to be good cooks too. Breakfast usually started with hot cereal. Mama served the cereal at the table from a beautiful covered soup tureen that kept it warm even for second helpings. There was sausage, ham or bacon, with potatoes and milk gravy. There were hot biscuits or hot crackling corn bread, and coffee, tea or milk to drink. There was always plenty of food for second helpings for the heavy eaters. I don't remember the dinners or suppers, but I do remember there was always rich pie, cake or pudding with the meals.

In spite of the quantities of rich foods they ate, not a man, woman or child on the ranch was fat. Fresh fruits from our orchard were plentiful in season, and apple cider was frequently made.

SAUERKRAUT:

A barrel of sauerkraut was made each year. There were usually four men and it was an all-day job. The cabbages were very white and about eighteen to twenty inches wide and five inches thick. On an improvised cutting table one man trimmed the cabbage, discarded the core, and cut it in thick slices, which were dropped into the barrel. A man with a clean wooden spade would throw in a handful of salt and start chopping. When these men tired the other two men took over. This went on hour after hour.

When the barrel was about half full the men began sampling the cabbage. They gave us kids a limited amount too. It was delicious! But the men kept sampling until one or more of them became stomach sick. They kept on adding cabbage and salt until the barrel was filled to about eight inches from the top and all of the cabbage chopped into very small pieces. The top of the kraut was covered with large cabbage leaves and a round board was put on top and pressed down. No water had been added, the cabbage fermented in its own juice. A big rock was put on the board to keep the cabbage under the brine.

Old timers would not eat the comparatively tasteless, finely sliced commercial sauerkraut.

Vinegar was made at home too. Something called “mother” was taken from the last barrel of vinegar and put in the new barrel. If they were starting from scratch a piece of brown paper was put in the barrel and the vinegar made its own mother. Corned beef was also made in a barrel. Old timers cured olives at home too. If you ever ate home-cured, half-ripe olives just once, it would take you years to be able to enjoy the “store bought’n kind” again!

THE RATTLESNAKE:

The days we remember from our early childhood are those on which we experienced either a great joy or a great fear.

I well remember a day when I was going to school on crutches barefoot. I came to a place where I was between two rocks higher than my head. I had gone past the center on my crutches, when a big rattle snake coiled in the center of the path a foot-and-a-half in front of me rattled its warning. I was terrified! There was nothing I could do and my foot was going to land right on top of him! Fortunately, my sister Myrtle was walking right behind me and reached forward and grabbed my dress and pulled me back to safety.

Ralph and Waldo had gone far ahead. My other sister, Birdie, called them and they came back and Ralph killed the snake. It had twelve rattles and a button. The men always collected the rattles of any snake they killed as a trophy, and Ralph offered this one to me.

“NO THANKS!”

When I went to school after this Papa had me ride Mousie, the mother of my pinto ponies. Mousie was mouse-colored. She must have known a high-spirited fancy dandy to foal those two beautiful pinto colts!

PINTO AND JACK 2:

A joyful memory was when Papa gave me Pinto and Jack. Papa made a bargain with me while we were on the ranch concerning Jack and Pinto. He said he knew I could not feed and take care of them myself, so he would do it for me, if I would let him use them; but they would always be my very own, and when I was old enough to ride or drive them they would be mine to use whenever I wished. It seemed reasonable to me and I agreed. Papa kept the bargain faithfully, as long as Jack and Pinto lived.

They were a high-spirited pair and I was about ten years old before I could ride either of them safely. Then I usually rode Pinto to school. I was fifteen before I could handle them as a team. They ran away a number of times with Papa. He said they never ran blind; they could be guided, but they couldn’t be stopped until they had had their run. One time on the ranch, Papa had a fine team of big dappled greys. One day they ran away, and ran blind right into a stone

wall, and one of them broke his neck. The grey mare grieved herself to death in spite of anything anyone could do.

Only once did Jack and Pinto run away with me. Addie, by brother Iven's wife, and I had been shopping in Santa Cruz and were on our way home to Ben Lomond, a small country town about ten miles back in the forested mountains, where Papa owned a Livery Stable at that time. She had her six-month-old baby with her, the day was hot, and the ponies were walking along slowly.

Someone drove up to pass us. Since we were talking we did not hear them. Their horses were almost beside us when someone in their carriage spoke loudly. It was startling even to us.

Jack and Pinto broke into a run, and ran three or four miles upgrade, with me braced against the dash-board and riding on the lines. It was a narrow, twisting country road, and Addie, afraid her baby would be killed, wanted to jump out. If we had met another carriage there would have been a disaster! I talked to the horses, and then to Addie, trying to calm them both down, because if she had jumped out they both would have been killed. I could not stop the ponies until they ran right inside Papa's Livery Stable.

While we were in Ben Lomond Papa bought two other pinto ponies, Dandy and Kento, which matched Jack and Pinto in color. These ponies were a little smaller than Jack and Pinto, and Papa liked to drive them four-in-hand. They were a beautiful sight!

Once, Ringling Brother's Circus wanted to buy them. They made a very generous offer, but Papa wouldn't sell. (However, after that I kept them out of sight whenever a circus was in town. I didn't want Papa to be tempted too far!)

I think Papa loved my ponies as much as I did, because he occasionally remarked that he would "horse-trade" anything that he possessed, except his wife and children, and Jack and Pinto.

PEOPLE LOVED MY PARENTS:

It wasn't only we who loved my parents. Oscar moved with us when we left Erskine Creek. He lived with us for fifteen years before he left to make a separate life for himself.

Waldo stayed with us until we left the ranch. A few years later his sister, Georgia, about my age, stayed with us for about six months, and didn't want to go home.

Papa went to Oklahoma to act as administrator for the estate of Mama's father, William S. Phillips, who died in November 1903. He left Mother, by holographic will, his ranch with a new house on it, horses, cattle and all. Her brothers had already had their share.

Papa had to reside in Oklahoma for six months to act as administrator. While there he lived with the Taylor family. When Papa came home, Mr. Taylor put his place up for sale and when it was sold, he moved his family to Soquel, California, to be near us. We were in Santa Cruz at that time.

Pearl Taylor was my age and stayed with us for a week once. Years later I visited with her for a few days. She told me that the week with us had been the happiest week of her life.

The only thing I now remember about that week is that one day Birdie made pull-candy, and each one was given a handful of candy to pull and eat. Iven pulled his candy and ate it while it was still hot, then he chased Pearl and me to take away some of our candy. We grabbed up a newspaper and some waxed paper and ran upstairs to get away from him.

We were afraid to stop in our room because we thought he might break the door, so we climbed the ladder into the attic and pulled the ladder up after us. We wedged it under a timber and sat on the other end. Iven couldn't pull the trapdoor open so he went away and came back with a hammer and some nails, and nailed the trap door shut from below. It was a draw. He couldn't get up, and we couldn't get down.

Soon he forgot about us and went away somewhere.

We had a high time up there. We pulled our candy until it was almost crumbly, then pulled it into twisted strings about the size of a finger and laid them on the waxed paper on top of a section of newspaper. It was a good task well done. Now we wanted out, but now one could hear us.

Later, Birdie wanted us to help her with something, and when we did not answer her calls she came upstairs and rescued us.

Things like that went on all the time around our house. While I was visiting Pearl years later she would ask me, "Do you remember this event?" I would say, "No." Then she would ask, "Do you remember that event?" I would say, "No." again.

"Well," she asked, "What do you remember?"

"I only remember the good things." I replied. She nearly cracked up. She would mimic me and burst into gales of laughter.

I still like to look on the sunny side of things, but I hope I have not made our lives sound stuffy or unreal. I'm sure we were very normal children.

TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL:

Once Iven made a wooden mold the size of a plug of chewing tobacco. We gathered the leaves from a wild herb. I think it was called Yerba Santos. It's a small shrub with elongate, rather sticky leaves. These we cut and pounded into the mold, and then weighted the top board which compressed it into a substance that, when dry, looked like a plug of tobacco. We picked up tin stars from real tobacco and pressed on into each section. It looked like we were spitting real tobacco juice.

The men on the Ranch both smoked and drank, but Papa never used either. The only liquor was Rye Whiskey and that was only used as a medicine. To make the medicine a quart bottle of Rye Whiskey was put into two bottles and quantities of rock-sugar was broken into small pieces and put in each bottle. The bottles were shaken often until as much of the sugar was melted as the whiskey would absorb. There was usually about a cup of crystals in the bottom of the bottles. This was called Rock and Rye. This was used for coughs, colds and sore throats. It was a standard remedy.

BOY'S PRANKS:

The boys played jokes on the teacher, Miss Merritt. Once they pt a dead mouse in a sardine can, ripped loose the lower covering of the springs in her chair and stuffed the can under the upholstering in the seat. For a while she stood by an open window to teach.

Another time they found a slight crack in the wall of the tower under the covered water tank. This was where the bathroom was located. Prim little Miss Merritt's bones would turn over in her grave even yet, if she knew the boys peeped into the room while she was bathing. They may have been a little roguish, but there wasn't a rogue in the lot.

How do I know these things? As I said, Iven was my pal and he swore me to secrecy before he told me what was going on.

PROSPECTORS:

Because of our location, where the little valley branched out from Erskine Creek, everyone who came into the valley stopped at our house. Prospectors came to the ranch for supplies, and stayed for a few days. They always had a burro to carry camping equipment and supplies. They regaled us with tall tales about their adventures. Occasionally, one carried a guitar and played and sang for us. We always enjoyed their visits.

"SOCKEYE"

One of the prospectors showed me how to make a kind of miner's stew. He called it "Sockeye," I don't know why. But in no other way can bacon, potatoes, onions, and salt and pepper be made to taste so good!

To make about four quarts I use:

4 or 5 thick slices of lean bacon, cut in ½ inch strips
2 large onions, cut in ¼ inch slices and diced in small pieces
4 or 6 medium-large potatoes, sliced crosswise in ½ inch slices
2 heaping tablespoons of flour
Salt and pepper

Use a cast-iron Dutch oven if you have one, or a heavy aluminum kettle.

Fry the bacon bits brown. Add onions and fry brown. Do not make it greasy. If there is too much grease for the flour, spoon some into a cup but keep the cup at the stove. Add the flour and brown. If need be a little grease can be put back. Have about a quart of water at hand. Pour it in slowly and stir until smooth. Drop in the potato slices separately. The water should just cover them loosely. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Move the potatoes about frequently, with a wooden spatula, while cooking. The potatoes should be fork tender, but whole and firm. The juice should be a rich brown, not thick like gravy, nor thin like soup. In clear country air you can smell it cooking for a half-mile!

Serve with home-made biscuits. If you mush use a mix, Fisher's Biscuit Mix is fair. Press a ½ inch cube of butter deep into the center of each 4-inch biscuit and salt lightly. Bake at 400 degrees.

Try it, you might like it!

For health's sake, serve a green salad first.

CELEBRATIONS:

Once a year there was a festival of some sort on the Ranch. It must have been after the harvest season.

People came from everywhere it seemed.

There were foot races and sack races, broad jumping and rope jumping. Even the women lined up for rope jumping. Each one jumped until they missed and stopped the rope. Some of the kids were real good at it and it took two ropes and salt and pepper (fast turning) to put then out.

There was a big dinner too, but I don't remember the details.

There was also horseshoe pitching for the men. For us little kids, Papa dug two round holes, two-and-a-half inches wide and about one-and-a-half inches deep and gave us two silver dollars in place of horse shoes. The game was played with the same rules and scores.

There was also wrestling matches and Indian wrestling, and boxing and other sports. There was no platform, no arena, and no fancy trappings for the contestants. Lines were drawn with a stick on the ground to se the start and finish of a race. A square was drawn to take the place of ropes for boxing, and a line was drawn for broad jump.

It was a great day for the old-timers and they looked forward to the reunion each year.

These were big, strong, hard-working ranchers, letting off steam by indulging in horse-play and matching their strength with friends on one of their few and far between holidays. Their cheering audiences were their wives, children, neighbors and friends. Professionals cannot know the pure joy these old-timers experienced on this, their day of play.

No wonder they looked eagerly forward to the next year's celebration.

MOTHER, THE FAMILY DOCTOR:

Mother was the daughter of William S. Phillips, a mining engineer who "came around the horn" in 1849. Her mother and father separated when she was eight years old. She chose to stay with her father and was raised in a Catholic convent in Eureka, California.

Whenever she needed anything at all, the Mother Superior would send her father a small painting that she had done. Soon a packing case of dress goods, including silks and satins, and one time, twenty pairs of shoes arrived. She still had one case of fine yardage when she was married.

When her father died in 1903 he had two framed maps on the wall that she had drawn in India Ink, and had tinted with water colors. They were exquisitely beautiful!

She was a favorite of the Mother Superior, who corresponded with her for years after she was married.

Mother was a lady of taste and culture, yet she handled every crisis that occurred on the ranch with wisdom and skill. One night there was a terrible storm and a cloudburst in the canyon above the ranch. A fine mare, driven by the storm was caught in the barbed wire fence for the pasture at the foot of the sled runway. Her right front leg was caught in the fence, and the wire had cut into her shoulder about four inches deep and a foot around.

The men got the mare loose from the wire and were going to shoot her "to put her out of her misery," but Mother wouldn't let them. She sent Ralph home for a big leather medicine case, a case that held everything needed for any emergency. She used medication and sewed the jagged cut together. The mare quivered when the stitches were put in, but made no other move, except to turn her head toward mother occasionally and whinny softly. It seemed as if the mare

knew mother was trying to help her. The shoulder healed with only a thin line of a scar, and she wasn't even lame.

RALPH'S ACCIDENT:

One winter two men decided to go a half-mile up the runway and slide back down. No one had ever tried it before. They wanted Ralph to go with them, but he didn't want to go. They dared him and called him a sissy and a fraidy-cat until finally he went with them. The men came down safely, but when Ralph's sled hit the ice near the foot of the slope, it skidded into a stump. He was thrown clear of the stump, but broke his left leg when he hit the ice. They brought him home on a sled.

Mother sent someone on horseback twenty miles to Havilah for a doctor. Oscar made splints and helped mother set the leg and tie on the splints. When the doctor got there he said mother had done as good a job as he could have done. He said Ralph must lay on his back until the bone knit and the leg became strong again, and that it would take some weeks before the leg could bear his weight without breaking again.

Ralph had never paid much attention to us little kids before, but now he kept Sadie and me interested and amused. He told us stories and read books t us. He knew many little tricks too, such as in the evening, when his coal-oil lamp was burning, he would make hand-shadow pictures on the wall. He made one look like a sheep's head eating grass. There were many others.

We waited on him, bringing him anything he wanted, because he couldn't move anything but his head and arms.

One day Ralph asked us to bring him two strips of white paper about two feet long and five inches wide, and a pair of scissors. He folded the strips into packets and cut a paper doll from each packet. He handed each of us a packet of the cut-outs and told us to find the ends of the paper, take one in each hand and pull gently. We did, and a long string of paper dolls unfolded between our hands. We were delighted!

Another time Ralph asked us to bring two large books and lay one of the books on each side of a chair by the bedside. Then he sent me for a piece of window-glass, and he sent Sadie for a newspaper. He had cut out a lot of paper dolls about an inch high and he told me to put them on the chair between the two books. Then he said, "Put the glass on top of the books." and he gave me a piece of crumpled up newspaper and told me to rub the glass. The little paper dolls jumped up and down as if they were alive! They danced and whirled around as long as either Sadie or I rubbed the glass. We had a great time! It seemed like magic!

Getting to know Ralph close up like this, he was great fun! No matter how ordinary my brother or sisters looked to others, to me they were like a young prince and a couple of princesses.

After an accident, and when things had been brought back under control, Papa would sometimes say, "Accidents will happen in the best of families, as the old made said when she had twins." We knew Papa was funning us again. Why? We knew old maids didn't have babies. Anyway, when Papa began telling funny stories we knew everything would be alright.

When the wind blew so hard we couldn't go out, Papa would say,

The devil was wicked and sent the wind,
To blow the skirts knee high.
But God was just and sent the dust,
To close the bad man's eye.

In those days women wore skirts almost down to the ground, and high button-up shoes with eight-inch tops. Seeing a leg was highly improbable, but I recon men knew women had 'em.

Mother had been a semi-invalid from the time Ralph was born. Papa saw to it that the girls learned to help with the housework, even when they had to stand on boxes to reach the sink and drain-board. Thus mother always had time for the little ones, and she would listen to our little woes and comfort us. She was our doctor and nurse. When we were ill she knew just what to do. Mother was the guiding star of our young years.

As I mentioned, Mother was raised in a Catholic Convent. Papa was from a long line of Quakers. We were not force-fed on religion. It was from the lives they led before us that we drew our examples of Christian living.

We used to think we were poor, but we were rich! rich!! rich!!! We were rich in all of the things needed to launch a well-adjusted family of children into an orderly life in a troubled world. Not only did we respect, love and obey our parents, we almost worshiped them!

AFTER 80 YEARS REVISITING THE ERSKINE CREEK RANCH:

In 1979 Frances Brewer returned with her daughter, Crystal Lewis, and Crystal's stepson, Terry.

Well, we went, but there were times when we almost wished we hadn't! We headed South out of Lake Isabella, and where a wide street ended and a country road began we left our car by the roadside, got in Crystal's truck with Terry driving, and we were on our way.

Terry drove down a steep hill and soon came to a strange means of fording the rushing waters of Erskine Creek. The crossing was made of concrete and so constructed that it conveyed much of the water through large conduits below, and also served as a channel for the overflow. As the truck plunged into the water and came out safely on the other side I thought, "Good, there have been some improvements in the old road," but alas, my joy was short-lived, for the concrete crossings were few and the natural channels were difficult and sometimes dangerous!

In the old days the canyon saw said to be nine miles long. That must have been "as the crow flies," for it seemed much longer! We went up and down, and up and down, and every time we went down, we forded the creek.

Finally, we came to a crossing where it was necessary to veer to the left downstream, and then to climb a steep hill as the road turned sharply to the left as it emerged from the water. Of course the truck lost traction in the water.

After Terry made a few attempts to pull out of the water I got out of the truck while the wheel on my side was on dry land. I knew Terry and Crystal could work more easily if I were not in the way, so taking a cane and a campstool I walked up the hill and sat in the shade where I could see what was going on.

Terry backed up and tried to come forward again. The right rear wheel dug into the creek-bed and he was stuck in midstream with the exhaust pipe under water. He rolled up his pant-legs, waded in, and went to work. I don't know what he did, but about an hour later he backed out safely. He and Crystal filled the holes with rocks and Terry plunged the truck into the creek, veered to the left and came right up the hill.

At the top there was room to turn aside into the shade of a big pine tree. We left Inyokern at 5 a.m. without breakfast, so while resting we ate sandwiches and sipped cold soft drinks. I thought Crystal and Terry might give up and go home, but we went right on!

The farther we went the worse the road got. Several times, when going over the top of a hill, no ground could be seen under the front of the truck, and always, the road twisted. After fording the creek 19 or 20 times we finally came to a locked gate with a "No Trespassing" sign above it. Someone, sometime, had bought a portion of the old home place and called it the "Lime Peak Ranch."

Beside the locked gate a new road (new in the last 30 years) wound up and over the hill and down to the Erskine Creek Ranch. It is now called "Liebel's Ranch" (pronounced "Leebel"). Frank and Virgie Liebel knew my niece and her husband, Edna and Oakley Horn, who lived near the entrance of the valley, very well, and we were graciously welcomed.

A big tree grows by the side of their house, with a picnic table with benches and a few chairs set in the shade. A slight breeze cooled the warm air, feeling like silk on one's skin as it passed by. It was out where I could see the mountains that recalled memories of bygone days.

Fire has twice roared over these mountains in the last 80 years. Some years after the first fire swept through the area I was taken up to the Erskine Creek Ranch, but I can't remember when or with whom. The pine trees were charred, but some of them struggled to live. A small house had been built to the right of the old cellar, but it had been abandoned.

In 1948 or 1949, after the second fire, my daughter, Crystal, and her husband, "Moe" Rampy, with her son, Bill Campbell, took me to the ranch again. At that time there were no buildings left in the whole valley. We had driven to the upper end, and there a rock fireplace was all that remained of what I thought to be the old Porter place. Merton, the Porter's son, was of school age when my family was living there and attended the school Papa built.

I asked "Moe" to drive back slowly and to stop when I asked him to and let me look around, which he did. I had to identify the location from my childhood memory of the contour of the mountains and the position of Mount Laura. We stopped exactly in front of the place where the house had been. I walked over to the place where the cellar had caved-in and everything fell into place.

That was a thrill I shall never forget! Water still flowed in the ditch at the back of the lot. The trees in the orchard had been damaged by the fires, but they were still bearing fruit! We picked some of the fragrant red apples and put them in the car.

Then we crossed the road to where the blacksmith shop had been. The old cracked grindstone lay on its side nearby, with its hardwood frame still intact. Down the bank lay a mass of old tin cans and a heap of rusted scrap iron. Crystal's son Bill went down and as he was poking around under the heap he found an old tarnished and blackened miner's headlamp. He took it home, cleaned and polished it and discovered it was made of brass and still in useable condition, a treasure of which he is justly proud.

As half-expected, childhood memories were somewhat out of focus. Memory had moved the well about 30 feet, added about 50 feet of yard onto the back and front of the house area, and added about half a block on the way to the wagon-track crossing the ditch beyond the vegetable garden.

And Mount Laura, is my face red! Mount Laura towers far up into the sky! The only way it could have appeared as I remembered it, would have had to be the view as seen through Papa's field glasses. Obviously, everything except that seen through the glasses when focused on the top, had been forgotten. At that time the mountain was a step cone covered with rocks and grasses, and crowned with a crest of limestone that whitened the top and streaked the sides.

The outward aspect of the area has completely changed. I would not have recognized it at first glance. Instead of the stately pines I remembered as a child, the mountains are covered with a thicket of Juniper.

The various people who have lived on the Erskine Creek Ranch through the years have kept a United States Flag flying atop Mount Laura. It was thrilling to hear that the flag had continued to fly over the valley! Some years ago the pole broke in the middle and the Liebel's made another pole and replaced it. In 1978, Terry Liebel, their youngest son, climbed the peak, and not having a flag with him, tied his shirt to the pole. The shirt flies as if in token of man's surrender to the laws of Mother Nature, for here also she has changed the jagged outline into a soft one of Juniper.

The rock the Indians used in grinding corn and other foods is still above ground, but it is covered with an impenetrable thicket.

Today the orchard thrives, a few grapevines still produce fruit, and there is a mass of the old Lilac bushes that have just finished blooming. The current house stands to the left of the place where the old cellar had been. A slab marks the spot.

Water is now pumped from the well with a handle. The clear, sparkling water tastes just as good as it did 80 years ago. Green lawns surround the house and a hedge shields part of the front. The small ditch still carries water from the back of the house to the orchard and onward down to the creek from which it came.

The deer, bear and mountain lions have returned to the valley also. Life is exciting to those who live there. The Erskine Creek Ranch is still a Paradise.

After a couple of very enjoyable hours we reluctantly tore ourselves away.

MOVING TO BAKERSFIELD:

I don't remember how, or when, we were told we were leaving our mountain paradise. The wagons were loaded the night before in preparation to leave at dawn. We girls slept on mattresses on the floor of the empty living room. I remember it because of an incident that affected me deeply.

For the last six months Oscar had kept me supplied with crutches. They were made of the straight and slender sprouts of a hardwood shrub that grew on the hillsides, and were called "iron oak" because they were so strong and tough. When he made the last pair, the ripsaw veered slightly to the side on one of them and when the armrest was glued on, and the hand-bar inserted, the crutch was misshapen. Around home I used only one crutch, and the good one had been broken. Then I found the crooked crutch to be more comfortable than the others and I

liked it that way. I could put my bent knee through under the hand-bar and walk better and easier.

It wasn't long before the weaker side of the crutch broke just above the hand-bar. I couldn't use it that way so I sawed off the armrest, but then I had to hold it to my side with one hand. That was awkward and I felt insecure with it. Well, I took one of Iven's old leather belts and fastened it around my chest to hold the crutch to my side, and suddenly, Oh joy! I could stand erect and face the world once more! And my hands were free! I now walked much as if I were using a peg leg.

We were to live in town when we moved to Bakersfield. Birdie and Myrtle were teenagers and were shamed at the thought of me walking about in the city on that makeshift crutch. They begged me not to take it with me. They argued and even tried to bribe me to leave it behind, but nothing worked. I was not ashamed of the crutch. I was even a little proud of it. It was the best crutch I had ever had, and I was determined to take it with me!

When I went to bed before we were to leave the next morning I put the crutch under the mattress on which I slept. Came the dawn, my crutch was gone~! Papa delayed the start of the journey for a half-hour in which he made everyone search for it. Of course, no one found it, and no one would admit to taking it. The crutch didn't get out from under the mattress by itself, but I never knew who could have been so thoughtlessly cruel.

It was said to be twenty miles to Kernville, which was at that time where the center of Lake Isabella is now. We arrived there in the late afternoon and camped about a quarter of a mile out of town. The grown-ups walked to Kernville to visit with friends, and the friends insisted that all of us have supper and breakfast with them, and that mother and the girls sleep in the house. The men and boys came back and carried in the things that were needed for the night. I had ridden on the wagon that Oscar drove and he carried me into the house.

The house had been built by the family, with the mudsills laid on the ground. It had started as a large cabin and rooms had been added as needed, some with a step up, and others with a step down. There were no hallways and, in places, you went through one room to another. I hopped all over the place. It was most interesting! Again, we girls slept on mattresses on the floor, their girls sleeping with us. There was a girl about my age with me and we had a great time. No one shushed our giggling but we were soon asleep anyway.

Daybreak saw us on the road again, and I was again put on the wagon with Oscar, probably because he was big, and strong enough to lift me about. According to the ranchers it was eighty miles from Kernville to Bakersfield by the road then used. At that time we went up the side of a steep mountain range and along the mountain's side and down toward Caliente.

NO PASSING:

We had climbed up to the summit and were on the down-grade when Oscar saw a boy on horseback leading another white horse on a rope behind him coming up behind us. Oscar pulled the horses and wagon as close to the cutbank as possible and stopped to let them pass. The narrow road had been blasted out of the side of the mountain and there was scarcely three feet on the outside. The boy was supposed to be leading the white horse, but in this case the white horse was apparently leading the boy. The horse was afraid to pass on the outside and he crowded in between the wagon and the bank, and fell down and slid under the wagon. The horse was blind in his right eye and didn't know he was walking into a trap. We couldn't drive on without running over the horse, and the horse couldn't get up under the wagon.

Now this makes me think of a problem we were once given at school: A man with a fox, a goose, and a bag of corn came to a river that he had to cross. He could only swim across with one thing at a time. If he took the corn across first, and left the fox with the goose, the fox would eat the goose. If he took the fox across first, the goose would eat the corn. How did he get them all across the river? The only way was to swim the river with the goose first, then take the fox across, but bring back the goose, and then leave the goose and take the corn across. Then finally come back for the goose.

Oscar solved our horse-problem by taking a long rope from the wagon and bringing it through the rear wheel about two feet off the ground and tying it to the rope around the neck of the horse. Then he carried the rope beside the wagon and past the wheel-horses. Next he released the ring from the gooseneck under the wagon tongue. Then he tied the rope into the ring of the double-tree for the lead team.

He then drove the lead team straight on down the road and dragged the fallen horse end-for-end and sideward so his body was out from under the wagon. He untied the rope from the rope around the horse's neck and the horse quickly struggled to its feet, but alas, his blind side was now toward the canyon and the horse staggered over the edge and skidded down the side about fifty feet before some shrubs stopped him. He wasn't hurt but there was no way we could get him back up on the road.

How do I remember these things? I sat 'way up on the high seat, of a heavily loaded wagon, parked on a down-grade, with the lines tied to the set-brake, and the horses all restive and nervous, and no one on the wagon to control them. I was scared, and I don't mean maybe! I always afterward thought of that grade as the "white horse" grade, and I have often wondered whatever happened to that unfortunate white horse.

BAKERSFIELD:

When we got to Bakersfield NO ONE would rent a house to a man with a big family like ours. Papa sent Mother up to San Jose so stay with his sister, Areadne Keesling, who we called Aunt Edna, until he could buy, or build, a place for us to live in.

He bought a pair of crutches for me and left me with friends who lived a few miles out of town on the edge of a tule swamp. Their children played in the swamp all day, and that's no place for a gal on crutches, so their poor mother had me underfoot the whole time.

THE ANTI-PARADISE:

Papa found us some temporary shelter at a homestead cabin a man had 'way out of town, about a mile-and-a-half from the Kern River, not far from where it poured out of the canyon. The "cabin" was a one-room shack, and nothing else – no water, and not even an outhouse. The man had given it up and abandoned it, but it was so rude that it continued to stand vacant.

There was also another possible reason no one had moved into the place though. The "neighbor" was a man who had no claim on either the river or the land, but when he saw us he stated flatly, "I will shoot anyone, man, woman or child who takes so much as a bucketful of water out of the river!" Papa, therefore, forbade any of us to go anywhere near the river, and brought food and water for us every other day to keep us going. Papa, Ralph and Oscar stayed in town, but Birdie, Myrtle, Iven, me, Sadie, and Phil, who was about three years old by then, stayed at the shack.

There was nothing but desert to be seen…..a desert presided over by a phantom carrying a gun and supposedly spying on us all the time!

We were told a family lived about two miles away in the opposite direction from the river, and one day the older girls decided to go visit them. They made us all dress up and away we went. I only remember we found the cabin a visited awhile, then started back home. On the way a man saw us and started toward us. We thought he might be "the phantom with a gun," and we ran! He soon realized we were afraid of HIM and turned back toward the cabin. We later learned he only meant to be friendly. It has been said that what you don't know won't hurt you -- well, maybe not, but it can sure scare you half to death!

In the evenings we sat in the dark huddled around Birdie, who sat in a rocking chair with Phil in her arms, rocking him to sleep, while she told us stories to keep us interested and quiet until bed time. We kept the cabin dark to keep anyone or anything from finding us, and quiet so nothing could hear us. We were just a bunch of kids, pretty big kids by now, but still we were scared at times, especially after dark!

At night the desert winds whistled around the cabin, banging a loose piece of something against the wall, and the coyotes howled.

After living on the Erskine Creek Ranch, which to us was paradise, this -- well this, was quite the opposite!

An old well had been drilled nearby, perhaps looking for oil, that had a casing at least 12 to 14 inches in diameter and stood about two-and-a-half feet out of the ground. This too was forbidden territory, but it fascinated Iven and me. We would go out there and drop small rocks down the pipe and lean over with our heads in the pipe and listen. It was so deep we couldn't hear a rock hit bottom. It's a wonder one of us didn't fall in!

Once, for some reason or other, Papa couldn't come with the food and water. Knowing that we must be about out of supplies he sent Oscar. Well, Oscar didn't start until evening, and had never been out there before, and since it was a dark night, he lost his way in the desert. When he couldn't find us he stopped and shouted in all directions for us to put out a light to guide him. Unfortunately, he was too far away for us to hear his words. We only heard a man's voice shouting, which sometimes sounded near, and sometimes sounded faint and far away. It was weird, and thinking it was a drunk, we cowered behind the barricaded door until after the shouting stopped. Oscar came in at daybreak the next morning with the supplies and had to hurry back to get to work on time.

There was just a little water left for us to drink that night, so we had eaten raw vegetables for supper that had just been wiped with a damp cloth. Before the day was over, all of us, except the baby, were afflicted with diarrhea. It was a busy day – every few minutes we were all running out to find a bush to hide behind!

TARANTULA:

For lack of something better to do Iven and I set out to dig up a tarantula's den. The tarantulas in the San Joaquin Valley were different from the black hairy type found in Arizona. These were neither black nor hairy, but yellow-brown with somewhat shorter legs.

It took us days of careful digging. We thought Mrs. Tarantula was not at home. The den had a trap-door on top of the hole about an inch in diameter, and the walls were lined with a light grey web that was moisture-proof and air-tight. The door fitted so perfectly that the tarantula could come up and slip two or three legs in some tiny pockets on the under side of the door and you couldn't pry it up. Much of the time, mama spider was just underneath the door, holding it up about a quarter of an inch.

We dug around the den, leaving about an inch of earth all the way around. We had to dig a hole big enough to work around the den and not put any pressure on it as we wanted to get it out whole. When we got down a little more than two feet the den made a turn to one side and there was a chamber about four inches in diameter and eight inches long. We dug all around the bulb-like chamber, but when we lifted it out the chamber broke off – and there was mama tarantula with dozens of tiny little ones!

We were horrified! The bite of a tarantula was supposed to be deadly. We destroyed them all.

When Papa finally took us into Bakersfield, he allowed us to take our prize with us. It seemed no one around there had ever dug up a tarantula's den before, and some official wanted to put it on display. A glass case was made for the den and it was exhibited in some public building.

A NEW LEG!

It seemed that we had been there in the desert for months, but it must have been just weeks, because we were all moved into Bakersfield before school started in the Fall, and I had a new artificial leg.

I had given Papa the black stocking more than half filled with silver coins, and he bought a new leg for me. It was a new type of leg made of aluminum with an ankle motion.

When I think of Papa climbing down from the high seat of the type of wagon he drove, and back up again, to pick up a whiskey flask that was worth only five cents, for me to save for another leg, I remind myself, "That made 20 times for every dollar, so he did that 2,500 times for the coins in that stocking!" Dear God! How Papa must have loved his "little guinea!"

THE LIVERY STABLE:

When Papa bought the Livery Stable in Bakersfield in 1898, he hit a financial jackpot. He had made a deal where the returns were all in "hard cash" and he was taking in a hundred dollars, or more, a day. It was located on the corner of 18th and M Streets and had a lean-to blacksmith shop on 18th street.

When the first Halloween came along, a light buggy had been left out by the blacksmith shop. A gang of boys took the shafts and the wheels off and hoisted it up over the blacksmith shop roof and onto the peak of the stable and put the wheels back on, leaving the buggy on the peak of the roof at the front. Papa said he couldn't think of a better advertisement and left it there!

Ralph was through high-school by now and was driving a horse-drawn delivery wagon for a bakery. He drove through the streets ringing a bell and people came out to the wagon to buy. There were pies, cakes, cookies, rolls and breads, warm from the ovens. They looked beautiful and smelled better, but our family had been raised on home-cooking and neither Papa nor Ralph would touch any of it. However, the bakery thrived without our patronage. When Ralph was 21 years old he went to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad and became a fireman, then later an engineer.

Birdie and Myrtle both finished high-school that same year, then Birdie stayed home and did the cooking and housework, and Myrtle took an apprenticeship in a millenary store. Myrtle

also took lessons in elocution. She had to recite a very long poem. I think it was called "Lasca" and the scene was set "In Texas, down by the Rio Grande." She was to practice in front of a full-length mirror and much acting accompanied the recitation. I thought she was beautiful and graceful, and I wanted to be graceful too, so I would stand behind her and try to imitate her graceful movements. She didn't appreciate my efforts at all and drove me away. Well, she didn't boost my morale a bit!

Later, when no one was around I went to practice in front of the mirror and found that with one leg longer then the other, and the foot limited to only a forward and back movement, swaying about like a willow in the wind was impossible. Drama and ballet, which was my ideal of beauty and grace, were not for me. Oh well, there would be other aims in life. I meant to find them!

A BAD CUSTOMER:

In 1899 oil was discovered at the foot of China Grade. A well-dressed and well-spoken man came into the stable and wanted a fast team to take out to the oil field. He assured Papa that he knew how to take care of a good team, so Papa harnessed Spice and Ginger, his best team, for him.

When the man drove back into the stable, one of the horses fell in the harness and lay dying on the floor. The other horse lived, but was ruined for any useful purpose. Papa said he would have let the man pay for the team and go, but when the man laughed at the horse in its death struggle, that was too much for Papa. He struck the man and knocked him down. When the man turned over and tried to get up Papa kicked him in the seat of the pants and sent him sprawling in the dust. Each time he tried to get up he was sent sprawling in the dust again, until he had been "assisted" half-way across 18th Street.

The next day the man's picture was on the front page of the newspaper. He explained his bruises by saying, "A horse kicked me." He was the governor of Pennsylvania!

Papa never got a cent out of the deal. I often heard old-timers say if someone didn't pay what he owed, or return something that he borrowed, that they would take it out of his hide. I wonder if something like this was what they had in mind? At any rate, Papa seemed to feel that at least one politician had got what he deserved at least once in his life. Papa was not a violent man, but in this case he felt justified.

OUR NEW HOUSES:

Papa built two houses on the corner of 16th and M Streets in 1901. A hydroelectric plant had just been put in operation at the mouth of Kern Canyon and we had electric light in the houses. Our house was on the corner and had a large parlor with a bay window in front, separated from the dining room by two wide sliding doors called "pocket doors." The fireplace was between the dining room and the kitchen. The kitchen had a pantry, sink and drain-boards,

lots of cupboard space, and a small, enclosed entry room from the open porch. For some reason, a six-foot long covered bathtub was set in the corner of the room!

The other half of the house had a covered front porch with a door into the hall and four bedrooms, each one large enough for two double beds and all of the needed furniture without crowding.

Papa furnished the new houses well. Mama had a new piano, and upholstered parlor furniture. In the dining room there was a large extension table, in solid walnut, and eight chairs with upholstered seats and backs, and castors on the front legs. There was also one of Edison's first phonographs, with a long, blue Morning-Glory horn, and an immense chest of wax cylinder-records, several of which were funny ones for the enjoyment of us kids.

The kitchen had another extension table, in solid oak, with eight chairs, also upholstered, and two high chairs.

A NEW FAMILY MEMBER:

We little ones didn't know it but Papa was racing the stork. Papa won, in a manner of speaking. We were all moved into the new house before the stork arrived, but, while the cesspool had been dug, the plumbing was not yet connected. Papa called the family doctor but he was on another maternity case at the time, so the doctor's son, just out of medical college, came to deliver the baby. All went well and Esther Camille Hobson was born June 17, 1901.

When Birdie heard the first cry of the baby she rushed right into the room. The young doctor was so embarrassed by a young lady's presence in the midst of the delivery that he fled as soon as possible. When he got outside the house he ran straight for his buggy – and fell right into the excavation for the cesspool, and couldn't get out. Although it was after dark we kids were still being kept outside, so we came to his rescue with a ladder. This funny experience was often mentioned in connection with Esther's birth.

THE ESCORT:

The other house was smaller than ours and was rented to a young couple. The husband was occasionally called away for a day or two on business. The wife had come from a large family and at such times she spent a good deal of time with us because there was always something going on at our house. She was talented and liked to play the piano. She knew a lot of fun songs. She fitted into our family like a hand fits in a glove and we all loved her. I remember her well, but I don't remember her name.

One time, her husband was called away on the day they had planned to go to a dance about ten miles out in the country. He asked Papa if he would take her to the dance and Papa said, "Yes." He always enjoyed dancing.

Just minutes after he drove away, one of our friends, Gather Gregg, drove up thinking to follow Papa's carriage to the dance. Mother tried to tell him how to get there, but Gather was afraid of getting lost in the tule swamps along the way. Mama's nurse was still with us and she suggested Mama go along with Gather, and she would take care of the baby. Gather though it a good idea, and finally Mother agreed. She told Gather to drive around to the barn and Iven would help him exchange his livery horse for her racing mare. Birdie and the nurse helped Mother get ready and they were soon on their way.

The two couples met on the steps of the building. For a moment the young lady thought Mother might be angry, but she wasn't and they all laughed and joked and had a good time. Each gentleman gallantly escorted the lady he brought to the dance inside for dinner, and safely home again. The unexpected could often happen at our place!

THE CITY OF BAKERSFIELD:

Historians seem to agree that in 1900 Bakersfield was the roughest, toughest, and most lawless place in the West.

The business center was on 19th Street and Chester Avenue. The "red-light district" was on 20th Street. Two or three dead bodies picked up there every week. One Monday morning there were eleven bodies on the Street! Most of the slain were men, but occasionally a woman was also shot, stabbed or beaten to death. It was said that the job of the Coroner was one of the busiest in the city.

My impression as a child was that no one felt much concern or sympathy for those who were slain; for by going there, they were practically asking for it.

CHINATOWN ADVENTURE:

Chinatown began at 21st Street, and it was said that at least three "tong" headquarters with opium dens below were in the district. The Chinese ran lotteries, laundries, and restaurants, and peddled vegetables about the community.

After a two-year chase a certain outlaw killer named James McKinney was cornered in one of the Chinese temples in this same district, known as "joss houses" after the name of one of the Chinese gods. On Sunday, April 19, 1903, he was killed in a shootout in which Marshall Jeff Parkard and Deputy Marshall Will Tibbet were both slain, after which Burt Tibbet fired the shot that killed the outlaw. One of Will Tibbet's children, Lawrence, was in the same grade in school as my sister Sadie. Lawrence grew up to attain fame as an opera singer and movie actor.

One day Iven asked me to go with him into Chinatown to sell a roll of burlap sacks. I was afraid, but Iven said he needed my help and he would take care of me. He showed me a loaded pistol that had hidden in the front of his pants and under his belt. Right after breakfast, away we

went. Iven carried the sacks until we came to 20th Street. Here we looked apprehensively to the right, and to the left – there were no dead bodies in sight.

Here was where I was needed. Iven handed me the sacks to carry, then he reached under his shirt and pulled the gun out of his trousers, and with it in his hand and his finger on the trigger – ready to use if needed; but still concealed by the shirt – we walked over into Chinatown. I sold the sacks at an open booth for ten cents each, and we returned home safely.

Our parents never knew anything about this little sortie! We were gone only about thirty minutes and weren't missed. Sometimes I wonder how kids live long enough to grow up!

Late that year the Government commissioned my father to go to the Midwest and buy a train-load of horses for them. Papa arranged for an old friend to run the Livery Stable for him while he was gone. He gave the man Power of Attorney to buy hay and grain for the horses, and supplies for the Blacksmith Shop. However, instead of buying supplies, he sold the Livery Stable, horses, carriages, Blacksmith Shop and all the equipment, then, just before Papa returned, he disappeared!

I'm sure this deal was the worst Papa ever made, and the loss the greatest he had ever taken. Yet, we kids never felt insecure.

Papa was never one to "cry over spilled milk."

TEHACHAPI:

Papa traded the two houses and Mama's racing mare and buggy on a deal for the El Capitan Hotel in Tehachapi. My pair of pinto ponies and their carriage remained with the barn behind the houses for the time being.

In 1876 the Southern Pacific Railroad laid track through the Tehachapi Valley. Extra locomotives were needed to pull the trains up to the summit, therefore, a train depot was built there and called Summit Station.

Old Tehachapi, referred to by the early settlers as "Old Town," which was about three miles away from the Station, and a small village called "Greenwich," about a mile from the Station, were both bypassed. Old Town soon moved to the new location and Summit Station was renamed Tehachapi. About 1883 Greenwich also packed up and moved "lock, stock and barrel" into town.

As towns go, the summit town of Tehachapi was comparatively new when we arrived there in 1901.

We went up there by night-train, which was quite a novelty to us. We were stilled and thrilled by going through the several short tunnels on the way up, even though it was dark. We arrived after midnight, there were no lights, and the wind was blowing a gale!

When we left the train station Papa carried the baby and had Mother holding his arm. Birdie and Myrtle held onto Sadie and me to keep us from being blown away. The wind was blowing towards us and we had to lean far into it in order to make any headway! We struggled against the wind for a long block before we arrived at the Hotel.

THE HOTEL:

The Hotel was on the corner of the block. A wide wooden porch extended the full width of the building, with three or four steps all the way across. There were double doors in the center and a single door on the right, into the Bar room.

The lobby was a large room with a linoleum floor, and a door into the bar on the right side. The counter and business center was in the back-right corner. The dining room and kitchen were beyond. On the left side of the Lobby a four-foot-wide stairway led to the upper floor. There was a recess under the stairway and a door there led into the Manager's office. Another door at a right-angle opened into the end of the hallway that went through the building toward the back yard.

There were four bedrooms off the hallway. Sadie and I occupied the first bedrooms, next to Papa and Mama, and William Hartzell, the only permanent guest, occupied the fourth bedroom. He drove a wagon hauling lime from a mine in the foothills,

Upstairs, there were perhaps 17 or 18 bedrooms opening off the wide central hall from front to back, with a bay window overhanging the front entrance on the main street. A pair of velvet draperies separated a little nook from the rest of the hall. The floors in the bedrooms, hall and stairway were all covered in red carpet. All carpets were swept with ordinary brooms in those days – no vacuum cleaners. There were four Dormer windows on each side of the roof and the building was painted a nice cream color.

There was a small back yard with a contraption in the center where carbide was used to make gas for the hotel lights. A small menagerie had also been established in the side-yard of the Hotel. A bald eagle in a nice cage on the corner of the main street was the chief attraction. There was also a badger, a porcupine, two or three other animals and a large desert tortoise with a three-inch clear spot on his shell.

This was where we were to live. Soon, everything at the Hotel was running smoothly…(that is, for everyone except Iven and me, but I'll get to that later). It was sort of exciting. We had never lived in a Hotel before. Papa became a genial host to most of the transient trade. Birdie became the waitress and Myrtle became the chamber-maid. I helped

Myrtle make the beds on Saturday and Sunday mornings. There was also a Chinese cook, I think he was called Sing.

THE COFFEE MILL:

The kitchen was out-of-bounds for all of us kids, but when Sing roasted a pan of coffee beans he would give me a quarter to grind them for him. The coffee mill was a large one just like those in the big stores. There were two iron wheels with heavy rims about a foot in diameter with the mill between them. The right wheel had a handle near the rim. It was enameled a pretty bright red.

Sing would take a scoop out of the bottom of the machine and scoop up a quart of hot, roasted coffee beans, lift the lid on top the mill, pour the beans in, and put the scoop back under. Then I would start the mill, and – um-um, did that coffee smell good! I think everyone in town knew when Sing had fresh, hot, roasted coffee to serve!

IVEN'S "WELCOMING COMMITTEE":

Oscar Mays still moved about with our family at that time, and in this case he drove my pintos up from Bakersfield, and Iven came with him for company. They were to arrive a few days after we did, and a few people knew they were coming, and when they were expected.

A gang of about a dozen boys stopped them about two miles out of town. They had went out there to fight the new boy! Oscar tried to talk them out of it, but they were determined.

Oscar said, "Wait until I tie the horses to the fence," which they did.

Then Oscar took the horse whip in his hand and said, "This is going to be a fair fight. There will be no ganging up on the boy. One boy will fight him at a time, and if anyone interferes he will get the whip."

Delmer Haig was the bully of the town and the leader of the gang. Iven had to fight every one of those boys before he even saw or set foot in the town! Some of the fights they won – some Iven won. When he arrived home he was a mass of bruises.

What a welcome for a twelve-year-old boy! Iven was small for his age.

THE HOTEL BAR:

Papa changed the name of the hotel from the "El Capitan Hotel" to the "Eagle Hotel." With his Quaker background Papa neither smoked, drank or gambled. Of the Bar he said, "Since the Bar is part of the Hotel, I will sell a man a drink or two, but I will never let a man get drunk at my Bar."

Well, one day a man got drunk somewhere else, and came and draped himself on the steps of the Hotel to sleep it off. Papa wouldn't leave him there for us kids to see, so he shook him awake enough to be helped around the corner to an empty building and left him on the steps there to finish sleeping it off.

On the way back he thought to himself, "People will say, that's the way Hobson runs his ideal Bar! He gets them drunk and leads them somewhere else to sober up!" So, he bought a big padlock and put it on the outside door of the Bar. Thereafter, he only sold an occasional drink to a guest who was staying at the Hotel.

THE WEDDING PARTY HAYRIDE:

The "Old Timers" were rough and tough – but they had to be in order to survive in the mining country. Nevertheless, there was an innate chivalry among them that made it possible for a respectable woman to travel among them safely. Should any man make even a snide remark about such a woman, there were many men, even strangers, ready to fight to defend her honor.

When they took time to play, even their play was likely to be a bit rough. For instance: a young couple got married in Tehachapi. That same evening a farm wagon and a four-horse team, with hay on the wagon for an old-fashioned hay-ride, pulled up in front of the Hotel to load up with people who were bent on having a "party" for the newlyweds – a real shivaree! The group had a five-pound box of fine Chocolate Creams for the bride, and there were cakes, pies and sandwiches for everyone – the works!

One couple brought a girl about my age along, Madge by name. She wanted me to go along so she would have someone to talk with. My sisters Birdie and Myrtle were going, so Papa let me go too. They all climbed up on the hay but Madge and me. We sat on the back of the wagon with our feet hanging over. Everyone was laughing and gay as we started on the ten-mile trip. They planned to arrive at the newlywed's home about ten o'clock at night.

They stopped a little distance from the house and everyone silently crept up close – then they let loose with the most horrible din I ever heard! There was anything and everything anyone could think of to make a noise. One noisemaker was called a "horse-fiddle," and there were three or four of these instruments there. They were made by cutting the top out of a five-gallon coal-oil can, and then punching a nail hole in the center of the bottom. Then a string about a yard long that had rosin rubbed into it and a knot tied on the end was drawn through the hole from the inside of the can outward. When the rosined string was pulled between one's fingers the can boomed out discordantly. In fact, I think they could almost be loud enough to wake the dead!

Lights soon appeared in the house and the new husband invited us in. However, the poor little bride was so embarrassed that no amount of coaxing could persuade her to appear, so the party had to go on without her. Spirits were somewhat dampened and the blustering party was soon over.

A NEAR DISASTER:

When we started back home Madge and I again sat at the back with our feet hanging over. The narrow country road was now down hill all the way and at the foot of the grade here was a right-angle turn onto a narrow bridge, without rails, over a deep, narrow gorge. The horses began going a little too fast and the driver leaned forward to pull on the brake. As he reached forward the foot-board broke and he fell through. Madge and I giggled when we felt the two big jolts, thinking it to be just a big rock in the road. We looked down to see the rock, and there lay, face-down, the body of the driver in the moonlight!

We looked anxiously back toward the front to see what was going on, just in time to see a man jump forward from his seat on the wagon. There was an old soldier in the group riding alongside the driver, and without hesitation he had leaped from the high seat forward, landing among the harnesses, and injuring his ankle. I don't know just how he did it, but he managed to get the reins of the four horses all together and got them stopped – just a few yards short of the bridge!

The driver was carried back to the wagon and the wagon driven across the gorge and to a nearby farmhouse and the people awakened. The injured men were taken into the house and a rider sent about eight miles down into town to get the doctor.

The rest of us remained outside. Some of the men built a small camp-fire in the yard and we all gathered around. The moon was full and the coyotes howled. It was rather weird! The grown-ups told stories to help pass the time. (There were many good story-tellers in the old days!)

When the doctor came the injured men were taken care of. The driver had fallen just in front of the front wheel, which had run over his thighs. As he rolled over the rear wheels ran over them from the other side. Amazingly, no bones were broken, though he was badly bruised. The soldier who had saved us had sprained one ankle badly, but he would be alright.

A very subdued group of people drove back into Tehachapi as the new day was dawning. We all well knew that if it had not been for the heroic action of the soldier, we would all have been at the bottom of the gorge. I, for one, am still grateful to that unsung hero!

DELMER THE BULLY:

Every time Delmer met Iven on the street he started a fight, and always -- Iven got licked. Then Delmer found that if he was mean to me, then Iven would have to stand for my honor and go fight him again, regardless of the consequences!

One day Delmer knocked Iven down in the street near the back-end of the Hotel and was trying to smother him with his felt hat. I started hitting him on the back with one of my crutches and he said, "When I have killed Iven, I'm going to kill you!" I ran into the Hotel for Papa, who hurried outside. When he saw Delmer he grabbed him by his shirt where his suspenders crossed in the back and tossed him sprawling ahead into the dirt of the road and told him not to come back. Well – that settled that skirmish!

There was a two-story school house about a half-mile across the railroad tracks from the town, and there, Iven, Sadie, and I went to school. One day, my teacher had given me permission to go upstairs with another girl while she brushed her hair during the noon hour. Delmer caught us up there and he grabbed me by the shoulders and shoved me down the long flight of stairs, feet first. I hit the wall at the foot of the stairs with both feet, hard. The force of the impact drove the metal bolt in the ankle of my artificial limb up into my stump and broke the bone.

My teacher kept me after school until all of the children had gone home so Delmer couldn't bother me, and afterward we started out together. I could barely walk, and she was in a hurry, so I assured her that I could get home alright by myself – but I couldn't. About half way home I sat down on the ground and took the leg off to see what was the matter. That was a mistake. The stump-stocking had a big clot of blood in it, which I tried to shake out, but couldn't, and then I discovered I couldn't get the leg back on either. I had to hop on one foot and carry the leg for the last quarter of a mile. It was a week or more before I could wear the leg again.

THE DAMAGED LEG:

Once, when playing "follow the leader" with some other kids, I jumped over a fence, and my artificial foot sank into a squirrel hole. When I pulled it out the foot hung down loosely from the bolt, so it had to be sent back to the factory for repairs. They said the aluminum casting had just wore into dust and there was no way to mend it. I had only had it for nine months. So, I was on crutches again, I don't remember how long. In those days $150.00 was a lot of money! Sometime later I was on my way home from school, and as I crossed the railroad tracks the Station Master called to me and told me that my new leg had arrived!

MORE SCHOOL LIFE:

In the old days teachers were allowed to render physical punishment on the children, and some of them were brutal. But since men were rough and tough in the early days, so also were children often much harder to deal with.

Generally, the women teachers were not so violent, but resorted to measures just as humiliating. Students were made to stand in the corner, facing the wall, while wearing a paper cap with "DUNCE" written on it for a half-hour, or maybe an hour. Or for something more serious children were made to hold out their hands while the teacher rapped their knuckles with a wooden ruler. That was painful enough!

Once, the little Asher boy in my room was called up for punishment, and he suddenly pulled out an open knife and made a slash at the teacher's throat! He severed her gold watch chain right by the side of her neck! After school she went with him to his home to report his conduct to his father. Upon hearing the story the father sought to attack the child in such a brutal manner that she stepped between them and told him that if that was the way he treated his children, he could expect nothing better from them. She had no more trouble from that boy ever after because he knew she was on his side.

Mr. Boudine, the teacher in the upper room and principal of the school once had something against Iven, I don't remember what, and he came to the Hotel. Iven and I were on the porch with a handful of small rocks that we had been throwing at a target in the street. He demanded that we throw the rocks down, and we did. He then just ran at Iven in a rage, shouting threats as he approached! Iven and I both knew that a teacher had no authority to punish a pupil in his own home and we were both defiant. I was on crutches and I stood on one and raised the other as a weapon. Papa heard the disturbance and came out and took care of the situation.

THE TRAVELING SALESMAN:

Mr. Peck, a traveling salesman, stopped off in Tehachapi for a few days. He wore a patch over one eye. He told us he was walking along a street in Los Angeles and a stranger had attacked him without warning. He knocked him down and jumped on him and stamped his eye out with the heel of his boot. The man thought he was playing around with his wife – an unfortunate case of mistaken identity.

Mr. Peck liked to play cards in the evening and since there weren't enough men for a game Papa had me play poker with them. Papa taught us to play cards when we were little, but never for stakes. Card games were for fun – if anyone got angry they were out of the game. Mr. Peck became interested in me because I too was maimed.

LORNA DOONE:

After he left he wrote letters to me for quite some time, and once he sent me a book called "Lorna Doone," of which I was very proud. My teacher wanted to read it to us at school so I took it to her. It was a very interesting novel about a little girl who in some way fell into a river and was swept over the falls into what would now be called another time-zone. She had many

adventures in the new land, but she was not happy there. She longed to go back home but could not find her way back up over the falls.

When we moved away from Tehachapi she had not finished reading it to the class and asked me to leave it with her. I didn't want to do it, but she promised to send it to me just as soon as she finished reading it to the class, so I left it with her. Well – she must have been a very slow reader because I am still waiting to find out what happened to poor lonely little Lorna Doone.

IVEN'S HAIRCUT:

Once, when our older brother, Ralph, came up from Bakersfield for a visit, he saw that Iven needed a haircut and undertook to do the job himself. Iven already resembled Papa alright but Ralph thought to intensify the resemblance and when he clipped the back of Iven's neck he raised up the clippers and cut off all of the hair that would go under a hat or cap.

Poor Iven – I still think it was a dirty trick. Then Ralph went down the street to the grocery store where a bunch of men were gossiping around the pot-bellied stove and told them about it. After a while Iven pulled his cap down over his head and ventured in. Soon afterward Delmer Haig walked in and someone offered him a quarter to pull Iven's cap off, so he did. This time Iven was so mad that he licked the tar out of him! Strange -- after that we had no more trouble with Delmer – he even wanted to be Iven's friend!

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE, GOOD AND BAD:

Ralph had met Tom Crawford in Bakersfield and they became great friends, so much so in fact that they each planned to marry a sister of the other to bind the relationship. So, one nice summer day Tom Crawford walked into the Hotel and introduced himself as Ralph's friend and visited the whole day. He told stories and jokes and entertained us all. He played my guitar and sang funny songs – among them was, "If I had a Scolding Wife." It was a comic series of things he would do if he had a scolding wife, and the chorus was:

"Oh, if I had a scolding wife,
As sure as you were born,
I'd take her down to New Orleans,
And trade her off for corn."

We did not know the purpose until he was about to take the train back to Bakersfield. The he asked Papa for permission to court my sister Myrtle.

It was the first proposal of marriage in our family and we were all quite excited. Tom's courtship was carried out mostly by letter and they soon planned to be married in Bakersfield on September 24, 1902.

Myrtle had never been away from the family before and in two weeks she was homesick. She was alone all day while her husband worked. So, Birdie was sent to Bakersfield for a week to comfort her.

The same day Birdie left Willis Gould Hartzell left for Bakersfield too, and on October 11 he and Birdie were married!

That was the first time I ever saw my father furiously angry. Papa was so mad that he took everything that Hartzell had left in his room and burned it! Willis Gould Hartzell was 45 and Birdie was only 17! I don't know how they fared or where they went.

Eighteen days later, on October 29, 1902, the final addition, Homer Hilton Hobson, was born into our family.

Iven Benbow Hobson (Nov. 4, 1861 – Oct. 4, 1942) passed away in Antioch, California, and was buried there.

Destiny's Call

By

Frances (Fern) Elizabeth Brewer

The Vessel

Believing God works in those living today
Two people were kneeling together to pray;
Souls intent only in seeking to find
A way to serve Him in His plan for mankind;
As if from one heart, from one mind, came the plea,
"Purge me of self! Then fill me with Thee."
Approaching the Throne, from this self-giving prayer,
An essence arose of a fragrance so rare:
"I'll make of this substance," said God, "that I see,
A vessel designed to draw others to Me."
He molded the vessel – a tiny glass bowl –
As sparkling and clear as a purified soul.

The Light

The Son filled the bowl to its out-curving rim
With Light, soft and golden, inherent in Him;
And then cast it down in the ocean of life

‘Mid greediness, envy and hatred, and strife.
The waters, when pierced by the bowl’s downward flight,
Stood like a wall ‘round a deep well of Light;
A soft mystic Light that came down from the sky
To vibrate unseen past the scope of the eye.
The bowl settled down on the sea’s murky floor
Firm as a rock – to be moved nevermore –
Passive it set ‘mid the rolling of sin
Its clearness maintained by the soft Light within.

The Darkness

The darkness assaulted the bowl with its might,
And sought to enshroud and obscure the soft Light;
Its minions were rushed past the Light to and fro,
They tried, but they failed, to extinguish the glow.
The Light in the vessel then spread far and wide
Pressing the minions of darkness aside.
Creating an outpost, a new field of Light,
‘Mid turbulent waters of mortal’s dark night;
It cleared the dark waters, and swept clean the sand,
And soothed the wild billows that raced o’er the land.

Souls in the Dark

Intrigued by the sight of the soft golden Light,
The populace thronged at the border of night.
That Light! Golden, beautiful! What could it be?
Some moved from among them more clearly to see:
They loved the soft glow and reflected the Light
That drew them so gently away from the night.
More crossed the divide ‘twixt the dark and the dawn
Then more, many more, to the soft light were drawn.

The Prince of Darkness

A dark, clumsy giant, the Prince of the night,
Stood waging his fight at the edge of the Light;
His might ‘gainst the Light of Creator’s Great Love,
That drew like a magnet when beamed from above.
He towered astride of an inky black well
And cast all he caught in some darker hell.
He showed no concern for the throng at his back,

Who seemed unaware of the Light, or its lack,
But tried to prevent those receiving new Light
From leaving his realm at the edge of the bight.
The wavering ones were the only ones caught
While pausing beside him a second for thought;
The sure, swiftly speeding from out of the night
Sped past him unhindered to enter the Light.

The Power of Love

A swift speeding current arose in the deep,
And from the Light's rim to its center did sweep;
Its in-rushing forming a vortex above
The bowl that was anchored by God's Shining Love.
Those fleeing darkness to enter the Light
Welcomed the current that speeded their flight
Nor ceased their own effort but sped with the tide,
Not looking backward nor turning aside.
When close to the source of the Light they drew nigh,
Their hearts were elated, their courage was high:
Drawn by the power of Love's Shining Gleam
They raced along gaily on soft golden beam
Straight to the lip of the eddy above
The luminous deeps of the Father's Great Love.

Transformation

Pausing a moment their faces shone bright
And even their garments reflected the Light!
In joyous abandon they leaped, and then fell,
One after another far down in the well.
When plunged in the vessel that held the soft Light
For one fleeting moment were hidden from sight;
And then reappeared at the top of the bowl
Transformed in appearance, translucent in soul.
Their purified hearts saw the Light from Above
And tranquil the rested in God's Holy Love;
Then rose from the depths to ascend beyond sight
Lifted by the Power Divine in the Light,
Risen in answer to Destiny's Call,
For this they were born! As was I! As were all.

Frances (Fern) Elizabeth Brewer passed to her rest on September 12, 1985.

Copied by Patrick L. Rampy, her grandson.