

## Mural for the Tabernacle

Someone asked dad to paint a large, real large, mural to hang in the local LDS tabernacle. So he did it, probably more because of the challenge rather than a sense of obligation or devotion. It was a challenge. The canvas he painted must have been 6-7 feet high and stretched 15 or 18 feet. I not really sure of the dimensions but make that estimate based on its size in relationship to the size of the walls it was hung against while he painted it and how it looked on the front wall of this building to the right. While painting it, he'd tack up the section he was going to work on and then attack it with drafting pencils first and then with brushes and oil paints. He worked in the evening so had to use artificial light, bare-bulbed lamps sitting on the floor shining on his work space. The thing was eventually completed and hung in the

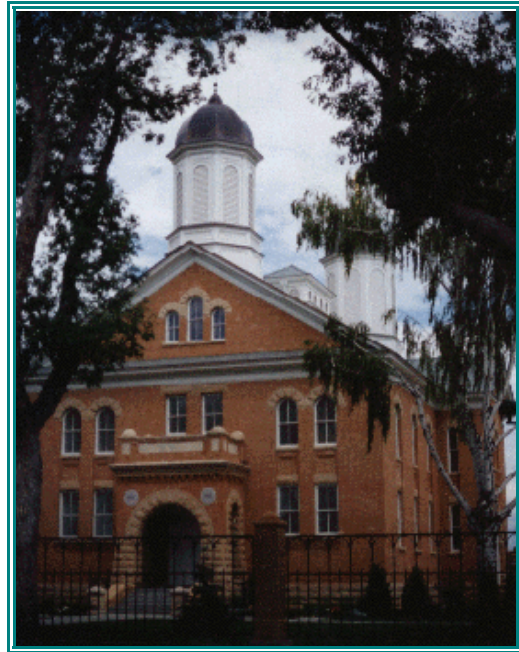


Figure 1 Vernal Tabernacle

Tabernacle. I remember sitting in the audience in the Tabernacle during conferences by grandma and grandpa Merrill, looking at that thing my dad did. My dad. I was pleased but didn't really grasp the fact that it was a dramatic accomplishment for anyone out there in that dry dusty uneducated place. Dad was an artist from my earliest memories.

At the boring quarterly conferences that we'd attend in the Tabernacle, I sometimes sat with grandma and grandpa Merrell. If the sun shined in through one of the upper windows, I'd try to coax her to loan me the pocket mirror out of her purse. She thought of it as a quiet toy to occupy a bored kid. That's what it apparently was for most kids. However, on at least one occasion, I reflected a brilliant ray of sunlight along the ceiling of the tabernacle, which attracted some attention, then up onto the mural, tracing the rail road and outlining the clouds. That got a lot of attention. Until some one figured out who was distracting the audience. The mirror was retrieved and put away - but I wasn't too repentant.



The mural was like a Thomas Benton or Diego Riviera mural. An allegory. In the style of public murals of the 1940's, WPA era. A sweeping view of the development of the country, starting in the industrialized east flowing across the central states into the Wild West. It showed the advent of steam railroad engines that traveled along side cowboys and Indians and settlers in Conestogas. Storms in one part of the mural, the growth of cities in the desert in another part. The thing is currently in mom's basement. The Daughter's of the Utah Pioneers made a serious mistake in their pursuit of the thing. Do-gooders believe good intentions justify bad manners. Marie may be old but she's tough as nails. She knows her rights and won't be intimidated. The DUP [don't you love the acronym?] apparently threatened mom in some manner after she hesitated to hand the thing over to them. They told her that she had "return" it to them. Ha. What was never theirs can never be returned. If it belonged to anyone other than dad, it was the LDS church, not some bunch of pompous nuts. They indignantly found their way out the front door after it was pointed out to them. Never returned.

On the back of the black and white photo shown above is a stamp showing it was the "Product of the Thorne Studios". This little guy was all over the place. Nice man. In dad's handwriting was the notation "Stake Conference circa ?1950". Followed by: "Painting 9' x 18'. By J.A. Jensen {Painted in 1947} for Vernal Highschool's Centennial "1847" program then donated to they Uintah Stake, Archie Johnson Stake President. Late pulled down by Irvin Haws, Stake President, after building was no longer used for stake conference." So now we know the truth behind the thing.

One of you kids needs to go over and spread the thing out and take its photo for UBW - your chapters of UBW. At least that's what I would have suggested in early 2002. But when I talked to mom about it later, she told me that someone had borrowed it in Provo., and still later she told me it was taken back to Vernal. So when I took mom out to Vernal in July, and we stopped to visit Mary Schaefermeyer, the one who went to Seward with us in 1951, I asked her about it. I told her that mom said it was back in the tabernacle. She snorted and looked at mom and said, "Marie, you know it's down there in your basement. It's not out here." Mary is always clear in what she means so there was no doubt. My guess now is that mom did in fact loan it to someone in Provo for some sort of celebration which means the darn thing is probably lost because she doesn't have a clue where it is now. I don't suppose it much matters. I don't want the thing in my house and none of you want it either. So just enjoy this picture and the memory. That's all

you'll be able to take when you go anyway.

On the next page is a fuzzy enlargement of the mural itself. Apparently the top edge was sagging on the left side but it looks fine. Out there in Vernal. I'd sit there and look at that man and woman with the handcart passing the prickly pear, wondering what it must have been like. The idealized goal on the right was too beautiful to believe my dad made it, but I knew he did and was proud of it. No one knew who I was, that it was my dad who did that thing, but that was ok with me because I knew who I was and that he did it.





## Central Elementary School

This school was two stories tall and spread over what seemed to be an enormous amount of land though when I visited it years later, it was not large. The combination of two unfamiliar-to-me features made the building impressive: first, the room dedicated to kindergarten was a large circular one, and second was the fact that I was trapped in an army of other kids and supervised by teachers of varying degrees of humanness. Disagreeable experience. I was claustrophobic and wanted to be back on the farm with 2 of my own acres to explore, without interference of other kids or intimidating big people who had the power to order me to do what I didn't understand or want to do.

I did 4 years there, starting with Miss Anderson in Kindergarten who should have been banned from teaching tender kids, followed by Miss Isabel in First Grade, Mrs. Williams in Second Grade, and Miss Schofield in Third Grade.

## Kindergarten

Kindergarten was a distressing experience. None of the kids in my class were familiar to me. I was taken away from my familiar home environment where there were few kids, the Roberts kids and two families of Cooper kids. Coopers owned the dairy and herd, and the Roberts kids lived further down the road past Coopers on my side of the road. The regimentation of kindergarten was hardest to cope with. True, mom was a strict disciplinarian but there was nonetheless freedom at home to walk around, to go to the privy, to get a drink whenever I wanted, and so on without needing to formally ask for permission. The arbitrariness of Kindergarten seemed as unreasonable as anything could be. Why did we need to sit with our hands folded when we weren't causing any trouble. But rules were rules and so it was.

The fun thing -the only one- about kindergarten was the snack that we received each day. It was some sort of cookie or cracker with a cup of fruit juice, sometimes orange juice. We didn't have fruit juices at home and certainly not orange juice, so it was exotic. Cooks hauled it from the cafeteria in a large metal cooking pot that looked to be aluminum. The teacher would ladle out juice and call us in order to go get our drink and whatever else was served with it. I suspect that the juice was made available by the federal government through one of its millions of welfare plans. I doubt that the farmers on the school board would approve spending money to buy orange juice for their kids when local tomato and apple juices were available, probably from one of them.

After completing our tour of duty in kindergarten we moved on to first grade. We understood that this was 'real' school, not the sissy stuff for babies. Actually didn't feel much different. The school rooms that I attended in Vernal and Seward looked like this with the difference that all of the desks were occupied:



تدریس و کلاس . Classrooms and desks

<http://www.usda.gov/oc/photo/00di0878.htm>

These desks were not uncomfortable to kids. Indeed, the question about whether they were comfortable" was laughable. They only had to be serviceable. Remember: in that era, "kids were to be seen and not heard." Anywhere. We were assigned to specific desks and kept our supplies inside the desk on a shelf under the writing surface. The desks had ink wells in one of the top corners where we would put a bottle of writing ink when we had to practice writing using quills and nibs. Our heavy-duty cast iron desks were bolted directly to the floor. Other desks were bolted in sets of 4 to 2 x 4 rails so they were stable and remained in place but could be moved around by the janitors.

## Miss Anderson

For me, going to kindergarten was the equivalent of being a wild stallion that unexpectedly had a saddle thrown on its back and a bridle with bit fitted painfully and permanently into its mouth. I bucked and I kicked and never adjusted. Never. I had been wild too long by then. The discipline and rules didn't make sense. I did nothing unkind to anyone. It wasn't -and isn't- my nature. I treated kids and adults with courtesy and kindness and respect. But I often found myself the object of criticism from the teacher. I didn't comprehend what I had done wrong, I observed the "Golden Rule", but I had failed somehow, I had erred, because I had transgressed something called "rules" that I didn't know. But that didn't matter. Horse sense was not the guiding principle, being kind was not the guiding rule here.

"Following the rules" was the rule. I was mystified, pained. Ignorance was no excuse. Failures to conform were equated with stupidity and castigated as such. I agonized over my failures which were abundant and frequent. I did not comprehend what was required of me. My mom and dad and Sunday school teachers had explained carefully what I was supposed to do. I thought that was all I was responsible for. I did those things as a necessity, because of fear, and because it was my nature to be kind and considerate of others. But to no avail. I knew I was a "bad" student.

Mom magically preserved most of my "report cards". Following is the one from Kindergarten signed by the Executioner "Lorene Anderson" and principal "John Stagg" who in that time was hopefully not the butt-kissing sycophants that are endemic in public schools today, NEA parasites on the local economy. Today, however, they strut around with Ed.D. as if they were gods. I'm off the soap box now....but not through.



*Ronnie Jensen*

Public School Kindergarten  
UINTAH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Harold M. Lundell, Superintendent

ACTIVITIES	Semesters		Days Belonging	Days Absent
	1st	2nd		
<u>Language and Literature</u>				
1. Likes to tell own stories.	S	S	90	0
2. Speaks clearly.	S	S		
3. Likes to listen to stories and poems.	S	S	86	17
4. Is learning new words.	S	S		
5. Likes to play stories.	S	S	Total 176	17
<u>Number Concepts</u>				
1. Likes to count.	S	S		
2. Understands terms of comparison, more-less, big-little, half-whole, etc.	S	S		
3. Understands clock, measures time.		S		
4. Associates numbers with objects.	S	S		
<u>Discovers The World About</u>				
1. Likes birds, flowers, animals.	S	S		
2. Is discovering how to obtain information from books.	S	S		
3. Becoming more observant.	S	S		
4. Asks good questions.	S	S		
<u>Reading Readiness</u>				
1. Knows his name in print.	S	S		
2. Likes to look at books.	S	S		
3. Repeats rhymes and retells stories.	S	S		
4. Can tell about things he has seen.	S	S		
5. Knows sounds of many consonants	S	S		
<u>Rhythm and Music</u>				
1. Likes to sing.	S	S		
2. Can march, gallop, skip, hop, run to music.	S	S		
3. Is learning left, right.	S	S		
4. Likes to listen to music.	S	S		
<u>Arts and Handcraft's</u>				
1. Likes to use crayons.	S	S		
2. Likes to paint.	S	S		
3. Likes to use clay.	S	S		
4. Can use scissors and paste.	S	S		
5. Knows colors.	S	S		
6. Likes to build and play with blocks.	S	S		

Figure 5 Kindergarten Report Card - Side B





half of the year where I was marked down because I hadn't learned to "rest quietly." Fact is, I still haven't. That goes against the grain of me to have to sit still, especially when I have to follow someone else's silly "rules". I have no problem with rules that arise from reality, from horse sense, but I will never freely accommodate myself to arbitrary rule that were dreamed up by some tight-souled mean person with what s/he perceives to be a modicum of authority. [Say 'thank you' now, because lots of really bad words were omitted here.]

Also note the absence of even a bad grade for the "Number Concepts", "Understands clocks, measures, time." I didn't get the clock. This business of big hands and little hands going in circles, pointing randomly at a series of numbers that "told" time just mystified the hell out of me. What nonsense was that. The more I was badgered about it, the more tentative I became until I learned what to answer. Not really grasping the ideas for some time. I did so poorly that the poor teacher didn't even know what to put in the box.

Note the interesting and bizarre measurements. What funny ways to measure a kid's progress" in kindergarten. I suppose I don't have others to substitute for them but they strike me as remarkably inane. Could I "March, gallop, skip, run to music"? It's embarrassing to even ask the question. If I had difficulty doing those things it was because they were such stupid things to be forced to do in the presence of a teacher who was evaluating you. I also like the one, "Asks good question." I suppose that means that some questions are 'bad' questions? Upsetting to me since my life was nothing if not a series of questions about every darn thing that came into view. Or "Takes turns using equipment." What a stupid thing to say. You need to know that we had a pair of D-6 Caterpillars, three front-end loaders and one Yellow Road Grader on the playground that we took turns with. Making trenches - to bury the teachers. Or "Knows what to do with things he finds." My ears burn. Or "Becoming more observant." How in \_\_\_\_\_ could one of these types even tell that? I was more observant of Mrs. Anderson than she ever was of me. Ha. It's a miracle we could eat our lunch alone and navigate stairs and walk through doors without hitting the jambs. These morons 'teaching' us were brilliant.

Two interesting items on the second page: note that I was absent zero days the first semester, but was absent 17 days in the second . That resulted from the childhood diseases that infested us. Funny thing about the report card - it has no date. So I can't use mom's list of diseases with confidence. Let's do some math, a shaky enterprise anytime with me. If I started kindergarten when I was 5, that

would have been in the fall of 1947 and would have finished in the spring on 1948. If that's the case, the list of illnesses and inoculations that mom prepared shows that I did not have diseases after all that spring. I had two surgeries. Age 6. My tonsils were taken out, and the tumor on my ear was removed. Those surgeries accounted for 17 days of missed school. Miracle that I ever passed kindergarten wouldn't you say? Sharing Cats and running to music. I must have been a prodigy. Cuz' I could even button my own pants.

Mom's signature. She signed herself "Mrs. James Alvin Jensen" which reveals the prevailing perception of mothers of their place in the community in the era, extensions of their men. They signed themselves as their men's possession. Odd in today's perspective. And the style of the signature. It is so carefully written that it looks like she wrote it with the expectation that her penmanship would be graded by the teacher. The odd thing about the signature today is that I can't distinguish it from dad's. In the end their writing was so similar that I couldn't discriminate one from the other in isolation. The only reason I am sure this was mom's signature and not dad's is because of the "Mrs."

### First Grade and Miss Isabelle

Miss Isabelle was a dream of a First Grade Teacher. I fell in love with her. My first true love, in truth. I had no idea what 'love' was -sad admission- but I experienced it in her class room. And was devastated. Even seeing this photo of her causes twinges in my poor old heart. She was absolutely gorgeous, stunning. Surprise you when you look at this photo of an old woman? I could understand why. But please remember: this woman represented the height of fashion and social power in the small agricultural town of Vernal in that era. She was one of the emerging liberated women though the term was too new for



Figure 7 Miss Isabelle



that era. [She's staring straight into my poor ol' eyes. Sigh. Amazing. Hope you have that experience 55 years later.]

She was actually Isabelle Johnson, but due to the fact that there was another Miss or Mrs. Johnson teaching at Central Elementary, Isabelle elected to go by her first name with "Miss" stuck on the front of it. That was a wise thing for her to do. It made her imminently approachable by us impressionable let-me-give-you-my-heart first graders who had done Kindergarten at this school with unapproachable Mrs. Anderson. Miss Isabelle explained to us kids the first week of school that we were to call her by her first name. I was undone. First name with a teacher. Well. When I had a chance in recess, I shyly went up to her and told her, "You can call me Ronnie."

Turned out that her home was across the street from the Merrell homestead in Naples I learned many years later. I remember several things about Miss Isabelle and First Grade. The most important was reading. What an extraordinary experience. I haven't recovered yet. "Run, Dick, Run", "See, See,



Figure 8

<http://www.bradmessenger.com/DogLite/doggieLight-1.htm>

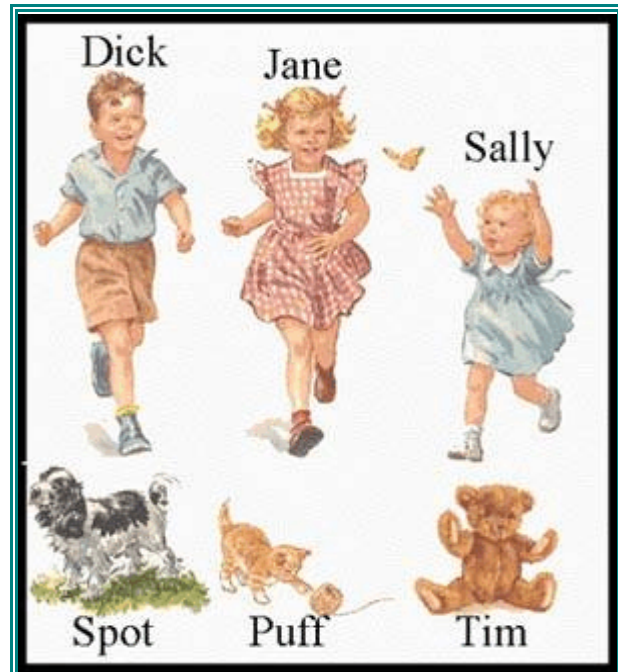


Figure 9 <http://www.elliottsamazing.com/phltalk.html>

See!", "Oh, Jane." and so on. Magic, pure unmitigated magic, little marks on a page telling words and stories. Today the educational specialist ridicule the method but let me tell you: it is as good as any of the educational technology crap they foist on

kids today. I loved those little books with large pictures and a few large words on each page. Look at how poorly kids read today and tell me the modern methods are better. Ha. These little kids were familiar. They looked like the kids we were back then.

The other big thing I learned from Miss Isabelle had to do with personal hygiene, not something I was really aware of up to that point. Mom touched on the



topic I expect but out there on the farm it wasn't a high priority thing. Just keeping flies out of the house was the major hygienic accomplishment and not coming into the house from the privy with smelly hands. Indeed, it didn't really "take" because the concepts were so foreign out on a farm, but out of fear of embarrassment if nothing else, I complied with the instructions. Plus I was in love. The first new concept was the idea of kids having to apply hand lotion after washing their hands. What a silly idea. Actually, as you can tell, the whole concept of washing my hands all the time was a bit foreign, but far be it from me to admit that putting this slippery greasy stuff on my hands was abnormal. Mom did that on occasion but she was a girl,. That was different. That was "girl stuff".

As I got into the spirit of the enterprise, I pleaded with mom to have my own little bottle of "Jergens Hand Lotion" with my name on it, to sit on the counter by the sink in the classroom with similar bottles - owned by kids who were probably as allergic to the stuff as I was. The hand washing was a mini-course in what today would be termed "Infection Control", a good thing to be teaching to a bunch of kids from farms who played in who-knows-what up to the point they went in to eat dinner. It isn't that farm moms didn't know or didn't care. They just had to contend with the challenge of no running water and dirty little kids who were anxious to get the meal over so they could go back outside again until dark. Splashed water on the dusty dirty skin with a swipe of a towel was it.

The second idea out of the good hygiene business was these neat little cellophane packages tightly filled with Kleenex, the stuff you saw but didn't dare use otherwise in your life. What a novel idea. After we got over the foreignness of the concept, I think us kids sort of dreamed up excuses to apply those delicate puffs of softness to our noses, really wasting them in the process.

My report card for the year follows on the next two pages. Note that I had problems in the first quarter with observing "Safety Rules". I still do. I imagine, once again, that the "safety rules" were really just "rules". If I didn't see a safety issue from the vantage point of a little boy running his body out there on the play ground, then I would proceed. Turns out that mom thinks that a big reason for the fact that my poor body has suffered so many traumas over the years is that I am first, impatient and second, anxious to do. I asked her why I got hurt so much and that was her explanation. I want to get out there and do the thing. None of this waiting, thank you. Let's get on with it.

Note also that I had difficulty, according to Miss Isabelle, with reading at grade level and with "phonics". BS. I was just fine, thank you. The problem was

that my interior discussion about philosophy of reading and learning didn't match that of the exterior world so I was viewed as troubled and at-risk. Because I followed my own path. Chuckle.

The second semester Isabelle noted that I was having trouble learning "self control." Still a problem with me. I have difficulty conforming to what I perceive as arbitrary rules, rules that appear to be the product of arbitrary people who don't have a clue about how life is lived.

**THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
OF  
**Utah School District**  
1948 - 1949

**GRADES: FIRST, SECOND, THIRD**

Report of Rondo Jensen  
Grade 1 School Central  
Teacher Isabelle Johnson  
Principal John Stagg

**TO PARENTS:**  
A child's education goes on twenty-four hours of the day. The activities of the school, the home and community all contribute to this process of development.  
This report gives our estimates of the results being achieved by this child in the classroom work and school activities.  
Parents are requested to study this report and when the progress of the pupil does not appear to be satisfactory it is urged that they confer with the teacher and principal. The report should be signed by the parent or guardian and returned to the teacher.  
**H. GRANT VEST,**  
Superintendent of Schools.

Figure 10 Figure 10 First Grade Report Card Side 1

**STUDY YOUR CHILD'S GROWTH**

**PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Vigorous play, large muscle activities, proper rest and nutrition are important aspects of a child's physical development. Parent and teacher should be conscious of the development of eye structure, the permanent teeth and the coordination of muscle and nerve. Practice in climbing, to develop chest muscles and back muscles should be encouraged. Experience in balancing the body in rhythmic response to music should be provided. Proper habits in drinking, eating, and elimination should be established. Parents and teachers should watch for colds and communicable diseases.

**MENTAL DEVELOPMENT**

With equal opportunity, development comes more slowly for some children than others. This is natural and is to be expected by parents and teachers. At this age it is important to develop wide interests and proper attitudes. Children will start to read, learn to do some writing, and a limited amount of number work. They will learn to express their thoughts by using appropriate words, stating clear sentences, and by taking pride in correct pronunciation. They should start showing interest in good literature. Pupils begin to take pleasure in writing ideas in the second grade.

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Children grow increasingly social in nature through experiences in group living and sharing. During these years they will become increasingly aware of the interdependence among people in the home, the school and the community. Friendships and loyalties develop rapidly and may change fleetingly, as they are based on transitory interests. Leaders will appear among children and need proper supervision in both the home and the school.

**EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

A sense of humor is an outstanding characteristic of pupils in primary grades. Children's emotional experiences should not be dramatized by adults as being more important than they really are. Children of this age make ready response to beauty which needs encouragement. They will make response to rhythm, which should be encouraged. A sense of security should be provided by both home and school.

Figure 11 First Grade Report Card Side 2



Signature of Parent

I have carefully read the report herein contained.

1st Report *Mrs. James A. Jensen*  
 2nd Report *Mrs. James A. Jensen*  
 3rd Report *Mrs. James A. Jensen*  
 4th Report *Mrs. James A. Jensen*

TRANSFER

THIS CERTIFIES THAT

has done work in ..... Grade ..... School  
 as shown on this report and has asked for this transfer  
 to: .....  
 Future Address: .....  
 Date .....  
 ..... Teacher  
 ..... Principal

CERTIFICATE OF PROMOTION

This certifies that as a result of the record shown in  
 this report *Ronan Jensen*  
 is hereby promoted to the *2<sup>nd</sup>* Grade on this  
 ..... day of *July* 19*49*  
*James Jensen*, Teacher  
*John Hagg*, Principal

VERNAL EXPRESS PRINT

Figure 12 First Grade Report Card Side 4

Progress Report

Days of School	45	45	45	43
Days Absent	0	0	3	0
Times Tardy	0	0	0	0

HEALTH and SAFETY Reports: 1 2 3 4

Keeps Clean and Neat	S	S	S	S
Has Good Posture	S	S	S	S
Observes Safety Rules	X	S	S	S

READING, WRITING, ARITHMETIC  
MUSIC

Is Reading at pre-primer level	S	S	S	S
Is Reading at the primer level	S	X	S	S
Is Reading at first reader level				
Is Reading at second reader level				
Is Reading at third reader level	S	S	S	S
Is satisfactorily developing skill in oral expression	S	S	S	S
Is satisfactorily developing skill in muscular control in art, writing and construction	S	S	S	S
Is satisfactorily developing skill and appreciation in music	S	S	S	S
Is satisfactorily developing skill in number work	S	S	S	S

WORK HABITS

Works well with others	S	S	S	S
Works well alone	X	S	S	S
Makes good use of time	X	S	S	S
Finishes work	S	S	S	S
Is developing self control	X	S	S	S

MARKING CODE:  
 S—Indicates progress is satisfactory  
 ✓—Indicates improvement is desirable  
 X—Indicates that progress has been made

Figure 13 First Grade Report Card - Side 3

In those days I was still "Ronnie". But I found something interesting when I scanned in the above report card. Mom had folded and preserved a double-sided piece of paper that had a drawing on each side. I assume I drew in that school year - why else would she have preserved the photo in an envelope that contained only the first grade report card? The two sides of the page follow. The first page is a primitive representation of human beings. The second page is an extraordinary creation. Remember, please, that I was a first grader when I did this. I had no training from my dad other than watching him work intently. I only used crayons.

The first page with the three stick figures is probably generally on track for any first grader. Primitive representations with sticks and circles. Mom obviously wrote in the "interpretation" that I must have provided to her later when she asked me what I had drawn. I am not entirely positive today that what I said is what I really intended but that is ancient history. Such bold, impersonal entries.

The second page surprises me. Staying within the lines, but more importantly the freshness and creative matching of lines and colors within the free-style shapes. I've seen comparable images, done by an idiot savant who was published to immense international acclaim. He also used crayons to capture his realistic reality. Mine was abstract, but it was comparably sophisticated and compelling in its imagery.

I need to comment further on the three stick figures. They are primitive because I was young. That isn't a problem. Motor skills develop at their own pace so are part of the problem for a young person. Rendering an image of a real thing is affected by the degree of physical control the kid has over the crayon. But in addition to the motor skills, there are the psychological and perceptual dimensions. Did you know that if you took that picture to a child psychologist today and asked him/her to tell you what s/he thinks about the home environment of the child who drew them, s/he would tell you that it was a negative, frightening, oppressive, unpleasant environment. Look at those open mouths. Terror. Fear. Lack of love, lack of warmth, no smiles, no interest. Just fear.

I tell you this because it is important that you understand the meaning of this artistic expression -anxiety- I lived with. Oppressive isn't it. Last week the Jewish attorney who works with Deanna brought in a drawing done by her 4 year old girl. It was stunning in its loveliness and wisdom and humor and ability to draw things with perspective and perception. I was amazed and I looked again at this picture drawn when I was 2 years older, i.e. 50% older than she was, and felt like weeping. What a terrible picture of my environment I presented to the world. But



it was accurate. I know that. It's no surprise. I just thought it was more hidden than that. The border along the top is the interesting artistic element - with three circular blank spots.



Figure 14 Drawing of "Boy, Mother and Dad"



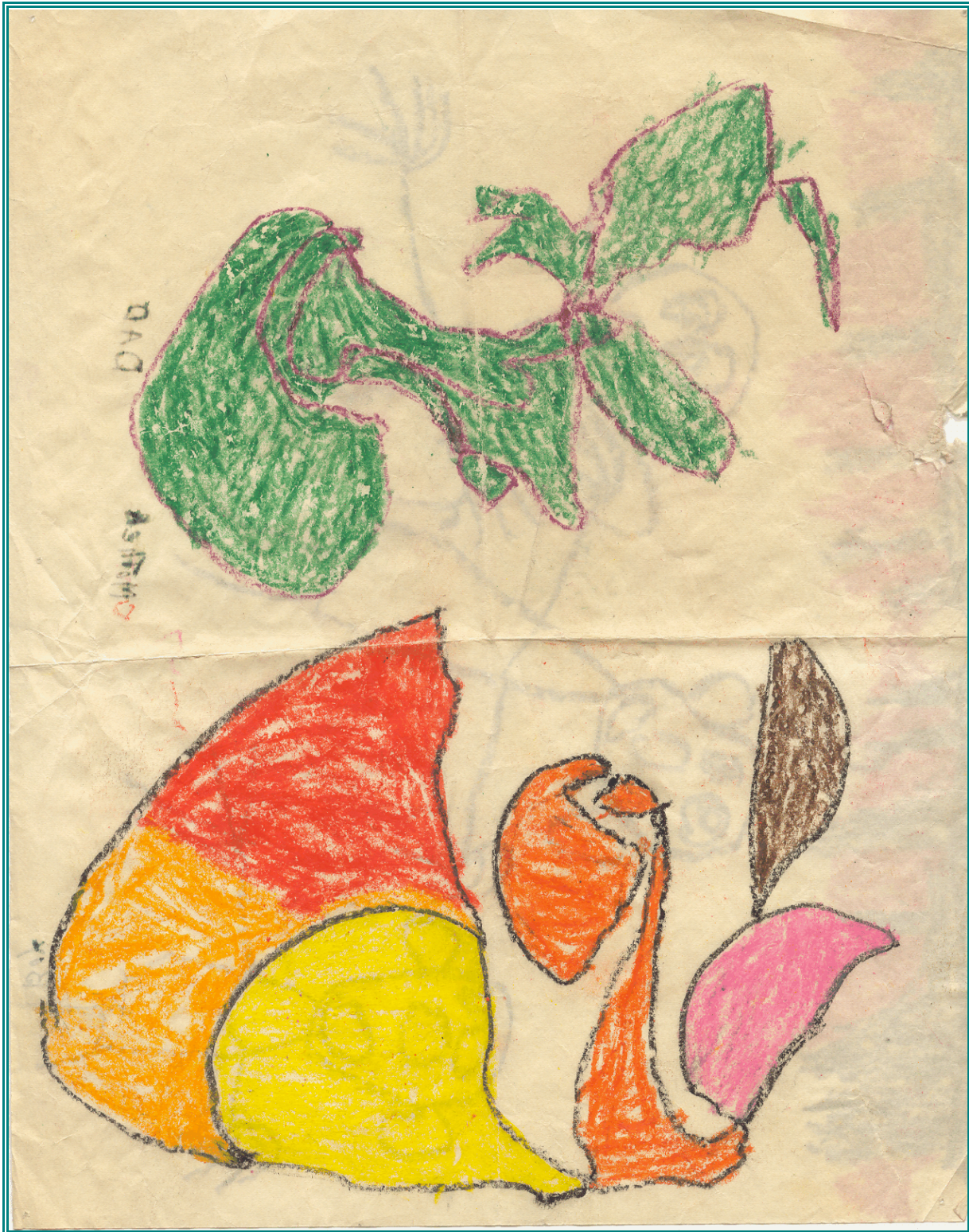


Figure 15 First Grade Drawing - Side 2

Actually, these pictures reveal substantial control over the crayon as in the fringe. Careful and controlled alternation of brown and red along the upper border of the picture. Similarly, the accurate placement of the pupils inside of the eyes of the stick figures shows control. Staying inside the lines in the abstract designs, particularly where two colors are blended inside of one shape shows that motor control was present. So the fact of the staring shocked anxious humans must have derived from the psyche, not from the muscles. It makes sense to me. I recall the time in Vernal as one of stress and anxiety. Constantly. Those three figures tell the tale.

### Second Grade and Mrs. Williams

Second grade with Mrs. Williams is pretty much a blank. Except that I knew that she didn't think highly of me as a person. Or of my penmanship. I have a vague image of her. She was a largish, severe, matronly woman with gray hair who never smiled and never joked with us. The most positive experience we could hope for was for her to mention our names as having earned a good grade on a test. I did not hear my name. My penmanship earned constant criticism from her. It was poor but she made it worse by confirming in my mind that I would never learn to write right. Interestingly enough, I have photos of Miss Isabel and Mrs. Schofield, but not Mrs. Williams. I didn't like her any more than she liked me.

### Third Grade and Mrs. Schofield

Third grade was different. I liked school and looked forward to going. I was still socially uncomfortable with those other kids, most of them city kids, in cliques that excluded me, a loner from the country, from a farm. When the bus picked us up in the morning, we were some of the first kids picked up. The driver continued south, picking up the two groups of Cooper kids, then the Roberts kids, and turned east along a road to collect other beves of kids before it headed north again to drop us off at the school. Getting off the bus and going to Ms. Schofield was totally different than going to Mrs. Williams. Wonderful things made school an exciting time, a fun time, a place to learn and gave a sense of being competent.

First, we could tell that she just liked us. Simply because she liked us. That made for a good beginning. Every morning she -like the other teachers- would enter the class room and greet us as we waited at our desks, "Hello children!" and



we replied in unison, "Good morning, teacher." Sound like too much regimentation? It wasn't. It was actually comforting. In a few minutes we would stand together, face the American flag that hung in the front of the class room and put our hand over our hearts. There were a few loudly whispered arguments about just where this thing called "heart" was located and where we should be holding our hands, but we generally knew that a hand over the center of our chest would satisfy most critics.

We said the Pledge of Allegiance out loud, slowly and carefully, as a group of dedicated citizens. I don't want to overstate that because there were some characters who were always half a beat off whatever we did, but the general tenor of the situation was understanding that it was a significant thing to stand as a class and honor our flag with our hands, hearts and mouths. The flag was a big deal in those days. A sacred emblem that unfortunately lost its meaning during the Viet Nam war, one of the sad casualties of those painful years. Flag etiquette was drilled into us and we accepted it. We knew that if there was bad weather that the janitor would not even expose the flag to the weather because the flag was sacred. If rain came after he had hung the flag, he'd run

-R U N- out and pull it down to keep it sacred. My my. Such a different time. We have lost something important, haven't we. Emblems are critical to the well-being of a society and we lost the most universal one.

We would also -perish the thought, all you ACLU lovers- sit quietly, bow our heads and repeat the Lord's Prayer out loud. Tsk tsk. The only thing that troubled us was the conflict over the words about "forgive us our debts" which was translated as "forgive us our trespasses" by another faith. But the concept of saying the prayer as a group to open our day was uniformly accepted. That obviously reflected the mores of the insular culture, yet it was a nearly universal exercise in schools across the country. When we later heard of the nasty souls who took schools to court because they felt their children were being forced to be religious against their will when "forced" to say the Lord's Prayer -poppycock because no one was "forced"- we were shocked. Truly shocked. What was this thing, to say that the Lord's Prayer was a bad thing, that kids were being harmed by saying it? I'm not sure it was really a religious things for us, but there was respect for the concept, a tolerance that boded well for the body politic. This skirmish over "religion in school" in the 1950's was a signal event, foreshadowing the massive shattering forces that culminated in the anti-Viet Nam movement. I personally think that the tolerance of the community for saying the lords prayer



was healthier for the community than the nasty selfishness of the do-gooders who were, after all was said and done, the bigots and intolerant souls. Poop on them.

This was during the winding down of WW II but military things were prominent in school and the news. Looking back I am surprised at how long the winding-down took. Officially WW II ended in 1945, yet 5 years later it was as vivid in my mind as when it was going on, perhaps more because my mind was unformed back then. Uncle Grant had come home from Guadalcanal with a broken back and for years had to wear a back brace, which probably refreshed my sense of the reality and nearness of WW II. In class, Ms. Schofield talked with great pride about her son who was a pilot in the air force. I don't recall any particular exploits of his but it was a big deal, her son being a pilot. I was impressed.

She explained, using her son as an example, what it meant to "be on the beam". She explained that her son relied on radio signals to guide him in combat. My, my. She was filled with palpable pride telling stories about him. He had to "be on the beam". We heard and were awed at her conviction and the lesson taught. We didn't have a clue about the technology but we learned something about the importance of being good people and good citizens. In those days it was safe to be patriotic, to speak of America with love, to be openly critical of our enemies. Such a change, isn't it, and not a good one when all is said and done.

Values were clearly explained and endorsed. There was no squeamishness about believing in our country and god and the flag, none about



**Multiply this... by 9,000,000**

**... to keep fighting radios on the beam!**

Under pressure of war's demands for immense quantities of radio equipment for use on land, at sea and in the air, crystal grinding techniques have been revolutionized.

More than 9,000,000 crystals have been produced for war by Western Electric to date. One of our shops now makes as many crystals in a day

as the whole industry used to turn out in a year! And four such Western Electric shops are now working.

In other phases of Western Electric's war work, much the same thing has been happening. Radio receivers and transmitters of many types have been produced by the tens of thousands—mikes of all types totaling

more than 600,000—over half a million headsets—vacuum tubes by the millions.

As a natural result of Western Electric's years of leadership in telephone and radio work, this Company is today the nation's largest producer of electronic and communications equipment for war.

*To speed Victory, buy War Bonds regularly—all you can!*

75th ANNIVERSARY  
**Western Electric**  
ARSENAL OF COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

Figure 16 "On the beam..."

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu:80/adaccess/R/R03/R0359-72dpi.jpeg>

being patriotic, about trying to be good people. My life has been richer for the experience.

Most of us were persuaded by Mrs. Schofield, to scrounge money from our parents to buy Postal Savings Stamps. My personal book is shown in Volume 1. She would write a list of who gave her how much money and would go to the post-office to buy these stamps. It was a bit like saving Greenstamps later because we were given small paper books with squares for stamps. Then we would lick and paste our next stamps into the book. The amount I was able to save was minuscule I am sure but the concept of doing something patriotic was drilled into us that year. Saving money through the post office was important. We understood that the government would have money to help soldiers, an important lesson.

It was during this year that learned about atom bombs, how they might land in this country, how powerful they were. We learned how to protect ourselves during an attack in the class room, learning how to crowd ourselves under our desks so that if the ceiling fell we would have some protection. We believed in the possibility although it was so foreign that we weren't really troubled by it. At this point I have to tell you something important: while I did grow up more or less during the time of what I consider to be hysteria about the atom bomb, I was not troubled by it, no more than I was about the concept of war itself. That interests me because I hear people a few years younger than me speak of the terror of the atom bomb and so on. I think that's silly. Perhaps because I preceded the baby boomers I am not hysterical like they are about the atom bomb. In fact, I have liked the idea that we had it and as a result were able to hold the communist philosophy in check.

Once more, I harbor a deep misgiving about the actual source for the anxiety: I believe it stemmed more from the manner in which the media chose to portray the atom bomb than from actual comprehension by the public of the risks of nuclear fission reactions. I don't think people really cared that much, and would not have gotten worked up about it if the media had been more balanced in its presentation of the facts. Similarly, I believe that there are snide groups of people who make it their objective to be destructive of everything, to tear down, to make fun on, the overstate or understand, etc. in order to make themselves feel important. They feel important when they get people to be upset and angry. That is sick, but it is the kind of sickness that has to be tolerated by the democracy that is being negatively affected by it.

Mrs. Schofield helped us memorize a variety of military songs. We would

march around the outside of the room in single file singing them under her direction. "The Caissons go Rolling Along", "From the Halls of Montezuma", as well as the usual "America the Beautiful" and the "Star Spangled Banner." I loved marching around the room singing my heart out participating in something larger than myself, something more real and tangible than singing songs in Sunday school.

Ms. Schofield believed in field trips and wasn't afraid to take her bunch of third graders out into the town, alone. Glorious opportunities to get out of the class room, under the guidance of someone who loved us who was going to treat us to something fun and something educational at the same time. I had never been of field trips before so these were like getting liberty from a ship for a weekend. I knew from my own dad how much fun learning can be and her style of teaching on field trips was comparable. One of the field trips was to her own house to show us her flowers. Four o'clocks stick in my memory from this trip. I even located seeds later in Boise and planted them in front of 5111 because I loved the name as much as anything. I've grown them since and they are imbued with a special quality derived from her instruction about where the name came from.

She took us to the Vernal Field House of Natural History. I thought I owned the place because dad did work there, and took us in many times. I personally knew Ernest and Billie Untermeyer, the directors, and they wisely reinforced my sense of familiarity during the introduction of us to them by saying something special that revealed to the other kids that they knew me and liked me.

True to form for a teacher who cared, she gave each of us kids a class picture with her standing in the background. There were 31 of us kids, divided about equally between boys and girls. I'm sitting on the front row on the right side of the kid with eyeglasses and his hand in his mouth. That's Clayton. Funny kid. I liked him. Vivian is



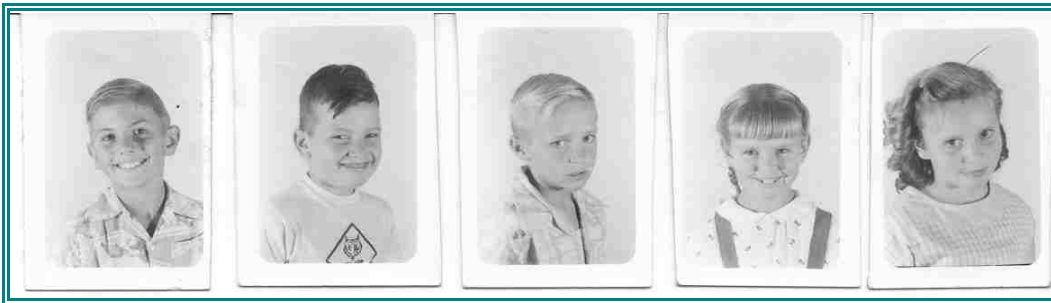
Figure 17 Miss Schofield and Third Grade Class



the fourth from the left. I loved and feared her. A pretty, powerful girl who scared the crap out of me by her directness and prettiness.

It seems odd to look closely at these kids today and to be able to remember most of them because I can't remember most of my high school senior class. What particularly surprises me is the fact that as I look at these little kids, I see them as being my own age - right now. My age today. But I am 60 and they are only 8. Odd that they should age as much as I, even though the images here are of little kids. How can that be?

Here's a set of "thumbnails" that I traded with five kids. Surprised I had the courage to do it.



Perhaps they initiated the trades? Clark on the left, Gary, Dale, Vivian and Carol Lee. I can describe the personalities of each kid. I liked Vivian but she was tougher than us boys. Her last name was something like Merkley. Gary was the class clown, Clark was the nice quiet likeable guy and Carol Lee was trying hard to be friends with every one, a little on the large size.

Mrs. Schofield maintained discipline by herself. No need for "team teachers" or "assistants" or "parent volunteers". That's impressive but of course, that was a different era. When a kid came home with a bad report, s/he got a heavy-duty lecture. Maybe a laying on of hands, you know, as in the "School Board". No kidding. Bad behavior in school for most families wasn't acceptable so Ms. Schofield and company could rely on that backstop. That simplified discipline in the classroom. What interests me about this business is that while discipline in the classroom was greater then, parental involvement in the classroom was less than when I was PTO President. There were a few things like Halloween Parties where mothers brought cup cakes and cookies but entertainment was the limit. None of the grading of papers, preparing of weekly take home packets, tutoring that happens today. I believe that the key to classroom discipline was parental

involvement at home.

I have to admit though that in the final years I worked with Valley View Elementary in Boise it was shocking how difficult it was becoming to find parents willing to volunteer to do about anything. When I moved there in 1977 there were more willing parents than jobs but when I was leaving they didn't want to help. Just ask them for money, and they'd produce it, but just don't ask for any of their time. Their lack of interest in school and behavior in school was reflected in their kids who didn't have great interest in or respect for education. Shortly after Julie left Valley View, discipline problems became so severe that Boise Police Department permanently stations a Resource Officer in the school. Of course, what I refer to was a microcosm of society. These changes weren't confined to our elementary school. Society itself was undergoing profound shifts that were undermining the social structure that schools used to be able to rely on for support.

Note in the class picture the same thing I've been harping on - all of the girls are wearing dresses. No levis, not jeans or slacks of any kind. Girls always wore dresses to school, and nice ones at that. If a girl wore levis or slacks it was because she had no dress to wear, was too poor or something equally unfortunate. This negative sense associated with slacks or jeans for girls was so prevalent that I think those girls would have begged borrowed or stolen a dress if necessary, just so they wouldn't have to appear in slacks. I'm not saying that girls ought to wear dresses today. I'm just pointing another of those subtle cultural clues that reveal something about the standards of the community and era. Acceptance of social norms was inculcated early. Notice their hair styles. And the hair of the boys. Neat and tidy all of them. Once more that reflects something about family life as well, the presence of mothers in most of the homes at the time kids went to school. Today single parent families have a different set of obligations and demands that allow some kids to appear at school disheveled. Teachers are as much social workers today as they are teachers, hence part of the justification for the support staff.

A puppet show near the end of the year was most memorable class project. The theme was dinosaurs which naturally was my forte. Mrs. Schofield -in those days the designation "Mrs." was not sneered at, and it referred to an adult woman who was married as opposed to "Miss" who regardless of age was not married and we made sure we knew which to use and did- encouraged me either directly or through her manner, so I took off with an assignment. We were each to prepare a

picture on a stick of whatever dinosaur we wanted, and had to prepare a short explanation or history about it. When everyone was ready on the assigned day, there would be a puppet theater for us to present our animal when we would each step up the to puppet theater and go behind the curtain to hold our creation up in front of the curtain. I did so well that Mrs. Schofield had me help other kids who were struggling.

I chose to make a puppet of dinicthys, a monstrosity of the prehistoric oceans, a huge fish creature that had armor plates on its head and chest. Why did it appeal to me? I don't know, but it did, so I made one. Mom got me some light cardboard and tongue depressors. I carefully drew the this creature and filled in the key elements. Then I cut it out and pasted it on the tongue depressors that we used as a handle to bring the creature up into the stage of the puppet theater without our hands showing. I colored the creature with colored pencils out of a box of 8. A treasure, my own set of 8 short colored pencils that put color on the page like crayons did but without the bulkiness and flakes. I think that's why I love the idea of the large sets of colored pencils sold in art stores. Throwback to being a child.

About the time we were getting ready to put on our puppet show, Mrs. Schofield took us on another field trip as part of the curriculum. She didn't use fancy words like that, but she knew her stuff. She walked our class down the street to Main Street and eastward to the Field House of Natural History. All by herself, and there was no monkey business. Kids lined up in pairs following behind her as she marched determinedly on her way. The fieldhouse looks like this today and it looked like this back then with the difference that there was nothing planted in this sidewalk. It was just a cement slab. I don't remember whether or not there was a flag.

The museum was a glorious place to spend hours. Three large rooms filled with exhibits. The main room had a counter where Billie or Ernest Unterman answered questions and gave directions. Nice people who treated kids well. The acted like they actually cared for kids even though they had none of their own. Surrounding this counter/information center was a collection of rock fragments, dinosaur bone fragments, gastroliths, minerals, books and so on. The point of these items didn't seem to me to be to take my money. It seemed to be aimed at



Figure 19

<http://utahreach.usu.edu/uintah/visitor/tour/ufh.htm>



giving information on topics I wanted to know more about. Indeed, over the years, Billie and Ernest gave Dick and me birthday presents of small books on dinosaurs that were in the museum collection. Some of them even survive today at 2821 North. If you asked Billie a question, she'd hunt for the little booklets that had the answer and show us. She didn't pressure us to buy them, rather pointed out what was there and the information it contained.

While we were visiting the museum, Mrs. Schofield told Billie Unterman about this dinosaur puppet project which was one of the reasons for the visit. Billie was interested to know more, like she always was so she asked some of us kids, ones she knew I think, about our individual choices. When she turned to me, the courage I had speaking privately with her dissolved. I told her that my project was dinicthys. She asked details about each of our creatures and I told her that mine was a big sea monster and that had armor on his head and thorax. At that point she did something unexpected.

She contradicted me. I suspect she was gentle about it because it was her nature to be careful with little minds, but she was also a stickler for accuracy. The latter is what prompted her to correct me in the presence of Mrs. Schofield and the class, all of whom were clustered around the information counter. I was mortified. I could scarcely tolerate the embarrassment of being singled out in the first place to be asked questions in public even about things I loved and understood, but it was much worse when she said I mis-spelled the name of this creature. She did know which one I was talking about no doubt. But she told me that I was mis-pronouncing and mis-spelling the name. Instead of "dinicthys" the correct name was "dinictys", she said. I was mortified.

But I knew I was right.

But what's a kid to do, even one that isn't falling apart?

Well, I went back to school and after school wandered home disconsolate. I had been embarrassed at having to speak in public, I had been mortified at being

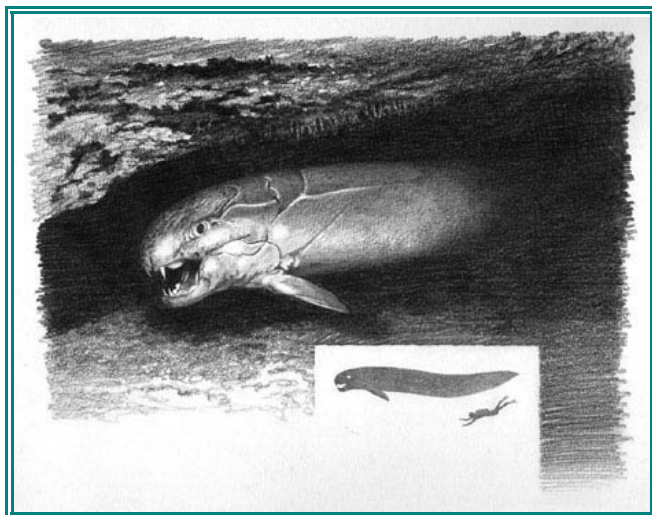


Figure 20 <http://www.chez.com/glandin/Dinicthys.jpg>

corrected in front of everyone, and I knew that I was right. I don't think I said anything to mom. She actually wasn't particularly interested in what happened at school, unless we were in trouble. Report card time we had her attention but only if there were bad grades, and that only for a day or two. Otherwise she was too occupied with her own issues, too busy to worry about me. So I don't think I told her what had happened. That is probably part of my problem. I had no outlet for my anxieties and fears so I kept them bottled up inside of me, carrying them around like lead sinkers that pulled my poor little soul down.

After dinner the phone rang, a rare thing. As noted above, people didn't hang on the phone all day. If they had a specific reason to use the phone they did, but it was not used as a form of recreation and gossip like it is today. The caller, a woman, asked for mom, so mom listened carefully to an explanation. After signing off, mom said that the caller was Billie Unterman. Billie called to apologize for what she had done that day, and said that she was the one who was wrong, that I did, in fact, spell the name right. What happened was that SHE had mixed up the names of this armored sea monster and a large saber-toothed tiger who was named "dinictys". I was vindicated. But of course, the kids at school didn't get to hear that. No justice for little kids.

### "I see London, I see France..."

On the playground behind the school we had two sets of swings, two slides, one of them so tall I was afraid of it, a merry-go-round, teeter-totters, monkey bars and a jungle gym. The swings were constructed of wide thick rubber-fabric strips that hung on chains from a steel pipe frame set in concrete, six or eight in two sets. The ground beneath them was covered with sawdust. A teacher prowled the yard refereeing the inevitable disputes that arose when two kids wanted the same thing, or one pushed the other and so on. Boys were also admonished to be nice to girls, to treat them more kindly than they did each other. That training took hold with the result today that I feel like being courteous to females, which doesn't always go over well with those who wear the chip of equality on their shoulder. I feel like I'm unkind when I offer my seat to a woman of that ilk and risk being rebuffed when I hold a door for her.

Girls jumped rope when the weather was good,

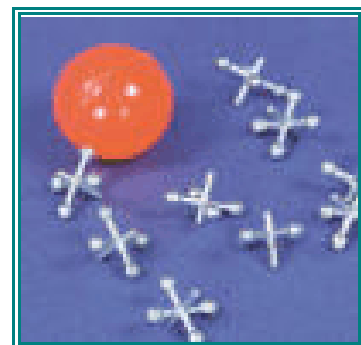


Figure 21  
<http://www.supercoolstuff.com/puzzle.htm>

and played jacks. This was an interesting game, requiring good hand-eye coordination. Smooth surfaces were hard to find so the girls always played over on the concrete walks. With a wise guy walking through to mess up the jacks - if he could get away with it. The downside was the anger of the teacher who would lecture the kid for doing that. The idea was to bounce the ball with one hand and to use the same hand to grab different numbers of jacks before the ball hit the ground. I didn't quite understand the rules.

Some kids brought a paddle ball with an elastic string that pulled the ball back to the paddle after it had been hit. Tough game. I couldn't master it. Fear of failure made it impossible to actually try it in front of other kids and since I didn't have my own, I never became competent at it.

Competition for the playground equipment was intense since there were so many kids. All six grades - minus kindergartners who were too small to risk the rowdiness- were on recess together so competed for the devices. Naturally, the larger kids tended to get their way. The monkey bars and jungle gym provided some unplanned excitement, kids being kids. As you noted above in the photograph of Mrs. Schofield's class, girls wore dresses so when they played on the jungle gym there was the possibility of someone looking up someone else's dress. The climbers tried to avoid that more or less successfully -though more than one actually desired it, even at that age. Same for the monkey bars. Hanging upside down by one's knees while waving the arms was the height of bravery. Particularly for the girls in their dresses. Naturally, as soon as any kid saw a girl attempting this, he focused on the project and when it was accomplished, he yelled loudly the ditty,

"I see London, I see France,  
I see Mary's underpants."

Tremendous interest and titters and shouts of derision resulted while the hapless Mary recovered herself, got down and with an embarrassed face told the kids to leave her alone.

There were a whole set of ditties that kids recited or shouted at appropriate times for various reasons. Herbie Snyder was a member of my class



Figure 22

<http://www.supercoolstuff.com/puzzle.htm>



and I don't remember what so special about him as to earn his own ditty but he did:

"Herbie Snyder, Billie Goat Rider,  
Lift up his tail, and out comes a spider."

The teachers shushed kids who said those things, but the net effect of the sanction was to push the behavior underground so it erupted on the periphery of the playground. In those days, there were no TVs, no electronic toys or games. No entertainment except that we created ourselves, so these things carried over for generations.

### Hopalong Cassidy

There were actually five famous cowboys that I looked up to and admired. Hopalong was one of them, a good guy, but notice that he's not wearing the traditional white hat of the good guy. He's wearing black. It makes a nice contrast with that white cloud behind him. The mountains look like the Uintahs so that would have increased our familiarity with him, our understanding of what he was about. Two six shooters. He was impressive.

Note that he had high cowboy boots with a white border. I always longed for a pair of cowboy boots but never had any. They were too expensive. Mom made us think that the reason she didn't get them was that they "weren't good for our feet". Humph. I understood the money part so wasn't entirely convinced she was entirely honest there. I was used to that duplicity in my parents, as you probably were with your parents.



Figure 23 Hopalong Cassidy  
<http://www.fiftiesweb.com/western.htm>

## Christmas and Santa Claus

Christmas turned out to be a real mixed bag. On the one hand, I was titillated and thrilled at the notion of getting a lot of freebies but on the other, there was rigid discipline and control, more than usual, which is saying a heck of a lot, which made Christmas a perilous enterprise. I suspected that they punished us for getting so much stuff from them. There are some wonderful memories about Christmas, and there are some bitter ones.

Some of the Christmas songs you kids sang came into being when I was a kid. That's probably surprising to hear because they may seem eternal to you like "Silent Night." But some sprang into existence on radio waves at a specific point in time that I remember.

"Here comes Santa Claus" was one. Sung by Gene Autry. Most of these Christmas songs were sung by one of the famous cowboys. I'm not sure what that means - but it does mean something. Cowboys the chosen ones to sing to the young. This image is of the printed, paper sleeve for a 78 RPM.

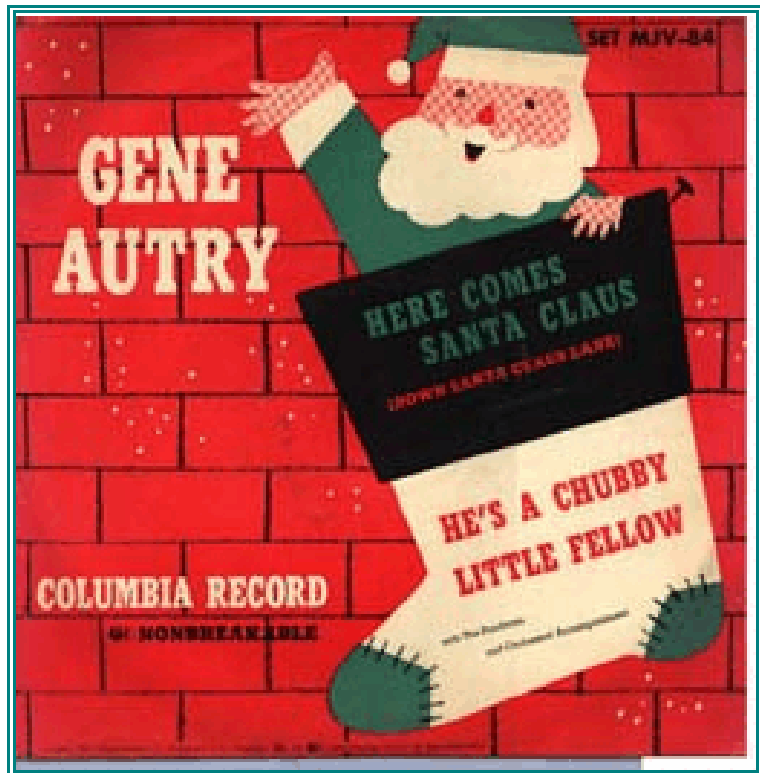


Figure 24 <http://www.the-forum.com/toys/images/004rc002.jpg>

"Up on the Housetop Reindeer Paws" was another carol I loved. It created the vision in me of Santa's sled and reindeers on my own roof, and I laid awake at night straining to hear the crunch and rustle of little paws - in the snow that usually was there. That was a delicious part of Christmas, the secret fantasies surrounding the Santa Claus, his elves and the reindeer.

"Frosty the Snowman" started back then. The thing that was new when you were small was the annual TV special of this name. It was based on the song, but was merely the adaptation to a new medium of the old lyrics. Look who sings it. "When Santa Claus gets your letter" was also popular so this 78 sold well. Frosty was a fascinating character. We made snow men so knew what happened in the sun and we wondered about Frosty while we watched our snowmen melt. The magic of a hat conferring life was wonderful. We put hats on our snowmen, secretly hoping, but nothing happened.

Rosemary Clooney managed to horn into the Christmas Scene somehow. Amazing. Her entry was "Winter Wonderland", a lovely song that conjured up images of a winter wonderland. I was young and impressionable and believed what she said and tried to create in my mind the images that her words were calling for.

We didn't own any of these records. Just heard them on the radio but that was enough to make them stick in our minds.



Figure 25 <http://www.the-forum.com/toys/images/004rc004.jpg>

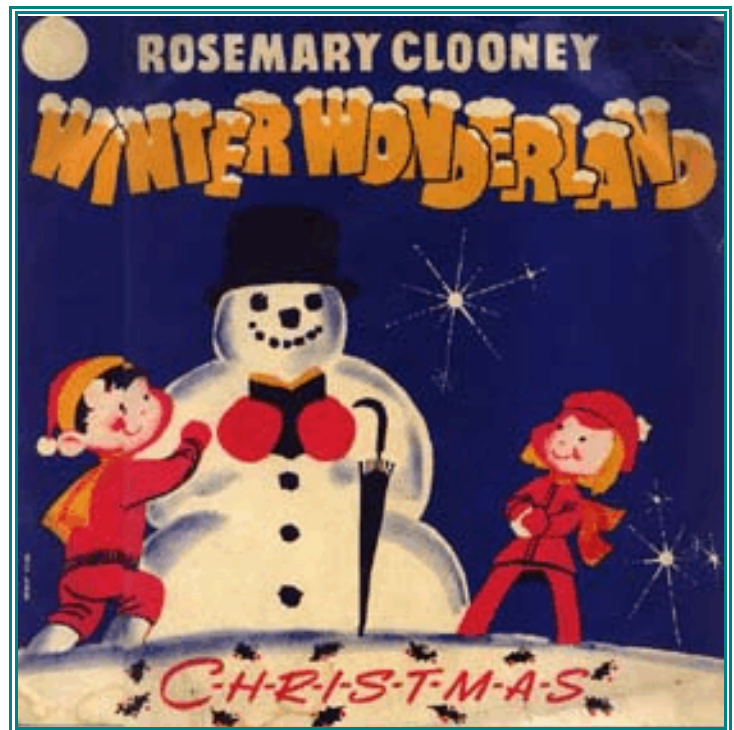


Figure 26 <http://www.the-forum.com/toys/images/004rc005.jpg>



There were no video games, no TV, nothing like that to distract us so when we heard something new, we listened and learned quickly.

Arthur Godfrey contributed his version of "T'was the Night before Christmas". He was another prominent man like Art Linkletter who stood tall in the world of radio. He pushed Chesterfield Cigarettes and was enormously popular.

When you listened to this song at Christmas time, did it create exciting images and expectations of something wonderful? Did you, too, lie in bed trying not to sleep, to listen for the sound of hooves on your roof when Santa's sleigh landed with the reindeer? You of course fell asleep before you heard the noise but in the morning you got up to see the evidence and you continued in your secret belief and hope for another year, didn't you.

"I'm dreaming of a White Christmas" appeared a year or two before I left Vernal. Bing Crosby came out with this song before we moved. Bing was called the "Crooner" for good reason, a lovely Irish tenor voice, smooth and mellow. He was always classy. This movie was one of the rare times when the four of us as a group indulged in sin. We knew better than to go to movies on Sunday. Right? Evil thing to do. I



Figure 27



Figure 28

[http://www.ifilm.com/image/stills/films/a/159153\\_m1a.jpg](http://www.ifilm.com/image/stills/films/a/159153_m1a.jpg)

heard preachings about that many times when we asked to go to a movie. Well, one bright sunny Sunday dad decided that he was going to see "White Christmas" that afternoon. He bamboozled mom into going with him and taking us kids. I sat in the theater not really enjoying the movie, partly because it was over my head, but also because I was actually knowingly intentionally purposely committing sin, sinking low in the eyes of the supreme being. I did enough bad stuff on my own and I didn't need to be shanghaied into doing something that I wouldn't be brave enough to do on my own. Tsk tsk.

Have you noticed now often my point of reference is the year we moved to Seward? That move was a defining time for me, a milestone, the first of two continental divides, the other being the move 5 years later to Boston, a psychologically shattering event.

The story of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer was written in 1939 I discovered recently, but I remember that the song, as distinguished from the story, appeared in 1949. I was 7 years old and I remember hearing the song and loving the magic of it. I remember it. Clearly. A reindeer that talked, one that had a red nose that glowed. I tried to imagine it in the dark cold snowy Vernal night, hoping he would guide the sleigh safely to my house. So that all were safe and so I got the goodies. I was split evenly between altruism and greediness.

One of the singing cowboys sang it, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. Can't remember which one, but the song enchanted me. This is the original cover. We had this book and I devoured it many time in Vernal and in Seward. Red shiny nose. This was in the days before miraculous electronic inventions and in the days before all of the phony fake graphics you are

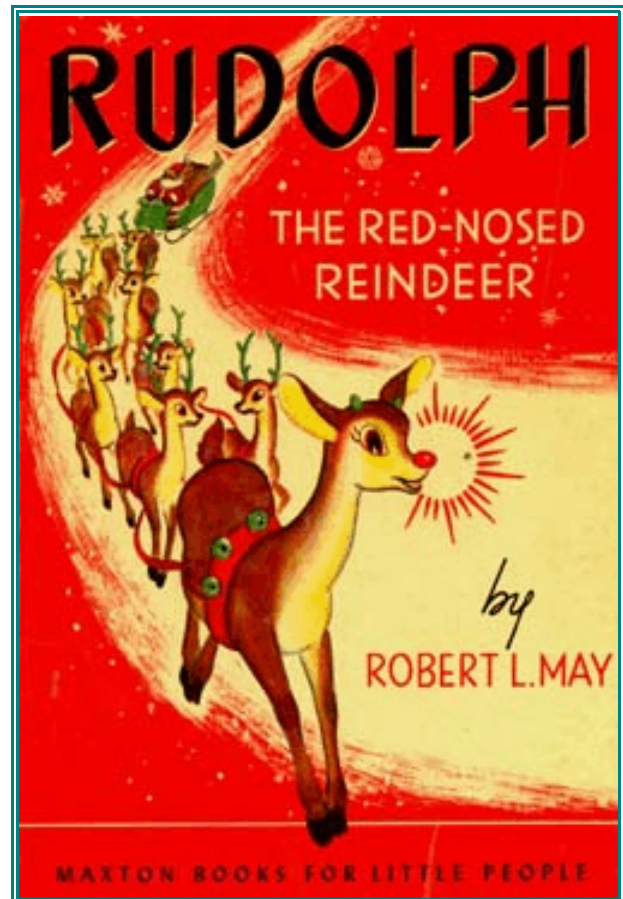


Figure 29

<http://www.heritagebks.com/christmas/c19400.jpg>

familiar with. So this flashing nose on a reindeer was in the world of marvelous, impossible, wonderful stuff.

"Santa Claus is comin' to town" was another one of these new Christmas Carols. I wonder why there were so many new Christmas songs in that era that have stuck in the national consciousness? When others have not followed? Perhaps it had to do with the national psyche that was recovering from WW II in ways I don't really understand, but results don't lie. You never had a "new" Christmas song appear in your youth. Just look at the number of Christmas songs you grew up that came out in those few post-war years. But not one in the next 40 years. I think, without a shred of evidence that this tells you something about the state of the county after we had defeated the Axis, prosperity had returned, the Depression was over, people were buying their own homes and cars and so on.

Anyway. This is the album cover for the 78 rpm of "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town." Did you ever hear a 78 playing? New experience you should have. Once.

About the time this song appeared, Santa Claus actually did come to town, to Vernal, if you can believe that. He even managed to hit town on Saturday when we were not in school, not at all troubling to a little kid who doesn't know that Christmas isn't due for a couple of weeks. Santa Claus made his appearance right down town in the center of everything, in the intersection in front of JC Penny's and the Bank of



Figure 30

<http://www.the-forum.com/toys/images/004rc003.jpg>

Vernal. There was a platform for him to stand on outfitted with one of those tinny PA systems that the MC -didn't know that was what this guy was called at the time- yelled to, "Watch out, here he comes! Look! Can you see him? Can you hear



him? There's Santa Claus! Let's cheer for him!"

He finally did make his appearance. To hundreds of kids and parents hollering, jammed together, like in a mad house. I wasn't used to such stuff and didn't enjoy it. The worst part, however, involved a box of flat pink wintergreen mints. They were stacked two-high in a long narrow box, probably 3 rows of these two-high, quarter sized mints - a total of six of these delectable unusual candies. It seems like Uncle Grant was involved.

Whatever the case, Santa Claus with his bag of stuff was throwing out handfuls of these and other kinds of candies to the kids crushed around the stand in the dirty packed snow. I badly wanted one but as you can guess, I was self-conscious and nervous. There was no way I was going to lunge after one of the things even if it came my way. In the end after Santa Claus had emptied his bag of goodies, I didn't get one and I was in tears. I wanted one so badly and I was miserable about not being brave enough to go after the things. That really was one of the feelings I had - pain at not being able to dare to try. So sad. I was conflicted here because most of the time mom reined us in and threatened us "within an inch of our lives" as the saying goes if we got rough with other kids but this time she was exhorting us like a coach to, "Get in there and get one!! Dang it! Do it! Do it!" With an underlying message, "What's wrong with you that you can't do it?!" Was I confused?!

One of the adults on our team understood what could be done at this point so he went to the store and bought one of the same boxes and gave it to me. But oddly enough, I didn't want it. I felt patronized, I felt angry, I was unable to deal with the whole experience. The crush of people, the rude kids, the fear of trying, the sadness at not getting one, the contradictory messages, and so on. I would rather not have even gone to town and had that experience. Santa Claus was a disappointment after all.

While it would be inaccurate to suggest that those feelings represented all of my feelings at all of my Christmases, you need to know that that kind of feeling was nonetheless present at some level most Christmases. Christmas just was not an entirely joyful time in that little family. Knowing that I am a mystic who has badly wanted to "believe", I have wondered how much of the sadness I've experienced with Christmases came from the harsh commercialism that conflicted so badly with the gentle loving notion of the birth of a special creature who loved me I was told, who should be loved and for whom we had a big birthday party. I gave my heart freely and wholly.

We had little money, as was the case with our neighbors and relatives, so I didn't really feel like I was worse off than most other kids -until I went to school after the Christmas break and saw what town kids got for Christmas. Mom and dad did what they could to give us gifts and goodies and in their way probably went beyond their personal boundaries. But at the same time, there was that quality of something negative that I mentioned above, control, anger, irritation, resentment, or whatever. I don't really know what it was, but I did know and did see that there was something going on inside their heads, particularly mom's, such that I had to be careful to not upset her around Christmas time. Not just because she would withhold the gifts, rather because she would flare up quickly and be irritated beyond her usual response about whatever I did and express her anger and disappointment.

Here's a classic example. Look above at the diagram of the house above to get your bearings.. See the doorway between our bedroom and the living room? The Christmas Tree was set up in the living room on the other side of our bedroom door. All we had to do was open the door to see the tree. We helped decorate it and watched it for weeks. We went to bed Christmas eve in the one Christmas present we were allowed to open that night, always pajamas, giddy with excitement, intoxicated at the thrill and anticipation. We knew better than to get up before mom and dad did. There would be hell to pay so we waited and waited, whispering, until they finally got up, knowing the whole time how excited we were.

The instructions they gave to us each Christmas morning were simple:

- (1) Get completely dressed before you come out of the kitchen,
- (2) Do not sneak a peak into the front room where the Christmas tree is, and
- (3) Eat all your breakfast before you go see the tree and presents.

We were threatened that if we failed to do those things we would be punished, which typically meant that the other son would be allowed to make first choices or some such thing. Sure enough, on this day, the pressure was just too great. One - likely both- of us stealthily, so we thought, got out of bed while mom and dad were still "sleeping", sneaked over to the door and slowly, carefully, excruciatingly slowly turned the knob and pulled the door open. Goodness, sakes alive! The tree was afire in colored lights and presents were strewn over the floor, a toy airplane, a..... Whammo! One of them stormed into our room and yelled at us to shut the

door, to finish getting dressed, to eat our breakfast, we knew better, etc. We were disciplined for our failure to obey their instructions. The squeaky hinges probably gave us away.

Understand please, that this breakfast wasn't an instant breakfast or a poptart. It was a full breakfast of cooked oatmeal with sugar and cream, a glass of milk or Postum and toast. We were sick with excitement and had no appetite. But it had to be eaten in its entirety before we could go see the tree. Neither of us could go until the other had finished. Such a diabolically clever form of torture. Make one of us the source of the delay for the other. They actually savored the pain we felt I think. You may think I belabor that point but I don't think I do.

We eventually got to go in to see the tree and presents. It seemed like noon. The nice part about that was that the living room was finally warm when we went in. We were practically lined up in uniform, put at attention and marched into the room. Then allowed one at a time and in order and slowly to see what was there. There were some nice gifts that we were happy to have, but our mood was tempered out of fear that we would commit another sin and be disciplined, not even knowing what we might do wrong. Minefields in Afghanistan sort of thing. It seemed like a Charles Dicken's kind of Christmas with Scrooge doing the grudging honors.

Would you enjoy that kind of Christmas morning?

## Jack Frost and New Year's Eve

We had another tradition that was actually a lot of fun and un-pressured. First, remember what our windows were like in the winter. The temperature was below freezing all winter and our house and our windows were uninsulated. The temperature inside the house dropped so low during the night that the water in the water bucket in the kitchen, the warmest room in the house, developed a skin of ice. The thin panes of window glass were all that kept the cold from flowing through the windows. Consequently, developed a thick skin, quarter to half-inch layer, of frost, whitish patterned rime. That was the work of Jack Frost. He painted the windows with this beautiful stuff - that made it impossible to see out, but which made stained glass windows of white stuff.

We kept our Christmas Tree up until after New Year's day every year only undecorating it and throwing it out after celebrating that day. On New Year's Eve Jack Frost would take advantage of our tree. He would come into the house when we were not paying attention and leave three things under our tree. First, a



coconut, a real hairy brown coconut that we never bought at any other time of the year. The eyes and mouth on the thing fascinated me. Second, he left a commercial box of white vanilla sandwich cookies, the only time we had such things in our years. And third, Jack Frost left a bag of tangerines, things that -you guessed it- we didn't have at other times. I find out from Deanna that in some parts of the British Isles, citrus fruits were mandatory for Christmas so perhaps this custom stemmed from that heritage.

So Jack Frost thrilled us on New Year's Eve. We saw his handiwork on the windows during the rest of winter, and saw his gifts so he was in a sense more authentic and real than Santa Claus was - who was supposed to come down the chimney, a thing we didn't have and so on. Jack did his work where we could see it every night of the winter. We liked him and loved his New Year's Gifts. What a treasure of a memory.

### Cats and Jelly Bean

We always had cats, and some dogs. But particularly cats. I don't know why that is, whether it is mom's preference that rubbed off on us or whether it was simply a natural preference of us. But cats it was, everywhere. I do suspect that the over-riding influence was mom. She tolerated dogs but never unreservedly liked them. She hated them because they jumped on people, sniffed you, crapped in the yard, knocked things over, dug up the flowers, etc. Just not good citizens. Since I was trained by her, I agree. I don't mind dogs that mind their own business but I dislike them in general. Too demanding, too dependent, too obtrusive.. So I have cats. They are quiet, they don't sniff visitor's crotches, they don't jump on visitors, they don't leave smelly large crap in the yard, I can leave them alone 3 or 4 days at a time in the house alone, untended, they purr when they are inclined to be petted but don't demand a great deal of me, if they jump on me they are light and soft and gentle, their presence is evident but not intrusive, they don't require me to spend lots of money being trained about to handle them, don't require vigilance on how they are treated by anyone, don't get upset if I pet their head, if I play with them, etc. etc. There's no accounting for taste, is there. Dogs are just fine. I just don't want any. Unless it were a tiny miniature.

So we had cats primarily. The ones we had in Vernal were from the relatives or feral cats that we re-domesticated. Ferals showed up in the orchard and we managed to get one or two of them to adjust to being handled.

The one dog I had in Vernal was named "Jelly Bean". It is a silly name, but

what's a kid going to name a small smooth entirely black dog? Jellybean was just fine, so Jelly bean it was. Its coat wasn't much for the winter so it was very cold, not being allowed in the house. It was allowed to spend time on the unheated porch but never allowed into the house.

The highlight of the Jellybean story was the white mother cat who had just had a litter about the time we got this newly weaned pup. For reasons that only she knows, she decided that this new puppy needed her attention more than her own kittens so she abandoned them letting them die and began to nurse this pup. Consequently, the pup never understood that it was a dog and not a cat, and that it was supposed to chase this cat. In turn, the cat was grateful at not being chased so she let the pup haul her around by the head in play. The pup had no manners and became larger and stronger than the cat so would pull her around by her head. She seemed to think this was the natural state of affairs and let him do it which was not a problem in the summer. But in the winter, it was another story. The first winter the momma cat's ears got wet with saliva, froze, and broke off. So this poor cat went around with broken ears, but didn't begrudge the pup the injury.

Momma cat was so protective of the puppy that when a visitor to the house started to talk to the tiny puppy on the front porch, momma cat rushed around the corner of the house, jumped on the porch, fluffed up and hissed angrily at the woman. She understood that she was not welcome to pet the pup but didn't understand why.

The pup came to an untimely death one day while we were at school. He ran in the road and managed to get under a car, being killed in the process. Thankfully we were not around to witness the event. After I walked home from school, mom broke the news to me. I was sad because I loved the little dog.

### Rose a' Sharn

This was the name of a flower I never saw, and a girl's name. "Rose of Sharon", but that isn't how it was pronounced. A name I heard used but I couldn't relate it to anything because they didn't grow in the valley. Such a strange name for a girl, a three-word name that described a flower. "Iris" was also a flower but it didn't seem funny like this one

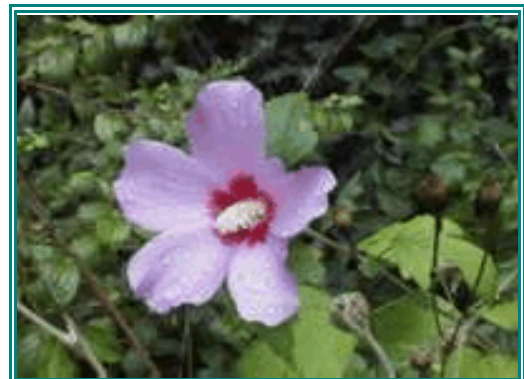


Figure 31

<http://www.mauney.com/bungalow/blooming/2000/sept04/>

did. It was a biblical name apparently but wasn't much used locally. Turns out that this is a sort of hibiscus, which probably explains why it didn't grow in the Uintah valley. Winters were cold, even sub-zero some times so tropical plants couldn't survive.