

The Fire Chronicle
Growing Up Men in a Time Now Gone

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1. Clearwater

Unlike today, in 1953 school teachers didn't make much and they didn't get paid summers. They had to have a summer job like college students do today. For my dad it was several things over the years, and the hope that at the end of summer there would be enough for a trip somewhere. Learning from a fellow teacher of a job in the northern Pomeroy District of the Umatilla National Forest would do both.

The job would be simple on paper. Work campgrounds and fix things most of the time, and fight fire when it happened, which was not that often it seemed. Mr. Smith left a few things out. He worked at the station along the Tucannon River out of Dayton, and we would be at Clearwater out of Pomeroy which was the main station for the district and the only one with two people. He was lower along the river, and it was a long way around to the rest of the district. His job was to maintain the busy campgrounds along the river, and rarely was a fire more than an unattended campfire. But then, he was an English teacher who by appearance would never even be out there.

Dad was an art teacher. Hardly one you would see out there either, but he had grown up one summer living with his uncle Harrison Crandall, the artist who owed part of what would become the Teton National Park. He had his studio and worked from Jenny Lake, and in 1928 my dad was sent there to be a man. He did so, but until this

time only seeing how hard he worked building our home and everything else he did I had no idea about that part of his life, or the bear cub he had for a pet or how a professional boxer had caused the scar on his nose in a Saturday night dance over a girl. I had not noticed this side of him. May be it was the flight he took with a pilot barnstorming in a by-plane that summer that made him a man so firmly planted on the ground.

At any rate I had been around people who worked hard and that was normal. The difference would be to find out what hard work was.

Needless to say we as kids had little understanding of much of what we would get into, much less how it related to the experiences of our parents as they were growing up. As a for instance, Mr. Smith neglected to tell us that while Tucannon had electricity Clearwater and the rest of the district did not.

Getting there was the first adventure. Leave at four in the morning so you can travel up Highway 395 on the desert side of California from Los Angeles to Reno in one day. The car was a 1947 Chevrolet, and it was packed. The trunk maybe had room for a feather or two, and the back seat was packed to the level of the front seat. That left the rest from seat top to roof for my fifteen year old brother, twelve year old me and small the dog. Dogs pant in hundred plus degree desert weather and open windows act like blast furnaces. Reno was no cooler, but night was.

The second day was even more isolated up the desert side of Oregon to Pendleton. In one stretch the "town" of Wagontire in what appeared to be the land time forgot had a single building station in the middle with one pump and you had to buy gas there to make the next town. They maybe saw five cars a day, you would see one or two depending on if they were going the same way you were or not.

Watch out for cows getting out of the fence in spots. The last year we saw a cow that had been hit straight from behind. It was now a short cow with about a foot of spine sticking out of it's rear end. The third year we were headed home when my mother of the lead foot was driving. I was awake, and my dad woke up just in time to see a small herd of cows in the headlights, and a speedometer showing eighty. Somehow, I think it was rollercoaster experience she had somewhere, we weaved through without hitting any of the twenty or so in the road. My dad had both hands on the dashboard and his eyes and mouth open as the car slowed to sixty five and went on without a word.

The first year we took a hotel in Pendleton to drop my dad off for fire camp, and I got sick. Real sick. My mother having medical training thought I might have scarlet fever, so we snuck out in the morning so we would not be quarantined, and called to tell them to disinfect the room. We left my father there for fire camp, and with the wife of the Assistant District Ranger Ellis Carlson went on to Pomeroy and Clearwater.

As years went by we stopped at the Pendleton Woolen Mills to buy Pendleton shirts and blankets from the Seconds Store. We saw some really bad examples of Indian blankets and were laughing about who would buy them when two families of Indians came in and bought several of them.

Ellis and Bess Carlson were our first contact in the new world. Ellis was a huge man with a barrel chest to hold the lungs of a voice that carried for miles some said. Bess was his wife and had been his eighth grade teacher when he as a little too large and old for the eighth grade. He finished high school before they got married. Bess was the Hollywood image of a country wife, round, rose cheeks, and a sears print dress with sensible shoes, and a smile and laugh to match her husband. Simply, she

looked like my Grandmother. They don't make better than these two and they remained friends of my parents two decades after we left the Forest Service.

We went to the market in Pomeroy first, and my mother not wanting to seem city asked for a peck of potatoes. The store clerk smiled, "We don't do them by the peck any more, we have a ten pound bag though."

The station itself sat in a hollow of about seven cleared acres, half a hill and half a field of daisies where deer and elk spent their mornings and evenings. Through the daisies from the base of the hill ran a cold spring that circled around in front of the wood shed and crossed the road to go behind the Crew Quarters and into the trees. At that point there was a second spring with a constant flow from a half inch pile into a hollowed log horse trough that was so cold we could use it for refrigeration if needed. Reaching in to grab a coke out of it meant your arm ached from the cold no matter how fast you moved.

The trough also had a certain fame in Pomeroy. Every year on the third of July we got a call from the newspaper in town asking if there was ice on the horse trough. The station being a mile high, and the spring being as cold as it was here was always ice until late August, so every year the answer was yes, and every year there was a headline in the paper about how summer would be late or delayed because there was still ice on the Clearwater horse trough.

Above there was an old gas station with no pump, you had to bring in a fifty five gallon drum and hand pump your own gas. Town was 23 miles of dirt road away. Up the hill and into the trees was a larger barn used for equipment that had little in it left over from the days the CCC had built the roads and buildings for the whole district, and a second barn and corals for horses.

We learned the first night several things about Clearwater, no electricity being first. We had Coleman lanterns for light. When they ran out you went to bed. It was also heated and you cooked by wood stove, had no refrigeration after two days and the ice melted in the icebox, and until you ran them off or caught them the summer started with the critters that had moved in during the winter months. The spring mattress squeaked when you laughed because the spring mattress squeaked and it was funny which that made it hard to get to sleep, and we had a week to get ready for my dad to finish fire camp and join us.

There was one other surprise. A half mile away was a lookout tower on top of the mountain at an elevation of 5660. It was one of the all metal towers with a 110 foot climb to an eight by eight room with a fire finder in the middle. The fire finder was a round map with a rotating sight used to gauge distance and find the spot on the map where you best thought the fire was, and it was quite accurate. Once in there was just room to walk around it. The first climb meant many stops on the landings, but by mid summer my brother and I could run it.

When I was growing up to be five or six years old I was raised in the same railroad company house in Minnesota my mother was. Wood stove was only an adjustment from the coal burning stoves she grew up with. Coal because it was railroad and they had a lot of it then.

When my dad arrived we had a list of tasks to perform. First was to fix the phones from what winter had taken down. That meant following the line of number 9 wire to find a break, splice it with a lead sleeve, and either restring it or put up a two piece ceramic insulator to string it from tree to tree. I would spend the first summer getting the hang of the spikes strapped to your legs and coordinating the act of tossing

the strap as you climbed, but I was twelve and didn't really have the strength until the next summer.

Once done the crank phone system was in and the one man stations at Wenatchee and Tucannon, and the tower at Big Butte could talk to each other and to town and the district office through an operator. Whoever was at Wenatchee had the job of working the line from Big Butte toward us, and we usually met somewhere around the spot of the old CCC camp where you could see the rocks they had lined up around their tents. Going along the ridge overlooking the Tucannon to the 6100 foot Misery Ridge there was always still snow until early July.

Misery Ridge was where the roads split to the site of the old Diamond Peak lookout which was open that first year though the lookout was gone, or you could head to the Wenatchee station and Big Butte lookouts, or travel the winding road down the mountain into the Wanaha River valley. It was the high point in this part of the Blue Mountains of Washington and Oregon, and off in the trees was an old outhouse that had some fame.

The story was that years before, probably during World War II, the District Ranger at the time was passing by on an inspection before the snow got too deep and saw smoke coming out of the outhouse. He walked over and found a man living in the hole who was convinced bombs were dropping all around and this was the only safe place on earth. Needless to say the Ranger tried to talk him out, but maybe not so hard. Whoever got him out had to deal with him. "They" had to come and take him away.

Clearwater had two men and was first call in case of a fire. There was no fire truck, you used your personal car and walked in. We also learned my brother and I

could go with dad, and we soon had our own hand made packs ready to go at a moments notice.

The first year the second man living in the crew cabin was Lonnie Eller.

At first there was more chore than fire. The campgrounds in the high country needed to be cleaned and opened. Like Clearwater first was to get the rats, mice and squirrels who had fallen in the holding tanks for the water at the campgrounds out, a process that went on all summer. In this process we found also that the district only had one chain saw, and it was in Pomeroy. If a tree fell in a campground we had to use a two man whip saw to cut it up and haul it off. It would be a talent we would need. Always pull, don't push of the saw will bind. I still have the saw by the way if someone wants to test it, but don't ask why I have it. My dad did it.

We also had to pick up the fence around Clearwater. It was a three wire fence and the barbed wire was laid down each fall so the snow would not destroy it. About every third post was rigid, and the rest went up and down with the wire. Where the wire hit the rigid post you had two round headed stapes to slip the wire in and hold with another staple dropped through. There were range cows that would wonder in if you didn't. At the entrance there was a cattle guard everyone drove over, and a gate for large loads and running the horses through.

A matter of some excitement occurred one morning when we woke up to find a large bull standing on the small lawn that surrounded the house. Someone had left the gate open. It took a few moments to get him to quit digging at the ground to show who was boss. When we were about to go get the horses we got him moving and back out the gate. He stayed most of the day looking over the fence wondering why he had to get off the grass so to speak. Elk were in the meadow, and he had to wonder who they were to be so allowed.

The second year the dog disappeared. For two days we looked, and feared something had taken her. We were outside, and my mother was checking the weather as we were an official weather station and had to call in three times a day. She heard a muffled rasp of a bark up the hill. Reaching the top of the road we looked down at a very dirty, very tired and barked out small dog named trouble. She had fallen in between to of the four by twelve's that made up the cattle guard and fallen into the pit below. People had been driving over her for two days.

Unless we were on a main road we also rode around face in the wind on the fenders of the '47 with a foot on the bumper guard and a hand on the hood ornament. The excuse was that it was easier to stop and pick up any trash we saw on the road though in those days there would be little of it.

Another grand discovery on our arrival was that we had horses and a mule, and that is a story unto itself for another chronicle.

It was a few weeks before the first lightning storm came through. We were out the door on a moments notice. But there was one thing that stopped it for a moment. Like the Forest Service packs my brother and I had put a shovel on one side and a Pulaski on the other. I was last out and the shovel came loose just as I was going through the kitchen door and the shovel caught the doorjamb. That caused the Pulaski to go the other way on the other side of the door. I was trapped until my mother untied it and I could go on with shovel in one hand and Pulaski in the other.

Once we got to the fire it was a typical lightning fire for those days. It was right next to the road up from Saddle Butte and covered about a quarter acre. But it was in the rocks, so as soon as we moved enough to get a line around it we had to work it one rock at a time getting water from a small stream a few hundred yards down the road for the hand pumps we had with us. The pumps were old and only held about

four gallons so much of my job became filling them. I remember once my dad tripped and fell head first with the full water pump on his back and wound up against a small tree upside down and could not move. He had to admit he could not right himself and I had to pull his feet down to get him up, and the mixture of mad and embarrassed was a classic I will always remember.

By late afternoon it was controlled, which then brought up the second problem common to that type of fire. The top of the three foot thick tree the lightning had struck was burning slowly. The next day we had to cut down the tree with the whip saw, using the ax side of the Pulaski's to make the slice to fall it. It took several hours, and by days end it was out and we were on our way home.

This first fire also introduced us to how the Forest Service was perceived in those days and where we were in the pecking order of government. In the standard pack was a days food, in the car another day or two, and it was in the form of a K ration. K ration, as in the food used by the military in World War I. Others were lucky, they had C rations from World War II, but not Pomeroy. It would be year three before we saw first day food on a fire that had a C on it. Needless to say, a canned cracker from 1917 can be real dry, but the chicken thing was not that bad. It was kind of like chicken soup without fluid. The canned fruit also held up, but a lot of it had been canned green to fit the small cans. They also included a small hand can opener that was a wonder, and we carried them in our pockets all summer.

Lonnie Eller was a farm kid. He could "jigger" anything and make it work. Just eighteen and away from the farm for the first time he was a talker and like all the man we would meet up there make a story out of walking to the barn. His most redeeming characteristic was his ability to drive his very nice '39 Chevrolet with the flipper moons on it while hanging out the open driver's door to watch the wheels go around. He

could drive that way for miles and never look up as he followed the trail of the ruts in the gravel roads.

Stories ranged from the aforementioned walk to the barn, to how to manage farm animals and where to go on a date if you lived in Anatone, south of Asotin in Asotin County. It was in the extreme southwest corner of Washington tucked in behind the Umatilla. It was small enough that the lookout at Big Butte could see both Oregon and over Asotin County to Idaho. It was one of the most isolated counties in the nation with a population he estimated at twelve to fifteen hundred at the time. He had never been to a city bigger than Lewiston, Idaho until he went through Walla Walla to go the fire camp in the city of Pendleton.

Lonnie was a wonder to two city kids. He ate dinner with us every night and talked until the Coleman's ran out.

Cleaning campgrounds was a weekly duty if not more often when a bear tossed it to one side or flipped it over to get into the garbage pit that each one had. You soon learned which camps had bears most often, and which had one large enough to flip the usually six by six wood platform completely over. Teal Spring Campground was just up an old road from Clearwater had an eight by eight platform for the garbage dump, and the bear there flipped it regularly taking all four of us to toss it back over and put it back. It was close enough to make it an excuse to ride the horses up and look now and then. The view of the Tucannon and the Blue Mountains was worth the trip as well.

It was Lonnie who taught us to wait at a campground for a woman to get settled and yell down one of the ubiquitous squirrel holes that surrounded the base of every outhouse, "Wait a minute lady, we are paintin' down here." Using the squirrel holes made it sound like we were under her and the rustle and run that came after was great

fun until she got part way back to her campsite and realized we were unable to keep a straight face.

He also told how he and his father had rigged the tailpipe on the farm truck for cars that followed too close. They replaced the pipe with the much stronger use of two inch water pipe, and drilled and threaded a sparkplug into it. If a car was following too close they would pull the manual choke to flood the car and the pipe with unused gas, hit the spark plug and throw a flame and black smoke at the car behind them. If they were close enough, you could turn one whole side of the cars grill black and scare the driver half out of his wits. It especially worked well on out of state cars it seemed. I think that discussion came out of the observation of our California plates.

We had about two or three more small fires that summer. My pack held together, and we learned how to work as a team when one would be showing flame and we had to get ahead of it. Each involved felling a tree.

My dad worked five on with one on call and one day off. Day off meant go to town for groceries. But first with no refrigeration the dairy was a first stop. We would each get a pint of ice cream and head for the large four person swing in the park next to the typical small town Bandstand. That done it was off to get a few things done before going to the town diner for a hamburger not unlike what would make McDonalds famous and a real malted milk. Off to groceries and ten pounds of ice from the dairy and to the theater to see what movie was playing. You learn quick to sit under the balcony not in front of it. Kids you know.

With the ice you had milk for two days, and could have bacon. A roast would make it to the next night. Work it right and we could have meat for three or even four days.

Every town along the canyon going through Dayton and Pomeroy up to Lewiston and Clarkston on either side of the Snake River had a Green Giant canning plant. When the Mexicans were coming through to harvest peas, we spent a little less time in town. It was a busy place. And like the peas, when the wheat was coming in the town was full of trucks being driven by the kids my age while older folks worked the harvest. This of course spawned dozens of stories of how everything in the field was picked up for the canning operation, including snakes and rats which were also chopped up and had to be hand picked out of the production line.

There were two big issues that summer that rocked the community. One was just before we arrived. They had the first fire of a building in town for years. The firehouse burned down and they had to wait for a truck from Dayton to come.

Second was far more serious. Like every town in rural areas the high school put the letter of the school or town in white rocks on a hill overlooking the town. Thus, Pomeroy had a "P" on the hill. One bright Sunday morning the rocks had been moved and the word "Hell" showed on the hill. It was headline for a week as they investigated. But good police work and cooperation between all of the agencies in Garfield and surrounding counties found the boys from Dayton who had done it. They were arrested with Garfield and Dayton county Sheriff cooperation, hauled into court and sentenced to put it back the way it was. The town came out to watch the criminals make the "P".

We also had one required task each year. We were the people from Clearwater, and that meant something to the people of Asotin County. It was no accident Lonnie Eller was at Clearwater, he had hit the big time.

The must attend event was the Asotin County picnic. Most of a hundred or more people would show up at a campground just before you got to Wenatchee. But it was Clearwater that had to have the question.

"Is this campground in Asotin or Garfield County? We don't want to have our Asotin County Picnic in Garfield County."

The answer was told to us, we didn't know for sure, it was awful close. But, according to the official maps there is a benchmark down the hill a few hundred yards that will tell you for sure. A committee was formed to look for it, and after years they had yet to find it. We could even take out a map and show the benchmark, but this was not an official camp and it was not on the map. It was well into Asotin County, it was just an argument they wanted to have and had had for years.

The picnic was pure Americana. There was a dance contest in a stake bed truck to the music of a fiddle and a jug. The base was a tub with a broomstick and wire. There was a prize for the couple married the longest, and it was the same couple all four or our years. They had been married when they were fifteen and had been married for over seventy plus years. They were helped from the car to chairs at the end of the stake bed truck where you could see more than someone moving from the waste up. He could still tap his foot to the music. They were also awarded for their longevity. She got a new bonnet, and he got a new tie even though his beard went to his belt. They crowned a County Queen. And the teenagers chased each other in the woods so boys could steal a kiss and they could get to know each other. My brother and I had to stay out of the woods, we were new meat.

When the all got there the food was spread and they ate like a road crew. One year a woman the size and demeanor of a bull arrived late because she "had to load a ton of tomatoes first. She walked around to the other side of the ton and half flat bed

truck she had driven in with a cloud of dust and pulled out the most beautiful decorated cake we had ever seen. She won that prize every year. After the judging which had been delayed a little knowing she was coming, she went to sit on the end of the long table the deserts were on and it collapsed.

2. People

Lonnie was not the only interesting character in the Pomeroy District. Ellis Carlson drove a newer pickup than the ranger, Spike Armstrong. Ellis drove like a maniac through the hills, and talked the whole time. Like Lonnie he had a hundred stories, and his greatest expletive and only thing close to swearing was to yell with a proper inflection to any situation, "By thee holly gemaneeze."

He had also been in these woods since childhood, and due to a new rule could not be the District Ranger due to his lack of a college education. But everyone knew who ran this forest on a daily basis. He loved horses, trees, dirt roads, wild animals, and kids equally. The crime was he and his wife had no children and that was the only thing you could note and get him to not be having the time of his life. He was a great teacher and we learned to fix phones, climb trees with spikes, saddle a horse, pack a mule, and spit from him. Always with him was his Winchester or his Hunting rifle, his gloves because he was always doing something, and his can of chew. He had a mountain mans view of everything in the woods, and a respect that bordered on a religion for all that was out there. For a kid from the city he was infectious.

I was riding with him the second year when he was talking and chewing. He could do both at the same time. It was however time to spit, which he did out the window as was his habit. Only it was cold that day and the window was up. No

matter, he grabbed his handkerchief and wiped, rolled down the window and spit again without missing a word.

One of the jobs we had that let us use his truck now and then was to spray Canadian thistle that was invading from hay coming out of Canada. It started around hunter's camps as they brought in hay for their camps and was spreading into meadows where cows resided for the summer. The job was to load the 250 gallon tank and pump in the truck and stray wherever you found it.

He was with us roaming away from the roads looking for thistle when a lightning storm hit us suddenly. My brother got inside the truck with Ellis and my dad leaving me out sitting on the 250 gallon tank and pump by myself in the rain. As we climbed up a slight grade lightning hit the large pine right next to the truck throwing splinters all around me and into the back of the truck. It was close enough it blew my hat off and I could feel the hair on my head rise. As I was pulling pieces of the tree off my clothes Ellis yelled out the window, "You alright back there?"

"Yes."

He simply drove on. He said later it had caused the truck to miss a beat, and he wanted to keep it going to the top of the rise where he stopped and my dad got out to find out how I was. I was fine, I had even jumped out of the truck to get my hat and climbed back in without their stopping as it started to pour and their windows went up.

Back at the station he said even he was amazed it had not arced to the truck, but tires are a good insulator.

We walked back down the hill to be sure there wasn't fire. The next day we had one.

Another character that year was the Ranger, Spike Armstrong. He was as much a constantly moving doer as Ellis as a get it done doer. Spike unlike Ellis was

short and skinny, and a strange mix of college and old time forest management. His personality was best described by my grandmother knowing such people as. "A fart in a leather mitten." We never worked the source of that one very well, but it is someone who is always on the move or doing something and nervous like they want out.

He was working on a project with Washington State University to study shrews and had coffee cans half filled with water all around the place. The shrew would fall in and drown. Every time he came to the station he would pull them out and skin them on our dining room table, study them and take notes, and ship the hides to the university in Spokane. Living in the woods you get used to things like skinning shrews on the dining room table.

Spike also had an interesting family and also remained friends with my parents for years after Clearwater. Outwardly a common marriage, he had his wife had an argument thirteen years earlier and had not spoken to each other directly in that thirteen years. Even at the dinner table he would ask one of the kids, two boys and a girl, to have her pass something. Even though they slept in the same bed each night it was the kids that heard how the day went and let the other know. If it was in the house she did it, if it was in the yard he did. See them at the annual party at the end of the year, which was the only time you saw her, they were both having a good time with everyone, just not each other. This went on for twenty plus years until their oldest son was in an accident and at the hospital they had to talk to each other. The ice broken of not wanting to be first they talked for days and got caught up with each others lives. He had just retired and they traveled all over the country together like newlyweds having the time of their lives.

Spike also was accompanied by his golden retriever and hunting buddy Daisy. He never took dog food when they were in the woods, she fended for herself. You

could never give her table scraps either. When it was time to leave he never called her, she just knew to get in. After the first year our dog Trouble had pups, and Daisy was getting older so she taught the female pup to hunt with her. The later part of the third year Spike had to take dog food with him, and the fourth he had a new black retriever.

He also had an old Dodge pick up that I think rattled when it was parked the first two years, but he liked it because it would go anywhere. When he found out I could drive he started taking me with him for small inspection jobs because he tended to wander away from his truck and I could follow him. In time if we had to go to some odd place, or follow to an area of thistle I was the one that knew where it was.

The trail crew was another somewhat regular crew to come through. The first year Pete Knott would stay a night and tell stories to wide eyed city folk, but after that they came in, took their four days off, and came back the morning they left. They would have coffee, but little else.

It was the road crew that would give my mother someone to talk to. They were eight men and a cook. Job one when they arrived was to level the old green school bus they called kitchen and mess hall, then they could put up their tents and get settled. Grace was in her early to mid seventies that first year, and second maybe to the bus was her car Betsy, but the bus and those men were her life. She put a pan of water in the oven, and when it had a bead all the way around it the bus was level. She was up at four in the morning to start breakfast, which consisted of a half dozen eggs each, several pounds of bacon or sausage, potatoes, pancakes, and a few loaves of toast. When they were done she had a huge box lunch for them, and they were off for the day. Like the trail crew they were ten on and four off, and worked ten hour days.

The job was simple, grade and repair every road in the district, bring in gravel if needed, and make a new section if one was getting too bad.

Grace had a break of about two or three hours to talk to my mother, have a cup of coffee, and relax before dinner started four hours before they came in. Every night the eight men ate one or two steaks, more potatoes, salad, one or two vegetables, bread by the loaf, and she baked ten to twelve pies for the eight of them each day. Once in a while there would be a little pie left for her and my mother to have at mid day, and occasionally some for the rest of us the next night. She ruled with a wooden spoon used to make a point, slap a wrist, or just wave to make a point when the men were in. Make her mad, she picked up a butcher knife the size of a small sword to make the point.

Chief among the road crew and Grace's best friend, and that of my mother and dad as time went on was Rex. Rex was the physical equivalent of Abraham Lincoln, thin and strong as an ox. He was about six foot three, but the primary mark in his appearance was a very pronounced parrot jaw. He had almost no lower jaw and it took some doing to understand him when he spoke to you. He was also one of the most gentle people you would ever want to meet. Mess with Rex, you got Grace. Mess with Grace you had real trouble. Rex ruled the crew with a laugh and smile, but everyone knew what a days work was by his example.

Several years later when he was in his forties Rex had surgery on his jaw. Grace wrote my mother a letter about how handsome he was, and how he had gotten married. In four years he had four kids before Grace died and we lost contact.

When the rest of the crew took their four days off, Rex and Grace stayed in camp. That was when conversation and friendship could develop.

Three things struck me meeting these people. One, these were men. Working men who judged by their ability to eat made that fact they were all thin and muscular seem odd. They enjoyed each other, picked on each other, worked when it was time to work without saying a word, and did whatever Rex told them with a level of respect none of us had ever seen.

They also knew how to have fun at it. After the dinner table was cleared it was pinochle every night.

One of them was getting his explosives license that year. Rex took him, and all of us except Grace who was cooking, out to a large meadow just away from the corals. He showed him how to place both dynamite and composition C, set the fuses, and run the line away from the huge stump they were going to use. In all they set seven charges during the learning process. When it came time to set it off, the trainee twisted the magneto style detonator and nothing happened. Rex told him they had too many charges on it, and to twist it repeatedly to work up more charge.

The hole was big enough that I could stand in it and not see out. We never found any of the stump used for testing.

The other event came when Rex had taken me with him to get a load of gravel in the six yard dump truck. He had just learned that though I was twelve I could drive, and drove not only the family car but Spike and Ellis' trucks as well. Half way back he pulled over, "Think you can drive this?"

Why not, twelve year olds have no fear.

He patiently showed me how to shift the five speed transmission, and how the button allowed the brownie to give you a half a gear. He also told me how to double clutch going through neutral and said simply, "Now drive back to the station."

He got a few smiles out of it, and patiently instructed when to shift on hills up and down for a few miles. One time I lost power and stalled when I picked the wrong gear. Stopped on a hill he simply said I missed that one and needed to do it a little sooner. He looked out the window and I knew it was for me to get it going and work it out. Sometimes you just need to know the "or what" of things.

My dad had a look of shock on his face when he looked up and I was driving the truck down the hill into the station and up to where they had pitched the tents they lived in. Just in time for Rex to get cleaned up for dinner. One never went into Grace's bus without washing up first.

They stayed two or three weeks each year.

A third person the second year was Lead Orvis, a forestry major from the University of Pennsylvania. Lead wanted to be national forest, and had taken the job at Wenatchee for the summer. He would graduate the next and wanted to see what it was like out west. Lead came to visit on his way in and out of town on his days off. He also asked a favor.

His girlfriend was coming out to visit him for a week, and it would be inappropriate for her to stay with him at Wenatchee since they were not married, could she stay with us and he would visit. They could go places during the day on his off days, and she could spend a day at Wenatchee, but nights were to be at Clearwater.

Who says there never was a Norman Rockwell world? I saw it as they sat on the lawn and talked under the watchful eye of Crandall's one whole day.

That spring they were married, Ellis retired, and Lead became the Assistant Ranger the third year.

These were the characters I learned from. They were all different, and they were all the same. They worked when it was time to work, and relaxed when it was

over. Few swore, I learned that from my mother who got it from living in a railroad town. They were a manner of people hard to find beyond a fire camp, farm or cattle ranch these days. They all had high school diplomas, and were the most educated people I would ever meet. What they knew was how to live, how to relate to others, how to get it done, and when to speak and be quiet. Mostly, they didn't speak unless they had something to say. None of them, especially Rex with his physical deformity ever judged another or looked down on someone until they had worked with them and knew them. Having them accept me was all the education I needed. From them I learned the rules you never learn in the city or in school. Rules that in the world my kids and grandkids would live are all but gone.

It was also a statement to the Crandall's. We had been accepted by everyone from road crew to townsfolk. It appeared in the paper we were back, and my parents spent a little time looking at a farm at the edge of the forest boundary with an interest to buy. I did not know it at the time, but Ellis had quietly announced his retirement to Spike, and my dad had been offered the job. He almost took it.

Also by the second year we had settled into the tasks of the place. We had settled to the point there was a pattern to life in Clearwater. One of them was days off. My dad had two days off at mid week. One was spent taking pictures of flowers, teaching his sons to shoot their twenty two rifles, or just going somewhere we had not been.

My brother and I were inventive types, and when first there had built a lean to that was the envy of Boy Scouts to get out of the rain. We also hand ax cut a substantial set of three steps of heavy logs to make it easier to get to the house without having to go around the retaining wall that made the flat foundation for the house and lawn. We built two bridges over the creek, tried to damn it up in the

meadow downstream, but it was too wet and loose to stay put. We attempted to build a log house with an ax like the pioneers had, and made it almost to roof level before abandoning it. We always wondered years later what people thought when they found it tucked in the woods. We also started downstream from the meadow following a deer trail and made a trail that went downstream for over a mile in the two summers my brother went with us. We had to build three bridges along the way.

Camping with my dad at the clearing we stopped the trail at I saw a man I knew nothing about. My brother asked about why he had divorced his mother, and my dad answered in detail. My brother knew nothing about the infidelity on his mother's part, much less the night he caught her. I was as shocked as he was. It also explained why she was on the fourth of seven husbands by then.

But our crowing accomplishment was the "Go-Go Mobile". To my brother and I a hill or a pond always meant something had to be done with it. The long hill from the gate to the front of the crew cabin would be no exception. We found a couple of two by eights, a bolt and some rope. Two small logs made axles, which had to be trimmed on the ends to a spindle that would take a hole made by a two inch auger, and provide a stop for the wheel to hold it straight. We then found a downed tree behind the gas station at the base of the ramp used to work on the bottom of a car, and cut four wheels about two inches thick. We would find that too thin, and went to three inches. The log was consistent, so every wheel for two years would be the same. We drilled the hole in the center of the wheel, greased the axel, used a wood pin to hold the wheel in place. The front axel was attached to one of the boards, and with the bolt a rope and feet we could steer the thing. Using the rope you could also haul it to the top again. It would have been a marvel to the Stone Age, and it was to Clearwater. We

broke a wheel about once a day, especially after the wheel log dried. We simply found a new one. The second year we broke an axel, and it was around all four years.

3. Working

As I said, it was not who you were, it was how you worked. There was always something that needed doing, and in those days it was usually done the hard way, the old way, and the way that worked. The only power tool in the district was a McCulloch chain saw that weighed about 46 pounds and was only used to cut a years firewood. Most fires were too far in to carry it, and the fuel to run it.

The second year would see more fires, and the first hint from Spike that years of fire suppression would some day cause fires to be larger and harder to manage. He said there was some talk of using control burns in the fall and winter. Thirty and forty years later they would learn that the hard way in Yosemite, and with a disaster that would destroy a third of Yellowstone.

We would have a few that would reach an acre that summer. The process was the same, but the work became more demanding with the distance to be covered to contain them with only two men and two boys.

Also this second year the new man at Clearwater was Dick Lund, another teacher from Pasadena my dad worked with. Dick was a wood shop teacher, and mechanic, and like my dad had a pace he worked at that kept him moving all day. No great highs, no great lows would describe him best. My parents were careful when my brother and I would go somewhere with him to work because he was an avid Seventh Day Adventist and didn't believe in as much as a band aid. If we got hurt he would

pray over it. He once turned his laundry red when he had a bleeding finger and would not use a band aid. Laundry was an interesting if not antique gas powered machine with rollers to get the water out, and he had cut it starting the engine. A few years later rather than call for help he prayed while his wife, a catholic, slowly died of a heart attack.

It was the third year when my brother was seventeen that he decided he had better things to do than go work that hard. He did not return, but my grandparents came for a weeks visit.

Dick Lund had returned with his son Bob, and kid large for his age and who like his father had a speed he worked at. However it was a first gear type of slow speed.

We had a storm that came in that was one band of lighting wave after another for an entire afternoon and early evening. One of the things we had been told was a good idea, but the situation had not come up yet, was to be in the tower while it came to us to see where the lightning was striking so we would know where to look for fire the next day, or catch one that popped up quickly. My dad and I climbed the tower as the first one was just reaching Oregon Butte in the distance. As it passed the small summer home of the lookout became a lightning rod taking over a dozen hits. As the wave neared us we did as we had been told, pull the rope that disconnected the phone line with a large switch at the bottom of the tower, and get on the stool with the old style glass phone insulators screwed onto the four legs.

One problem, there was one stool. We soon found that dad and I can sit quite close if we needed to. As it passed over us the wind was driving a torrential rain sideways making the window wet on only two sides of the 110 foot steal tower. Second, we were being hit so often by lightning that sparks were flashing between the bolts in the corners of the steal box we were in.

It lasted about fifteen minutes and then it was gone. Another wave was crossing over Oregon Butte and we could no longer see it, and I had to pee.

After a short funny conversation about how it would look in the paper if we were struck while being grounded from taking a pee of the side of the tower from the first landing, I went down through the door in the floor and took care of the problem remembering the old Indian adage about keeping your back to the wind for such things I was soon back inside for the second wave to come over us, and a third. In between we watched to see movement at Oregon Butte barely detectable at that distance even with binoculars. He was alright.

We thought we saw hundreds of fires, but soon learned the difference between a fire and a fog devil when we went to the bottom and the phone was reconnected. We did see a row of four on a ridge in the direction of Oregon Butte and went home to prepare for the next day as darkness came and a more gentle rain started.

My mother was laughing her head off when we came into the station. She recited the conversation about being grounded while taking a pee over the side of a metal tower in a lightning storm, and one when I asked my dad if he was scared. He said no, and I asked him why his eyes were so wide open. She also noted she too had been scared as we talked about the sparks between the bolts in the corners. It seemed we were being hit so often, and there was enough residual electricity in the air to short the phone switch at the bottom making the phone connection live. She was also listening to the entire conversation with the phone at the station still on the hook. She was afraid to pick it up.

I also learned that in a lightning storm like this you even have to close doors and windows in the house even though it might get hot. I learned about Saint Elmo's Balls. Both my mother in Minnesota and father in Oklahoma had seen this balls of lightning

rolling on the ground, and they had heard of them rolling in through an open door or window burning the house down. I took it as interesting, and with a grain of salt until years later in Altadena I saw one come down and land stop making the whole sky green for several seconds. The next day the paper reported the incident where one of Saint Elmo's balls, extremely rare away from the mid west, had landed on a telephone pole by the Sheriffs office about a mile away. It had fried the pole and phone lines isolating the Sheriffs station and homes in the area for several hours.

The next day we had six fires in a row spread out for just over a mile on the top of a ridge. There were six of us with Dick Lund and his son, Lead Orvis, Bob Morse from Wenatchee, and Jerry the mule was along with his four ten gallon water cans. Jerry hated those cans and how they rattled.

We hit the small first one quickly and had it contained in just a few minutes. Three hundred yards away was the second slightly larger and with a heavier duff for it to creep in. A line was around it in about an hour. At this point Lead made a decision that made my dad smile, and me swell up with pride. Though only fourteen, I could handle the first two by my myself while they went for the other four.

I worked most of the time on the larger one to get it out of the duff, running back and forth making sure the other didn't take off. I was alone all day, and all but Dick and his son returned late afternoon. They had been left at number four which needed more work.

The water was gone and Jerry and I were sent to fill then at the river we had crossed on the way in. Though Jerry and I had been working together for over two years and were great friends, it was the first time I had used the cans with him. He was having none of it. Once the cans were filled, I found out how heavy ten gallons was trying to lift them up to the level of the pack saddle. Jerry would see them coming

and move, and I would have to chase. Luckily there were several trees around and he could not go far, but I would learn later at another fire the chase could go on for days if it was open ground. It was not the first time we slept in our clothes.

The next day I again had my two and the others finished the other four. We were home for late dinner where we ate like a road crew.

We also had a singular event that summer. A teenage girl had wandered off from a campground in the high country. The panicked mother came in just as we were finishing dinner. A call to Pomeroy and we headed for the campground with the road crew. In an hour Spike, Ellis and a professional tracker arrived and we were organized and spread in all four possible directions just as a storm hit. We were out calling with flashlights until three thirty in the morning before we came back to the camp as another wave of lightning and rain hit. It was decided to call it a night and come back in the morning with more people from town.

Spike, my dad and I went with the tracker. I was amazed at two things, he was a younger version of Pete Knott the mountain man who had worked the trail crew, and he was wearing a cold '45 and a Bowie knife, just like they did back then in the mind of a kid. Second, he had found a number of things to follow that I would never have seen, nor my father or Spike. In the end we wound up looking in to the darkness of a canyon and he announced we have been following an elk for over an hour. I saw that, I thought he was looking at something I missed.

Spike sent him home when we got back to the camp.

It was three in the morning and the storm was back as we all gathered in the campground. With us the road crew, Lead now the Assistant Ranger and Spike all went to Clearwater where we would eat. And did we eat. My mother served while Grace and Rex cooked. We went through everything we had and much of what was

in the bus. I remember it was several dozen eggs, pounds of bacon and sausage, several loaves of bread, biscuits, and three whole boxes of pancake mix. I don't remember potatoes, but there was some left over apple pie. I remember that somehow I was at the head of the table where I could watch the whole process, and do remember eating like the road crew, even to the amazement of my mother and father, and not feeling stuffed when I was done.

Two hours sleep before we were out again, this time with several pickups full of volunteers from town to travel back roads to see if she had found one and was trying to get back. Again planning was at the campground and everyone was sent out except Spike, my dad and I. Dick Lund had stayed at the station in case there was a fire from the overnight lightning storm.

A couple of hours alter a pickup came in with a group of young men we had laughed about, and they were yelling and whooping all the way in. They had found her walking a road over five miles from the campground. She had spent the night in a lightning storm, and heard and seen a mountain lion. She was walking the wrong way on the road as well, and glad it was over. She was also going exactly the opposite way the tracker had thought and taken us the night before.

There were a few more small fires that summer. The rats ate all the wires in the car of the college kid in Big Butte and a tow truck had to take it all the way back to town, almost a half day trip.

However one more fire would be of note. Spike had taken the horses and Jerry the mule to escort a group of Forest Service dignitaries around the district. He called from the station outside of the little town of Troy on the Wanaha River which was the south boundary of our district. They had a fire on our side of the river. It had been spotted by a citizen, and we were told to take Leads truck and load the pumper, and

bring everything we could think of in case it took off before we could get there. It also meant travel several hours at night to be at the trailhead by morning when they would know more.

It was near dark when we took off, and late and dark when we went through the town of Troy. All I remember was a couple of buildings, and the only lights on were at a square front wood building which served as a store and bar with a porch that looked straight out of the movie *Shane*. As we passed several men, some with beer in hand came out to see who was coming through that time of night.

My dad found the ranger station and pulled in. As he came to the top of the hill and pulled off into the grass Spike suddenly stood up waving his arms in the headlights. We had driven directly into where they were all sleeping, and would have driven over Spike if he had not jumped up. There were forest dignitaries on both sides of us.

We slept for a few hours and at daybreak we took off down the trail. Reaching the river we found the fire smoldering on the other side down the trail about two hundred yards, and the river was chest deep. We had to strip and hold everything over our heads to cross in the freezing water, then dress and start on the fire itself.

This fire was a little odd. It was on a fairly steep hill, but was not moving much. We had it contained in a couple of hours. It also had a tree burning on top, and it would have to come down. By late afternoon we were started on the tree when Spike and his five dignitaries came riding by on horseback. We walked over to meet the men we had almost driven over in the night.

One of them was the Head Ranger for the Umatilla, which stretched from central Oregon to the Pomeroy District in Washington. It was his offices housed in Pendleton that the entire Umatilla was directed. One was from Washington D.C.

We also learned they were looking at the timber as there would be more logging down the road a very few years, and that is why Lead had been hired as the assistant to Spike.

One of them asked me how old I was, and learning fourteen looked at the rest of them. Spike quickly noted that I was with my father, and had been on fires many times before. They accepted it if for no other reason than they wished they didn't know how old I was. They had been watching as they came down the trail and crossed the river and I obviously could do the job.

We were going to be there three days. The tree was close to five foot in diameter and we had a six foot hand saw to cut it with. Spike arranged for food and sleeping bags to be dropped to us by air, and we were sent three bags, one having eggs in it was used to cushion their fall, which did not work. There was a case of peaches, and other things to insure we ate well. The sleeping bags were also made of paper. We were so amazed by them, and how well they worked we hauled them out and my dad brought them back to southern California with him.

That third year also saw another Pasadena teacher and his family at Wenatchee. Bob Morse, his wife and two younger kids were having the time of their lives, and a third child they would always call Wenatchee Willie would result.

It was also a year the rock section of the road passing in front of Wenatchee would need to be fixed. The road crew took an hour to get there, and they knew that if they were not back for dinner they would see the butcher knife not the wooden spoon in Grace's hand. They set the charges and decided to do it all at once since it was spread out. Bob spent the rest of the summer resetting the doors to every building at Wenatchee. It seemed all of the buildings had changed shape a little. One small shed was off its foundation and several windows on one side had to be replaced. They

offered to help, but Wenatchee didn't have as much to do as Clearwater and he needed to have something to do since the Wenatchee Willy project had been completed.

Every station that summer, all four of the firemen on the line were from the Pasadena School district that summer, and all from Eliot Junior High School. The same school I went to.

We also brought a friend from the neighborhood, Tommy Johnson. Tommy fell out of every tree he ever climbed, and if there was a way to get hurt he would find it. When we reworked the Go Go Mobile back into service, he got hurt on that. The cut his toe missing the swing while cutting firewood and could easily have lost his foot had the ax not gone through his shoe and stuck in the floor between to toes. He tried to ride Jerry and almost lost his manhood.

As luck would have it he would miss most of the fires that summer either from injury, of the fact that in most cases my dad and the Forest Service didn't mind sons along, but friends was a liability they did not want.

Along with my dad and I, and Dick Lund the second man at Clearwater, Tommy did go on but one that third the year.

It was a mile in down one side of a small canyon and up the next. Like most it was a lightning fire with the central tree burning at the top. There was a water source down the hill, and we used Tommy to go down and fill them for us. It was only a couple of hours to get it contained, and we took a break before taking down the burning tree. Laying there we noticed there was also a second smaller tree about two feet in diameter also burning.

We decided to take it down first, and use the Pulaski's to do it. Making the front cut Tommy and I were working across from each other and getting good at a pattern of

swings to make a constant job of making the cut. Tommy got winded and stopped, and as he did I kept chopping but looked over to see the head almost ready to come off his Pulaski. As he raised it again I yelled and he stopped his swing. My dad had seen it too and yelled. Tommy put his hand on the head and it fell off. There would be no more two man ax work that day.

Once it was down we turned to the larger tree.

We knew it would be tough as we got to the middle. The tree was almost six feet though, and the saw was six feet. We then had a second problem. The tree was hollow like a chimney. As soon as we broke through to the center it let air in and the chimney effect let the tree burst into flame at the top. We had to be careful, and two would cut while Tommy and the other were spotters. We also had to make our own wedges from the tree we had first cut, and had to stop to cut a slice off of it. We also had to cool the saw now and then as the flame worked its way down the tree in the inside.

In the middle we could move the saw less than six inches, and we were afraid to start the ax cut and open the chimney too soon. Luckily, most of the branches on the old tree were on the side where we wanted it to go. When we started the cut from the other side, the drop side it was not long before it settled on the saw, and we had to use wedges to keep it free, in the end we had to take one handle off and try to pull it out, but it was stuck.

Also by this time we had Tommy chasing small slot fires that were being created by the sparks coming off the top. We started the ax cut, and sooner than expected the tree fell right where we wanted it. It also broke into pieces at the burning top which allowed us to get in with the water and put it out. It was the toughest tree cut we had ever had to do, and took almost an entire day. Several times the spotter

would have to yell and one at the saw would have to run as sparks or a piece of burning material came down. From that day on it seemed fine with Tommy that he not go on fires.

As a footnote, Tommy joined the Army when he turned eighteen, and at nineteen got drunk died in a car crash. His younger sister almost died in a single engine plane crash with her boyfriend when she was eighteen but survived because the plane landed on the lawn of a hospital. It was the Los Angeles television sensation of the year.

4. Changes come to Clearwater.

A number of things changed the fourth year at Clearwater. Suddenly my dad was the only Pasadena teacher there. I had been down for most of the year with a kidney infection, and had grown. I was no longer the kid, and now being six foot one and a hundred ninety pounds would come in handy as the year went on.

There was another Bob in the district, and this time he was the second man at Clearwater. He had been farmer and cowboy, and like Lonnie the first year was a good hand. He was short and stocky, but worked like a dervish. At Wenatchee was a school teacher from Idaho who liked every bit the part of Smokey the Bear. As usual there was someone new at Oregon Butte. No one stayed more than one year, and of late they could get themselves packed in so that trip was no longer on the itinerary. Even Tucannon had a new man. Big Butte had a repeat lookout though.

The next fire was at a lower elevation near the entrance to the forest. It was in an area that had not burned in decades and the duff and fallen timber would make it a longer job than it normally would. There was no tree to cut, but the chain saw was brought out for the volume of it all. It would also be the only fire in the four years where we worked with the man from Tucannon.

Smokey and Jerry would be brought out as well and that would be my job for the three days. I packed equipment and food in, and used Jerry to haul water from the camp at the end of the road. It would be my greatest experience working Smokey and

Jerry to get a job done. It was back and forth for over a mile across a long meadow, and down the rocky side of the ridge to where the fire was in the trees and back again often after working the fire for a while.

The highlight was Jerry, and the cans he hated so much. I spent most of one day and part of another chasing him around a tree to throw the cans on and duck if he came back at me. It was a game, and we both played it well. At the end of the run we had a disagreement about who was going to lead, but he need to be with Smokey and his history with me made him run and put the halter in my hand. He also saved me from a rattle snake as I was leading him back on foot the last trip out.

It was the last time I worked them, fire was changing.

The next call came late afternoon and the fire was out by Big Butte where some logging had been going on. Jim from Wenatchee called that it was beyond him in some slash left by the loggers.

As my dad, Bob and I took off first. Lead was arriving to get the tank and pump we had used for thistle on his pickup and went just behind us. When we arrived at the fire it was taking off, and Lead went to a nearby logging operation to impress the loggers into federal service. In those days with only seven men on a district, and two of them in towers, if a fire needed more people impressments were the answer. We knew it could happen, but this was the first time it had. The fire had hit about five acres, and I was sent out to direct them, and to ride in with the bulldozer that was on the way. When we arrived on the dozer it was night and the area was only seen by the light of the fire itself when the fire crowned. We were working in front of it as fast as possible and the dozer was starting a trail along one side when it took off up the trees and jumped over us. The trees started to explode above us raining burning

embers and branches down all around us. All we could do was run as the ground started to catch from what was coming down on top of us.

As we checked each other and put out spots on our clothing that was smoking the dozer driver took off in front of it taking down trees as he went to take away the fuel and the fire dropped to the ground again. He also had a problem when a branch poked a hole in his radiator, and we used what was left in the pumper for the radiator. As luck would have it the loggers knew of a pond a half mile down where I could take the truck and fill the tank again to keep water in the dozer as he made a trail around the fire while those on foot took over spot fires outside the line he was making and we had it contained by one in the morning.

It was the first time we had seen a fire crown. It was also the first time I feared for my life as we checked each other out to stamp out parts of our shirts that were starting to burn.

We watched it all night chasing flair ups and using shovels and the truck to be a step ahead of it, and by morning the dozer made one more trip around to make something better of a road for the pickup with the tank and fire hose to make it around as we worked for the next week on this fire.

That day also proved dangerous. It was decided that the fire was still moving up hill, and there was a stand of trees inside the line the dozer had cut. To keep it from crowning again they had to come down and into the fire.

Nothing was said when I grabbed the old McCulloch and started to cut. The loggers had also accepted me by then. As I cut and stepped back to watch it fall and start the next one, a logger started above me and in front of me cutting a second row. Between us we could drop the whole stand in one pass.

About half way through I stepped back and tripped over a small log on the ground. As I did I of course grabbed the saw which opened the throttle all the way as I fell back. When I hit the ground the saw was going full on when it hit the top of my thigh before I could toss it over my head and it stopped.

Two people saw it. The logger heard the saw race and looked back. He got to me first. My dad was across the fire and came running as well.

The logger and I looked together as I opened the tear in my Levis. Expecting the worst, there was only a small scratch half the length of the tear in my pants.

The logger looked at me and said, "You are one lucky son of a bitch kid," and we went back to work. But my dad had to see it first. In another quarter hour the stand of trees were all down.

When it was settled down the working side of the fire moved away from containment and into putting it out. We finally had a chance to set up some kind of camp to spend the next night, and having been up for two days it was time to take turns getting a little sleep in. Spike showed up with food for several days, sleeping bags and other things. He also took Lead back with him and left the truck with the pump on it for us to use on the crude road the bull dozer had made. We still had a few of the trees that had exploded over us to drop and it became a game of follow the smoke. I was charged to take the truck to the pond and fill it, then drive to where it was needed. I would make those runs nonstop from sun up to sun down for the next three days.

Remember here I was fifteen and didn't have a driver's license yet.

Entertainment was provided by the new man from Wenatchee. Every time you went by him he would continue his concern, and ask his question. It was especially

funny in that he looked like a bear himself, and the dirtier he got the more he looked like one.

It would go something like this.

"Here we are out in the damn woods fighting this fire and putting out lives on the line, and where is Smokey? That damned bear is probably having lunch with some damned Congressman or the President, or having his picture taken with some movie star. But oh no, we are out here doing what his job." He kept saying was he bet Mr. S. T Bear has never been on even one.

Or, "Why does he get his picture on every damned tree and sign in the nation when we do all the work around here. I haven't even seen him clean a campground much less show up on the fire line."

If you were working on a spot with him it continued on. If you passed by him he would ask, "You seen that damned bear yet?"

"No."

"Me either. Remind me to bring it up with Spike next time I see him."

Lead showed up in his personal pickup, and new 56 Chevrolet with a V-8. I was told to take the four cans that were part of Jerry's pack which he had brought from the station for me to go to a campground that had a spring about five miles away and get water for the camp.

Of course I would.

I was sent on my way with a request to look for the damned bear while I was at it, and soon discovered this truck though not Forest Service had a siren. No one was around, why not. I got the water, and for the first time used a faucet to fill it full at ten gallons, and found out by the weight I had not had them as full as I thought before. I also had a short hill to climb with them.

But I was on my way back in just a few minutes.

Half way back I had to stop in the middle of a meadow. Two very small bobcat cubs were scrambling across the meadow and road as fast as they could. They were small enough they were tripping all over each other and running sideways. I could have put one in each hand easily, and catching them could be done by little more than walking fast. So, I opened the door.

Second thought, mom would be just inside the trees. I will just watch. When they finally reached the trees she stepped out and looked at me as much to say either good choice, or thank you.

As I said, the road made by the dozer was not a freeway, and as the days went on it kept getting worse. When we got the truck back to Clearwater three things were obvious. First, the exhaust system was in the back with the tank and pump. It was gone all the way from the base of the engine. Second, both rear springs were broken. Third, there was a slow leak in the radiator emulating from a stick in the base of it we left because it seemed to plug the hole pretty well.

When the district mechanic came to look at it he was furious. He demanded to know who did this to the truck. Lead pointed to me sitting on the coral fence and the mechanic said, "I don't want to know about that, do I?"

Lead explained the reason and the road and he accepted it as inevitable no matter who was driving.

Two days later it was a Sunday, and Lead showed up at the station at six in the morning with his truck. He was going to cite the logging operation that had left the piles of slash that had caused the fire to crown. The same loggers they had called to fight the fire and the one's that owned the bull dozer.

He also asked if I would go along with him.

Sure.

On the way there he told me he was citing them for little things. This was a small time operation and they could ill afford to be shut down for long, or fined. We were hitting on Sunday for a reason, they could get it done and be back to work on Monday. Sunday was an off day, and if they fixed things they could be back working on Monday morning as usual. He also seemed to know they would be fixing the radiator and would be there.

As we pulled in the owner of the operation stepped out of the shed they were using for an office. When he saw who it was two other men came out, the one who saw me go down with the chain saw, and the dozer operator.

When he said he was there to cite them and shut them down until it was fixed the two both grabbed an ax and stepped to either side of the owner.

The citation was to be for gas cans left lying around and a few other small items, and for the lack of a fire arrester on the dozers exhaust stack. He also demanded the names of the men who had come to the fire, and that he have their Social Security numbers.

These were not happy people, and they let it be known how they felt quite clearly.

They had an old half worn out fire arrester for the dozer, and were in the middle of making a new one knowing the Forest Service had seen it was missing at the fire.

At that Lead handed me a Forest Service seal and told me to put it somewhere on the dozer where it would be broken if they tried to move it. As I stepped that way the dozer operator and his ax stepped in front of me.

I simply walked past him and he let me go. I climbed on the dozer and set the seal on the bar I had seen him engage the transmission with and jumped down.

Lead explained that if they could not get the new one built, use the old one for now. Clean the place up and he would be back at six in the morning to get them back to work.

Hands were shaken, mine included, and we were gone.

Lead had to give me a better explanation about the seal.

"I knew they wouldn't bother you."

"I didn't."

"I wasn't sure until they picked up the axes how they were going to take me."

Thank you very much for scaring me half to death. But I did it.

Lead was back at the logging camp at six the next morning. They were back to work with Forest Service approval stickers and a paycheck from their work on the fire.

5. The End of an Era and a Lifestyle

There would be two more fires that fourth summer. The Pomeroy District of the Umatilla would be changed forever because of them.

As storm came through and Oregon Butte reported some smoke, and a pilot also saw it. But the Butte could not see it later in the day, or the next. It was my dad's day off so we were in town when Spike came to the restaurant he knew we would be in. He had found a pilot to take him out and look for the fire, and wanted to know if I wanted to go with him.

Sure.

We drove to a recently mowed wheat field a mile of so out of town and waited in the wind. In a few minutes we heard a plane coming up the canyon. It suddenly appeared and came up over the fence but under the phone wires and landed in the field next to us. We got in, and took off over the fence and under the wires again with a slight drop and turn into the canyon before he started to climb. I was in the front with the pilot and Spike in the back where he handed me a container in case I needed it.

I was too nervous to throw up as the plane was bouncing around in the wind in the general direction of the forest. I didn't know that to compensate for the wind you have to fly slightly sideways, but by the time we reached the forest I was a veteran. We flew around and saw nothing while the pilot pointed out all the places where planes had crashed in the area. He explained how if you come out of a canyon the cross wind will drive you into the ground if you don't allow for it.

At that Spike asked him to follow down the canyon, so just above tree top level he went over the canyon and shut the engine down to fall into the canyon. Stomach in throat I still didn't need the container. Coming up I remembered the conversation as he swung at the last minute away from the canyon wall and let the wind blow him across the top of the ridge. A few more times and I am okay with this as well.

Until he hit the tree.

He was dropping down a canyon like he had before when the plane jerked violently to his my side and righted it self on the say down to a simple I am sorry about that. Looking out the window I cold see a pinecone in the wheel.

No fire and we are headed back in a little over an hour and a half.

The ride back was a little bit of a tour so Spike could see a few things without having to make the drive, and a joy for me to see the world I had known for four summers, much less anywhere from the air.

Spike decided we needed to fly over Clearwater, he had told my dad to head back in case we found the fire. We announced our arrival by dropping and buzzing the house, then climbing to go around the lookout tower. At that Spike handed me a bag of rocks with a note in it.

"As we go over again open your door and hold it open with your foot and drop the bag when the pilot tells you."

"What?"

"Just open the door and you will have to lean out a little and hold it open against the wind with your foot. When you do the door will be against the wind in front of you so you can't see very well. The pilot will tell you when to drop it."

I can do that. I think.

The pilot was a good shot. We almost killed my dad with a bag of rocks.

Back at the wheat field we came up out of the canyon only the pilot turned away. His something wasn't working and he could not compensate for the wind any more.

Glad it waited for now to break instead of coming out of a canyon in the woods.

He just had to come in over the wires against the wind and drop it on the ground. Sorry about the hard landing. As long as it was a landing don't be sorry at this point.

I learned what rubber legs were. Luckily Spike had me drive home which gave my mind something to do.

It was a few weeks later that we did get one in that part of the forest, near the Oregon boarder in the rockier country around Oregon Butte. My dad, Bob and I had to go down into an area we had not been to before. We had to drive toward Troy and the Wahaha River, but head back into Washington State through a small valley with a few back country farmers to the Crooked Creek trail head. From there hike with full packs into the mountains from there. We met a man at the end of the road who came out and fired into the trees. We later learned he was probably warning his son at the still the Feds were around. He also had a plane he took off from in his meadow and had some notoriety for taking hunters in to isolated areas where he would land in a meadow, and pick them up later. He had been up and seen the fire and showed us where it was on the map.

We parked and started the walk. We hiked down into the canyon and walked for a couple of hours before seeing it on the ridge above us. We also were in a dead spot for the radio and started to climb. When we reached the level of the fire we realized it was one finger ridge farther on, and with the curve of the mountain did not

realized it was actually five or six ridges beyond us. We went back down to make better time on the trail by the river again.

As we reached closer to where we would climb again a plane flew down the canyon, and in it was Spike trying to get us on the radio. We had been unable to report in most of the day and they were worried. The conversation was in pieces, Spike had to fly directly up the canyon and turn around and come down again as the window we could talk through was narrow.

It was also getting dark, and very cold and Spike told us the fire was spreading. We should spend the night there and climb up in the morning.

None of us had ever been that cold. We kept the fire on all night, and at one point I got too close and my coat started to smolder.

We were up when it was just light enough to see and started to climb the steep cliffs just above tree line in the steep rocky canyon, and saw the fire as we cleared the first layer. Another hour and we were there, and the radio could get out.

In a few minutes we heard the planes come with smoke jumpers from Montana we had just learned Spike had ordered. By now the fire was about twenty acres and working its way through the rocky hillside. We were told to set up a camp.

The base of the fire was on a cliff, and we found a spot at the top where we could be protected by rock. I also found a spring around the corner which with a little work might pan out. Just above where we had set camp was an outcrop of rocks with a pointed top, at the base was a fairly flat spot with another outcrop

Smoke Jumpers, especially in 1956 were a unique bunch of men. This was fairly late in the season, and the ten that came were half of what was left of sixty that had started the summer, and one of them was just back from injury. They were not

brought in by helicopter in those days, they were dropped in by parachute, two at each pass.

One was climbing his parachute and at the last minute lifted his legs to miss the point of the rock. One landed in the fire at one edge, another on some rocks inside the fire by about a hundred feet. One was hanging in a tree half way down the side of the finger ridge. Another landed right next to me, and his partner almost did, but roled half way down the ridge to land just under the one that was hanging. Two more landed and rolled but caught something to stop the roll and were close to where they should be, another at the base of the fire and the last one with all watching drifted all the way across the main canyon and landed in a heavy thicket about three hundred yards from the river below. When he hit we could hear him yelling clear across the canyon and the concern showed on the faces of the others.

But just as quickly we could see a bear running out of the thicket, and almost immediately the man yelling at the top of his lungs and throwing rocks at the bear. It took him two hours to hike down and up the other side to the fire where he explained how he had landed right next to the bear, and when the bear started running from fear he decided he better keep him afraid so he wouldn't turn around and see it was only a man, and get mad. That is why he started yelling, chasing and throwing rocks.

For the next five days they proved to be the type of people who would jump out of a plane in the wind over a fire on the side of a steep canyon. I would have to say not quite crazy, certainly not insane, but somewhere close to nuts. They had the sense of humor to go with it.

At that point Lead had joined us, and the man we had seen with the place on the way in dropped over the ridge and came in to look at the fire about thirty to forty feet below the level of the camp at the top of the fire. He few down the canyon, and

ten minutes later he came by again. After a third pass Lead said to the Smoke Jumpers that he needed to give the guy a message to get out of here, we didn't need another fire caused by him crashing his plane. He made one more pass, and was peppered with rocks as he passed under us. He took off. Lead smiled that it wasn't quite the message he would have recommended, but that it did work.

My spring cleared with some work and could fill a canteen now and then, but not help with the fire. Lead arrived on foot to coordinate the drops of water and supplies we would need. Had me build a small table along top of the small rock wall at the base of where we had camp to serve and act as cook and bottle washer.

They started dropping five gallon cans of water to fight the smoldering fire with, cases of peaches and pears, and everything from sleeping bags to bacon. They used two very expensive sleeping bags to cradle eggs, but the parachute didn't open on one.

What they were doing was dropping two things at a pass. Especially with the water the first chute would take the wind from the second and it became a cannon ball. The way they dropped some of the second ones landed in the fire, and that was a help, but one took out my table as it acted as a five gallon tin water ballon, which on reflection did calm the dust for a while. But it destroyed my table for serving the men when they came in for something to eat. Lead told them to watch it, and the next drop was a case of food with the note on it from the plane, "Quit your bitchin', we'll miss your kitchen."

We had another problem pop up. The rocks were full of rattlesnakes. At one point one of the smoke jumpers came in with one that had just lost his skin and was still blind. As he climbed up through the rocks it had struck him on the top of the hard hat, and you could see two spots of venom. He had pulled his head back and watched

it striking out, waited for the right strike and caught it with his hand. He brought it in live for all to see.

My dad took a picture of Dick Lund holding it. Dick was six foot two, he is holding it at arms length by the now severed head with his hand near the top of his head. There is about a foot or so of the snake on the ground. We used the fact you can skin a snake and the body fluids will act as a natural glue and made three belts and four hat bands out of him.

We also decided he was meat, we would eat him. So it fell to the cook to skin him with the help of a smoke jumper to show me how to cut down the center, then Fold back at the head and it simply peels off, complete with the dozen rattles at the end of the tail. I started to try to put him in a pot. He also had been dead for over an hour and skinned and cleaned he was still trying to get away. One of the smoke jumpers was laughing and said that was always a problem when they ate a snake on a fire, and said you have to cut him in pieces about seven inches long first, then he will stay in the pot to boil. As I was cutting him with the large knife in the kitchen set they had dropped my dad had to hold the other end to keep it still enough to cut. When I was half way he let go and took out his camera just in time to see the stump of the head end twist around into position and strike me on the top of the hand. He got the picture as it pulled back and was only a couple of inches away. It also struck a second time.

That stuff gives a kid the creeps.

The smoke jumpers started out first on the fifth day. Lead and Dick Lund later and my dad and I spent another night. In the morning nothing was smoking, and the line was patrolled before we started back ourselves. When we got to the river we were crossing a log, and I was about twenty feet ahead when I heard my dad yell. I ran back to find him in the middle of the river soaked from head to toe.

This was one of my wrong moments. Though I looked at him with a little laughter he did not appreciate, what I saw was an art teacher who fell off a log after five days with smoke jumpers. He looked out of his element for a moment. What I would see as the day went on was a man in his mid forties, older than anyone else in the forest who kept moving one step at a time after two days hiking and climbing, and five of mountain climbing while fighting a fire. He was exhausted and it showed. I could also see the limp and found out about the short leg. At one time we had stopped to rest on the trail half way out of the steep canyon, and were laying in the trail. I fell asleep, and possibly my dad did too for a moment. I woke to his telling me not to move. I looked, my arm was hanging out over the edge of the trail and my hand was just about an inch and a half over a rattlesnake curled up on a flat rock using my hand for shade. I held my hand while we discussed it. It was decided that he lived here, we didn't. I pulled my hand away quicker than I had ever moved, and we were on our way again to a surprised rattlesnake wondering where his shade went.

This fire signaled a change in the forest we had known. Fires requiring smoke jumpers were common in Idaho and Montana as storms which passed over us strengthened as they moved on. But even in this rocky location there was enough build up unburned fuel that one could take off like they did elsewhere.

In about a week and a half it would prove true again the same isolated area of the district.

We got the call late in the day. My dad, Dick and I met Spike on the way and we headed to the back side of the district, this time coming in the way from the direction of Oregon Butte. It was dark when we hit the end of the road, and we could see the glow of the fire in the distance. Using flashlights we started down the ridge, and just about a mile later we were standing on a flat spot on top of a rock outcrop

looking down on a very large fire. By morning it was over fifty acres, and settled in the end at sixty three.

Spike's immediate reaction was we stay here tonight, we are not going down there in the dark. Also, here above it the heat would keep us warm as we had nothing but our packs, and someone had to stay awake in case it took off up the hill toward us.

It was a long night, and in the morning smoke jumpers were called in and two larger logging camps were pressed into service.

Spike also looked at me and said, "You aren't on this one. Mark a trail on your way out and meet Lead with the flatbed and tools. You guide people in.

We had a cruisers ax with us, which is a smaller version of a double bit I loved to use. A cruiser is someone that goes through the forest and uses this smaller ax to cut a mark on trees that will be cut for lumber. Now they use paint cans. Being a smaller double bit, you could swing with one hand both ways and make the mark without stopping very long. I used it to mark the trail on trees both coming in to the fire, and coming out. I was only at the end of the road for a few minutes when Lead arrived with the flat bed and the first of the loggers.

He broke the seals on the large boxes of shovels or Pulaski and handed out one each to the men who would follow him in on the trail I had cut. It would be for me to do the same as other came in over the next three hours.

The first thing that happened was that I was sitting in the truck waiting for another group to come in when a badger came running by. Next to the truck about ten feet away was a large pile of fresh dirt some other critter had made and as he passed it he stopped and looked at it, went on a few steps and looked again, moved a few feet more and made another double take, then jumped on the pile and rolled over in it, slid

down the side of it, and destroyed the pile before shaking himself off and trotting off with a definite spring in his step. Before that I didn't know a badger could smile.

The second was a little more dangerous for a moment. Three pickups came in with a group of loggers. One pickup had identical twins in it. They were maybe eighteen or nineteen years old and full of both energy and attitude about being here. They were wearing slick new quick draw holsters with bone handled nickel plated Colt '45s. As they came up to the truck to get their shovel and Pulaski I told them they had to leave the weapons in their truck.

"There are snakes out there?" one asked.

"There probably is, but you are going to be crawling around in the brush on the side of a cliff and they will get in the way. If you catch the hammer on a bush you could shoot yourself in the leg with those holsters. If you shoot a snake in the rocks where else is the bullet going in a row of other men."

They stepped back side by side and pulled the leather off the hammer and prepared to draw on me, "You will have to take them from us."

"Fine, take them."

They started for the flat bed to get the tools and I added, "But use them to fight the fire. You aren't getting one of these unless you leave the guns in your truck," I said and stepped in front of them.

They pulled back to face me again and one of the older men in the group stepped forward and told them to come along, they could use one of the two he and the others had and they started toward the trail.

A little over an hour later I saw the twins coming back up the trail. They didn't say a word as they put the holsters with the guns on the seat of the truck next to me

and left. They had wire and led Forest Service seals on them like the one's on the tool boxes the shovels and Pulaskis had come in.

A few hours later I had been watching the planes go over that dropped smoke jumpers in. Spike came out and asked if I had the guns, and told me to get in the flatbed and drive him back to Clearwater. As we left I asked what had happened.

"When they came in without shovels I asked what had happened and the older guy told me what had happened and how you stood them down. He was laughing the whole time. Lead had some seals he was going to use to reseal the boxes when it was over so I used them and sent them back."

"What happens now?"

"They will have to go before a federal judge and explain why they used them to threaten a federal agent."

"I'm not a federal agent, I'm only fifteen."

"Did I ask you to stay out here and hand out the tools?"

"Yes."

"That makes you a federal agent. You are big enough no one will ask how old you are and I see no reason to tell them."

Wow, a federal agent.

Spike had one more bit of news, "Last week I tried to get them to pay you for the last two fires. You are too young and they don't want to set the precedent. Next year maybe if you have a driver's license for stuff like this," he said with a smile as I was driving him in a Forest Service flatbed truck with no driver's license.

6. Lessons

That spring my dad had a heart attack. It wasn't a bad one, but enough that he didn't want to take the chance on a fire. It was also clear that the Clearwater we knew was gone. They were bringing in more people as logging would begin, and a generator for electricity.

Between years two and three my dad inherited a farm in Canada on the Columbia River when it is traveling north above the pan handle of Idaho. The third year he and I went to see it. It was also about seven acres cleared, and had a neighbor who was a man with an Indian wife who had simply moved into it. Our place had a two story log house and a large barn. There was also three Model A Fords there, two pickups and a car. As I went exploring I also found the biggest pig and her brood I have ever seen.

It was beautiful and we were here from Clearwater and my dad was thinking retirement until three things came to be seen. The forest around it was so thick you could not enter it, the river was so cold it was a light blue and so swift you couldn't get near it, and as the sun came down you saw the reason for a two story house. The mosquitoes literally darkened the sky at the first floor level. We went back the next year to find the man in our house, the pig, "Poor dear" was gone and weighed over a thousand pounds, and the cars were gone. My parents called him a caretaker since he was clearly going to live there when we were gone, and sold it to him two years

later when he wrote to say it was an early spring since the tops of the fence posts were out of the snow by May 31st. Not a place to retire.

On the way back the first trip I was driving at night and suddenly we lost the lights on a curve. It was pitch black. While I simply stopped the car while my dad went nuts. We flagged a truck that came by a few minutes later and followed his tail lights to the next town where we discovered it was just a fuse. But when we got the car started to follow the radio blared and everything was tweaked in my dad's frenzy to do something. He had a nick name already because he had to fuss with knobs and switches, "Mr. Twiggle." Frantic Mr. Twiggle was something else.

But Clearwater was over. A time of living without electricity, refrigeration and most amenities, having a crank phone where your number was two longs and two shorts, using a horse and mule to fight fire or get somewhere, and a thousand other things less important than the people we met and worked with there was gone.

I was on a total of twenty three fires in the four years. Some were simple like the first one, but by now more dangerous like the last one we had. Clearly they had gotten a little worse each year.

But the effect it had on a kid from Los Angeles would last a lifetime and to some extent reach into the next generation.

The next summer we went back to Canada one more time with my mother along this time. On the way back we stopped by Clearwater just to see if it had changed with the addition of a generator for electricity. There were five men at Clearwater now. And logging had begun. I recently looked at it on a satellite map and could see large tracks of bare ground where the forest used to be, the field of daisies now has a circle driveway in it and a small pond. The road in is different and the wood shed seems to be gone, and they have made a large pond out of the meadow behind

the barn where the stump blew up and my brother and I tried to make a pond ourselves.

They have a saying for a time and a life you can not go back to. While it is nice to know the house and the rest of it is still there, "You can't go back." A part of me didn't want to see, and wishes I hadn't. Another part says what matters is what happened there in the mid 1950's, and what it did to make a kid grow up. I have changed and Clearwater would not recognize me either. What will not change is what we did to live that life now gone, the people we met now also gone, and the parts of me that became the man I now am.