FOX TALES ..... by JD FOX

A SUMMER TO REMEMBER, 1947

Cover Illustration by D. R. Hodge

A SUMMER TO REMEMBER, 1947

In 1947, two young men who had not been to war, and had never been far from their parents' side, left their home in Texas to seek lucrative summer work in Oregon.

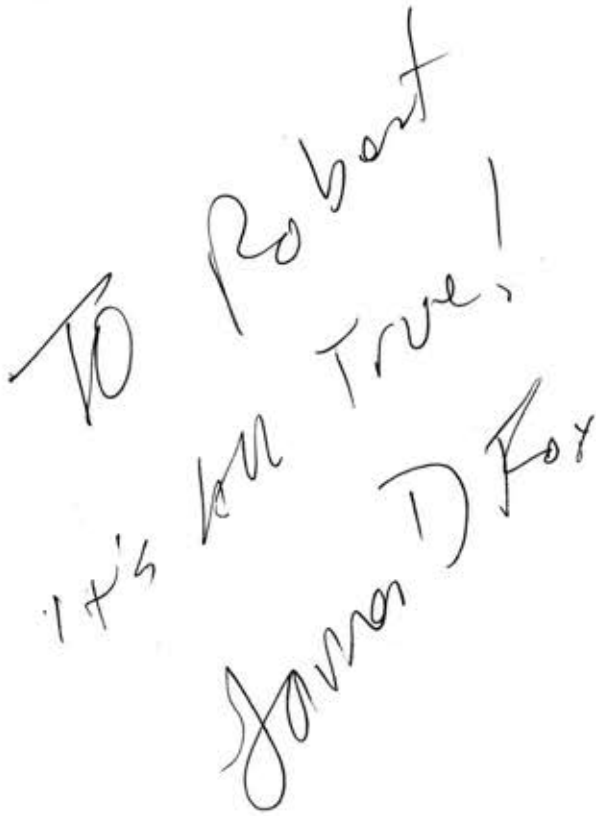
They dreamed of large paychecks and great adventures.

They found the adventures.

They fought to hold their car on winding mountain roads during a freak June snow storm, yielded to the forbidden allure of a burlesque theater, learned to hop a moving freight and witnessed the aftermath of a deadly train crash.

Large paychecks were hard to come by. In the summer of '47 gasoline was less than 20¢ a gallon, big hamburgers were a dime and the movies cost only a quarter. A boy could take a girl out on a date for $1 and still have change left over. The only catch was finding the dollar.

A Summer to Remember, 1947 tells how the two 18-year-olds handled—or mishandled—the situations in which they found themselves.



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A SUMMER TO REMEMBER, 1947 brings a warm and folksy style to a wonderful tale from a different time and place. We long for that innocence and adventure again. The story is refreshing and uplifting.

—Albert Marino, Ed.D.
Securities executive

JD Fox is a good teller of tales, richly evoking time and place. Each of his sketches contains a bit of humor, a suggestion of suspense, or an ironic statement of a lesson learned. A SUMMER TO REMEMBER, 1947 will be enjoyed by readers of all ages.

—Betty Wilke Cox, MLS
Author and librarian

Compliments to JD Fox on his ability to organize and convert his boyhood experiences to story form. I enjoyed reading A SUMMER TO REMEMBER, 1947 and wish Fox many happy returns in his writing career.

—Ron R. Barrick
Attorney at Law

Limited First Edition

Fields Station, Oregon, 1947. This is a reproduction of the pencil sketch the author made at the time.

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FOX TALES

by

JD FOX

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Dedicated to my wife,
Charlotte Anne,
without whose encouragement
this book would never
have been written.

GROWING UP

In the spring a young man's fancy is supposed to turn to love, but I was too broke to be in love.

In the summer of 1947 gasoline was less than 20¢ a gallon, big hamburgers were a dime and the movies cost only a quarter. A boy could take a girl out on a date for $1 and still have change left over.

The only catch was finding the dollar.

Oh, there were a lot of things you could do for free. Trouble was, most of them didn't impress the girls or even hold their attention for very long.

After a while a boy really needs to have some money in his pocket—not to spend, but just to make him feel like a grownup.

There's a funny thing about growing up from a boy to a man. What does it take? When does it happen?

Some boys have to try the smokes and booze. Others pick fights. I didn't fit into any of those categories. It seemed to me that if only I had a couple of bucks in my pocket, I'd feel more like a grown man.

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Many years later a good friend of mine from a more affluent family than mine said his father had told him, "Son, a man should always have $300 in his wallet that he doesn't intend to spend if he wants to feel like a gentleman."

His father was right. Despite inflation, a man should have enough money on his person to remove himself from unexpected emergencies: fix a flat, buy a tire, or get out of jail.

The feeling is independence, and independence helps a person's self esteem. A man must have self esteem.

The summer of the year before, I had taken a job for a while with the Keith Produce Company, unloading produce from railroad cars and storing it in ice houses or refrigerated warehouses.

The lightest load I handled was a 100-pound sack of potatoes, and the heaviest was a 125-pound crate of lettuce. The lettuce crates were always filled with chipped ice that ran down on you in the summer heat while you stacked or attempted to stack the crates five high, on their ends, in the warehouse.

Take a glance sometime and see how long a lettuce crate is and you'll know that the top of three stacked crates is higher than most grown men can reach. Keith Produce didn't have any forklifts in those days, or if it did, it didn't waste them on the job I was doing. It paid 52¢ per hour and it was a tough job.

I never liked that job. The work was hard, the conditions were tough, and the foreman had a mean disposition.

I gave up the job at the ice house for a job in a combination feed store and filling station. The station was on the Iowa Park[1] road only about three miles from our home, so the fact that I didn't have a car didn't matter.

The hours were seven at night to seven in the morning, seven days a week. That meant that for every eighty-four hour week I worked I earned an even $20. There were no coffee breaks, no holidays, no benefits. But there also were no taxes, and the sacks of feed and bales of hay didn't run ice water down my back when I hoisted them on my shoulder.

Even though Wichita Falls, Texas was my hometown—and I had lived there most of my life—our family had just moved back there in the summer of 1946.

From August 1944 until June 1946, my family had lived on the high plains in New Mexico.

We had moved to New Mexico for my Dad's heart condition. Mom and Dad sold everything they owned in Texas and invested in a thousand acres of land in central New Mexico. That was during World War II and we took with us some expectation of making money by growing pinto beans to help the war effort.

My Dad's health was bad but our efforts to raise beans were worse.

While we were there my sisters' two kids lived with us—Margaret's son and Louise's daughter, both the same age.

Louise's husband, Gerald "Tex" Jones, was in the Army. Margaret and Louise were in El Paso where the

A COWBOY'S LIFE FOR ME

Those two years in New Mexico meant a lot to me. Living in such remote surroundings can teach a boy many lessons.

We lived one hundred miles southeast of Albuquerque and a hundred and fifty miles northwest of Roswell. Our home was forty miles from the nearest paved road. The closest store and gas station was seven miles from our house.

How did you find our place? Just keep going until you think you've gone too far over caliche washboard roads—and it was still another twenty miles.

We heated and cooked with wood. We had no electricity, no running water, no indoor facilities. Did someone say telephone? That area didn't get telephone service until 1987.

I rode a school bus thirty miles each way to school in Corona, Lincoln County. In the winter when it snowed heavily we kids had to get out and push the

bus over the hill coming and going. If it snowed a little heavier we didn't get to go to school at all.

By the way, school let out for important events like the bean harvest in September and the deer season in November.

Since I was the only boy at home and with two younger sisters, my everyday chores were cutting wood, milking cows, plowing and building fences. That didn't leave me much time to get into trouble even if I could have found any.

Now don't get me wrong. I didn't suffer. In fact, I had a great time. I had game to hunt. I had a string of horses and I broke them to ride all by myself. Ginger was my favorite. I had bought Ginger as a yearling Palomino colt with money I'd made delivering newspapers and prescriptions for the Brook & 8th Drug Store back in Wichita Falls. When we moved to New Mexico I took Ginger with me.

Not bad for a sixteen year old kid more accustomed to a sitting on a bicycle than a horse. Our place in New Mexico was a great place for a teenager to have fun.

We had some great times in New Mexico, my Dad and I. It was the time I really got to know my Dad. We had much to do together—playing cowboys and hunting deer, bear and lions in the Lincoln National Forest.

Maybe it was just my age but there was never another time for me to enjoy my Dad as I did in those days in New Mexico.

The only trouble with being bean farmers was, we couldn't afford to wait three to five years to make a

bean crop. Our family was accustomed to a payday that came a little more often than that.

My Dad's offer in June of '46 to return to his old job with the Doran Drilling Company was happily accepted by the owner, "Doc" Doran. Dad's old routine of working long hours at Doc's garage along with several days in the field was resumed almost as if there had never been a break of two years.

It never occurred to me to ask my Dad for financial help. It was obvious—even to me, just a kid—that he had his hands full without my schooling as an added burden. So I had to do something.

In the Forties there were still some country people who traded work for vegetables but the people I was dealing with had progressed to cash transactions. Cash was one of the commodities that I did not possess.

You might say all my assets were tied up—at the hitching post, that is.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS WITH A PLAN

The summer of 1947 had to be different. I needed money for the next semester of college, and a couple of extra bucks in my pocket would feel awfully good. I always had a job of some kind, but most of the time there was nothing left after payday.

Early in '47 I got a job at a little flying field on the Iowa Park road, just a few miles west of our house. The Gilchrist Airport was owned and operated by Col. H. R. Gilchrist, a World War II veteran who had flown with the Air Transport Command.

The deal was that I worked from noon until dark on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and all day Saturdays and Sundays, in exchange for flying lessons. I got one and a half hours of flying per week in a J-3 Piper Cub[2] for my labor.

No money changed hands; I received flying time only for my labor.

The Cub rented for $8 per hour, so I got what amounted to $12 worth of flying time for the equivalent of three full days of work.

My instructor, T. E. Kane, normally received $2 per hour for his time, but because of my enthusiasm, he donated his fee. I never asked him for free instruction. He just did it for a kid he knew wanted to be a pilot and didn't have the money.

Col. Gilchrist would let me trade J-3 time for Stearman[3] time, but it would cost me more than double.

That meant I was so busy learning how to fly that I had no time left over to work for money.

So by the time my freshman year at Hardin Junior College (later named Midwestern University—now Midwestern State University) was out in June I was really flat. Eighteen years old and broke—but I had ideas.

My older sister, Margaret, was working as a telegrapher[4] for the Southern Pacific railroad in Oregon. My other older sister, Louise, also had been a telegrapher there, but she had quit her job when her husband, Tex Jones, came back from World War II.

Both sisters gave glowing accounts of the near miracles of living in Oregon, and of the money growing wild alongside the roads. Their stories described how much fruit grew in Oregon. There was nothing to compare with these stories in Texas, or anywhere else we had ever been. The fruit on the roadside was free for the picking, and the Oregon fruit growers would pay fantastic wages for pickers in their orchards.

Now that I think of it, that sounds a lot like the tale my Uncle Dave from Oklahoma used to tell about going to California in the Thirties. Uncle Dave came back broke and nearly starved to death, but he told us, "It was wonderful, boys. You just can't imagine, since you haven't been out there like I was."

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[2]J-3 Piper Cub — The little two-place, single engine, fabric-covered yellow (yes, always yellow) airplane which was by far the most popular type of its day. It is still popular as a classic and is even now available in kit form for the individual to build. They had four-cylinder engines. Some were 65 HP and later ones were 85 HP engines. They were super simple with no flaps, no constant speed prop, no retractable gear, and very few flight instruments. The gas tank was not in the wings like later high wing airplanes, but instead it was located between the engine and the pilot. The filler cap was centered directly in front of the pilot's eyes and a wire protruded through the cap. The part of the wire inside of the gas tank was embedded in a cork and floated on top of the fuel supply. The part of the wire outside of the tank had an L shape bent at the top. The pilot was constantly reminded of the fuel left in the tank.

[3]Stearman — The bi-plane of the late Thirties and early Forties that was widely used for flight instruction by the military. It was also known as a PT-17 or PT-27, depending on whether it was a Navy model or an Army Air Corps model. It was a favorite of many pilots who did aerobatics at the time.

[4]Telegraphers — The railroads found it necessary to change the requirements for the job title of Telegrapher during World War II. Prior to the war the job required a man with experience and knowledge far beyond that which was actually needed for the job. For example, they needed to be expert in telegraphy even if their assignments placed them in a position where they never used telegraphy. It was probably a negotiated deal with the union to keep the job's wages up. The war took many of the trained telegraphers and the railroads, with the concurrence of the union, changed their requirements and allowed women to be trained quickly to fill the vacancies. The quickly trained women replacements for the men gone to war were not even taught the art of telegraphy. None was taught the Morse Code.

THE ADVENTURE NEEDS PLAYERS

That was about all it took for me to stir up my closest friend, Charles Roby.

Charles was in the same financial plight I was. He lived in Iowa Park with his widowed mother, a school teacher. Charles was a busy boy. We met in engineering drawing class on the first day of college. He asked to share the drafting table where I was sitting, and we were good friends almost before he got seated.

Charles knew about a lot of things like working on radios that I didn't know, and I had been places and had done things that he hadn't, so we were a natural fit.

Our common interest was engineering, but Charles wasn't much good at drawing. I could help him with drawing and he could help me with the things I had missed in the little country high school from which I had graduated.

Besides, Charles had a car! It was an old Dodge, with a hole in the side of the crankcase patched with a piece of tin can, but it was wheels. Wheels meant you could date a girl, if you had the money to buy gas.

Since Charles lived in Iowa Park and had his own car, sometimes he would stop on the way to school and give me a ride. When he didn't drive we rode the school bus. High school girls rode the school bus too, and you know how sophisticated college boys can affect high school girls.

Either way, Charles and I were together almost every day.

We were a pair, all right, and when I started to tell second-hand stories about the big money waiting

The author, aged eighteen, and please note: no wavy hair.

The author's friend, Charles Roby, also eighteen. The girls never had a chance.

to be picked up in Oregon, we had to find a way to get there.

Even a couple of kids like us knew that the old Dodge wouldn't make the trip. We had to find another form of transportation.

About that time Charles came up with Kenneth Roberts. Kenneth had a '37 Ford with a bad engine, but his father was willing to pay for a new one. Kenneth had a car and money, and he was our new best friend.

This gets better. Kenneth was going to Washington State for a summer job with the U.S. Forest Service. He already had his letter of acceptance and everything. All he needed was a good engine in his Ford, and he had just met a couple of new friends who knew all about changing engines in cars.

That Kenneth was one lucky fellow!

Since my Dad operated a garage, we even had a place to do the work. Yes, that Kenneth sure had the luck. The fact that Charles and I had never changed an engine before had little to do with our enthusiasm, and besides, my Dad would keep us straight.

Well, keeping us straight might be too much even for my Dad, but he could make sure the Ford ran after we got through with the job.

You might appreciate a little more insight into the personalities of the players in this little adventure.

Charles and I were certainly not just alike, but we fit. We had similar likes and interests, and maybe we could have been described as boys who were always up to something.

I was very bashful with the girls and reluctant to ask for a date. Charles was just the opposite. He'd had plenty of practice dating and no fear of rejection. Charles had brown eyes and a sort of wavy, dark blond hair. Girls could never resist a guy with brown eyes and wavy hair, and if the hair was dark blond then the girls were certainly goners.

Charles and I were both mechanically inclined. Charles had developed his talents out of necessity. Mine came mostly from good luck. I could always do better accidentally than I could do on purpose. We both laughed and kidded a lot and enjoyed each other's company.

Kenneth, on the other hand, was a more serious type. He had already decided what he was going to do when he finished college. He was going to work for the government, probably as a forest ranger or something like that.

So there we were, a couple of guys who were ready for any new adventure, and one serious lad with a plan and a car.

The contrast of personalities between the solemn young man and the dreamers was considerable but not critical. It was the dreamers who would be together every day for the rest of the summer. Kenneth, with his serious attitude and well-laid plans, was not going to distract me and Charles from our fun.

You see, Kenneth's plan was farsighted. It had to do with his career. Charles and I planned only on having an opportunity to see a new and strange part of the world and maybe earn a little money.

So we all had a plan. Little did we know then that the plan of the dreamers was a forecast of our lives in later years.

The Ford stayed at our place while we worked on it. My young sister Wana Beth enjoyed playing house in the back seat when Dad and I weren't busy pulling the engine out.

The engine job became a little more complicated along the way. The first thing we found out was that we couldn't buy an engine to fit the '37 Ford. We could, however, find a brand new '47 Mercury engine! This was almost like building a hot rod. The prospects were exciting for three kids who didn't know anything.

My Dad was somewhat less than excited.

"Well, James," Dad said, "you can see the engine mounting bolts don't fit."

As Johnny Cash said in his song, "Somebody moved the holes." With a welding torch and a lot of work my Dad finally got the Merc engine into the Ford shell.

"That half-breed ought to really move when you get it onto the road," he warned us. "But you better take it easy—you can burn up that new engine if you drive too fast.

"Keep it under fifty for the first few hundred miles," he advised, "Give it a chance to break in. I know you know all about cars, but remember, boys: that '37 Ford has those old mechanical brakes. You can get her going a lot faster than you can get her to stop."

Those were fateful words.

THE ADVENTURE NEEDS FINANCING

The deal was that Charles and I would put in the engine for Kenneth and that would pay for our part of the gas. We still had to come up with cash for everything else on the trip. We might even need a little money to live on until we found jobs.

Charles and I were dead broke.

The only property I had to sell or trade was my little mare, Ginger. I'd taken her to New Mexico and brought her back with me when we moved home. She was now about four years old and well trained as a saddle horse. Much of the time I rode her bare-back and without a bridle.

Ginger would come to me when I whistled, shake hands, kiss me on the cheek. But the times were desperate, and desperate measures were called for. Considering my financial plight, the mare was expendable. The best offer was $125. That seemed fair since I only

Two pals, Charles and James, ready for an adventure in their brand new Army surplus bomber jackets. (The jackets cost only $4.) It was summer time, but they had money in their pockets that had to be spent.

paid $100 for her when she was a colt and I had ridden her for over three years.

Well, I had my finances figured out for the big summer adventure. Charles traded and sold junk for his share, so we were ready. The money was already beginning to smoke in our pockets.

The Army Surplus store in Wichita Falls had real U.S. Army Air Corps bomber jackets, caps, boots and everything. In those days, just a couple of years after

the end of WW II, Army surplus was just that. While we were shopping in the surplus store I bought an empty binocular case. I wasn't sure what I'd do with it but for a quarter I figured it was a bargain.

We bought a sheepskin-lined jacket, a sheepskin-lined cap and a B-4[5] bag for each of us. After all we were buddies and we wanted to look just like our heroes in the movies. I was a new pilot and Charles wanted to be one, so now we were going to dress the part. We had money in our pockets, we were dressed like real aviators, and we were about to launch an adventure of unknown riches and consequences.

We couldn't wait.

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[5]B-4 bag — To my knowledge, the first of the hang-up or folding type of clothes bag. Uniforms could be carried on hangers then when the bag was folded over and the zipper closed from one side to the other it was easy for a bomber crew to carry. It was Army Air Corps issue and a favorite with all.

SNOW IN JUNE?

We three adventurers left Wichita Falls in the early morning on June 21, 1947. Kenneth drove because it was his car. No matter, we were all so excited that we could have been sitting on cast iron seats and it would have been okay.

We spent the first night in a motel in Ratón, New Mexico, and ate in a café. We were having the time of our young lives, and we felt rich.

The second day took us through Denver, Colorado. No one told us what route to take. We just followed what looked like the shortest way. In the early afternoon we were west of Denver approaching what the locals referred to as Rabbit Ears Pass.

The day had become overcast earlier, and the weather was gradually getting worse. It was looking more like winter than summer, and our sheepskin jackets were really feeling good.

Then it started to snow. The flakes were as big as half dollars and they were falling so thick you could hardly see.

Charles and Kenneth were gleeful, just as if they were back home in Texas and watching an uncommon sight.

It was uncommon all right, but it caused some ominous feelings within me. It didn't snow like we had seen in Texas; it snowed like I had seen in New Mexico, and I knew it could keep falling until it was over your head.

After all, it was the 22nd of June. It was summer time. This had to be just a temporary period of some kind of freak weather. No problem. Kenneth kept driving because the snow was melting as fast as it hit the ground.

The snow continued to fall, and then it began to accumulate on the road.

We noticed that many of the cars in front were turning around and going back. Kenneth continued, but slower. Soon the road was beginning to get slick with the snow, and as it got deeper, it got slicker. The Ford was going slower and slower until it was finished. Kenneth didn't know how to drive in snow and we were off the side of the road hopelessly stuck.

The snow came down even heavier.

Kenneth was in a panic. He felt somehow responsible. As it turned out he was concerned about losing the Ford because his Daddy had paid for everything.

Kenneth was convinced that we were only a short way from the top. He reasoned that if we could just

get the Ford unstuck, we could make it over the top and going downhill would be easy. He jumped out of the car and started up the road toward what he thought must be the summit only a quarter mile or so ahead.

"I'm going to see how far it is to the top!" he said. He tried to appear calm and collected like he knew exactly what he was doing, but I knew better.

I knew that when you're driving up a mountain you don't just drive straight to the top. There has to be a lot of going up, winding around, going down, and then going back up some more before you reach the crest.

Poor Kenneth was a flatlander for sure. He was out of sight in less than fifty yards. He disappeared in the snow haze with Charles and me both yelling at him not to go.

"Shouldn't we do something?" Charles asked after half an hour had gone by.

"There's nothing to do." I said. "We should wait here in the car and on the road. If anyone comes to help us, we're already in the best place for them to find us."

I looked at the snow. It was already a foot deep and still falling as if it would never quit.

"Besides," I pointed out, "any tracks will be wiped out by the snow. We'd better stay in the car and wait."

After an hour Kenneth came back. He was near exhaustion and scared to death. Under his heavy clothes he was sweating from exertion. Charles and I covered him up as best we could so he could cool down gradually without going into shock.

Oh yeah, I knew all about shock from the Boy Scouts.

In less than five minutes a fellow in a Jeep came up behind us with a chain and offered to pull us out for $5.

We agreed.

It was easy for the man to see he had three losers in tow so he pulled us out and turned us around to point back down the hill. He told us it was about fifteen miles up to the crest and we couldn't make it without chains. When we asked how much chains cost and started counting our money, he forgave us his $5 fee and wished us well.

We lucked out. The man was making good money on the flatlanders that day. He just drove up the road in his four-wheel drive Jeep and turned people around for $5 each. He must have had a good day.

Down the hill we found a gas station with a big sign out front advertising tire chains for sale. The boy selling the chains said his dad was gone in the Jeep, but he still had a couple of sets of chains left. He hoped his dad got back before they ran out of chains. The Jeep man had been generous with his fee for a turnaround, but he made it all back on the chains. Yes, he must have had a good day.

Soon we were back on the road and moving up the hill. Traffic was beginning to build as more and more cars got chains. In a short while we were creeping along bumper to bumper with the traffic, and the snow was still falling.

Before we had left home, my sister, Wana Beth, left her little play broom in the Ford. It was coming in handy now. We used it to sweep the snow off the windshield. The wiper blades just couldn't handle the load.

Charles and I took turns sitting on the driver's right with our right arm out the window, wiping the windshield with the small broom.

Pretty soon that wasn't good enough. The chains were doing their job, giving us the traction to stay on the road. But the problem was visibility. Kenneth was bent over with his face close to the wheel, as if to see further through the snow.

We noticed that men were out walking by the fenders of the cars in front of us so the driver could see where the edge of the road was supposed to be. Soon Charles and I were taking turns walking the fender of the Ford. There was no way Kenneth was going to relinquish his position at the wheel of his most precious Ford.

The road in front was bending to the right, and as the turn increased so did the slope of the road. The road was super elevated by engineers for traffic that customarily would be driving at highway speeds of thirty to thirty-five miles per hour. The traffic on the road that day was slower than a man normally walked. It was worsened by the poor visibility and the slick surface.

We could see the danger as we approached the sharpest part of the bend with the steepest slope toward the edge. The slope and slick surface of the road under the snow were allowing gravity to overcome

forces that would usually hold the cars on the road as they went around the bend.

Gravity was pulling all the cars in front of us closer and closer to the edge of the cliff. The shoulder of the road fell away to an almost vertical descent to the valley about three thousand feet below.

We all watched a Plymouth about eight cars in front of us as it gradually neared the edge. Fender walkers in front of and behind the Plymouth moved to the assistance of the car in trouble. No one could afford to stop, because if you stopped you increased your chances of beginning a very slow and gentle skid to the right.

That's what happened to the Plymouth.

He had stopped, and when he tried to start again the hind end of the car just started a slow but continuous skid toward the low side of the road next to the cliff.

The traffic had to keep moving. I'll never forget the helplessness I felt.

After only a few minutes the Plymouth, in trouble, was no longer able to make any forward progress. The traffic was passing on the left to keep from stopping. There had been little traffic from the opposite direction, so there was plenty of room to pass.

At least twelve men were on three sides of the Plymouth. The front, back, and left sides were covered with those trying to help. As the traffic passed, the helpers changed off.

I ran forward a few car lengths to lend a hand. When Kenneth was about to go out of sight ahead, I had to leave my post or be stranded.

A new pair of hands took my place. The last thing I saw as I slowly moved up the hill along side of the Ford was the Plymouth less than a foot from the very edge. The driver's door was open and he was trying to stay with the vehicle for a last minute reprieve from what seemed like a certain fate.

I couldn't have helped anymore—no one could. We needed the Jeep Man with his four-wheel drive and a chain.

Then the Plymouth was out of sight and we were still in a blizzard.

The snow was still falling when we reached the crest and started down the grade. We had spent much longer than planned on that part of the trip, and by the time we reached the valley it was time to buy some gas. We thought we would refuel and just keep driving to make up for the lost time, but it was not to happen.

The blizzard had taken down the power lines. There was no electricity, so we were stranded and out of gas. Five years before we could have hand-pumped gas, but with everyone switching to the new electric pumps we were shut down.

The only motel in town had one room and one bed left. We took it. There was no thought of sleeping in the car: it was too cold.

A couple of hamburgers later it was three boys to one bed.

While we were eating we met the driver of the Plymouth. He told us he was able to get out just as the car went over the cliff.

"The Plymouth just sort of eased over the edge and slid down the cliff side," he said. "Then it hung up on a couple of trees about 200 feet down. A friend and I will go out with a wrecker tomorrow to try to get it back on the road."

We never heard the end of that story.

It was a short night with no room for tossing and turning. In those days a lot of motels didn't have any

Charles and Kenneth check the overnight accumulation of more than twelve inches of snow on the Ford's fender.

heating or cooling. Well, that's not exactly true: they were cool in the winter and hot in the summer, so you couldn't actually say they didn't have heating or cooling.

Boys from a cold country know there is never any heat in a bedroom. You were supposed to keep warm in one of the two rooms of the house that had a fireplace or a stove. One was the living room, the other the kitchen. When you went to bed in the winter, you kept warm by just adding "cover" until you had enough.

In the mountains of New Mexico, it was often twenty degrees below zero Fahrenheit. I can remember having twelve of my grandmother's quilts on top of me and the feather mattress below to keep me warm. The weight of the quilts alone discouraged much tossing or turning.

KENNETH MEETS THE WASHBOARD

Early the next morning we were on the road again and headed toward Grand Junction, Colorado. Kenneth was still driving when he hit his first stretch of washboard[6] road.

What a first time experience!

He was driving about sixty miles per hour when suddenly the road became a long series of ripples just like an old-fashioned washboard.

Of course, you must understand we were on unpaved or *caliche* roads. It is common for such roads to form ripples that are crosswise to the flow of traffic. In New Mexico I had seen such ripples go on for miles.

Country folk knew to slow down when they first saw the washboard condition ahead. To hit that condition at any speed meant a certain loss of control. The wheels would bounce up and down so violently that there was no steering and very little brakes.

Kenneth felt the steering wheel go useless and he hit the brakes.

We felt ourselves bouncing wildly and beginning a turn to the left. Nothing the driver was doing made it any better. We started to spin helplessly to the left while our direction continued more or less straight down the road. I knew if we ever turned ninety degrees to the ripples we would certainly roll.

When the car began to twist out of control, all the dirt that had accumulated inside the car was magically freed from its prison. It shook loose from the floor boards (in those days we still had boards on the floor), the headliner and the side panels. Inside the car became worse than any dust storm the Sahara has experienced.

We couldn't see and we couldn't breathe. Before vacuum sweepers were invented, people used to hang their rugs on an outdoor clothesline and beat them to get rid of the dust. A washboard road does the same thing to a car.

Providence was with us that day. As we neared the ninety degrees mark our forward velocity was reduced. The car rolled up on two wheels and dropped back down with a thud.

My first thought, after I realized we were safe, was how funny we must have looked to the driver of the road grader ahead. Charles and Kenneth thought the man had climbed out of his seat to help us, but I knew better.

The driver was laughing so hard he had to climb down for fear of falling out of his seat and being run over by his own grader.

After my lecture to Kenneth about how to drive on country roads out West, he decided to relent and let me take a turn at the wheel.

Well, that turned out to be both good and bad. I'd had experience driving in snow, in mud, and on washboard roads. But I didn't have any experience driving with mechanical brakes.

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[6]Washboard road — The condition of a dirt road that was also called "corduroy" in other parts of the country.

MECHANICAL BRAKES DON'T WORK

Somewhere west of Grand Junction we got into the mountains again, but without snow. We didn't have a crest to worry about either. Mostly we were driving through valleys and along rivers.

My memory for exact details is dulled because of a distraction.

We found ourselves following a station wagon with Texas license plates. Three girls in the back were waving to us. They were smiling and seemed to be very friendly.

Now why should such a minor thing be so distracting to three young men? Was it because we were young or was it because we were men? Maybe it was because we were young and men.

Regardless, we were somewhere between Provo and Salt Lake City, Utah. Our front bumper was getting a little too close to the station wagon in front for safety.

Suddenly the driver of the station wagon hit the brakes hard. The two-lane road was flat. Traffic was approaching in the left lane, and on the right was a wide, deep irrigation ditch.

The road had no shoulder for me take. My choices were straight ahead into the rear of the station wagon, left into head-on traffic, or right into the irrigation ditch.

There was no fourth option. I was already standing on the brakes and I might just as well have been pushing on a brick.

Our car's separation from the station wagon probably would have been sufficient for hydraulic brakes, but I didn't have any such modern conveniences.

While the three girls watched out their car's rear window with growing horror on their faces, I made my choice for the irrigation ditch. It was the best decision I could make, but it was going to be bad and we all knew it. There was no time to get ready. It was going to be a hard stop and a quick swim.

The ditch was a large one, close to thirty feet wide and deep-looking. The water level was about six feet lower than the road, but its depth was a mystery.

The irrigation ditches in Texas that I knew about and swam in were much smaller and usually about five feet deep. This ditch was much wider and could have been half that deep, or four times that deep—you couldn't tell.

A grader had been by recently and turned up a fresh berm[7] that was about twelve or eighteen inches

high and twice that wide. As my right front wheel hit the berm, the Ford tried to jerk the steering wheel from my hand. I clutched that wheel in a panic grip and held fast.

The forward motion of the Ford stopped suddenly as we came to rest with the left front and right rear wheel in the berm. The left rear wheel was still on the pavement, and the right front wheel was hanging in free space above the water. We had stopped crosswise and balanced on the berm.

The Ford seemed to rock slightly from one side to the other. We three occupants were petrified.

The three faces at the rear glass had changed their expressions from fear to laughter. The Texas station wagon disappeared from sight as if nothing had happened. It must have been about that time that we lost further interest in the girls.

The first vehicle in the oncoming traffic was a Jeep. The driver saw what had happened as he passed. He turned his Jeep around, hooked on to the rear of the Ford and pulled us free of our latest predicament.

Hands were shaken, thanks were given, thanks were received, and we were on our way before our pulses had gotten back to normal. We made no effort to catch up to the station wagon. In the quiet that followed we all knew it could have been worse.

Our route continued north to Twin Falls, Idaho, Burns, Oregon, and Bend, Oregon, then it turned south on US 97 to the intersection of State Highway 58. The Southern Pacific tracks paralleled the road

Since we had entered Oregon, we had traveled through some very desolate country that exceeded anything we had seen before. Of course every day we were seeing things that we had never seen before, but the vast nothingness of eastern Oregon was something to remember. We could see nothing of the plush forests we had expected.

Mostly we just hoped that the little Ford would keep on running.[7]

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[7]Berm — An engineering term referring to the pile of dirt turned up by a road grader as it passes by while grading a road. The dirt will be loose and soft. The height and breadth depend, of course, on the depth of the cut the grader is making at the time.

THE MOUNTAINS

Turning northwest on Highway 58 we began our ascent of the Cascade Range.

Almost at once the environment began a transformation. At first there were cedars, then there were some pines, and soon there were a lot of pines. The rolling flat land changed to hills and those soon changed to mountains. The mountains had trees and they were tall ones. The pine trees were so tall they seemed to close out the sky above the road.

The boys from Texas were impressed. It was nothing like we had seen in Texas. I had seen similar sights in New Mexico, but on a much smaller scale. The strange new surroundings held our attention while we kept an eye out for a place called McCredie Springs.[8]

My sisters had told me to stay on Highway 58 until we had crossed the crest or summit, and almost at the foot of the Cascades on the Pacific side we should find

a wide place in the road named McCredie Springs. My instructions included the information that McCredie Springs was as close as we could drive to our destination, which was Fields Station, Oregon.

In due course we arrived and began the unloading process.

Kenneth was ready to let us off there in the driveway of the little country store, because he was running late on his schedule to reach his job in Washington.

"After we find our jobs, we'll write and tell you where to pick us up for the return trip to Texas," I told Kenneth. It was all agreed. Kenneth and the little Ford disappeared through the trees and down the road toward Oakridge.

Charles and I went inside the small country store. "How do we get to Fields Station?" I asked the man behind the counter.

He told us there were three ways to get there. One was by railroad, and that would be about seventeen miles. The second was by four-wheel-drive vehicle up the logging trail, and that would be seven miles. The third way was for us to climb up the side of the mountain on foot and that was one and three-quarters of a mile.

Our choice was simple since we didn't have a way to get to Oakridge to catch the train, and we didn't have a vehicle to get up the logging trail. The idea of stopping at Fields Station was to get further instructions from my sister about work, because neither of us knew anything about where to go to pick

fruit. Besides, that way we didn't have to spend our money for food or motel rooms.

So we grabbed our B-4 bags, and with the enthusiasm of the young and unknowing we set off from McCredie Springs for Fields Station on foot.

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[8]McCredie Springs, Oregon — Don't look on the map. It's not there. I believe it was once a health resort with a lodge or hotel, a few cabins and a swimming pool and hot mineral springs. There had been a little country store and post office but a fire burned everything except the swimming pool. I returned to the spot twenty years later and found no evidence of the original site.

FIELDS STATION, OREGON

The mountain was not bad, but it was steep and I'll have to confess that it was the longest one and three-quarters of a mile that I can recall. Time passed, and after what seemed an endless effort, Charles and I arrived at our destination.

Fields Station was not a town or a village. It was a remote station on the Southern Pacific Railroad near the Cascade Summit.

Due to the steep grade of the railroad as it crossed the Cascades, more than one engine was needed to pull a train over the summit. The extra engines were called "helper" engines. That's simple enough. When the trains reached the summit the helpers were no longer needed, so they unhooked at a "Y," and returned down the hill to help the next train.

If an engine entered a Y at either of the top arms and progressed down to the base of the Y, then backed out the opposite arm, it would have reversed itself by

Fields Station, Oregon, 1947. This is a reproduction of a sketch made by the author at the time.

one hundred and eighty degrees. How else are you going to turn a locomotive around?

I never knew, but I'm sure there was a similar operation going on, on the east side of the summit.

You might say critical coordination and timing were required for the operation and movement of opposite-

direction traffic at the same time on the same track. Well, it did take coordination and timing, but sometimes the system didn't all work, as we were soon to find out.

The Southern Pacific railroad built several Ys on the main track going up the hill toward the crest. Inside one such Y the S/P had built a station called Fields for a telegrapher and a bridge building gang.[9]

The railroad's reason for picking such a remote spot was never shared with me, but it was isolated enough to suit most anyone looking for an out of the way place.

To construct Fields, the S/P had laid an extra set of rails next to the main track, on the mountain side. The railway had installed several old Pullman or sleeper cars on this piece of track and converted them into a telegrapher's station and living quarters. A couple of extra cars were unoccupied.

Fifty feet closer to the mountain, and still inside the Y, was a mess hall. Another fifty feet—perpendicular to the telegrapher's office and inside of the Y—was another short stretch of track with old Pullman cars. Those cars had been renovated as apartments and were occupied by the bridge building gang.

Fields Station was certainly a sight for a couple of boys from Texas. It was high upon the side of a real mountain, with trees like you only see in *National Geographic* photographs. It was like a hide-out or at least such a remote place that a guy could do anything he was big enough to do.

My sister Margaret was glad to see us and we had to tell her all about our trip to Oregon.

We had hardly started on our tale when a man crashed through the screen door with bulging eyes in a sweaty face and torn, wet clothing. For a moment all action was frozen, until the words spilled from his mouth.

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[9]Bridge-building gang — The BB gang was up the pecking order among the railroad gangs. For example, the section gang was much better known and was comprised of common laborers of unskilled background. The BB gangs, however, had a higher standing and were made up of men with carpentry, plumbing, electrical or engineering skills. Their job responsibilities covered more than building bridges that their titles might imply. Therefore they were treated with respect and received higher wages with more amenities.

THE TRAIN WRECK

"Train wreck! Train wreck! There's been a train wreck!"

The trainman threw the words into the room and collapsed into the nearest chair. For a half second no one moved, then we were all up to help the fallen messenger.

"Where? Where's the wreck?"

"Just up the track about a quarter mile," he gasped. "Just happened. It's awful! There's men dead!"

The man was wearing the uniform of a train crewman—the striped bib overalls common to the railroad and country people alike. The trainman's cap they all wore was missing. His clothes were wet and at first I thought it was sweat.

"I got out before getting burned by the steam," he explained, "but I'm soaking wet."

Margaret was already on the phone calling Oakridge and reporting the wreck.

The train wreck occurred minutes after the boys arrived. Their adventures had begun! No one died, but some men were badly burned by the escaping steam. It could have been much worse.

The S/P office there would handle all the details. They would know the wrecked train had just passed Fields Station on the way to the summit.

Charles and I realized the wreck had occurred only a few moments after we had arrived.

But what could have caused the wreck? Could it have been a rock slide? The primary reason the bridge building gang was located at Fields Station was to drill into the water trapped inside the mountain and drain those internal pools. The water's presence caused rock slides on the track, which are not good for railroad operations.

If that freight had hit a big slide, that certainly could have caused a wreck.

Enough speculation. I grabbed my little camera and Charles and I were on our way in a dead run. The run went out of us a little way back down the hill. We arrived at the scene of the wreck at a walk.

We soon saw what had caused the wreck. Not a rock slide, but a helper engine coming down the hill.

Trainmen watch the signals along the tracks for information about what is happening in front of them. You don't worry about the track behind because you're not going that way. It's the track in front you want to know about.

A green signal means the track is clear, of course, and it is given to priority traffic.

A red signal means there is traffic coming your way and you'd better get off the track. A man looking at a red signal in front of him would be looking for the next Y or switch to get off the track. I don't pretend to know all the signals, but what I just told you is close enough.

Some adventurous type might look down the track to see if the oncoming traffic was far enough away for him to make an extra switch before he had to leave the track.

Perhaps that was what happened that day. The helper coming down the hill ran a red signal in hopes of getting to a further switch before he had to leave the track.

The freight coming up the hill saw nothing but green signals because that was all he was supposed to

see. He was pulling the heavy load and was not supposed to stop.

The helper was running fast backwards down the hill, trying to make the switch. He never slowed up! The freight train didn't see the helper in time to stop. The hapless engineer of the helper was halfway into the switch when the freight hit him.

The freight train hit the helper in the side, splitting its boiler open. The live steam from the ruptured locomotive exploded into the freight engineer's cab and burned the occupants.

The greater weight of the freight train kept it upright and on the track. If the freight had left the track it would have plunged several thousand feet below to its resting place.

The helper, which was turning into the Y when it was hit, rolled over on its side against the mountain. Trainmen in the helper's cab were trapped between the mountain on their left and the freight train's locomotive on their right.

Steam had filled the helper's cab as well. As it turned out no one died, but it was a dreadful period of pain and suffering to those exposed. I saw several trainmen whose familiar stripped overalls were wet from steam and sticking to their bodies. They were burned and wandering around the wreck site with dazed expressions.

Charles and I were the only witnesses who had not been involved in the wreck. I still have a mental image of the pain and shock of the survivors—as if they couldn't believe this could have happened. Well, it did.

In a few moments I remembered my camera and started clicking away. The Southern Pacific railroad later used the photographs I took in the settlement of the case when it was brought to trial. The engineer of the helper had not been killed, and he was charged with responsibility for the accident.

I learned later that the most frequent accident of this type was with handcars. Some people on the handcars tried to stretch their luck and make a few more miles before they honored the red signal they were facing. The handcars had more "get-offs" or sidings. They didn't need a full size Y—there were little switches made just for handcars—but they still took chances.

Sometimes they lost.

"I know one man who has lost three handcars," Margaret told me. "The S/P has put him on notice—one more wreck and he'll be gone." It seems ridiculous, but then some people learn hard, I guess.

We met several members of the BB gang the night of the wreck. We talked about little else except the wreck.

People who work on the railroad have a special feeling about accidents. They are constant reminders of the seriousness of their jobs. Heavy equipment moving at fast speeds is nothing to fool with or be careless about. It was a foretaste of much to come in my life.

This was a lot of excitement for the freshly arrived boys from Texas. We planned to head out the next day looking for a chance to earn some easy money in the fruit orchards.

Then we found out that the fruit season had been over for almost a month. No one was hiring fruit pickers that late in the season. Oops!

HOPPING A FREIGHT

The BB gang was helpful to the boys from Texas and allowed that our best bet for work probably would be in Portland.

"Since you're going to Portland, you ought to try out for the Southern Pacific," one of the gang advised us. "The railroad hires summer help. They might just have something for you."

Well, that sounded like a good idea to us, but first we needed transportation to Portland. That was no problem for the BB gang.

"All you have to do is hop a freight," our new friend said. "They come by all day long on the way to Portland. You lads just hop aboard and the next thing you know you'll be in Portland."

Plainly the BB gang had taken a personal interest in us. They seemed to enjoy instructing a couple of green hands.

The bridge building gang all dressed up and ready for their regular Saturday trip away from Fields Station. Their railroad passes allowed them to ride free anywhere that the Southern Pacific had tracks.

"Now boys, the thing you want to watch—never hop a car on the back end," another one joined in. "You always hop onto the front end. If you misgauge the speed of the train and it's moving a little faster than you thought, well then when you grab the ladder rungs it'll sling you up against the car."

He paused to be sure we were taking his advice seriously.

"If it's moving too fast you might not be able to hang on but at least when you hit the side of the car you'll just fall back onto the gravel next to the track.

"But if you hop the back of a car," he continued, "it can sling you into the crack between the cars. If you can't hang on, well, you'll end up on the track between the cars—and that's not good!"

Sounded simple, but we had another problem—our bags. We had to reason this out.

We couldn't hop a freight holding onto our B-4 bags—we needed both hands free. So what should we do?

The obvious solution was to pitch the bags on before we climbed on. But that meant that we might not end up in the same car where we'd thrown our bags. What if some hobo got them?

Or, what if we threw our bags on and then we couldn't make the hop? Well, these were really insignificant little problems to a couple of boys like us. We'd worry about them later.

The next morning promised a beautiful day. Margaret made us a hearty breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon. We were ready for the world. A mid-morning freight train was just what we needed.

My sister was a telegrapher and knew to the second what time the freight would pass by. Our goodbyes had all been said earlier.

We were standing beside the track with our bags in our hands when the locomotive pulled in. Looking back, I'm sure that the engineer knew we were about to hop his train. He probably also knew we were

somehow connected or we wouldn't have been at Fields Station.

The train wasn't going fast. For all I know that may have been arranged as well. After several cars had passed us, we spied a few empty flatcars approaching.

Hey, flatcars! That would be perfect, we thought. You can see exactly what you're getting into, you know, with the hobos and all. We threw our bags on a likely looking flatcar and I hopped the front of the very next car.

No problem.

Charles hopped the next car with no more of a problem than I had and joined me. We used our bags for pillows and we stretched out in the sun. We thought we had just killed a fat hog. We couldn't have been prouder of ourselves.

This was the way to travel! Just lie back No gas to buy, no worry about mechanical auto brakes, no snow or irrigation ditches— nothing to do but just lie back, relax, and enjoy the free ride.

Why, we could even take a nap if we wanted.

THE TUNNEL

We couldn't have enjoyed more than ten minutes of euphoria before we entered the tunnel.

No one had warned us about tunnels. At first it was just dark, but soon it was real dark, and hot.

It kept getting hotter. The heat came from the engine's smoke which was so thick we couldn't breathe. The smoke carried red hot cinders that began to pepper our bare skin and burn our clothes.

There was no end to this tunnel. It went on and on.

After the first few seconds we both knew we were in deep trouble and we had no idea how long it would last.

Our only knowledge of trains and tunnels came from the movies we'd seen. In the movies, people on the train travel through tunnels and nothing ever happens except that it gets dark for a while. In the movies the blackout only lasts a few seconds, but this tunnel was lasting forever.

The author, James Fox, traveling in style on a Southern Pacific flatcar.

We moved off our bags and tried to think of shelter. There was no shelter. If we had been inside a boxcar it wouldn't have been so bad. At least we wouldn't have been burned while we couldn't breathe.

We didn't dare try to climb off the flatcar onto a boxcar in darkness so dense we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces. Besides we didn't have any idea which boxcar might be open.

It was time to think of survival.

Just as we were in the final stage—somewhere between absolute panic and our last gasp for air—suddenly we were back out into the sunshine. The air was clear, with no hot cinders, and everything was wonderful again.

Charles and I never ever completely trusted that freight train again.

Only moments before, we had thought what a good deal it would be to have jobs with a big company and all kinds of retirement and sick benefits and everything.

Well, the picture wasn't so clear after the tunnel. If we were going to be surprised again like the last time, maybe we would be better off on the highway using our thumbs.

With all that helpful advice back at Fields Station, why had no one told us that the longest tunnel in North America or maybe the world was just down the track a few miles?

If my memory serves me, the tunnel was almost two miles long. Calculating our speed at about twenty miles an hour, we must have been in the tunnel nearly six minutes.

That's a long time, folks, and you can take my word for it.

Just as soon as we got to Eugene, which was on the main road, we jumped off that freight, found our way to the bus station, and bought tickets to Portland. Riding the bus was easy and dependable, and it didn't burn holes in your shirt when it went though a tunnel.

That tunnel incident was going to take some thinking about before we decided it was funny.

THE BIG CITY

Arriving in a large city on a bus in 1947 was another new experience for a couple of boys from North Texas.

Portland was certainly the largest city I had ever been in, and we weren't just passing through. We were going to have to find a place to stay and look for a job.

Everything we were doing added to the list of things we had never done before. We hadn't been anywhere or done anything like what we were doing. Thousands of people milled all around us and we didn't know a single one. We had no one to ask for advice, and we never considered a long distance phone call. People like us *never made long distance phone calls!*

We decided to go with the things we did know something about and probably could trust.

We found a phone book and called the YMCA. Sure, they had a place for us to stay, and it only cost a dollar a night. We could afford that, and we had

heard that Ys were always clean and no one would bother you.

Of course, we both were trying to look as if we knew exactly where we were and what we were doing, but neither of us was sure we were carrying it off.

There is no use spending time and effort describing our first couple of days. It can all be covered by saying that we searched the classified ads of the local papers, ate hamburgers at least twice a day, and stayed close to our B-4 bags at the YMCA.

Soon it became obvious there weren't many jobs in Portland, Oregon for a couple of college boys from Wichita Falls, Texas.

It was time to check our hole card.

THE DISTRACTION

We left the YMCA and walked toward the Southern Pacific Railroad offices.

Our route took us by and directly in front of a building with a sign proclaiming in large letters: BURLESQUE THEATER!

The first time we passed, Charles and I forced our eyes to look straight ahead, with not even a quick glance to our left to see what such an infamous establishment would look like.

I certainly didn't want anyone to think I was interested in such a place.

You must try to realize that Charles and I were eighteen years old, and as pure as the driven snow. Well, some driven snow.

We didn't know anything for sure, but we did suspect a few things. We were green, but we had heard the big boys talk of such things as a burlesque theater.

My sources said there were beautiful women inside those places and they took off all their clothes and did other things on the stage that kids our age had no business even knowing about.

I must say the late Forties were simpler times, and youths like Charles and I were then might be hard to find today.

Well, we passed the place without a word or a glance and continued to the S/P building to look for a job.

The Southern Pacific offices were located in the big Union Station. It was one of largest buildings I had ever seen. I never did know why railway stations were always called Union Stations.

No matter—it seemed as if the whole of the railroad was just waiting for us to arrive.

We asked the first person we saw and he sent us to an office and before you could say "naked woman" we were filling out job applications.

I was learning new things fast and that day I was learning more than usual. Before I left the building, I had learned the benefits of lying and cheating—or maybe just exaggerating a little— when you are looking for a job.

The job interview went well until we were asked for our Social Security numbers. Charles whipped his right out and I had a feeling all was lost for me. I had left my card in Texas. Charles was writing down his number when I poked him in the side.

A young man often sent his folks postcards for evidence of his adventures. Note handwritten explanation of the obvious.

The author's mother never threw anything her son sent her from his many adventures. This postcard, postmarked Portland, was one of the first.

"I left my card back home," I whispered.

"Well heck," Charles said. "Just make up a number."

"Yeah, but ... ."

"Go ahead, Fox. They won't know the difference."

He was right. They didn't know the difference. I just looked at the figures he wrote down, changed them up a little, and invented my own.

I had the strangest feeling that lightning was going to strike me or at least a large man in uniform would appear and put handcuffs on me. Nothing happened, and I learned that a little lying and cheating were okay if you got the job.

I would learn about CONSEQUENCES and RETRIBUTION later.

All my life I had been taught to tell the truth, but during the war I heard of men who lied about their experiences and qualifications when they applied for defense jobs. They got better jobs with higher pay than their buddies that told the truth. At the time I was convinced that they were doing a bad thing and somehow not helping the war effort.

Now I felt like I was one of them—a cheat—and something terrible was going to happen to me.

The man told us to come back tomorrow for a company physical. If we checked out okay, we could choose from a list of jobs.

How about that? We were going to get a choice.

The walk back to the YMCA was going to take us right back by that place, and we both must have been thinking the same thing.

Our discipline broke as we approached the marquee of the burlesque theater. We both did a sharp eyes right as we passed the forbidden zone.

We saw photographs of women scantily clad in costumes. I guess they were called costumes. There didn't seem to be enough material involved to call them anything else.

Some of the women had fans of ostrich feathers, and some held other things like giant snakes. I couldn't be too sure, because we didn't stop to study. It was just a passing glance, but each of us noticed the other was looking.

I saw a girl selling tickets and I wondered if she was one of the girls in the show. Charles made no comment, and I certainly wasn't going to mention what I had seen.

THE PHYSICAL

The next day we were scheduled to go down to the Union Station to take a physical.

I had never taken a physical before, for a railroad or anything else. We talked about what they might do to us, but we had no clear picture of what was going to happen.

Our only guess was that they would make us take off all our clothes and then turn our heads and cough. We knew that much from the movies we'd seen about guys going into the army. We didn't have a clue about flat feet or anything like that. We weren't even sure what flat feet looked like.

Oh well, no need to worry—it was one test we didn't have to study for.

We did talk about the laugh we'd had when we took our driver's license tests.

I had a driver's license early because back then you could get one in New Mexico without a test. You just

went to one of the highway patrol offices and asked for a license and they would sign you up.

It was easy in New Mexico, but in Texas you had to take a *test.* You had to answer some written questions and read an eye chart, and then a man would go with you for a behind-the-wheel driving test. That was scary, because you had to do every thing just right or they would fail you.

Everyone knew that those government men could be real tough if they had a mind to.

Charles remembered going to get his first driver's license. He had been driving his old Dodge without a license for a couple of years up around Iowa Park. Now that he was going to college he would have to get a license, because if you were from Iowa Park and got stopped in Wichita Falls without one, they would be extra hard on a fellow.

Well, some of the big boys had told us how hard it was going to be, especially the *surprise* part of the test. They told us that when the government man got into the car with you he would be carrying a foot- long piece of two-by-four in his hand.

The man set the two-by-four on the its edge behind his feet. When you were driving along and maybe not paying attention, he would suddenly yell out "*Stop!*" in a loud voice as if you were about to run over something. The driver had to stop quick enough to make the two-by-four turn over. If you didn't make the chunk of wood turn over you failed the test.

We had to get ready for that stop.

Charles's old Dodge had mechanical brakes and they were about worn out. So to help them stop better, Charles and I did a quick brake job on the Dodge just before going down for the driving test.

We pulled off the wheels and sandpapered the brakeshoes to make them rough. Charles drove with extra care on the way to Wichita Falls so that the brakeshoes wouldn't have a chance to get slick again.

The man came out of the building with Charles to give him the driving test and besides his clipboard, sure enough, he was carrying the block of wood. I could hardly wait until Charles got back to see what happened.

"Golly, Fox," he said, looking worried. "I must have failed."

"Failed your driver's test? Why? What happened?"

"Well, I was so nervous waiting for him to yell *stop* that I couldn't remember all the other stuff you're supposed to do, like hand signals and all. So when he finally did yell, I really hit the brakes hard."

By now Charles was beginning to look more cheerful as he warmed to his story.

"The old Dodge never stopped that well before," he said. "All the wheels locked up and the government man banged his head on the windshield. The two-by-four rolled over a couple of times and hit the back of the his heels. He was so mad that he told me to just take him back, because he'd had enough."

Charles got his license, of course, but thinking back on it was funny. That was the first test outside of school

that either of us had ever experienced. Soon we were going to take another test together.

The third time we passed by the burlesque theater each of us was sure the other had some curiosity about the place. It doesn't make any difference which of us made the suggestion first, because it was only a technicality, you see. It was something that each of us had decided to do without saying a word to his buddy.

We got up our combined nerve to stop and study the posters out front.

There they were, in glorious black and white glossy 8x10 photographs. The girls were dressed differently, but somehow they all looked the same to me. It was easy for me, however, to believe that these were the women that the big boys had told me about.

We peered without appearing to peer. We studied without appearing to study, and we yearned without appearing to yearn.

Well, enough of that—we had to go get our jobs. The seed was planted, and as sure as we had to pass that way again, we were going to have to go inside. Still, we didn't share such desires with each other. We had to play as if it wasn't really important—yet.

The railroad doctor was a kindly sort. Without much of an exchange he told us to go into the next room and take off all our clothes except our shorts.

There was a young black man taking off his clothes in the same room. He was older than we were—maybe mid-twenties, but no more. The black man looked like

the picture of health to me, and we could see from watching what the doctor did to him what was going to be done to us next. It was like having a chance to get ready.

The physical progressed well until they came to the eye chart.

The doctor faced the young black man toward the chart on the wall about twenty feet away. The chart was the standard one for the day with little bitty lines at the bottom and a huge **E** at the top that must have been six inches tall.

"Okay, young man," the doctor said. "Read the smallest line that you can."

"Uh, uh, A ... , B ... , C ... ."

"No," the doctor said patiently. "Read the larger line above that one and try again."

The man tried again. "Uh, A ... , B ... , C ... ."

"No, no. Just read the one letter at the top of the chart, please."

"Uh, A ... ."

"Okay, you pass. Next man, please."

I was the next man, and I couldn't believe what I had seen. The black guy didn't get any of the letters right and the doctor passed him!

"Okay, young man. Can you read line eleven?"

"Yes sir. D-E-F-P-O-T-E-C."

"Okay, you passed. Next man, please."

I was too puzzled to let it go. "Hey, Doc. Excuse me, but can I ask you something first?"

"Of course," the doctor said. "What is it?"

"Well, I understand about reading the eye chart. I know the better your eyes are then the smaller the print you can read. Right?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"Well, what I don't understand is, the black guy didn't get anything right in three tries and you passed him anyway. Why is that?"

"Oh. Well, you see, I realized he can't read, so the chart was no good as an eye test for him. But I knew he could see all right, because when I told him to look at the eye chart, he looked right at it."

Next lesson: if you're going to fail a test, then fail it so badly the experts think the test is no good.

THE JOB

We passed our physicals. Then we were directed to go back to the man downstairs and choose our jobs.

He had several on his list, but only one location that had two openings for summer jobs.

I couldn't believe our good luck, but Fields Station wanted two young men for carpenter helpers with the bridge building gang! They would pay us 93½ cents per hour! They would give us a place to sleep, but we would have to pay $1.80 per day for our board.

There was no hesitation. We made our choice.

The man tried to get us to change our minds. He told us Fields Station was very remote, but we held steady for our choice. He mentioned something about other openings down in northern California, but we didn't waver.

I'm sure he was afraid that once we saw where we were going we might quit, but what he didn't know was

that we had already been there. What *we* didn't know was what kind of work we'd be doing when we got there! I knew it couldn't be as bad as the job I'd had the previous summer with Keith Produce Company in Wichita Falls, and besides the pay was twice as good.

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

We were excited and talkative on the walk back to the YMCA. We'd passed our physicals and we had the jobs we wanted! Our elevated feelings made us ready for a little adventure. It was easy for us to make a positive decision regarding the burlesque theater on our fourth trip past.

When I got a look at her, I realized the girl selling tickets was not a girl at all. She was a much older woman than I had imagined from my first sidewise impression. She wore a lot of makeup and lipstick, and a cigarette protruded from between her painted lips in the very middle of her mouth.

I'd already observed that real cigarette smokers always left their cigarettes dangling in their mouths—no hands.

Funny, though, how women always seemed to dangle from the center of their mouths. Men always dangled from the corner. I wonder why that is?

I know it's a lot harder to do than it looks.

I tried it once. There was no way I could keep the smoke from going up my nose. It burned and made my eyes water and quickly became a failed experiment. The real smokers seemed to be able to handle the smoke problem without notice. I guess there's a trick involved that takes a long time to figure out.

Well, the dangling cigarette in the mouth of the female ticket seller started building a very slight rise of suspicion within me that this burlesque thing might not be as glamorous as we expected.

I didn't let my doubts get far, because Charles and I had individually and collectively made up our minds to go inside. Nothing at this point short of a police squad or my mother was going to stop us.

The man collecting the tickets looked like he might belong to the woman selling them—not by the way he was dressed, but by his attitude. He seemed bored to death. How could he be so calm while all that—whatever it was—was going on just inside?

Charles and I were a little confused but we tried to look bored as well. We hoped we would appear as if we had done this many times before.

The ticket man showed no sign that he might have recognized our innocence. That was probably just another part of his boredom, what with all the boys showing up for the first time. To him we were just a couple of dumb kids who were being suckered into his den of iniquity.

We hoped the theater would be extra dark inside

so no one would see us. No such luck—it was no darker than most other theaters.

A movie was showing on the screen as we entered, which was both good and bad. The bad part was that we were still going to have to wait to see the real show.

The good part was that we some had time to get ourselves ready.

Ready for what? The shock, the thrill of our lives? Who knows? All I knew was that I wasn't supposed to be there doing what I was doing. I couldn't even set my full weight down in the seat for fear someone was going to catch me! The extra time would help.

The picture on the screen was not a full-length movie, but just a cartoon. Soon enough it was over, and the curtain closed in front of the screen. A spotlight came on, and a comedian in baggy clothes approached the center stage from the wings at the right.

The guy had a routine that I thought was very funny, but he wasn't on long. He was there to introduce the first girl, or dancer, or entertainer, or whatever she was called.

Anticipation was at its peak in the two kids from Texas seated in the aisle seats about halfway back. Our eyes were fixed on the spotlight, and for a few seconds I don't think I breathed regular.

My sources had told me that the girls came on stage dressed. As the music played, they would begin to take off their clothes. Well, maybe my source had never been to Portland. Maybe they did it differently here. How would a guy know for sure if he'd never been here?

Suddenly we had no more time for conjecture: the girl appeared. She was smiling and sort of danced onto the stage in time with the music. The "crowd" cheered and whistled. (I learned later that Charles and I were almost alone in the theater. We never had an accurate count, but probably ten or twelve would have covered the total.) You can be sure that my buddy and I didn't cheer or whistle. We didn't want anyone to know we were there.

The dancer performed her dance and we watched. She didn't take all her clothes off, even after the pleadings of the scant audience, but she kept smiling as she left the stage.

Then it was time for the comedian to return. The second time he was joined by another comedian, and they put on a skit about being marooned on a desert island together. The skit was about as risqué as the dancer, but a lot more entertaining for me. The comedians introduced another dancer and the whole thing was repeated.

The second girl was dressed differently, and danced to different music, but it ended the same. She took off just so much then smiled and left the stage. We were beginning to feel certain the best part was yet to come.

In one way we were correct, because now it was time for the management to sell its stuff from the stage.

They had boxes of candy that also contained a "special" prize that would "tickle" your lady friend. They had little books of cartoons, showing "how" for all kinds of people—short people, tall people, fat people, skinny

people, and even ugly people were shown. Yes sir, it was all in the book.

The man on the stage assured us that the items being offered for sale during this screening would not be found on sale in stores. We imagined a reason for this, but we were soon to find out it was a different reason.

The boys from Texas fell for the entire scam.

We bought everything the man walking down the aisle had to sell. The man was the same guy who had taken our tickets when we first came inside. He was no longer bored, but seemed to enjoy taking our money for the candy, books and whatever.

Charles and I laughed a little inside the theater when we opened the box of candy and found that the special prize that would tickle our lady friends was just a feather. We jointly moaned when we opened the illustrated comic books to see that the cartoons only showed different types of people and their smoking habits. It wasn't at all what we expected.

We left the theater considerably changed. The two children who had entered the theater had left as grown men. We were no longer innocent. We had seen the ways of the world, and what a disappointment!

Then, outside in daylight once more, we became more vocal about our most recent experience. It was a cheat. We agreed that the only things we enjoyed were the cartoons and the comedians. We berated the experience all the way back to the YMCA. The consolation was that we were now employees of the railroad, and

we were soon going to have a payday to replace the money we had just wasted.

The ride back to Fields was considerably different now that we worked for the railroad. We had passes that were good any time and any place as long as it was inside the state of Oregon. Well, that meant that we could return to Fields sitting in seats in a passenger car. There would be no flatcars or smoke or burning cinders on the return.

With all that we had learned in the last week, we couldn't help but feel very grown up.

Stepping off the train, we were greeted by my sister Margaret. She couldn't believe we were back and we were going to spend the summer at her station.

I don't think she could tell from looking at us that we had been to a burlesque show.

WORKING ON THE RAILROAD

As soon as we could stow our bags with Margaret, it was time for our interviews with the foreman of the bridge building gang.

He was older than the rest of the gang. A heavy man with a lot of thick gray hair, he seemed very stern at first but I soon realized that he was okay. He was ready to put up with what must have been another summer of college boys who were going to be more trouble than they were worth.

The two jobs he had asked to have filled were quite different. The classification was "carpenter's helper," but that was just for pay purposes. One job was as "cook's helper," and the other job was as a helper with the BB gang working in the mine.

As I have already mentioned, Charles was much more outgoing than I was. He spoke right up for the job working in the mine.

"Fox, you won't mind, will you?" Charles asked. "I really would like to work in that mine. You don't want to do that, do you? I really would like to work in that mine!"

All this came from Charles before I had time to even think or compare the two jobs. It was an easy decision for me. Charles was my best friend—if he wanted the job in the mine, that was okay with me.

He offered, finally, to match me for the job.

"It's okay with me, Roby," I told him again. "You can have the job if you want it that bad." I had a little difficulty convincing him that I really didn't care. I really *didn't* care—but he wanted the job so bad, he just couldn't believe I didn't want it as well.

As the cook's helper, I was obligated to keep the coal bin and kindling pile filled for the mess hall. Oh yes, I also had to keep the coal bin and kindling supply topped off for the BB gang's apartments. I was expected to sweep out the apartments for the BB gang each day and refill the hot water tanks. Once a week I had to mop the floor of the apartments.

To top off the job requirement, the old foreman told me that I must do anything else the cook might want me to do to help. The "cook" turned out to be a man-and-wife team.

Mine was not what you might call a high-tech job, but then I wasn't a high-tech employee. The job didn't require anything that I couldn't handle with ease. I had been cutting wood with a double bit ax[10] since I was eight years old. My job at the drug store in Wichita

Falls had required that I sweep and mop it every night, so the only thing that had to be explained to me was the part about filling the hot water tanks.

As it turned out that was the easiest part of all. The water supply was from mountain springs high above our location. The hot water supply was from large flat containers placed on top of the apartments. The icy cold water was piped into camp and each of the apartments had hot and cold water taps in each sink.

The taps were faucets just like those on the outside of your house. They were threaded to fit a garden hose. Each apartment had a little piece of garden hose about a foot long with a female connection on each end. The piece of hose could be screwed onto the hot and cold water faucets simultaneously. Then you opened both faucets and the gravity pressure of the cold water supply overpowered the pressure of the hot water tanks up on the roof, so the cold mountain water flowed into the hot water tanks.

When the tanks were full they overflowed and the water ran off the roof. That was my clue to turn the water off and remove the short piece of hose. It was easy. The water stayed in the sun all day, and when the workers came in from the mine they would have hot water for their showers.

No, it wasn't high-tech, and with hardly any effort on my part I was through by noon each day.

We didn't know about the fine details at first, and the two boys from Texas started off even and happy. We didn't stay even for long.

I think by the end of the first week, the shine had left Charles' mining job. It was noted first that I got through working at noon each day and had the rest of the day off. Charles had to work in the mine all day. Next it was noted that I enjoyed a good, hot lunch each day. Charles had to eat his lunch from a paper sack.

"But you get to drive the ore car," I reminded him. "And besides," I threw in the clincher, "the mine job was your choice."

Not only that, but even when I wasn't working I kept busy in the afternoons. Since Charles didn't do any of the things I enjoyed, I reasoned he probably would be very bored with my job.

A member of the bridge building gang #22 driving the little ore car that Charles thought was going to be such a keen job.

We were good friends and it all worked out, but it was another example of how things always worked out for me better accidentally than I could have planned them on purpose.

The average day at the station was pretty simple.

We got up early, went to the dining hall, and ate a big country breakfast like I was used to back home. Charles trudged off to the mine with the BB gang, and I started my chores.

The afternoon was all mine and I did whatever I wanted. The remoteness of the station made that okay. If whatever you did irritated anyone, you just went further out into the woods.

I was never bored. There was always plenty to fill my time. Hunting with my slingshot was great fun,

The author, with his slingshot and binocular case, after a hard half day's work at Fields Station.

and playing my harmonica was a bother to no one. The binocular case I'd bought at the Army Surplus store turned out to be just right for carrying my stuff with me.

I spent most of my time sketching. I enjoyed drawing very much. I had taught myself to draw from a mail-order course I'd sent off for. Cartooning was my first choice, but at that time the only encouragement I got came from my friends. Little did I know then that becoming a successful cartoonist was about as likely as becoming a famous movie star. It was of no matter to me at the time.

I was still hoping that someday I could earn my living by drawing. I never had the least suspicion that before another year went by, I would be doing exactly that.

The daily routine was broken by the announcement that the "Cat" was stuck. The Cat, or Caterpillar, or bulldozer was supposed to be cleaning out a shallow ditch inside and next to the west side of the Y that comprised Fields Station. It was a simple job for a Caterpillar, but the driver managed to get it stuck.

How could a guy get stuck with a Caterpillar? The dozer was old and had seen better days, but it seemed impossible to imagine that the ultimate machine for working in mud was stuck.

Well, it seems there were some spots on that mountain that were so saturated with water that the ground just under the surface was nothing more than

Charles Roby, the miner, after a hard long day's work in the mine.

a bog. Perhaps it could be considered something like quicksand.

Now don't call up the image you have seen on TV or in the movies. It's just not that way. In the movies they always have some water that is thickened with a little of this and that with a lot of pieces of cork floating on the surface. Any country boy who has ever had to pull a calf or cow or even a horse out of a bog will tell you that it's nothing more than just a big mud

hole. It's a trap for animals that they don't see until too late.

I rode a horse into a bog once, and it happened so fast it was just unbelievable.

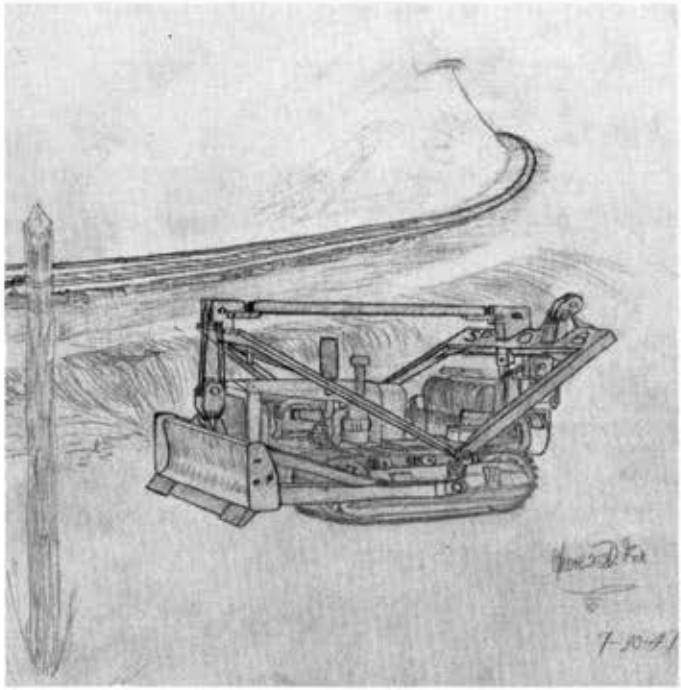
The horse was just walking along, and all of sudden he fell out from between my legs. With a great *plop!* his stomach hit the bog and there we were. He was helpless. It took me a couple of hours to get him out with the aid of my rope and two more horses. He wasn't going to sink out of sight like in the movies. He was just going to be trapped there until he starved to death.

Sorry, Hollywood, but that's what happens in the real world. You don't suppose those Hollywood folks would write stories about something they don't know anything about, do you?

Well, the Cat was stuck and it occasioned great excitement for the station. The BB gang was called out of the mine to deal with the problem. The men arrived, looked the scene over, and concluded that yes, the Cat was indeed stuck.

They also concluded that it was not their problem. This was a job for a section gang, not a bridge-building gang.

As I said earlier, there was a class difference between different types of railroad gangs. I didn't work on the railroad long enough to get the complete picture, but it was easy to see that the BB gang considered themselves above the type of work that could be done by a section gang.



The old bulldozer that couldn't pull a fat man's hat off!

It was my first experience with the world of the unions, but it was not to be my last.

"Okay, I'll call the district office and have them to send in a section gang," the BB foreman said. "They'll probably be here by tomorrow morning and they should have the Cat out by the afternoon."

The foreman had spoken, and that was all there was to it.

The section gang arrived the next morning and started the job of digging under the front end of the double-tracked vehicle. It was not an easy job. Most

of the members of the section gang were blacks, and accustomed to the hard work, I suppose, but each hour got more difficult. They dug under the front of the dozer and placed a cross tie from the railroad stock under the treads.

The driver of the dozer climbed into the seat as the gang, the cooks and the cooks' helper watched.

The engine roared with a lot of black smoke, and all the roaring was done with the transmission in neutral. The audience watched with anticipation. The expectation was that the dozer would come out of its shallow location easily now that the gang had worked all day to install a cross tie under the front of the treads.

The driver may have needed to add a little drama for the benefit of the crowd. No use in making this look too easy.

"Rawwoh, rawwoh, rawwoh," the engine complained.

More smoke, and it was time. The driver shifted into gear and revved the engine. The dozer seemed to groan, and its treads started to turn, but there was no forward motion of the giant machine.

What was happening?

Its treads were turning, but the dozer was not coming out. Instead, the rear end could be seen sinking deeper into the hole the dozer was digging with its treads! By the time the driver stepped on the clutch, the dozer had dug its rear end at least another two feet deeper into the ground. The cross tie was still

in place, but the ground was so soft that the dozer couldn't pull itself over the cross tie. Instead it had just dug itself deeper into the bog.

Now the driver had a much bigger problem than before. He was not only deeper into the bog, but his machine was taking a bad angle with the horizon. He was now faced not only with coming out of the bog, but also climbing an incline!

Over the next several days, the drama increased. With each additional effort of the section gang, the dozer only sank deeper into the bog. Everyone involved was beginning to catch some blame.

"That driver couldn't handle a red wagon rolling down a shallow hill," one BB worker snorted.

"That dozer couldn't get up the power to pull a fat man's hat off," another added.

I was on the edge of the pit that had been dug by the combined efforts of the section gang and the dozer. I was just watching and drawing, but I knew if they didn't get the machine out of that hole soon there would be blame enough to spread around on everyone. It might end up being my fault somehow.

The dozer now was completely below ground level. Only the cross bar on the top was above the ground. The gang had completely shored up under the dozer from the front to back, so that it was now sitting on a wooden floor of cross ties.

The new problem had become the angle of the incline. The dozer was now obligated to climb at least forty-five to fifty degrees of slope. The effort had been

great. The workers were tired and frustrated. Two of them near me discussed the engineering problem they had been attempting to solve as they climbed out of the pit. Wiping off a combination of sweat and mud, one worker was sure he had the final solution.

"Well, she's coming out of there this time!" he predicted confidently.

"No, she ain't!"

"Yes, she is! She's coming out this time."

"No, she ain't!"

"Yes, she is!"

"No, she ain't!"

This argument went on for at least fifty such exchanges.

Just before the driver fired up the engine for what became his final effort to climb out of the ever-deepening pit, the two workers finally finished their exchange.

"Well, if she don't come out, then why won't she?"

"'Cause she can't, that's why!"

That was that. The argument was settled and over before the diesel engine once again came to life. The need for drama had long since gone from the driver's repertoire. The situation had become too critical. It was time for some serious effort on the part of the driver and his machine.

He didn't make it. The dozer couldn't climb the ramp. Perhaps the engine was in poor mechanical condition, but for whatever the reason the second of the two workers was right. "She didn't come out 'cause she couldn't, that's why!"

The project was over for the section gang, but the railroad was not licked.

One little bulldozer stuck in the mud was not going to lick the people who had laid railroad track across the fruited plain, across the widest rivers, through the vast deserts and over the great mountains. They built bridges, dug tunnels and fought the Indians, or was it the Chinese? Well, the railroad wasn't licked.

The next morning a helper engine arrived at Fields and was ready to make short work of jerking that little ol' dozer out of that little ol' hole. Everyone wanted to watch it happen, but the effort took a big chunk out of the day.

The helper engine had the power, but the first try revealed a new problem. A large steel cable was attached to the steam locomotive. The men hooked the other end of the cable to the hapless bulldozer. It seemed to me that it was going to take a pretty good yank to pull that dozer, and I was reminded what I had learned about cables from my Dad in the oil field.

"James, give them plenty of room," he'd warned me. "I've seen a steel cable break. When it snaps, it can slice right through the side of a house. Always stand further back than the length of cable, because you don't ever know which end may turn loose on you."

Well, my Daddy was right again. When that steam engine put a strain on the cable the dozer didn't move. The locomotive threw on the power, and the dozer still didn't move.

The engineer must have muttered to himself, "Oh yeah, you want to play tough, eh?" As we have learned to say, he "poured the coal to her" and the cable snapped!

The only thing that saved all those innocents who hadn't had the benefit of my Dad's advice was that the cable snapped where it was attached to the dozer and all the energy was dissipated along the engine on track. It happened so suddenly the danger passed before anyone could jump. All onlookers instinctively moved away from the action with no further encouragement from anyone. The lesson was clear.

As I watched the frustrated workers, my mind drifted back to a time when I had been about fourteen—I was helping a rancher with his branding. He didn't have a chute to run cattle through, so we did it the old-fashioned way: we roped 'em and threw 'em on the ground.

There were three of us boys who were allowed to practice our roping on the intended object of the branding iron as they were released to come into the lot. A thousand pounds of beef is easily roped, but not so easily brought down.

The three of us had a plan. One would rope the head, one would rope the front feet and the third would rope the hind feet—that was the plan. It was a good plan, and it worked well until two small things happened.

One of my friends was roping the head, and I was roping the front feet. Our friend who was roping the

hind feet was using a manila rope with a metal hondo.

The hondo is a device inserted into the loop of the rope to improve the roping action. It's as big as a man's fist and probably weighs at least a pound or two. The purist would never use such a device, but my friend did. He also decided to tie off the other end of his rope to a cedar post at the corner of the shed on the barn. He reasoned that he wouldn't have to work so hard when the beef hit the end of his rope.

Well, he was right. The only problem was that my other friend wasn't ready when the next beef came into the lot, so no one roped the head. I caught the front feet but my rope was longer and my other friend caught the rear feet with his shorter rope.

The half ton of beef hit the end of the rope with the metal hondo, and two things happened real fast.

The cedar post came loose from the shed roof, but not in time to help my friend much. The rope snapped, and the metal hondo came home to its owner. The heavy metal ring hit him right between the eyes.

With the blood and all, we were sure the kid was dead, but he was lucky. He was only goofy for a while. Come to think of it, he was a little goofy before, or he never would have been using that metal hondo.

"Here she comes!" one of the crew shouted, bringing me back to the scene.

The final effort of the steam locomotive was a grand gesture accompanied by several additional steel cables, and with the dozer driver in his seat and gunning the

engine at full power. To the relief of all watching, the old machine climbed out of the hole.

The section gang gathered their tools, the cooks went back to the dinning hall, and all went home. The show was over, and Fields Station returned to normal.

I'm reminded of a dark and rainy night years later when a soldier came up to me and asked if I had a shovel he could borrow.

"Are you going to dig out your Jeep?" I asked him.

"No," he replied sourly. "I'm going to bury it."

He had run the Jeep off in a mud hole, he explained, and it had sunk below its headlights.

If a man had stopped to calculate what it would cost to get that worthless piece of junk of a bulldozer out of the hole at Fields Station, he might have concluded that it would have been cheaper to just cover it up.

But, of course, it was a challenge that had to be met and won.

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[10]Double bit ax — An ax head with a blade on each side. A single bit ax has a blade on one side and a hammer head on the other side. Many years later I worked in a Field Survey party for an oil company and we were forbidden to use double bit axes. They were considered unsafe. To my thinking, the single bit was the most dangerous because it was never balanced right. The design favored using it as a sledge hammer instead of an ax to cut. The double bit, on the other hand, was well balanced and even a small boy could use it with little awkwardness. Another example of rules laid down by someone who probably never used either of the axes, but was in a position of authority.

THE GENERATOR

Did I mention that there was no electricity at Fields Station?

Well, if I did then I was only half right. There was no electricity except for the telegrapher's key. There was none for lights or a radio, or anything like an appliance.

None, that is, except for the BB gang. They had their own gasoline generator, and they didn't share with anyone. They didn't share with the cooks in the mess hall, and they didn't share with my sister the telegrapher. It wasn't fair.

Of course, it didn't have to be fair, but when a couple of kids are looking for an excuse, then "fair" is an easy justification for what they want to do anyway.

No, it wasn't fair, and we needed to do something about it.

The BB gang had their generator in a little outbuilding about a hundred yards from their apartments.

The distance was to kill part of the noise that the generator created when it was running.

Every evening one of the gang went out to the generator building and poured a measured amount of gasoline into the generator's gas tank. Then he cranked it up and returned to his apartment. The measured amount of gasoline ran out about ten o'clock—kind of like sand in an hourglass. The generator died, the lights went out, and the BB gang all went to sleep.

That was the drill, and it had been going on for several years without a hitch, before we came.

Charles had grown less than enchanted with his job in the mine, and he was aggravated by the kerosene lamps we used to read by at night. Besides, there was no radio or anything.

The reader must understand that in 1947 a portable radio was large, bulky and very expensive to run. It was a full-time job keeping the "B" battery—the high voltage battery—operational. I had never even known anyone with a portable radio. When I lived on the ranch in New Mexico, in the house we had a direct current radio built by Montgomery Ward.

It was an "Airline," and operated on six volts DC. Ward's intention when they built the radio was to serve the needs of country folks with a "wind charger" that would put out six volts DC. You could even buy six-volt bulbs in the country stores, but we didn't have a wind charger.

Twice a week we took the car battery out and hooked it to the little radio in the house. We could listen

to a couple of hours of radio on Wednesday and Saturday nights. Our choice was wrestling from Fort Worth, Texas, on Wednesday nights, and "The Grand Ol' Opry" from Nashville, Tennessee, on Saturday nights. It was a family treat.

Charles had never lived in the country without electricity and running water. The summer camp we were attending had become something of a hardship for him. We had to get some of that electricity that the BB gang was being so stingy with.

Charles had the know-how and I was a willing accomplice. The BB gang's line of old Pullman cars that we called apartments formed a "T" with the cars that Charles, Margaret, and I were occupying. Our apartments formed the cross bar at the top of the T. This T I have just described did not actually touch. Our apartments were about 100 yards to the north of the gang's apartments. The supply car was located between the gang's apartments and ours.

Ahh, the supply car—how do we get into the supply car?

I found out later that it had a "railroad seal"[11] on the door. The door wasn't actually locked, because the little metal seal would let anyone know if the door had been opened. Of course, if you kept the extra supply of seals inside the supply car, anyone could take a handful of seals with him and just put on a new one behind himself each time he left the scene.

Charles's plan called for us to run a wire from the north end of the BB gang's apartments to the supply

car and then on to our apartment.

The BB gang always—I say always—left Field Station at noon on Saturday. A passenger train stopped every Saturday at noon, and the men didn't miss their rides. We needed a weekend for getting into the supply car, making the connection, and hiding the wire from view.

Any weekend would do, but Charles picked the one weekend that I was going to play baseball at Oakridge with the Southern Pacific team.

I had been playing with them on a regular basis, but to Charles it was just another irritation. He didn't play sports and he couldn't understand my interest in something as useless as baseball. Moreover, it reminded him of how easy my job was compared to his. Further, it seemed that just when he needed me I deserted him.

It was a small thing to me. We could have carried out our scheme the following weekend. But Charles was not going to wait. He was determined not to do without electricity another week.

When I got back from Oakridge Sunday afternoon, he had already completed the job! It was a minor miracle. I went over and checked his work out.

The connection to the gang's apartment was good. No one but an electrical inspector would ever notice, and then only if he was looking for it. The wire ran down the side of the old Pullman car and was stuffed behind a vertical plank that was part of the car's design. Charles had then routed the wire under the car

and between the wheels that sat on the track, and brought the wire under the rail back out to the outside beyond the cross ties. The wire then continued along the track past the supply car and up under our apartment.

All of this was buried in a shallow trench that Charles had dug and recovered. The wire was well hidden for its entire length, and even under our apartment it would never be seen by a casual observer.

We could hardly wait for the sun to go down on Sunday night. We couldn't start the generator ourselves, so we just had to wait until the gang was back. Finally they began to return from their weekend and it was time to start the generator.

Charles had run a pair of wires into our apartment and terminated them into a single light bulb socket with a twist switch on the side. The result of his efforts was to furnish us with one 40-watt 110-volt A.C. light. We heard the generator start, but our light didn't come on.

The light switch! Of course—it must be in the off position.

Charles turned the switch, and WOW, we had light!

"Turn it off, Roby. Quick!"

"What?"

"Turn it off, quick. They'll see the light!"

We hadn't thought of that.

If we had a reading light in our apartment, it would stand out like a lighthouse. We couldn't burn the bulb without being discovered.

I came up with the solution.

We found a pasteboard box that measured about two feet on each side. I cut a hole in the bottom, put the light bulb through, turned it upside down, and we had a pasteboard lamp shade. This meant that only one of us could use the light at a time, because you had to put the box over your head and set it down on your shoulders to keep the light from showing on the outside.

Five minutes was about as long as the most avid reader could stand to be inside the incubator that we had just installed. There had to be a better way.

I started collecting brown paper from the dining hall, and within a few days I had enough to cover the windows in our apartment. It worked great. One of us would stand outside in the dark and watch while the other lawbreaker turned on the light inside. If the outside man could see *anything*, we turned the light off until we corrected the error.

It was working just right. In fact, it worked so well that we decided to add a second light.

The only thing of note was the conversation of the BB gang at breakfast. They grumbled that the generator wasn't running as long on the measured amount of gasoline. The consensus was that the generator was getting old.

"We can fix that," one of the bridge builders said. "We'll just add an extra cup of gasoline to the regular amount."

Of course, Charles and I knew it was the additional load we were placing on the generator that

caused it to use more gas. We had to start paying closer attention to our load on the north end of the line.

Within a relatively short period we not only had lights for ourselves but for Margaret, too. We had a radio and record player going as well. The increasingly larger amount of gas required by the generator was becoming a major part of the conversation among the gang members every morning.

The boys from Texas had to do something or the whole thing was going to come unglued.

The solution was simple.

After the bridge builders started up their generator and left the outbuilding, one of us would sneak out to the generator building and add a cup or so of gas. Of course we would tell no one. The gang members would think their precious generator had gotten well or returned to normal.

Our idea worked fine—too fine.

It worked so well that Charles got a little carried away after a few days and doubled the dose. He felt partly justified: Margaret had found a small washing machine among the household goods she had moved up from Texas, and Charles decided to hook it up for her. Of course he knew it was going to use extra juice. He just didn't know how much.

The generator ran until eleven o'clock that night, and it was the cause of great wonderment the next morning at breakfast. The gang decided to do nothing for a while, and just wait to see what would happen.

Charles and I were in on all the talk at the breakfast table so we knew what they were planning.

The trouble was that we liked the idea of staying up until eleven o'clock, so we added our amount each night and the generator hummed right along with all its extra load and shut itself down about the same time every night, at about eleven o'clock.

After a few nights the gang couldn't stand it any longer. They had to do something about that "dad-gummed" generator running so late. They decided to go back to the original amount of gasoline and see what would happen.

For the next several days the conversation about the generator at the breakfast table crowded out the national news and even talk about what was going on in the headquarters of the Southern Pacific railroad. The reason for the heightened consternation of the gang was their inability to get the generator to shut off at ten o'clock as it had done so reliably for so many years.

What they didn't know, as they discussed how much less fuel they were going to try that night, was we would just add that same amount to what we put in the little generator. The generator didn't know, so it just ran until eleven o'clock and quit.

It was driving the gang crazy.

If they had just stopped to realize they hadn't had any problem until those boys from Texas showed up, they would have seen the problem and its solution in quick time.

When Charles and I left a month later, the gang were adding only a cupful of fuel and the generator still ran until eleven o'clock.

"The first night after you and Charles left, the generator ran for about fifteen minutes and quit," Margaret told me later.

She said a member of the gang went out and added another cupful and it ran about fifteen minutes and quit. During the remainder of the evening they continued to add gas a cupful at a time and it would only run for fifteen minutes.

When it finally quit at about ten o'clock it had used about twice the amount that it had used before the boys from Texas arrived with their scheme for a private utility company. It was a knotty problem all right. If they ever figured it out they kept quiet about it—because of the humiliation, I suppose.

The station continued to run on a more or less even keel in spite of the turmoil about the generator.

But the day of reckoning was fast approaching for me. One day I received two letters in the mail, One was from S/P headquarters telling me the Social Security office had informed them that there was no such number as the one I had given them.

The second letter was from my mother and in it was my Social Security card that I had left at home. I had written her of my need before leaving Portland and like all good mothers she came through just in time. I sent the correct number to the office by return mail and never heard from them on the matter again.

The summer was coming to a close. Kenneth arrived to pick us up precisely according to his plan and as stated in his letter. We three made the trip back to Texas without further incident.

Today I have no memories of the return trip—none. I wonder if the return trip was uneventful because we had learned all we needed to know on the trip up, and therefore were prepared for the unexpected on the return.

No, I don't think so!

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[11]railroad seal — The seal was a long piece of soft tin-like metal that could easily be cut or broken with your pocketknife or pliers or even your bare hands. This would allow a trainman to check a boxcar from a distance to see if someone had broken the seal to get inside. It was an easy way to catch a hobo.

EPILOGUE

My sister, Margaret, married a civil engineer for the Southern Pacific railroad, and is now a widow living in Oregon.

Kenneth Roberts survived our return trip to Wichita Falls, but I lost track of him after that summer. Kenneth had worked for the US Forestry Service in Washington State that summer, and he often spoke of wanting a career along those lines. Who knows? By this time he may be a "Smoky Bear" somewhere up there in the north woods.

The engineer of the helper engine who had been responsible for the train wreck was fired, and the photos I had taken were used by the S/P railroad in his dismissal.

Charles and I remained best of friends.

We had other adventures together and separately. In time, our shared love of aviation took us on

different paths, but with similar courses. We had talked to each other many times about our desire to enlist in the Air Force and become pilots—but first one regulation and then another always kept us on the outside looking in.

I finished two years of college in the spring of 1948 and took a job as an engineering draftsman for the Humble Oil & Refining Company. I gave up even thinking of becoming an Air Force pilot—there seemed to be just too many hurdles in the way.

Charles stayed in school one more semester, and he continued trying to get into the US Air Force Cadet program.

I gave up trying just a few months too soon. In September of 1948 I married a girl who didn't like to fly. Applicants for the Cadet program had to be unmarried and agree to remain single until after graduation.

In the fall after I married, the US Air Force reduced its college requirement from four years to two years for the Cadet program applicants. That allowed Charles to enlist for the career of his dreams.

The original college requirement had been too much for me to strive for. By the time the Air Force changed the college credit rules that let Charles join, my wife was pregnant and I was obligated to my family. It never occurred to me to fib about being married and apply for cadet training anyway. Others did such things, but the thought never even crossed my mind.

You see, by that time in my life, I had learned a little more about RESPONSIBILITY and CONSEQUENCES.

Ever since we first met, Charles and I had talked of somehow getting into the US Air Force Cadet Program and becoming pilots. But even though Fortune at times may smile on the dreamers, at other times that smile seems more like a laugh.

We were always friends and kept in touch over the years. Sometimes we got together when Charles came back to Texas to visit his mother. Other times we made trips just to see each other. We both became amateur radio operators and then we could talk to each other over great distances. We flew together a few times after he entered the Air Force, and he gave me my first ride in a jet.

We always had some laughs together, and often it was when we remembered some incident of that summer of '47 in Fields, Oregon.

It took me twenty years to become a fulltime pilot. Charles was a lieutenant colonel and a test pilot stationed at Fort Walton Beach, Florida, by the time I finally began my career as a corporate pilot for the same company I had started with back in 1948.

Within six months of my beginning a flying career, Charles was gone. He was lost in a Phantom F4 over North Vietnam in March of 1967. His body was not returned to his family until twenty years later. I have kept in touch with his widow and children over the years, and this story is in honor of Lt. Col. Charles D. Roby, my friend.

There were other adventure for me and my friends but you will have to read about them in another book

Lt. Charles Roby, in advanced pilot training at Goodfellow AFB, San Angelo, Texas. Just before Charles was sent to Korea (two tours), he had to bail out of a jet over California. He was the fourth man in history to bail out of a jet and survive.

If you would like to write the author,
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Eng. Robert David Gavidia
October 2024 - Temple, Texas

JD Fox believes people never change—only circumstances change. Circumstances in the past were quite different compared to today.

The author recalls, "One of my uncles told me that when he came to Texas in the early part of the 20th century, he and his family forded the Red River in a covered wagon. He lived to see men walking on the moon. Covered wagons to space travel—the changes came all within his lifetime.

"My uncle described the changes in technology. As his nephew, I have seen as dramatic a change in society.

"Just as we will never go back to the covered wagon for transportation, neither will we ever again see the innocent, uncomplicated times enjoyed by James Fox and Charles Roby in ***A Summer to Remember, 1947.***"

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The author, James D. Fox, in the air over Europe while flying for the Saudi Armed Forces, 1988.

Fox was born in Wichita Falls, Texas in 1929, but denies he was the cause of the Great Depression that began the same year.

His careers have included engineering draftsman, land surveyor, and electronic technician. He has owned and operated a small electronic sales and service business, a computer dealership, and a computer bookkeeping service.

As a professional pilot, his flying experiences have included corporate, military, airline, cargo, DHL, MEDEVAC, royalty and private. Currently he is flying as the personal pilot of the Shivers Estate—the family of the late Allan Shivers, one of Texas' most beloved former governors.

Fox's hobbies have included amateur radio, golf, photography, pen and pencil drawing, and fixing things that are broken.

Storytelling is his principal pastime. His "Fox Tales" short stories have appeared in numerous publications. ***A Summer to Remember, 1947***, is his first book. His second book will be published soon.

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