

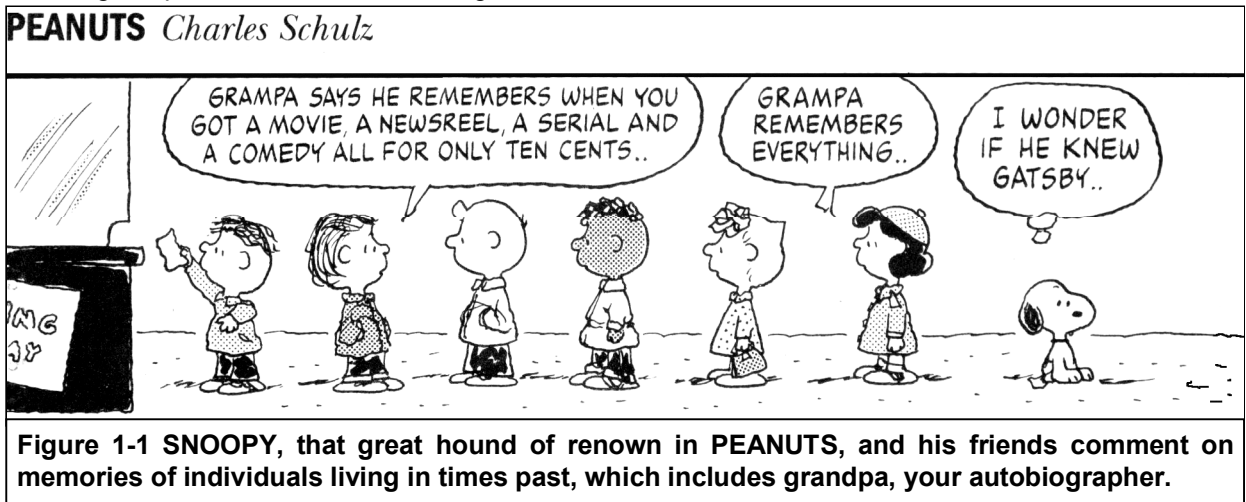
CHAPTER ONE

MY BIRTHPLACE AND EARLY YEARS

AN INTRODUCTION

To all of you who might be so bold and/or unwise as to say, "how could grandpa even think of writing about

Snoopy, himself? I must warn you; however, this first chapter may seem a little disjointed. It is being written without a plan as well as from memories conjured up by stories of others and a



events and stories that took place so far in the past", I will begin by inserting the words of one you all can identify with, i.e. SNOOPY. He is a mutt after my own heart who; obviously has wisdom far beyond his years, as well as a deep seated respect for the memory displayed by the elderly. I suspect that that keen discernment of his and his associates for the abilities of those living in the past stems from their many intellectual discussions regarding his battles with the "Red Baron". One could hardly experience such traumatic encounters without developing an appreciation for the wisdom and mental acuity we senior citizens have developed over the years. Now, with my credentials established, I'll move on to the matter at hand, namely, Grandpa Tom's autobiography. I feel sure any readers I might have must be waiting for it with great anticipation after such an introduction from

Because of that fortuitous timing, I often plead the fifth when faced with unpleasant situations.

few of my personal experiences, which I still seem to remember.

THE ILLINOIS YEARS

I was born of goodly parents (as Nephi said) in Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois on May 1, 1928 in a hospital whose name escapes me. I guess neither my reading ability nor my newly formed brain was fully developed at that particular time. In fact, many who know me today are still waiting for those two events. My mother had a picture of it, at one time (the hospital not my brain, silly). Valerie may still have a print since she went to the trouble of copying many of the old pictures Mom had. I did, however, manage to find a copy of my birth announcement, which is displayed in figure 1-2 and proves the reality of that event. Its validity is beyond question, because of mom's authorship, while aches and pains,

common to all senior citizens; verify the reality of my existence. Unfortunately, my copy of the announcement wasn't all there, as one can see; giving rise to the vicious rumors that I suffer from the same malady. This bodacious work may or may not confirm such speculation.

I was the fifth of nine children, having two brothers and two sisters older than I and eventually two brothers and two sisters younger than I. Because of that fortuitous timing I often pled the fifth when faced with unpleasant situations in life. Unfortunately for me, my

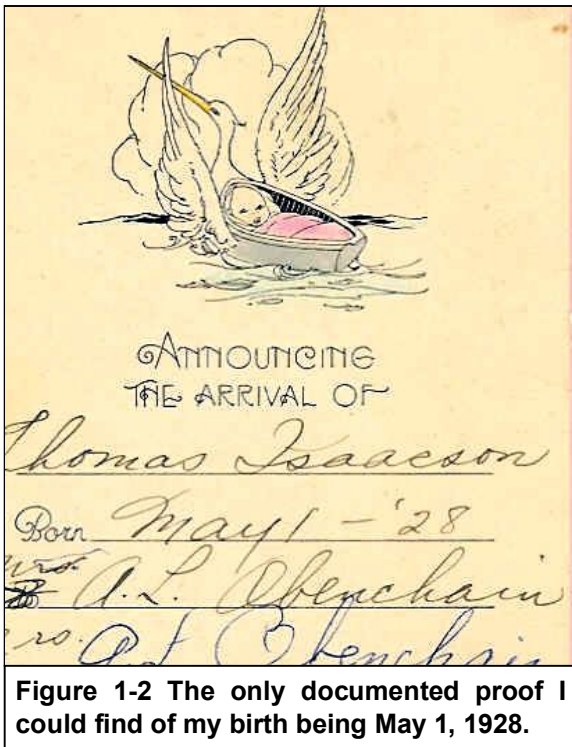


Figure 1-2 The only documented proof I could find of my birth being May 1, 1928.

siblings (especially Dan), didn't recognize that particular jurisprudential right of mankind. Fortunately for them, our folks were more concerned with the source of the next meal than the legality of the older kid's actions. Thus the fifth seldom was effective in curtailing my elder siblings questionable actions, let alone mom's, which occurred more frequently than I found pleasant. Mom and dad had come east some five years earlier, prior to the depression, with two daughters. Here, I as well as two older brothers and a younger sister Connie, were born, bringing the fledglings of our parents little covey to a grand total of six souls. My little portion of the family tree which has now sprouted and flourished from that humble beginning is illustrated, as an after-thought, in the appendix of the last volume for any

interested souls. Though modest by comparison to the tree of some of my siblings, it is healthy, growing, and becoming a thriving group of branches, none-the-less.

OF GENES AND ENVIRONMENT

As I previously mentioned, we were born of goodly parents. How good, I didn't fully appreciate until many years later after having gone through many parenting experiences of my own and observing families of ours and succeeding generations. Although there are many reasons for family problems, making comparisons questionable at best, I feel confident our parents had the important values of life pretty well in hand and understood the basic techniques required to communicate them to a growing family.

While it is undoubtedly true that we (their children) have all made our share of mistakes in life, I believe it is also true that we have absorbed in large measure those basic characteristics so necessary to a free society, i.e. integrity, a good work ethic, responsibility of a personal sense, a degree of tolerance for the acts of others and even a measure of charity. I believe ours was a stronger than average family, raised in difficult times financially speaking, by God fearing, unselfish parents committed to each other and to the family institution. While this may not seem unusual to many of our generation, it comprises a set of values, which seem to be rapidly declining in those generations, which succeed us. I credit our parents for instilling these important values in each of us in varying degrees, as evidenced by the lives we managed to carve out in society.

I don't know that I can remember my mother; let alone my father, verbally telling me they loved me. Yet, I intuitively knew that was the case by the way I was treated, by the priorities they established and by the very way they lived. Yes, they were committed to raising their children in a way that would prepare them to meet life's challenges and be productive members of society. I think mom accepted her role as mother and housewife willingly with no particular thought of achieving recognition or prominence on her own. While that was more the norm in those days, I never heard her complain in later years of her role or talk about what might have been. Even so, she knew the importance of school in preparing one for life and constantly urged us to do well. I credit her with the drive many of us found to obtain a higher education or

for that matter; achieve success in the business world. Such was not given to us but rather developed from our parents' example of industry, as well as by our own efforts and ingenuity. Mom, I think, simply instilled the desire within us.

Dad, on the other hand, provided a model of hard work, selflessness and integrity. He only achieved an eighth grade education, which I suppose was the norm in those days, but he displayed tremendous skills and understanding in his work as a carpenter. I still remember him pointing out to me, one day when we were going fishing, how the forms for some basement walls being poured for a lodge near Lowman, Idaho were insufficiently supported. He told me the walls would swell outward in the center after the forms were removed. I happened to go by there a few weeks later and sure enough he was correct. He seemed to know intuitively the requirements for a well-built house in virtually all the important areas. He also knew how to translate such knowledge into fact or the house itself. I believe he had all the necessary skills needed to complete a house from framing to brick laying, wiring, plumbing, etc. You name it and he could do it when it came to such building.

He always gave his best and was known for his integrity on the job. Hard work was as natural to him as was breathing. If he erred in the work ethic, it was for giving too much for the pay but never for giving too little or providing inferior quality. I think his example in these important areas provided the standard each of us boys expected to meet in the work place as adults.

I have included a picture of mom, dad and family in an early era of time in their lives, (figure 1-3), which I particularly like. I would guess it was taken in Illinois about 1925 because Phil appears to be about a year old. I think mom was an attractive woman, to say the least, and Madeleine and Delight were beautiful little girls. I'll even concede that Phil was a cute little tike even though it takes some imagination. They seem like a model family and in fact, I believe they were. I remember very little quarreling between my parents and certainly no abuse of any kind on the part of my dad. I do remember him walking out a time or two when words were getting a little heated on the part of my mom. In spousal relations I suspect his major fault would have been a failure to communicate because I think he would leave rather than argue. All in all, I remember our home life as peaceful with the

major problems being how to pay the bills or maybe settling quarrels among siblings. I don't suppose either is too surprising considering ours



Figure 1-3 L to R; Delight, dad, mom, Phil and Madeleine in Illinois around 1925.

was a family of nine, being reared during the great depression. It had to be a major



Figure 1-4 Mother's childhood home located at 1728 Charles Street in Rockford.

undertaking to simply feed such a group, let alone clothe and provide other care.

Rockford, Illinois was my mother's hometown, while Ketchum, Idaho was where my father was raised. They had been married in the latter town

soon after World War I and initially settled there. Actually, mom describes their several places of abode in her autobiography. I have often suspected they moved east at my mother's urging, although I never really knew. Contrary to my understanding over the years, the move was not motivated primarily by poor economic times. Rather, my dad and Uncle Guy had obtained good jobs in mining after some hard times in ranching. Apparently dad and mom made the decision to go east first and convinced Uncle Guy and aunt Mab to come as well. This occurred sometime in 1923. According to mother, they all settled in her mother's house at 1728 Charles Street. See fig. 1-4 for a glimpse of that rather nice home. Apparently, moving in with mom and dad wasn't something new to our generation.

According to mom, dad got a job in a large furniture factory in the finishing department. Though this experience didn't help with my birth, it did add to his later ability in carpentry. He worked among Swedes who had learned the trade of cabinet making in Sweden. As a child, I had known he was skilled at finishing work, building cabinets, etc. although I didn't question how he acquired such skills. I only knew he could build most anything we needed. I had seen him in action at our house on 17th and Irene streets as he transformed that dingy old yellow house of 19th century vintage to one with modern conveniences, which I speak of in chapter 2.

Apparently mother's mother rented the house out in 1925 and we moved to a five-room bungalow on Broadway (no address). My, what parents will do to get rid of children! Even expulsion tactics haven't changed, have they?

I was born while we lived on Broadway. Mother mentions Phil being born in the Swedish American Hospital and thus, I suppose that to be my place of entry into mortality, as well. In 1929 she indicates that we moved to New Milford, a little community about five miles outside of Rockford. According to her we lived in one

house a short while but then it was sold. We moved later to a second house, which she refers to as "nice", whatever that means.

If my information is correct and my count accurate, I figure that makes four houses we lived in while in the Rockford area from 1923 to 1931. I guess I followed that example in my own adult life, being constantly on the move, I mean. At some point my father, along with Uncle Guy, left the furniture factory and began working for the Elco Screw and Tool Company. Mom talked about how it was destroyed by a tornado and how she worried until she saw Dad coming towards her as he walked home. She gives a little more detail in her story titled "The Past Tents".

WHAT A NASTY COW

An incident took place while we lived in New Milford, which I either observed or remember from later stories. It involved mother and a rather mean and nasty old cow. It seems to me we were standing at the screen door looking into the back yard watching mom who had decided to chase some cows away. Apparently they had wandered into the yard and were contentedly grazing. She took a broom or stick and went after them. One old Bessie wasn't impressed because she sent mother up a tree where she stayed until the cow or cows wandered off or someone came to help. I can believe such an incident really happened because a similar situation occurred in Montana on a camping trip she took with Esther and I in about 1960 or 61. That story will have to wait, however, because it fits in better with my Schlumberger years and a trip she took with us. It shows just how deeply that experience had been imprinted in her mind.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

A story I often heard my mother tell regarding quite a scare I gave her while we lived in Illinois involved a snake. It seems I had been out in the yard playing. I guess I was 2 or 2 1/2. The earliest picture I have myself must have been taken at about that age and is included here as



Figure 1-5 Grandpa Tom at about 2 or 3 years old.

figure 1-5. Anyway I came in carrying what she supposed was a stick. I threw it on the floor and went about my business. A few minutes later she noticed it move out of the corner of her eye. Soon it was slithering off across the floor. She let out a scream and someone, I guess dad, managed to kill it and identified it as a spotted adder. That particular species, I understand, is a poisonous variety. In any case, the good Lord was taking care of me that day just as He has frequently watched out for other little ones throughout the ages. It seems He is especially mindful of those of us who learn slowly. What a blessing for me it was that day, which brings me to a poem I read in the Reader's Digest. It seems that here is an appropriate place for it.

***Said the two snakes to Noah,
Okay, we'll give it a try
But remember we're only adders,
And we really can't multiply.***

In 1931, when I was only three, the great depression was in full swing. Contrary to popular opinion, it wasn't sparked by my birth even though the crash occurred only a year later in 1929. My father was a carpenter by trade (maybe that's where my religious inclinations are rooted) but, as I mentioned earlier, he was now working for the Elco Screw and Tool Company. Although destroyed by the tornado, it must have been rebuilt because, according to mom, he still had a good job. I feel sure however, he was dissatisfied with that type of work and yearned to return to Idaho. Mother speaks of this as well and says she too had a longing for the west. The depression hadn't been felt, as yet, in the west and dad wanted to return to the country he loved. In any case, they decided to return to the Wood River area of Idaho and in the summer of that year (1931) we were on our way. Mom speaks of withdrawing our money out of the Broadway Bank just a day before it and several other banks went under due to the depression. She mentions that there was little more than sufficient money to make the trip, which should squelch any rumors that the massive Obenchain withdrawals contributed to the bank failures.

MATERNAL RELATIVES OF NOTE

I'll now say a little about mother's side of the family because from this point on, we'll be among my father's relatives and in his world, so to speak, which encompasses the majority of my experiences as a youth. I will include some photos and add the little I remember about them as well as excerpts from mothers "Past Tents".

Although I have several stories contributed by Phil, the earliest I remember was about our trip to Idaho in the good old Velie, which lies ahead.

JOHN ALBIN ISAACSON

John Albin is, of course, my maternal grandfather, a man whom I never met because he passed away on 9 October 1918 according to



Figure 1-6 The siblings of mom's paternal Isaacson family. FR, L to R; Lena, Hulda, Clara; BR, L to R; Albin (her father) & Karl.

our genealogy research. He appears to have been a pleasant man who would have enjoyed his grandchildren but such was not to be since his death preceded the marriage of our parents by some nine months.

It would appear from his photo that the old adage of male baldness being genetically transmitted through females of the family is factual. Though my dad's side of the family had their share of baldness, it may well be that Grandpa Albin was the main culprit behind the malady plaguing Guy and dad's descendents.

John Albin was born on 1 March 1863 in the little town of Skrukby, Sweden, according to mom. Our genealogy records place his birth on March 3, 1865. Assuming Aunt Clara's birth date is correct, mother's can hardly be right with John

Albin following 4 months later. He came to this country 19 years later or about 1884 to visit his sister Caroline and her husband, John Larson, near Rockford, Illinois. John Albin died, according to mom's recollection, on Halloween night in 1918 while she was teaching in Ketchum. He was a victim of the influenza epidemic, which ravaged the country and the world. Unless Halloween was celebrated in those days on the 9th of October, that day is also in conflict with Valerie's research. Mom states in her life's story that Mab and she left the next day by train for Rockford and the funeral. With all that effort (train rides were more like covered wagons) she still missed it. You see, she also came down with the flu upon her arrival, which must have compounded her grief.

CAROLINE MATHILDA OR LENA

Lena was born 2 July 1859 in Sweden. I gather from mother's remarks that she and Clara came



Figure 1-7 Alice Maria J. Parkerson, our English maternal grandmother.

to this country ahead of their parents and John Albin. Apparently, Lena married John Larson here and settled in Pecatonica just south of

Rockford. I have no memory of her, Karl or Hulda except from photos because my brain, you'll remember, didn't form right away and as stated earlier, some still question its reality. Aunt Lena is on the left in figure 1-6.

AUNT CLARA JOSEPHINA

I only remember Aunt Clara because she visited us in Boise while we lived on 11th street. That would have been in about 1939 when she was 76 or so. No wonder I remember her as an old woman. My goodness, that's almost as old as I am now. She was the second child of the family and just 3 years younger than Lena being born on 3 November 1862. She is on the right in the photo of figure 1-6.

UNCLE KARL AND AUNT HULDA

Karl and Hulda were twins who were born on 3 May 1869 in Sweden. They immigrated to the United States with their parents a couple of years after John Albin or around 1883. As I mentioned, my only memories of either are from photos. According to mother, Karl was part owner of the Columbia Coffee and Tea



Figure 1-8 Artie Obenchain family just prior to leaving Rockford on May 31, 1931. L to R; Tom, dad, Dan, Delight, Phil, Madeleine, mom and Connie.

Company with a man named Gust Kling. My favorite photo of him shows him standing beside their delivery truck, a model T Ford. Mother speaks of their delivery vehicle as being a wagon drawn by one horse. I guess they had modernized.

ALICE MARIA JANE PARKERSON

Alice Maria is my maternal grandmother whom I've shown in figure 1-7. She was born on

December 1, 1857 in Kirby Cane, Northfolk, England and passed away on 10 November 1930 while we were yet in Rockford. Unlike my mother's father, she must have seen me, and even Connie, prior to her death. Maybe she bounced me on her knee from time to time and told me how cute I was. I realize that's stretching my credibility quite a little but then grandmas do that kind of thing whether it's true or not. Anyhow, it's only my imagination; so don't any of you researchers try to disprove it.

Mom has a lot of neat stories about her mother, some of which appear to be her imaginations. Most, I feel sure, are factual even though such facts are based on someone else's memories or imagination. Besides, they're fun to read about and who cares anyway? Supposedly her maternal grandfather was of landed gentry in England and her mother led a rather protected life. This is contradicted by some work done by our second cousin, John Halborg who apparently told Madeleine that mother's English grandparents actually were hired help on some rather nice estate of some kind. We may never know the facts for sure until we meet them in the hereafter and they can then fill us in.

WESTWARD HO

I suppose it is normal to take a picture or so of departing loved ones just prior to their move and especially when one might not see them for a long time. Such would have been particularly true in 1931 with roads little better than cow trails and airlines non-existent. In our case, they must have wondered whether they would see any of us again. Consequently, we were lined up for a picture, which is shown in figure 1-8. What a motley crew we made.

Just think six kids and my parents in a grand old car called a Velie, I believe, even though I'm not sure I could spell it without someone else's help. Mom said it was a 1924 model, as depicted in figure 1-9 and that it was so big we were able to take lots of bedding and a camp stove from Montgomery Ward with us. I suspected that we had pulled a trailer because we camped along the way and I can hardly imagine getting six kids and two adults in such a car let alone camping gear and food. However, that doesn't jive with mom's or Phil's story to follow, so I guess we didn't. She speaks of camping in the rain in the basement of a city band shell and along the banks of the Missouri River, probably in the Dakotas. I do know that much of our belongings

were shipped to us later but that wouldn't make the crowded conditions seem any better.

I remember hearing a story that our gas stove exploded one evening but fortunately no one was injured. Apparently, it gave mom and dad quite a scare not to mention us kids. That's primarily where I got the impression we camped along the way; so you see, even though partially formed, my memory had started to function.

I remember Phil telling a story regarding Dan, the eternal optimist, and his effort to collect bicycle parts along the way. As I remember the story, Dan got it into his head (that's not easy) to build a bicycle upon his arrival in Ketchum. He decided to collect parts along the way and tie them on to an already overloaded Velie. I don't know what all he found but according to Phil, when Dad finally found all that junk hidden among the baggage, he put a stop to it.

Somehow baby pictures of me, other than that in figures 1-5 and 1-8, were lost in the materials that were shipped. I never was sure whether



Figure 1-9 The old Velie (compliments of Phil) in which the Obenchain clan rode.

that was by accident or design. However, it proved to be another fortuitous incident over which I had no control because I never suffered the indignities that my brothers and sisters did as their little bare behinds were viewed with various relatives and fiancées looking on. Even so, some have compared photos of me in my declining years to those chubby cheeks, considering my shiny crown and its resemblance to such chubby cheeks.

My memory of this trip to Idaho is clouded, much like the water Phil speaks of in his rendition of the trip, which I will now insert in italics. His version is undoubtedly more accurate than my memories and is titled,

“VEE-LIE? IN A VELIE? REALLY?”

Not many people remember that make of car. But we had one, a 1924 Velie, big, quiet, even grand, dark blue and black, fitted with a dash board clock, upholstered and adjustable foot boards in the back (Must have been so passengers could brace themselves for rough roads of the day).

The Obenchain clan bought it to come west from Rockford, Illinois in 1931. Even most of the main highways were gravel in those days. With six kids, all of their worldly goods, slow roads, hot summer, warm and cloudy drinking water, as well as, no doubt, a measure of trepidation, Dad and Mom undertook that 2,000 mile trek with the destination Ketchum, Idaho...off, we thought, somewhere in the distant reaches of a land parading cowboys and Indians and buffalo as far as the eye could see.

We, who were old enough, remember heat and riding, heat and riding and more heat and riding...an interminable journey toward strange but beckoning horizons, which, once passed,



Figure 1-10 The Dollarhyde or Heeps' house, as we called it, in Ketchum, Idaho.

would most certainly reveal our visions of western Americana. But another day of travel repeatedly failed to do so. Then, one day, after numerous discouraging new vistas, we came to Pocatello and the first drink of cold, clear spring water "from out of the mountains" as Dad told us. This was indelibly printed on the young mind because upon looking up from that drink; ... low and behold, there was an Indian, a real Indian mother with a papoose strapped to her back.

The Velie chugged on. We arrived in Ketchum on July 3rd, travel weary to the point that mother said they could not get little Tom into the car for a long time afterward. But the Velie brought us through.

Dad liked the big, bulky machine. He must have looked back on the westward trek and the old bus much as his pioneering forefathers of another day viewed their Conestoga wagons. He had modified some of the Velie's features a bit to better serve on the long and tortuous way west as well as to provide for the needs of the family while en route.

I watched him "make" the spare tires -- two of them -- doubles each, but very serviceable. I assume it was the high price of new ones that brought him to innovating as he did. With tin snips he laboriously cut the bead (with which the tire gripped the rim) away from one old tire (must have been a slightly larger size) and then forced it over an old Velie tire. In so doing, he kept the most worn section of the two opposite each other. Voile! A very heavy but serviceable double spare. He made two such and they were bound together and lashed atop the oversize trunk. This was the usual, large attic trunk, which he had substituted for the standard auto trunk fastened on the back of the car.

I don't recall that we used the old Velie much, if at all, when we lived in Ketchum and Hailey. It must have been running but perhaps it was the high cost of gas (11 cents to 13 cents per gallon) that kept it idle those four years.

However, it was the Velie power that brought us to Boise in 1935. Once again, packed with kids (eight now) and pulling a four wheel trailer, loaded with everything we owned, we said our "goodbyes" to friends and relatives and the Wood River country and set out for Boise. That day we made it as far as King Hill where we stopped and took a cabin for the night (no motels) and some ice cold watermelon, a treat that we talked about for years afterward because it had been a hot August day and a long ride in the old Velie.

The next afternoon we arrived in Boise and went to Uncle Edgar's place way out in the country on North 28th street. We stayed there for several days until the folks found a rental that wasn't afraid of eight kids. Not easy.

Well, to make a long story short, we made two more moves in Boise with the "Old Velie" before we were willing to acknowledge that its running

days were numbered. When we lived on north Eleventh Street, (about 1938) Dad traded the old bus in on a 1936 Terraplane, made by Hudson Manufacturing. Man, what a car. Streamlined...electric gear...the cat's meow. But "The Car" was still the Velie. Really.

What a great story. It brought back memories, of the trek to Idaho, which I had long forgotten, as well as events I didn't remember or which didn't even register on my three year old mind. I did have, you know even though it may not be apparent today. They will allow me to correct some of my more foggy visions of the past.

SETTLING IN KETCHUM

Sometime later we arrived in Ketchum, Idaho where we settled in a rather nice, it seemed to me, and big old house. How big it was I really don't know at least in terms of bedrooms or total rooms for that matter. It's obvious from the old picture I dug out of mom's personal history that it was a two story home. I remember it as the Heeps' house but mom infers that the correct name was the Dollarhyde house, shown in figure 1-10. At any rate I remember it as a heap of a house even though they may well have taken the dollars out of dad's hide each month. It came complete with a state of the art outhouse, a two-holer, as I remember. My, it was nice to have company on a dark night. Such lack of indoor plumbing was the norm in those days, at least out west. The Sears catalogue, almost universally present in such accommodations, was obviously meant for more than reading.

As I mentioned, I don't really remember how large the house was. I suppose I slept upstairs but I have no clear recollection of that area. I do remember the kitchen, living room and a downstairs bedroom where mom was in bed for a time. I also remember a crawl space underneath the house where we kept home bottled root beer for use on hot summer days and at least one occasion when dad was killing chickens for dinner. You see really important matters such as the location and preparation of food and drink, had now begun to register in my young mind, a characteristic I never lost. The chickens would flop around the yard for a time after their heads were gone which also made an impression on me. Later in life, I frequently pondered the similarity of their actions with those my own as well as those of certain other people I have known over the years, as we too lost our heads, at least for a time.

Dad's father was an original settler or pioneer in that area. Dad was the eldest of fourteen children. Needless to say there were plenty of relatives around. I can remember to some degree my Uncle Edgar's ranch/farm, my Uncle Alfred's house, Aunt Mabel McCoy's farm/ranch, Aunt Gladys's house, Aunt Alma's house in Hailey and to a lesser extent grandpa and grandma Obenchains' house with a big heating stove in the living room. I also vaguely remember going to Uncle Maurice's home.

My younger sister June was born in Ketchum about a year after we arrived. Mother was sick a good deal of the time while we lived there according to my recollections. I don't know exactly what ailed her but she spent a good deal of time on special diets and in bed. I suspect



Figure 1-11 Mom and dad skiing near Ketchum before marriage, I suppose.

more than just pregnancy was involved. As I remember she had a special diet, for a while, which included eating several raw eggs each day, ugh! I thought that was terrible. How in the world could a person eat something like that and actually feel or even get better?

INTELLECTUAL GEMS

I might as well throw in a couple of stories here, which Mom used to love to tell about me. Don't worry they are short. It seems when June took her first steps I was quick to recognize the change in her traveling mode and ran to Mom telling her to, **"Come quick because June is walking on her hind legs"**. Another time when Dad was plucking chickens for dinner I told her, **"Dad is taking the leaves off the chickens"**. Later in life Dad used to tell me, "it was after these incidents that he realized here was a child with an analytical mind and a future in engineering". Now, if you believe that, establishing the credibility of the rest of my life's story should be a breeze.

Connie reminded me of my bartering instincts which seemed to develop early. As you saw in



Figure 1-12 Mom's school class in Ketchum about 1918 providing an idea of the climate.

figure 1-5, I had quite a head of hair. It seems dad wanted to give me my first haircut and I wasn't exactly a willing patron. He offered me a few goodies to get my cooperation but I drove a hard bargain. He finally consented to give me two pennies and a Ford key if I would acquiesce. Actually, it seems to me a couple bowls of strawberries were thrown in for good measure. I vaguely remember being told how one of my uncles said to me, "if I didn't quit eating so many of them, strawberries would soon grow out of my neck." Later, supposedly, red spots did appear on my neck and maybe other places too and I got a little worried. Actually, that would have been a problem because what better deal could I get than my own personal strawberry crop.

RELIGION

We attended a small church in Ketchum, which was rather typical for a country style church, hard benches and all. As I picture it in my mind, it was a small white building on the right hand side of the road as we went toward town from our home in the Dollarhyde house. I don't have any idea what faith or denomination the little church claimed nor do I remember any other details except that it was small, the benches were hard and the sermons rather boring. What else would you expect through the eyes and ears of a 4 year old? I never looked forward to those chapel visits but it seemed they came on a regular basis. I had no choice but to wiggle and squirm rather than sit quietly until the weekly ordeal was over. I don't know how much good such worship did me other than instill, at an early age, a pattern for worshipping God.

KETCHUM CLIMATE

As I remember, the snow got very deep in Ketchum. In my mind's eye, I can clearly see it

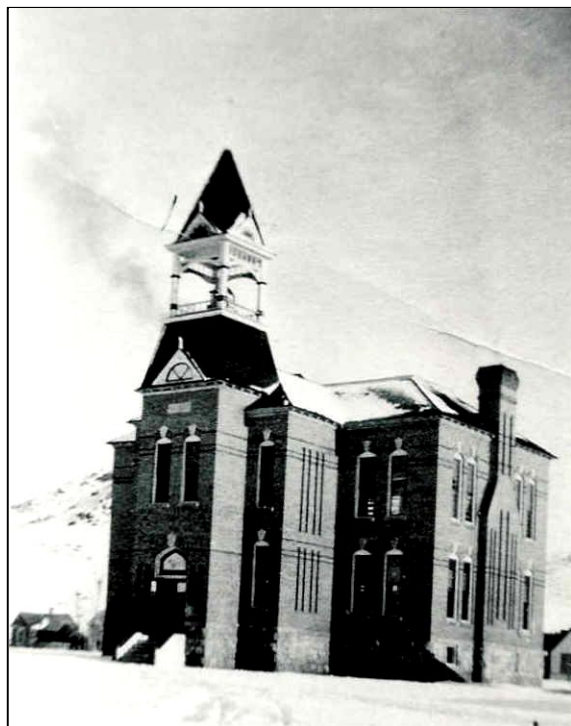


Figure 1-13 The school in Ketchum, Idaho where mother taught when she met dad.

piled up along the walks and roadways but maybe it was more my imagination because of my age (3 to 4). One Christmas, several of us kids got to go with Dad and Uncle Edgar, in a sleigh, to cut Christmas trees. I think we went

out near where our uncles Gene and George lived. In any case, I can still hear the bells on the horses' harnesses tinkling as they trotted down the road. Boy; that was a lot of fun for me.

Another time my cousin Fred and I were jumping into the snow off the roofs of various buildings we managed to get on top of. It wasn't too hard because the snow came up near to the eaves. We could then struggle up the roof to the ridge and jump from there into the snow providing it wasn't too high. What fun, that was! One time I was on a shed in the forest service yard whose ridge was a little higher than earlier buildings. Down I went into a big drift, maybe 4 or 5 feet deep. Anyhow, I got stuck in that drift. It was too deep for me to climb out of because my head just stuck over the top and I couldn't get any leverage to raise myself out. I struggled for some time, maybe 10 or 15 minutes but couldn't make any headway. Fred finally decided I was there for the winter I guess. Anyway he ran and got his dad who proceeded to dig me out. I have no pictures of that particular era but I thought I would insert some of my mother's pictures, which would have been taken some 10 years or so earlier. The weather as well as other things probably hadn't changed that much and besides, I like this particular picture of my dad and mom shown in figure 1-11. I believe it was taken while they were still going together, probably in late 1918. A second, figure 1-12, simply illustrates the snow again and mom's school class at the time she met dad. Next, figure 1-13 is the Ketchum grade school where she taught. Anyhow you can see the snow was real and not simply the imagination of an overly impressed 4 year old. Also it kind of gives you an idea of what kids looked like in that era (no designer jeans) as well as what they did with their spare time (skiing, throwing snow balls, etc). Kids weren't much different then, than they are today, except they had to improvise more. There were no readymade games or automatic entertainment machines.

To further illustrate the times I'll include another picture of dad as a young man, figure 1-14, which I like a lot. I don't know the exact vintage of this one. I suspect it predates his marriage to mom but I'm not sure. In any case, progress wasn't as rapid as today and, as I mentioned, times probably weren't that different in the early thirties. It's obvious he liked to horse around although, generally, he tended to be rather serious in nature. I guess he believed the old adage that **"if you picked up a calf every day**

while it was growing, you would obviously be able to pick up a cow at some later time". I don't remember, however, dad ever saying he could pick up a full-grown horse. Had he said so, I might have believed him; considering the fact that he could accomplish almost anything, at least in my admiring eyes.

His brother, Elfred, however, was the mischievous one. His natural ability to joke around and stir things up somehow got transplanted into Dan. He provided fertile ground in which such mischief thrived and somehow, it seems, I paid for it all my childhood years. To me, it was like poison oak, for the more I scratched to clear it up, the more it spread with no one willing to provide relief.

MEMORIES OF ODDS AND ENDS

Several other memories of Ketchum come to mind as I try to stir up that part of this old brain. I'm not sure they are particularly interesting but they do tell you what kinds of things impressed me. There was a hill near our house with a path



Figure 1-14 Dad horsing around while still a young man, probably prior to WW I service.

that led down to Trail Creek, I believe. We used to have great times there on sleds, pieces of tin and the like in the winter. Usually we stopped at the edge of the creek but sometimes we sailed clear across and up the bank on the other side. Of course, the creek was frozen over. Also we used to collect the icicles hanging from the houses. It was a contest to see who could get the biggest one without breaking it. Some would touch the ground and be rather heavy and hard to carry. Then again, I remember my introduction to real canned soup. One morning one of my sisters, Delight I believe and I were visiting Aunt Gladys when lunchtime came. She invited us to lunch and prepared canned tomato

soup with crackers. Boy; that was good! I didn't know soup came in cans or that stores actually sold such stuff. All I had experienced at the time was the home made variety.

Still other vivid memories of mine involve a fire and a bumblebee. One summer my older brothers and I were playing down by the creek. They were digging holes into the bank, which was rather high, at least from my perspective. For some reason they decided to build a fire in the holes or small caves. As you might guess, it got out of control and soon there was a grass and brush fire burning up the hill toward the house. I remember being very scared and my sister Delight coming to the rescue. She went to work with a rug or blanket and beat the flames out. Details aren't very clear in my mind but she was in control and from that day on, my heroine.

Another time I remember leaving the house with a slice of bread and honey headed for my cousins' house. Well, the biggest, nastiest looking bumble bee I had ever seen came buzzing along and fell into formation with me. He or she decided to take a little taste of the honey and landed right on my slice of bread. I wasn't sure just what would happen next nor was I about to wait and find out. I let out a yell, dropped the bread and, in the vernacular, made a beeline for home as fast as I could. That bee got the mother load because, you see, she didn't even have to process the nectar. I'd still like to see if she toted bread and all or simply scraped off the honey for transport.

A WAGON TRIP WITH DAD

One summer dad took me on a trip up Wood River, I believe. We traveled in a wagon, which I suppose was Uncle Edgar's. We camped out somewhere north of Ketchum and come morning the horses were gone. Apparently they had headed back home towards better feed. Dad took after them with me on his shoulders and went some distance before tiring enough to leave me on another wagon along the road. I'm sure I was a load and was slowing him down considerably. I stayed put on that wagon for what seemed to me an eternity but it was probably more in the order of an hour or two. Pretty soon dad came back riding one horse and leading the other. He picked me up and placed me in front of him on this big old

I stayed put on that wagon for what seemed to me, an eternity but it was probably more in the order of an hour or two.

Why, people came from as far away as Twin Falls and even Boise to relax in this languorous shadow of native custom as well as to enjoy that crisp mountain air.

workhorse and we went back to camp. Of course there was no saddle or bridle, only a halter to guide the horse. I really didn't care because my dad was in control. I had the utmost faith in him regarding his control of the horse as well as his concern for me. Times have changed. Can you imagine leaving a four year old in such circumstances today? I still can't remember the purpose of the trip, only the fact that I was alone with my dad and that time alone would not soon be forgotten.

INLAWS AND OUTLAWS

Still another memory of Ketchum involved Dan, Phil and several of my cousins as well as me. I specifically remember Alvin and Earl McCoy being there and, in fact, I believe they were the ring leaders. Some of the older guys under their leadership, I believe, swiped some cans of sardines, pork and beans, etc. from the local grocery and took them up into the loft of Uncle

Edgar's barn. There they were opened and eaten with crackers. That was my introduction to crime.

To the best of my recollection, we weren't caught and as yet, I haven't been asked to pay my debt for that infraction to society.

Logically (remember, I'm an engineer), Phil's next story fits in about here. I will insert it along with figure 1-15, a photo of Phil, Dan, Connie and I, which was taken in Ketchum in 1935, according to Sigrid from whom I received it. Connie isn't part of the story and though innocent, in that respect, she unfortunately hadn't learned to allow her picture to be taken with a group of rowdies. I can't recollect this story at all but apparently I was there. Anyway, his story typifies the kind of antics you might expect of a bunch of kids our age. He calls the experience, which follows, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes". If the older boys were scared, I must have been terrified. They were my protectors.

SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES

Ketchum, before Sun Valley, was a quiet little mountain town known more for its past than for its present. (1. It once had been the biggest sheep shipping point in the U.S. 2. It had sent more boys, per capita, to serve in World War I than any other town in the U.S.) So in this tale the "present" is 1931. However, even then it was something of a tourist haven --

summer tourists, that is. Why, people came from as far away as Twin Falls and even Boise to relax in this languorous shadow of native custom as well as to enjoy that crisp mountain air. I remember well when the first cars from the "lower country" showed up in early summer to park at Griffith's Grocery and "stock up" on their way to the cabin.

Others showed up then too but were not so welcome. They were the "painted ladies" who,



Figure 1-15 Dan, Connie, myself and Phil in front of the Dollarhyde or Heeps' house, which was taken in 1935.

in manifest contrast with their personal ostentation, took an old ramshackle, unpainted house for the season. It was just across the side street from the grocery and a few steps to the west.

At our tender age (five to eight years) we didn't know what it was that made the women of our family speak so critically of them. We didn't know why but we knew they were bad -- ba-ad women. So anytime we (Dan, Tom, the Callahan boys, et al.) went along the dirt road, we moved to the far side, away from the house, to pass -- then back into the middle of the road.

Well, Ketchum in those days was crisscrossed with wide paths and narrow paths (streets and alleys) and mottled with vacant lots. So we had the freedom to roam erratically hither and yon -- rather than geometrically as city folk must do. The town site was our oyster and the sun was our only clock.

One day we were out in the road between Brandt's Plunge and the Brandt home, thus a block south of the painted ladies place of abode. Then whatever it is that triggers a shift in the attention span of little boys dictated that we jump and run toward the back of the grocery store. That we did.

As we approached the rear of the store, running hard, we failed to note that we were running close alongside (not our usual approach) the house of the infamous women who "smoked and wore lipstick".

Too late, we suddenly found ourselves within arms-reach of the front porch railing -- and, sitting there relaxing were two of 'em -- Two -- smoking -- looking right at us.

We stood transfixed -- as if cornered by a cobra. They looked at us unsmiling. Then, slowly, one of them rose from her chair, stepped to the railing, took a deep draw on her cigarette, leaned over and "poof" blew smoke at us.

Sacre bleu! Sound the klaxon! Every man for himself! She's gonna get us! Eight bare feet clawed at the dirt road -- dust flying -- tore behind the old I.O.O.F. Hall before we dared look back.

It was some years before I learned exactly what the entrepreneurial spirit of those ladies had brought to our little corner of the world. And I can still see that woman. But now, in retrospect, I also see her humor. She had read us to a T.

SANTA CLAUSE WAS REAL

Let me relate one final memory of Ketchum before I move on. It involves my first recollection of Santa Claus and was so real that I wouldn't believe he didn't exist until I was about 10. At any rate Christmas Eve of, probably, 1932 we were all at the supper table including Dad. Dinner was about complete, when all at once there was a big noise in the living room including a Santa Claus laugh, bells and stomping boots. We jumped up and ran into the living room only to find an open door and toys from Santa around and under the tree. Most certainly Santa Claus had come to our house.

Who could doubt it with such evidence in plain sight? Later attempts by my siblings to convince me that dad was actually Santa Claus fell on deaf ears. I didn't want to hear their reasons. He had come, I had heard and I was convinced. Besides, what was the benefit of believing otherwise? It wasn't until years later that I found out my uncle Elfred was the culprit or maybe I should say the saint in red clothing. He had been quiet as a mouse while he did his work but boy did he raise a ruckus as he departed. I'm sure some of the older ones knew what was going on but I suspect Dan and maybe even Phil might have been fooled. As for me, the reality of Santa Claus was indelibly printed in my little brain; to remain there for another 4 or 5 years.

PORCUPINE IS EDIBLE

One day I remember dad bringing a porcupine home as he returned from work. I was really curious about the quills on such a critter and managed to get pricked a couple of times. Dad didn't seem bothered by them and proceeded to clean and skin him for dinner. Maybe it was the reverse, i.e. skin and clean him. That would have been the order for me. Anyway the family had porcupine for dinner that night with nary a sign of a quill nor do I recall any other ill effects. In fact, credit to that experience as being a major factor in the Obenchain kids development of rather sharp intellects.

I'm sure we had little in a material sense in those days. The depression was still severe but I remember no ill effects. My parents always provided the necessary food and clothes. However, by today's standards, we would have been classified as poor, but happy I might add. I'm sure mother and dad must have worried a lot about how to feed 7 children and I suspect our economic situation led to our move some two years later to Hailey, Idaho just 12 miles to the south. That must have occurred in the summer of 1933 because I started school there in 1934.

OUR MOVE TO HAILEY

We moved to Hailey in a wagon pulled by my Uncle Edgar's team. Mom mentioned this was necessary because they couldn't afford tires for the Velie. I suppose that was the reason for its lack of use while we lived in Ketchum as well as, rather than, the atrocious gas prices Phil refers to of 12 to 13 cents a gallon. Of course almost everybody walked wherever they were going unless they had a load of some kind. The wagon, I suppose, carried certain essential

items necessary to sustain us upon our arrival in Hailey. I suspect other loads followed but how or when I don't remember. The wagon we had wasn't much larger, if any, than a farm wagon but it was flat with no sides, as I remember, and maybe rubber tires. The tires may be confused with the trailer we pulled with the Velie on our move to Boise a couple years later. Anyway, that wouldn't have left room for much more than the seven kids now, would it? We ran or walked alongside the wagon or rode as our fancy chose, probably spending more time getting on and off than walking or sitting still.

It took all day to make that 12-mile trip and we arrived at our new home late that afternoon or early evening. The two horsepower engine pulling it seems about right as well, considering the roughly 2 miles per hour speed we maintained throughout the day. It does, indeed, give you a little more respect for those of our forefathers who came across the plains, particularly those who walked and/or pulled handcarts. The first thing we did upon our arrival, the smaller kids that is, was to run up to the grade school on top of the hill to play on the swings. Such items were either non-existent or too far away to fool with in Ketchum, I suppose, this being my first experience with them.

As I said, our first house in Hailey was located at the bottom of the hill on which the grade school was located. There, I attended kindergarten that fall, as well as the first grade a year later. The house had a kitchen, three bedrooms, a living room, dining room and a basement, I believe. My older brothers and I slept in one bed in the dining room converted for that purpose. Naturally, I got the middle of the bed and there was little sympathy for my complaints of being crowded, jabbed and rolled upon. It was simply part of my existence as the youngest boy at that time. The older ones got their choice and I took the leavings. Actually, that wasn't as bad as being Dan's punching bag on a rather regular basis. In all fairness to him, however, if he said boo, I ran to mom for protection. I wasn't what you would call a model of bravery, to say the least and Dan knew how to capitalize on such weakness. He loved to terrorize me at every chance. Could it be that his frequent terrorizing of me was, in actuality, hallucinations brought on by diphtheria and small pox vaccinations rather than reality? I still ponder that possibility but since both mental and physical scars have now disappeared, I have never arrived at a conclusion. I wouldn't dare ask Dan because he

would still play innocent as he did in those early days. Such was the rigor of being the youngest of three boys in a house screaming for space to accommodate 7 kids, their parents and another boy about to arrive. We all ate in the kitchen, which I remember to have been quite large, complete with a wood-burning stove. The bathroom was located to the rear of the kitchen, as I remember and a screened in porch with the dog's dishes extended out from the left side of the kitchen. It was there on that porch where I pulled a typical kid's mistake, which had some rather terrifying consequences for both mother and I. That's a story in itself, which I'll fill you in on a little later.

CHICKEN POX

It was in that house where my brother Carl, or should I say Frankie, was born in 1934, but his name change is another story which I'll cover later. Mom relates it very effectively in her stories of "THE PAST TENTS". Soon after Carl was born he came down with chicken pox, apparently carried by the nurse or maybe midwife (he was born at home). Soon it spread through the whole family and I believe we all eventually contacted it. We were quarantined for some of the time and only dad could leave the house to work and get groceries. Apparently he stayed somewhere else as I remember him dropping by with groceries and other essentials from time to time. I don't believe he was allowed to enter the house during the quarantine.

OTHER MEMORIES OF HAILEY

Maybe my worst experience of that time period was getting my first shots. It was a community effort and all of us in kindergarten lined up to be vaccinated for small pox and receive a diphtheria shot. I'm not sure whether my brothers and sisters were involved in that exercise as well but I believe so. I do remember, quite vividly, going to receive them with my classmates and standing in a line that extended out the door of the little medical building and down the block for several yards, maybe a hundred or so. I didn't mind the wait as much as the fear of the unknown.

It was also in that house where Connie fell down the basement stairs and broke her arm. I remember my mother worrying whether it would fully grow to maturity. However, I don't remember Connie ever having any ill effects.

In that house I managed to scare the wits out of my mother by teasing the police dog we had. I

was blowing through a piece of candy at her and she snapped at it, catching me just below the eye. Apparently, it bled profusely and mother thought the whole eye was gone for a time. She, of course, rushed me to the local doctor who apparently patched me up quite well finding only a deep cut below the eye. There never was a scar, to my recollection. It taught me a lesson, of sorts, by adding meaning to that old adage, "Let a sleeping dog lie".

Leave it to Connie to remind me of my abusive nature relative to her. Maybe I took out the frustrations on her that built up from interactions with Dan. It seems appropriate to blame him as a means for getting even for all those years of being under his domination. He'll never see this until it's too late and then the damage will be done. Anyway, according to Connie, while we lived in Hailey she was given a penny. She was too young to go to the store by herself but not me. So with generosity typical of big brothers, I volunteered to go for her. Being quite trusting in nature Connie handed over the penny and off I went. I purchased some candy, only one piece for a penny, and returned home eating it. She asked me where hers was and I said, "They would only give me one piece for the penny," and shrugged my shoulders as if to say, "What do you expect?" My effort seemed to justify the reward, at least in my mind, but for poor Connie it was a sad day indeed. No wonder she viewed my volunteer help in later years with somewhat less trust and confidence.

RELIGION AND VIRTUES

I know we went to church while living in Hailey but my memory isn't very clear about the building or any experiences therein. I suspect it was Baptist or something along that line as that seemed to be mothers and dad's religious leanings. All through our years of growing up, mother saw to it that we attended church. Although I questioned His existence later, my belief in God was probably established through such an effort on her part. I give credit to her and dad for various personal virtues mentioned earlier and which seem evident in all my brothers and sisters; such as personal responsibility, integrity, a strong work ethic and so forth. Their example and teachings were undoubtedly the reason such virtues were so well established, at least in my case. Some of the other kids may have been more conscientious than I about developing them on their own. That I don't know. Ask them. The

older ones, at least, may also have gotten something from the services.

SMOKING THE INDIAN WAY

Still another memory of Hailey was associated with smoking. Phil, Dan and I had been somewhere nearby and one of them, not me for heaven's sake, noticed a weed along the path whose seeds looked kind of like tobacco. Consequently, it had the name Indian tobacco or maybe Dan or Phil coined it, I'm not sure. At any rate we picked some and went home where we got some paper, old newspaper I suppose, and rolled our own cigarettes. We were sitting on top of an old shed facing the alley to hide from mom when what to our wondering eyes should appear, not Santa Claus, but mom coming home from the store. She looked at us and simply said, "**I hope you all get sick**". Well, I can't speak for Dan or Phil but, in my case, the good Lord honored her wishes. That experience may be the reason why I never took up the smoking habit later in life.

THE BIG FIRE

Another vivid memory I have of Hailey stems from a fire that occurred in the middle of the night. We had moved into a rather ramshackle old house for a period of time before moving to Boise. It creaked and it groaned at night, which stimulated my rather vivid imagination and produced fears not necessarily related to reality. I often lay awake at night listening for the monsters, which I was sure were prowling the house. On one particular night I heard fire engines and soon someone said, "**Look the store is on fire**". The name of the store escapes me but I do remember looking out the upstairs window and seeing the roof of a building enveloped in flames. I wondered as I climbed back into bed if it would spread to our house. After all it was somewhat of a tinderbox and would burn quickly. Would we all be able to get out in time and could we find a place to stay while we waited to move to Boise? I'm not sure I slept anymore that night. Now not only monsters were sneaking around but the house might also burst into flames any minute.

WASH DAY

We had a wooden washing machine (that is the tub was constructed of wooden slats held together with metal bands, like a barrel) while we were living in that old house. I'm not sure whether we had had it at the previous residence or not but this is where it comes to my mind.

Mom kept it in kind of a covered porch area, which had a dirt floor. The machine leaked like a sieve as you filled it with water, that is, until the boards forming its sides swelled sufficiently to seal off the cracks. She also used a washboard for tougher dirt, I suppose. All the drying took place on a clothesline or maybe draped around the house if the weather was too bad. I remember many instances over the years during winter when she or the older girls would bring in frozen pants, dresses, etc. and stand them in the corner to thaw. When they crumpled to the floor, it was time to hang them up somewhere.

GOING FISHING

One time I was with Dan and Phil down by a creek below a little diversion dam, I believe. I guess it must have been Wood River but I'm not sure of that. There were some other kids along who ran around with my older brothers but I can't remember their names (Remember, my memory was still only partially developed). I was at the height of my glory when I was with my older brothers. They were big and strong and really wise as to the important things in life. At this particular time the river below the dam was essentially dry because of the water being diverted to farms. Pools of water remained and in those pools were fish. Well, Dan, Phil and the others used gunnysacks to catch those fish and we roasted them over a bonfire. What a treat! I really looked up to my older brothers and as I look back in life, I now realize many of my antics were performed to impress them. I wanted their recognition and respect more than anything in the world. Of course I was never successful, being the little brother, and, I suspect, was only tolerated at best by those whom I looked up to.

MOVING ON TO BOISE

I believe we moved to Boise in the summer of 1935 and I was enrolled in the second grade there. Upon arrival in Boise we stayed for a while at Uncle Edgars and Aunt Mabel's house. They had preceded us to Boise and lived on north 28th street according to Phil. We slept under a big weeping willow tree in the front yard. I have a vivid memory of that because the area around the trunk was somewhat like a private room shielded from the outside by the willowy branches of the tree. I'm not sure how long we stayed, maybe a week, before mom and dad secured housing for us. During that time, I remember playing anti-I-over, kick the can and a little hide and seek in the evenings while staying with our cousins. That coupled with the outdoor

bedroom and necessary meals provided all the essentials of life in my opinion. What else could a seven year old ask for? What fun we all had.

OUR HOME ON HAYS STREET

We first settled in a house on Hays street between 10th and 11th. It was only a few blocks from the high school, which was also between 10th and 11th on Washington Street if my memory is correct. In the fall I can remember being out on the lawn and seeing high school age boys going by with their football uniforms. How impressed I was at their size and the fact they "played football". The house was green and owned by a Mrs. Soucie. She and her son lived in the same house on the lower floor.

BEDS, BUGS & WASHING DISHES

I clearly remember sleeping on the floor while living on Hays street and so said in my first attempt at an autobiography. I figured it was because we couldn't afford beds but was corrected by Mom in no uncertain terms. Apparently we were waiting on furniture to arrive from Hailey. I'm sure that is the case but to me it seemed like an eternity that I slept on the floor.

I also remember bedbugs being present in the apartment and, in fact, mom and dad had some difficulty getting rid of them after moving to Franklin Street, I do believe. The little critters weren't a figment of my imagination because the bites I experienced from time to time were real. Mom minimized the impact of their presence but to me the memories were unpleasant. I dreamed about them for sometime afterward.

We had a wood fired cooking stove while living there. One of my chores was to build the fire from time to time as well as bring in the wood. I distinctly remember reaching over the spout of the teakettle one time to take something from the stove. The kettle was boiling with a plume of steam coming out of the spout. Needless to say, that steam burned a nice blister on my forearm. One might say, "Boy did I get steamed". Talk about a lesson in judgment.

I also had to wash dishes. Man, did I hate that. I couldn't wait to become old enough to pass it on to Connie and June. You gotta remember, at that time, the only automatic dishwasher in the house was the kids and it wasn't guaranteed to remove all food remnants. In fact, it wasn't unusual to redo 50% of the work after inspection by one of the older girls. Man, they were tough and had little sympathy for excuses. They would

say, "No wonder you didn't get these clean. Look at all that garbage floating in the sink. Here, drain that mess and fix some fresh wash water". I couldn't see where a little garbage in the wash water hurt, as long as you rinsed the dishes off before drying. Even pointing out how hard we had worked had little effect on their less than tolerant mood. Talk about a wailing and gnashing of teeth after their inspections!

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

I still remember getting an airplane for Christmas with real propellers and two engines, no less. Usually we got one toy and the rest clothes. My, what a *time I had with that one toy. In the case of the plane, I would swoop around the house while imagining dangerous missions with difficult landing fields. I was at my best as I brought the plane to a stop on a small table or even a windowsill. Obviously, the enjoyment was 90% imagination and 10% equipment. The new clothes were of more importance I am sure and were also enjoyed to a degree but you can't fly a pair of britches gracefully through the air or land them on the windowsill, let alone fantasize regarding them.

THE BAREFOOT LIFE

Going barefoot most of the summer was another memory of that house and I stated it was tied to economic circumstances. I was again corrected by my loving mother. However, I do know dad had difficulty providing for us because work was scarce with the depression in full swing. Dad would not take welfare nor would he work on the WPA. Somehow he managed to provide for a family of 8 kids at that time. In any case, whatever the reason, I ran around all summer without shoes and in so doing managed to run numerous nails into my feet as well as stub my toe on almost a daily basis. I can remember soaking my foot in Lysol but that's about all. Band Aids weren't around, at least in our household, and bandaging was with a clean piece of cloth and a little tape. I suspect any attempt to keep such a wound in a sanitary state was defeated as soon as I managed to get free and able to exit the kitchen door. Why gangue green or some equally severe infection didn't set in, I'll never know, unless the good Lord was watching over me.

RANDOM MEMORIES ON HAYS

In the summer mom would buy fresh prunes, which we would wash, cut in half, remove the seed and place them on a sheet on top of the

garage roof to dry. If successful, i.e. if the birds didn't eat them, we could store them for the winter. They made great toppings for pancakes, etc.

At that time the dairy industry had such power that margarine couldn't be sold looking or tasting like butter and it became a weekly activity to color a couple of pounds. Margarine was much cheaper, of course, and would have taken over the market in the thirties had it been anywhere near as tasty as today. In that era, you bought margarine as a white 1 lb. block, colored it with the food coloring provided and salted it as well. Of course, we could then mold it into cubes or some other preferred form. We usually ate it out of a bowl, in whatever form it was left, by the kid who had colored it, i.e. lumpy and variegated in color. You can imagine, with kids like me involved in the process, it was never a nice even color and the completed product was less than appetizing. Of course, we weren't picky either and ate the same with gusto; on toast, pancakes or anything else needing a spread. We had all learned to eat that which was placed before us before someone else did.

Yes, you might say, competition at our house was in striving to get your fair share of whatever was placed on the table. Though I might have been a wimp in many ways, I fared quite well in surviving at the family table. Long arms and a quick reaction were essential if one was to compete.

I think Delight, and maybe Madeleine, took a year off from school to help mom at different times. Delight's turn, I remember, occurred while we lived on Hays street. She didn't get behind in school because of having skipped a grade earlier. Older sisters being kind of in charge of the house didn't help us younger ones. They fully expected us to do our share of the work and not only that, they followed through on our assignments and even checked the results, as I previously indicated regarding dish

washing. Man, life was tough with ambitious sisters in charge.

HAPPINESS IS IN THE MIND

Such were the rigors of life in the Obenchain household in the thirties. We had little in a material sense but life was good and we were happy, or at least we thought we were. That's all that counts, I suppose. I never remember feeling we were unusual. Few families had much in a material sense. We might have had a little less per kid because of the size of the family but our folks taught us to accent the positive and eliminate the negative, so to speak. We didn't need welfare because we could make it on our own and would rather do so. That was the important thing in life as far as dad was concerned. We knew we could make it because dad said so and, in my opinion, he knew most everything. Things might be tough for a while but eventually they would get better.

Dad had no use for help from the government and held little or no admiration for those that accepted it and particularly those who

Dad would not take welfare nor would he work on the WPA. Somehow he managed to provide for a family of 8 kids at that time.

demonstrated little or no initiative to earn what they were given. He loved his independence and would rather live in a shack and go

hungry than sell the same for a handout. He was a man of integrity, determination and strength, a type of individual somewhat uncommon in society these days, even a man whose virtues I have always wanted to emulate. He typified excellence as a father and husband as well as in his chosen field of carpentry. Society could use more such individuals who worried about their families more and less about their personal image and their temporal achievements. That I can somehow approach his example as a father, a husband and contributor to society has been my goal for some time now. How close I might have come to that goal at this point in life can only be judged by the good Lord, I suppose.