

## Breakfast Cereals

**B**reakfast cereal was usually a cooked cereal, cream of wheat being my favorite. Oatmeal, especially if there were any raisins, was probably about a tie. On rare occasions mom would also cook whole wheat for us, real wheat grains that she soaked overnight and then boiled slowly until they swelled and burst. That was something I liked. It had its own flavor and was chewy. We had eggs for breakfast sometimes but usually it was "mush". Commercially prepared cereals had been around a long time but they were more expensive than these cooked cereals. I don't remember how often mom bought commercial breakfast cereals in Vernal, although after Vernal we usually had prepared cereals - Wheaties, Kix, CornFlakes and if we were lucky, one of the new sugar cereals. Early on, cereal manufacturers discovered that their cereal boxes were natural advertising devices.

Putting Superman into any ad focused it on kids, created a compelling interest in the product. Not accidental at all. Kellogg's PEP cereal was a whole wheat product that fell by the wayside. Anything made out of whole wheat probably suffered that same fate until the health food nuts rose up in the '70's with granola and the hokey "organic" monkey business. Whole wheat fell out of favor because it was associated with a country-type food I guess. Perhaps it was the flavor. We ate it sometimes but I don't remember what it tasted like.

The propaganda in these ads was complicated. The kids are smiling, healthy kids probably because they are the stuff. The little girl is smiling at Superman, a coy smile, in her pig tails. Superman is a ruddy cheeked young man who just flew in, cape trailing in the air. He looks kindly at the little boy with a gentle smile, listening to his words, holding his shoulder as a friend. The third boy with the happy smile has his



Figure 1 <http://theimaginaryworld.com/disp2.jpg>

fingers in his lips, whistling up his friends to come and see Superman - and to eat this cereal, with bananas on it. In a bowl, sitting on a plate.

The grand-daddy of cereals is Kellogg's Corn Flakes. Oh, there were many competitors, but somehow Kellogg's Corn Flakes managed to become the archetype of prepared breakfast foods. Everyone knows the name, everyone has eaten the stuff. You don't know a single person who has not eaten the stuff - unless they are a recent immigrant. That's what I mean by being the archetype. Probably no other breakfast cereal is as widely known and remembered as Kellogg's Corn Flakes.

Kids were sucked into the Madison Ave Culture early by these gimmicks. An amount of silver plus one or two box tops would buy heaven, excitement, thrills, uniqueness. That was a special draw I think. Being special in the groups of kids you associated with because you had these toys that you had obtained through the US mail instead of at the local Five and Dime. Just look at these little grinning kids. You wanted to be one of them.



Figure 2 <http://theimaginaryworld.com/disp87.jpg>

Eating this stuff was fun. The result was a table littered with splashes of milk and a dusting of granulated sugar. Mom's judgment about how much sugar to put on the cereal was flawed. About half what it should be. So when she wasn't looking someone might help himself to another teaspoon of the stuff - if she forgot and left the sugar bowl on the table. That's where the spills of sugar originated. The splashes of milk came from the flat flakes that redirected the pouring milk out of the bowl. The best part of the cereal was the bottom part of the bowl. Where the sugar had fallen to the bottom and produced a sludge that was pure pleasure.

I think my next favorite cereal after Kellogg's Corn Flakes was Kix. Little

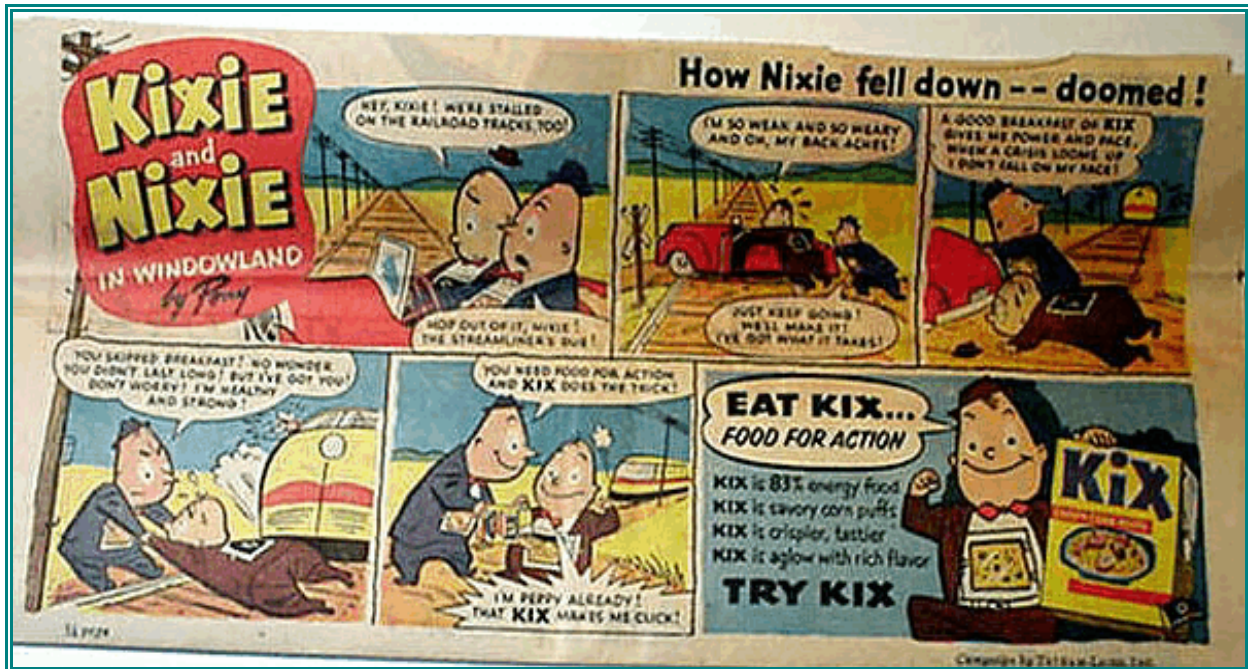


Figure 3 <http://theimaginaryworld.com/>

round puffs of oat flour that had a wonderful taste with milk and sugar. Kixie and Nixie were the characters created to pitch the product to kids in cartoon. Filled with excitement. Like when one of them stalled their car on the tracks -while the train approached- but the one that had his breakfast of Kix had the energy needed to push the car off the tracks and pull the other guy off the tracks just the locomotive would have cut him in half. Then a celebration. With a breakfast of Kix. Note that the ad even pitches the nutritional value, though how it concludes that "Kid is 85% energy food", one can only guess. That's what the company did.

### Mercury and Silver Inlays in Gunstocks

It must have been about the time that dad was working as a gunsmith, i.e. gun maker, that he picked up another skill: inlaying gun stocks with silver. He was a natural for learning anything that you did with your hands, that involved creating something of beauty.

He probably learned this technique from some else but I don't know who. It's such an obvious thing to do that it seems like any number of other people would have already done it. Or he may have seen it in a gun magazine or heard about it

from a friend or seen it at a gun show. Whatever the facts were, the basic process was straightforward.

Dad would remove the gun barrel and trigger works from the gunstock. Then he'd layout on one or both sides of the stock a design that he -or the owner- liked. It might be a Moorish-style filigree pattern or it might be an elk head.

After he had the outline of the thing drawn in pencil on the stock, he'd take a small electric drill that he used for many purposes and load it with some sort of dental drill bits. Whatever they were, they had to be able to cut wood easily and be easily controlled as he followed his lines with the tool. The stock was stabilized on the table on a towel or something to keep it from tipping back and forth so that he could concentrate on cutting the right depth while he followed the outline. After the outline was cut, he would drill out the wood between the lines to create a space in which to place the metal. This sounds simple but it required considerable skill when he did this process over a curved surface because it was difficult to keep the same depth to his cut. He would smooth the bottom of the cut out and then make a final critical cut. He undercut the margin of the opened area in order to have a lip that would retain the inlay that otherwise would fall out. It was obviously critical that the open areas not be too large because a gun stock receives hard use so it was inevitable that the inlay was going to be abused during its life. This is probably why the filigree was optimal for this technique. The areas of silver were narrow so stayed in place.

The silver material was prepared precisely as a dentist prepares amalgam, the metal putty that you have in your teeth after cavities are drilled out. It is a mixture compounded of powdered silver and mercury, the heavy flowing metal that you saw in the small bottle I kept around at 5111. Fooled Kent one day with that tiny 3 inch long bottle -which weighed a full pound- when I handed it to him as if it were an ounce or two. He nearly dropped it, but wasn't too surprised in the end - because I was always doing something that sort of took advantage of his good nature and trusting nature. Shame on



**Figure 4 Mortar and Pestle**  
<http://newton.dep.anl.gov/york/pestle.html>

me. Like the time I tricked him into taking a big bite of a jalapeno pepper. He and I had been pulling sweet pickled peppers from a jar and while he wasn't watching, I stuck a pickled jalapeno that looked the same. Poor guy. He deserves gold stars for what he put up with good-naturedly.

The proportions of mercury and powdered silver had to be precise so dad used a measure to meter out the proper quantities of the two elements. After measuring them out, he poured them into a ceramic mortar and pestle like this one. Then he would laboriously and carefully grind them together until they were a uniform paste - used to be called "Bell's Paste". That is the way dentists made amalgam at the same time.

You never saw this process because in your days dentists used pre-measured packets of stuff that they would pop open, insert in an electrical-mechanical mixer, turn on for 60 seconds or so, and then remove the capsule and spoon the liquid amalgam into your prepared cavity. Back then, the dentist and dad had to measure out the elements into the mortar and with a pestle grind the two together for several minutes. The process of hardening was a chemical one and if the metals were not evenly mixed they would not set up uniformly hard. In your mouth it was critical that there wasn't be too much mercury in the amalgam because if there was, it would separate out of the mixture and you would swallow it, possibly to your detriment.

That was something I learned. The hysteria in the world today about mercury is just that, hysteria. Oh, I agree that it is a bad idea to inhale mercury that has been converted into a gas, a vapor. The reason is simple: if you inhale a molecule of mercury -yes, that is very possible to do if someone is stupid enough to make molecules of mercury appear in the air we breathe- then the mercury molecule will go down into your lungs as easily as a molecules of oxygen. It turns out that molecules of anything behave the same way in this respect -they are all "gas". When the molecule of mercury is down there in the lung, it will do what oxygen molecules do, i.e. it will cross over into a capillary filled with blood. Then when this blood in the capillary moves up into your brain, that molecule of mercury will move out of the capillary flowing through the brain into the brain itself, and that is a problem because the metallic molecule creates an electrical short and prevents electricity from flowing along that wire, i.e. prevents brain waves from flowing down along the brain cell that is now holding onto the molecule. There is no way to get it out, so if a dentist is careless enough to put amalgam into his high temperature autoclave and silly enough to hang around to breathe the steam that

comes out of it, he will end up with a blank stare and a fine tremor in a wheelchair in a nursing home, staring blankly into nothing.

So, yes, mercury can be horribly dangerous. But the problem for me is that the naive stupid regulators of the last 20 years act as if all mercury, both elemental and molecular, is evil, high risk stuff that will kill you on contact etc ad nauseam. Nonsense. I played with the dang stuff as a kid and never was injured by it. Was I?! My dad worked with the stuff as did all dentists. It isn't elemental, i.e. liquid, mercury that is the real risk so playing with it is not really a bad risk. Obviously, it does pose a threat if it converts into vapor and you inhale enough of it, but that requires an enormous amount of exposure.

More lecture: while I was risk manager at St. Al's one of my crusades was employee safety. The first study I had the Hartford Insurance company perform was to go through every room in the hospital, which was hundreds, with a highly sensitive analyzer to detect the presence of mercury. It was a device that used a thin sheet of gold foil as a detector. An electrical current was set up across the foil and when even one molecule of mercury landed on it, the current was altered. There was little mercury anywhere which made us all happy. Except for one room in Central Supply. In that room employees were required to cut the fingers off of rubber gloves and then fill the cut-off fingers with elemental mercury and tie them off a certain way so that a selfish little general surgeon could use them to dilate esophaguses. Even after we offered him the pre-manufactured replacements, he refused, so I just went around him and got an administrative decision made that he couldn't get around that forbid my employees from being forced to do that job. He was forced to use pre-manufactured devices.

I did that because the concentration of molecular mercury in the room was 250 parts per million when there should be zero. The problem was that employees occasionally spilled mercury out of the finger tips during this primitive process, so mercury ended up

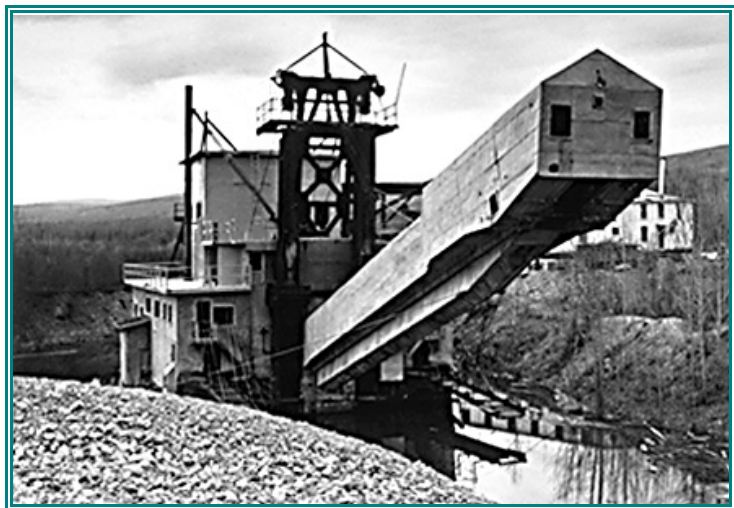


Figure 5 Dredge in Fairbanks  
<http://www.asme.org/history/images/IH113.html>

the floor was covered with a carpet. No way to ever collect it all so the mercury in the carpet exhaled molecules and raised the level to this dangerous level where certain employees worked for years. And guess what: none of them were harmed. That doesn't mean it was OK to expose them to molecular mercury. I'm just making the point that they DID experience an enormous exposure but were not harmed by it. [I had the carpet also removed as hazardous waste and manifested and shipped to a hazardous material dump out by mountain home. We got a commendation from some government agency for the exemplary way we handled and documented our actions.]

The nastiest example I ever heard of uncontrolled employee exposure to mercury was exemplified by Baumhoff's dredge up on the South Fork of the Yankee. It looks just like this one from Alaska, sitting in a pool it created from a narrow stream of water.

One of the times I toured the thing an old timer who volunteered to teach visitors about the dredge -who insisted on referring to Oscar Baumhoff as "Bumhoff" which tickled me every time he said it- explained how the gold was extracted from the gravel and collected inside of the dredge, the purpose of the entire machine. Mercury was then poured in that space because gold dissolves in mercury. Then the mercury was re-collected into containers and were removed from the dredge. On the shore along side the dredge a small still was set up to distill the mercury-gold compound. As the still was heated, the mercury quickly converted into molecular mercury and was driven out into the air, leaving gold behind. That was fine, except that during the time the still was hot and the mercury was being driven off, any employee who stood downwind for a length of time was going to breathe the stuff in, and that was bad. Really bad. I don't know how many men were harmed by that process but it was highly dangerous and is one I would have forbidden on sight.

Ever heard the term "Mad as a Hatter"? Remember the "Mad Hatter" in ALICE IN WONDERLAND? They did get mad, i.e. crazy, over time as they practiced their trade. Because



Figure 6 Mad Hatter Tea Party  
<http://www.bedtime-story.com/bedtime-story/classics-alice-7.htm>

the way they made sheets of felt in those days which was then converted into hats was to take chopped hair and spread it out on a flat surface and compact it together in a technique I don't know, using liquid mercury. The stuff I played with. But these guys were exposed 8-10 hours a day to the stuff, rubbing their hands in it so eventually went mad because they did acquire molecular mercury in their brains from that massive exposure. This madness was known to an occupational hazard of hat making, though years were required for the effect to happen.

Anyway, I get carried away at the mass hysteria of government and do-gooders who don't have a clue what they are doing, filled with the idiocy of inexperienced, unrealistic, impractical snot-nosed college graduates who live their lives in a hermetically sealed play rooms and haven't a clue what life really is like, what the real risks are. They are a greater danger than the mercury.

So dad did compound his amalgam and then used dentist tools to place and compact -dentists say 'condense'- the amalgam. It was an art to create the proper thickness of the layer. Too thick and he was wasting silver and too thin and he had to drill it out and replace it. After it was hardened he polished the surface to a high finish that reflected like a mirror. Silver of course does that. He polished the inlay so that its margin was absolutely flush with the level of the surface of the gun stock and did it so well that you couldn't even feel the margin if you passed your finger over it without looking at it. He did this for several other men.

The old Enfield 30.06 dad had was an exemplar of one of the finest rifles produced. It was manufactured by the British but was such an accurate durable rifle that the US used them in WWI, WWII and the Korean Conflict. Dad got his as army surplus in the late 1940's and it looked like this, with the stock that extended to the end of the barrel. He didn't like that style so he cut the stock down to the front anchor for the shoulder strap. He didn't like the wood stock over the top of the barrel either so he removed that as well.

After he had re-machined the barrel and outfitted it with a muzzle brake he inlaid the stock. I haven't seen it for years but believe it is still at 2828 N.



**Figure 7 Lee Enfield 30.06**  
[http://www.rt66.com/~korteng/SmallArms/le  
enfld.htm](http://www.rt66.com/~korteng/SmallArms/le%20enfld.htm)



### The Baby and the Bread Can

Last night while talking to Mom about the 'new' house in Naples she told me a story that still bothers her. She was about 10 years of age. She explained that her mom had been president of the Relief Society for most of the time she had lived in Naples. I had heard that before and found it eminently reasonable, such a peaceful quiet woman. She is the only person I have met who embodies what I believe "Christian Charity" is. No anger, no threats, no boastfulness, no hypocrisy. Just a gentle peaceful person. She was suited to lead a group by nature and example.

Mom's life was obviously affected by her mother's responsibilities. She said that about this age, she and several girl friends had made plans to go into 'town', i.e. Vernal, for a Saturday afternoon. She went home to tell her mom and get ready to leave, but her mom told her that she couldn't go, that she needed Marie in the house that afternoon to help, so mom had to cancel her participation in the outing. What had happened was that Teen asked several women to make several quilts that she was going to give to a family that needed them. Unfortunately, the quality of the work that the adult women had done was unsatisfactory to grandma, a highly skilled quilter. [The quilt she gave me as a wedding present is now in Lisa's home if you'd like to see it. She made that quilt entirely by hand when she was 79 years old. It does not have the quality of her work when she was in her prime, but it was a gift of love created in her twilight years as she sat alone in a tiny apartment in SLC. She lived 4 years after grandpa died.] Grandma kept mom home that afternoon to help her unpick all of the poor work. Then they had to rematch the blocks and corners and edges and re-tie and finish off the quilts.

The most distasteful responsibility grandma had was to lay out the dead and prepare them for burial. There were undertakers in town but these people couldn't afford that extravagance, even for the dead, so the congregation took care of the process for the bereaved family. This meant undressing and washing the bodies. Then clean clothing was put on, the hair combed and the body arranged in a coffin. Grandma did that for years. She was known to be a compassionate kind person who treated the deceased with respect and courtesy so people liked her to do it.

In addition to laying out the bodies, grandma also finished the coffins. Mom said that the coffins were made by any carpenter in the congregation who had time

but that her dad never made one. He wasn't skilled at wood-working. After the coffin was made, it was taken to grandma who would line it and cover it. She tacked a thin cotton batt inside the coffin, and covered it with a satiny cloth of a solid color. Mom said it was difficult to get the cloth because of the depression so they used pretty much what was at hand. She'd then cover the entire outside of the coffin with another fabric that was preferably one that had a textured pattern to it, a sort of brocade. This attention to appearances was appreciated by the family and congregation.

Grandma baked bread every couple of days but the kitchen didn't have much storage space or counter space. One loaf of bread was stored in the kitchen in the "bread can" and the others were put on the chest of drawers in grandma's bedroom under a white dishtowel. Everyone knew that was where the extra bread was and went there to get more if needed. Mom came home from school one afternoon and went to get a piece of bread out of the bread can in the kitchen and found it empty. She went into the bedroom to get a new loaf, lifted the dishtowel, and found a dead baby that had come to the house that afternoon. The shock was obviously great. Grandma had forgotten to tell her to watch out in there. Mom also had to help sew the white burial clothing for the baby. A little girl. Stillborn.

## Greased Pigs

**P**igs are fascinating. They eat meat, for example. They are surprisingly strong, their hooves are like hammers, they are highly intelligent, and they run like the wind. So when uncles take a 25 pound pig, which isn't very big, slather it with grease, and then tell the nieces and nephews that whoever catches it can have it, they know that whoever 'contributed' the pig isn't giving up a thing.

Family gatherings were where greased pigs were let loose. All of the relatives in the region -who were multitude- would attend these gatherings so there was always a dozen or two kids just the right age to chase a pig. At such a party at our house in Vernal, Grant brought the pig in a crate in the back of his pickup. He waited until after everyone had eaten and the adults were sitting around in the yard, men on chairs turned backwards. Needing a little entertainment to spice up the gathering.

It was summer so the weather was warm. Our place was 2 acres, fenced all around, so there was a limit to where the pig could run. But it did run to the limits. With a crowd of screaming howling kids chasing it as fast as they could. Which only made the crittur run faster. After failing to even get near the pig, us kids started to get smart. We were also tired. We decided to divide into two groups. One group was to wait by the southeast corner of the house and the other group was to go out and chase the pig. Around the house to where the first group was waiting to grab it.



**Figure 8 Greased pigs at a country fair**  
<http://www.capecodonline.com/cctimes/archives/2001/jul/26/greasedchase26.htm>

The plan actually worked. The pig came tearing around the house squealing and driving as fast as he could when the first group that he didn't anticipate jumped him. In the melee, screams of "I got 'im!", "Hold 'im!", "Don't let 'im get away!" "Grab 'im!", "Ouch!", "I can't!" were mixed with the frantic squeals and snorts - probably from the pig. In the end, however, each of us who really did get a grip on the pig discovered the strength of the animal, how hard it was, how slippery it was and how determined it was to get away. It got away.

I don't remember how the uncles finally caught the greasy pig. But it was doubtless a matter of being smarter than the pig. Cornering or trapping it back into the crate. Turns out that the point of the exercise was entertainment for the adults more than for the kids. We were disappointed that none of us caught it, but satisfied anyway. We had successfully tricked it, not a trivial matter with a pig. That is smarter than most kids.

## Ghost Riders in the Sky

Vaughn Monroe sang it, one of dad's favorite songs of all time. I scrounged around a couple of years ago and found it reissued and sent it to him, during the last year of his life after his stroke and fall, confined to bed. It was popular on the radio just about the time we went to Alaska. The story is a dramatic one, told by an unfortunate sinner who managed to speak to us living people. The message was a warning, "Take heed, or with me you'll ride, trying to catch the devil's herd across the lonely sky."

Dad never talked about what he liked, or why he liked things, so I don't know what the attraction was to this song. My guess is that it was a song that called to mind his own boyhood out in a desolate desert where he rode horses and was familiar with cattle drives. His own voice was comparable to Vaughn Monroe, a deep tenor voice so perhaps that was part of the draw. Dad was sentimental and would tear up when he was touched with something and this song seemed to call up deep emotions. The



Figure 9 Vaughn Monroe  
<http://www.asv.co.uk/sleeve/5312.jpg>



Figure 10 Ghost Riders  
[http://www.siggraph.org/chapters/san\\_francisco/events/1997\\_08\\_30/downs/Ghost\\_Riders.jpg](http://www.siggraph.org/chapters/san_francisco/events/1997_08_30/downs/Ghost_Riders.jpg)

story was equally compelling to me. I imagined what the "Devil's herd" looked like, or what the ghost riders looked like. An image, gaunt, strained and pained.

### Galuses, Galoshes and Garters

Grandpa Merrell wore galuses. So did Grandpa Jensen. I thought of them as "suspenders" but these old men referred to them as "galuses" with a certainty and conviction that persuaded me that I was mistaken. The right word was, after all, galuses. Such a strange word. Sounded like something that went wrong with your feet. Users of galuses claimed that they relieved a man of the pressure of a band around his waist while he was laboring on horses or shovels, an important benefit. Belts did the same job but constricted the abdomen, leading to speculation that they might also impair digestion. Who knows. Perhaps they did. And do. Us uptight modern men may just be suffering from too-tight belts and would benefit from reverting to old-fashioned galuses.

Similarly, these old men wore "galoshes", things I thought of as "rubber boots". Again, I was apparently mistaken. The right name was "galoshes" but when kids at school laughed meanly at my use of the term, I prudently decided that I'd limit use of that particular word to a particular domain of my life, i.e. the household of my grandparents. I didn't mind using the word with them because it was what they preferred, but I was danged if I was going to say that word and get laughed at in school. Looking back, I suspect that the kids who laughed knew the word out of the mouths of their own grandparents who also lived in the valley, but they were city kids, aloof and superior, above using old-fashioned words when there were new words. So "galuses" and "galoshes" found their way into a verbal dustbin, used sparingly and in particular safe environments where the smart-alec city kids weren't around. Actually, I came to agree on a strictly objective basis that these old-fashioned boots were irritating. The new boots slipped on, and didn't require the buckling of these metal clasps that would freeze over with ice, making it impossible to maneuver them. Grandpa found his word and preference in "rubber boots" relegated to the dust heap of old-fashionedness.

The last archaic personal item I encountered was the garter, two kinds, the



Figure

<http://www.classicboots.com/other/details/rubber08.htm>

kind that held socks up and the kind work around the upper arm to hold a sleeve up. Mr. Thorne of the photo studio fame wore the latter, along with his greet eye shield. Mom made us wear garters to hold up heavy wool socks that had no elastic in them which meant they slipped down quickly. These garters were a band that was fastened around the calf just below the knee so that the fatness of the calf would hold it up. This band had one or two clips that could be opened over the top of the sock to hold it in place. I was embarrassed to wear them but there was no choice about it. We wore long underwear that sagged, too. I suspect that the sagginess of clothing was related in large part to the fact that we wore articles of clothing for so many days. If something wasn't visibly dirty, mom didn't wash it. The work of washing clothes was much greater than today so she'd hold a pair of levis up and look for stains or grime. If there was none, we got to wear them for another day or two. The smell of clothing wasn't a consideration for kids, though perhaps it was for adults. I don't know that. But I do know that us little kids that only bathed once a week were oderiferous after about Wednesday, which meant that we had no sense of smell for others I'd guess.

### Peter Cottontail and Easter

We grew up eating rabbits, because cottontails were abundant in the desert-and free. They taste sort of like chicken when cooked and even resemble nondescript pieces of chicken. I had a real good understanding about rabbits, what they were, how they looked. And what they tasted like. That's the practical reality. Sitting in a car while dad shot cottontails that he picked up and put in the trunk to be cleaned and skinned later at home. That's what rabbits were. Dinner. And pests because they would get into alfalfa fields and eat



Figure 12 Cottontail Rabbit

<http://www.ohiokids.org/ohc/nature/animals/mammals/crabbit.html>

substantial amounts.

We even caught some rabbits barehanded out on the Green River Ranch. There is a parasitic plant -related to morning glories- called "dodder"- that can attack alfalfa fields. This yellowish filamentous plant has no leaves, just narrow stems, which grow densely and spread from plant to plant, thereby creating a tight net over the



Figure 13

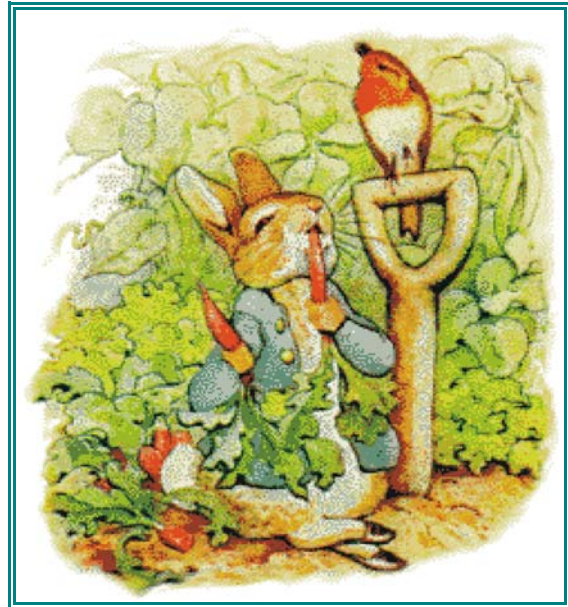
<http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/TRA/dodder.html>

entire field if it is not controlled. When we were out on the Greenriver Ranch, we would go out in the evening before we had to return to grandpa Merrell's house. And walk along dirt roads through the alfalfa fields, looking for spots where there was dodder, looking to see if there was anything moving underneath the nets. When we saw something move, we'd run crazily out to the spot because the dodder net slowed us down. We looked like drunken sailors staggering instead of running. When we got near the rabbits that were foraging in the early evening, they would obviously spook and try to get away and usually did. But the netting of dodder also slowed them down, making them vulnerable to almost being caught by little kids.

I also encountered rabbits raised in hutches for dinner. Farms don't teach you any sympathy for animals or birds. They certainly don't teach violence either, but you don't grow up with soft spots in your hearts for the prize pig or chicken you raised in 4-H or Future Farmers of America. Nope, you grew it and sold it for cash.

But there was a magical world of rabbits separate from this practical one, one peopled -rabbited- by Peter Rabbit in the Beatrice Potter books, and Peter Cottontail, the official Easter Bunny. This was the world of the Easter Bunny that I fervently believed in - being a naturally practical kid who understood that this rabbit produced some pretty nice goodies on his day, plus there were lots of fun things to do.

The Easter Bunny and Santa Claus were both believable to me. The proof was in the fact of the celebrations that involved each. If they were not 'real', then why would adults go to such expense to buy toys and candy? Why would the adults tell me about them, persuading me that they were real? Why would stores and churches and school celebrate them if they weren't real? The evidence for their authenticity was unarguable, compelling and dang near as believable as the statement that "The sun always comes up in the east." Period. No argument. Though I wasn't quite sure what this "east" business was about. In addition to these objective proofs of the reality of Klaus and Peter, I simply wanted to believe in the fantasy. My world had room for fantasy. I understood that the loud startling noise made by lightening in the sky was



**Figure 14 Peter Rabbit**  
<http://www.tcom.ohiou.edu/books/kids/beatrix/p8.htm>



**Figure 15 Peter Cottontail**  
<http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/easter/gb.html>



the noise created by the celestial unloading of logs by some gigantic creature, the man in the moon or some such enormous distant being -so said Uncle Grant. These two fantasy characters were as believable.

In this fervent clasping of these fantasies to myself I was no different than most little kids. Didn't you, too, cling to the wispy fuzzy stories associated with actual celebrations simply because you wanted to believe in them, believe in fantasy? Separate from the goodies. You may not have known that they were what is termed 'fantasy' but at some level in your soul and mind you intuited that they were stories of supernatural things that otherwise didn't exist in your everyday world. You knew they were different. And you wanted that difference. I did too.

So Peter Cottontail was a special thing for me just as was Jack Frost. The fact that there were so many rabbits around somehow added to the believability of the story. Had I never seen a rabbit, I may not have found it as easy to believe. The same with Jack Frost. While I never saw evidence of his person, I nonetheless saw evidence of his reality in his nightly work on our windows, quarter inch thick layers of gorgeous crystalized ice.

About the time I was becoming sentient, we heard a new song on the radio and I still remember these words, as if I had heard them last night:

*Here comes Peter Cottontail,  
Hopping down the bunny trail,  
Hippity-hoppity Easter's on its way.  
Try to do the things you should  
Maybe if you're extra good  
He'll roll lots of Easter eggs your way.*

*You'll wake up on Easter Morning  
And you'll know that he was there  
When you see those Easter goodies  
That he's scattered everywhere.  
Here comes Peter Cotton tail  
Hopping down the bunny trail,  
Hippity hoppity Easter's on its way.*



**Figure 16 Peter Cottontail**  
<http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/easter/gb.html>

Those memorized words that still hum in my memory were sung by Gene Autry. I

can hear his sweet voice singing those words while he strums his cowboy guitar. There was a Little Golden Book about Peter that these images are from.

Dick and I decorated eggs every Easter using the Paas Easter egg dye kits. I imagine they are the same today. There were half a dozen tablets of color, a copper wire device for lifting eggs into and out of the dye solutions and wonder of wonders, the tattoo-like transfers you wet and held on the egg to imprint them with wondrous images of Easter. Mom helped us do this mess, on the kitchen table. She prepared the hot water and mixed the tablets in individual cups with the right amount of vinegar and then turned us loose. I think that most of our eggs were pretty muddy brown out of our enthusiasm to experiment with as many dyes as possible. Almost always muddy brown, with smeared, illegible tattoos, but we had such a good time that it really didn't matter.

One of the other things that made me a firm believer in Peter Cottontail turned out to be entirely accidental. It's hard to believe it happened like it did.

On this particular Easter Sunday we had been duded up in whatever new clothes we were given -Easter always involved some new clothes- and went to Sunday School in the morning. As was typical for our household, there was no sampling of the Easter basket or goodies before we had done our duty. We weren't even allowed to SEE our Easter Baskets. Indeed, we had no way of even knowing if there were such, but we trusted our folks, and knew their style. When they said, "No, You don't get to do that until you do such and such", then you dang well knew they spoke truth, i.e. there were in fact such. You could wear yourself out on them like waves against the Rock of Gibraltar but you were some puny balsa wood boat. There was to be no viewing even. Just eat your breakfast, please, comb your hair, go to Sunday School and then and only then after you get home from church do you get to see your Easter Baskets.

Since on the day before we had personally dyed 2 dozen eggs -probably from Norie's place- we knew that there were at least a few dyed eggs around the place, many of them having been destroyed the day before in our annual Easter egg roll, but some remained. So if worse came to worse, we could find solace in eating those. It was always fun anyway to see the filigree patterns dyed into the surface of the boiled egg through the cracks in the shells.

When we came home from church we were as excited as we could be, probably not having heard a word that was said to us at church. We jumped out of the car and started running flat-out for the house. Suddenly mom yelled a loud yell for us to stop. Being obedient -those yells always caught me off-guard and I

learned the hard way that they were usually followed by a lecture and punishment and even though I sometimes but not always didn't have a clue what misdemeanor I had committed this time which was how things usually were- I stopped stock still and waited to hear what there was to hear. Surprise of surprises, there was no lecture. Deep sigh of relief because that yell put even the excitement of seeing my Easter Basket out of my mind, and now I could think about it again. Then she did something that she had never done before and which she didn't do again.

She called us to go with her to look for rabbit tracks around the house. That was a new one, but I was involved in fantasy. If mom said we'd look for Easter Bunny prints, then we would and the chances were good that we'd find some sort of clue about this secretive creature that somehow got into our houses with goodies. How he carried them was never a concern, where he'd get all the candy never bothered me, what chickens he conned never bothered me. Nothing did. He was real and I reaped the results. So we checked in front of the house to see if we could tell whether he had been there, but all that grass didn't wouldn't show any prints. The north side of the house was never used by anyone for anything -even Peter Cottontail. Somehow mom steered us from looking around the back porch. We then checked on the south side of the house. Most of it was grass as well, but just below the window of mom's and dad's bedroom there was a patch of loose dirt. We said 'ah ha!" and ran to look. Lo and behold, there actually were rabbit tracks. All over the place. We were excited because we knew he had been to the house and had left us something wonderful.

By now mom allowed as how we could probably go into the house to check and see what there might be. We went to the back door, up the 4 stairs, through the enclosed porch, through the kitchen, and into the dining room. There on the dining room table were two baskets filled with candy, plastic grass, dyed eggs, jelly beans and large colored candy eggs. We knew Peter Cottontail had done this deed personally. Because we saw his footprints out there on the ground. It was a satisfying Easter to have the fantasy prove out in reality, in a way that Santa Claus never did.

Years later mom told me the rest of the story after I had kids of my own. She asked me if I remembered an Easter in Vernal where we had hunted for Easter bunny prints around the house after church and oddly enough, I did remember it. It was such a vivid experience to actually see rabbit prints outside the house on the very day the Easter Bunny was to be there that it was indelibly marked in my memory. She went on to explain as one parent to another what the

truth of the situation was.

What had happened was that in the rush and hubbub of getting ready to go to church, she and dad completely forgot to assemble the Easter baskets and put them out for us to find when we came home. It was only when we all were getting out of the car after church that they realized their problem. They improvised. Somehow the two of them hurriedly exchanged signals as us kids were on a dead-run for the back door. The agreement was that mom was in charge of heading us off for a while -hence the loud paralyzing yell- during which time dad went into the house, grabbed the stuff, assembled it and put it on the dining room table. The biggest surprise to her was the fact that there really were prints in the loose dust under her bedroom window - that really looked like rabbit prints. She almost believed her own story. She said they were not cat prints.

## Easter Egg Roll

This was an annual event, an outing into the desert to have a picnic and roll Easter eggs that we had laboriously decorated, out there on sand hills. Here's a shot of the picnic part. Look at mom. She's wearing slacks, a sweater and blouse and some kind of sandals. I remember the outing and it was when I was about 6-7 years old. While we couldn't have done this many times what with dad traipsing around the world, these few Easter egg rolls stand as one of the traditions we honored, insofar as a young family can have traditions. There is something so wonderful about going out there in a sort of warm but still coolish day, one of the first outings of the new spring and summer. As a family. Perhaps the major feature of the excursion. A family. A family. Not a few people from the family, but

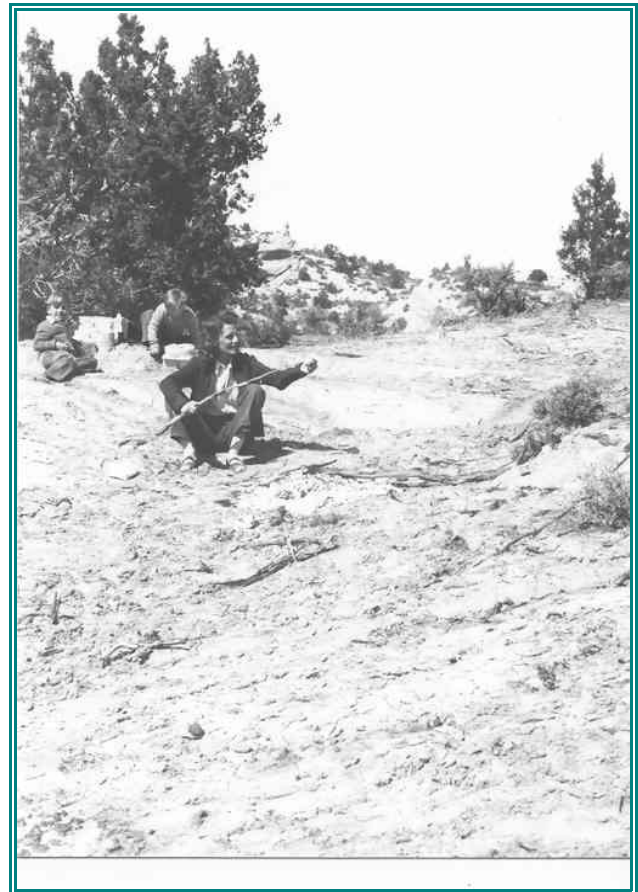


Figure 17 Mom roasting wienies during "Easter Egg Roll" near Brush Creek ~1947

the entire bunch.

Dick and I are kicked back lying in the dirt enjoying ourselves. In the tallish junipers and cedars. Notice, too, that we are duded up. To go out into the desert to play in the sand. Interesting isn't it to be so formally attired for a romp in the sand. Sand and dirt blended. Dead wood lying all over because there were no tourists to burn it up. Easy to collect enough wood to make all the fire we needed. Can't tell whether the Easter egg roll already occurred but it didn't obviously matter. If it was over, we were content, and if it was still to come, we were still content. Look at our comfort.

Dad sometimes did funny things, things that startled and pleased us. Usually he didn't say a great deal to us, and usually he was so absorbed in what he was doing that we couldn't tell whether he was even aware we were around. But every so often he would do something funny and warm, like climb into a hole in a large sand stone, wearing his fedora, and lie there like he was having a good time.

This picture shows the three of us, Dickie on the right by dad's head, at this Easter Egg Roll. The desert was a familiar comforting place to dad. He was a "man of the

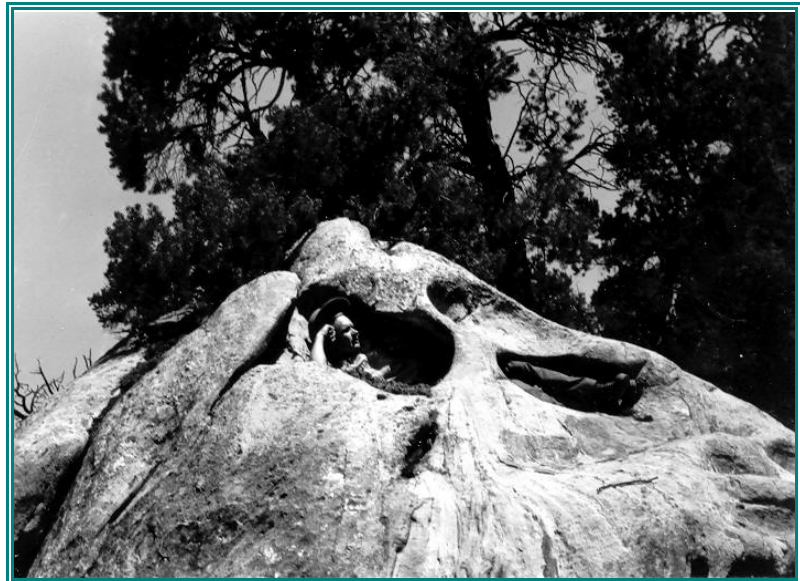


Figure 18 Dad in a rock on an Easter Egg Roll

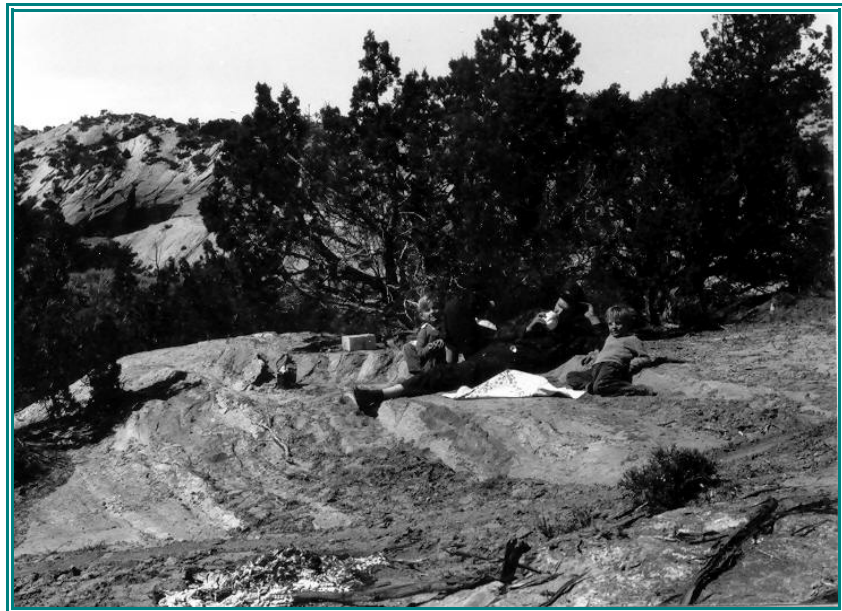


Figure 19 Dad Dickie & Ronnie at Easter Egg Roll

desert" and fit in with it intimately, having been born and raised in desert. Note the whitish spot in the left half of the bottom edge of the photo. That's the campfire that you see mom roasting wienies in just above and just below.

I like how we were happy together here. Look at our smiles and body language. We were happy. Please note that. I carry on here at great length about the pain and difficulty of being my father's son, which was real, yet there were lots of good times. Interestingly, as I think about them, a good share of the good times were on outings, not in the house. He liked to travel and be out and about. As a result, his treatment of us was affected positively when we were out and about. He became approachable and friendly. He'd be silly and fun - which he never did in any house we ever lived in. Odd, really, to realize that now, but it is true. Ask Dick if that's his memory as well.

Mom is roasting a wienie on a stick -that we just took from the desert after we got out there- in the fire that is right there in front of her. If you haven't

built fires in the desert, you probably can't see the fire in this picture and don't understand how there can be a fire right there. It looks like there is nothing there. But there is. The reason she has her hand over her face is to protect it from the intense heat of what looks here like a pile of white dust. What happens is that the dried juniper and cedar, started with rabbit brush, burn hot and burn completely



**Figure 20 Another view of cooking over desert campfire**

so there is little smoke, and all that remains of a fire is ash. No charcoal, nothing. Just powdery ash that blows away in the slightest breeze. She had a fire there and since the two of us are lying back with smiles on our face over there behind her, my bet is that she was roasting wienies. We would have been right there participating in the roasting of marshmallows. More likely that as the mother bear she was getting our main course ready. We knew it and we relaxed. Roasting wienies was actually not a really fun thing. We usually burned them. It took a while

and required patience and a technique which we didn't have. The marshmallow edition was a different story. Even if we caught them on fire and charred them, there was still the lovely sweet soft heart to savor and munch on.

Those sand dunes there in the back ground, to the right of and behind mom is where we rolled Easter eggs. Mom would boil the eggs on the Saturday before Easter while we nervously hovered around, not wanting them to crack because that marred them for dying. They obviously tasted just great but the point here was not taste. It was perfection.. After we harvested however many came out of the boil intact, we would dye them with Paas dyes in cup-sized containers filled with a dissolved dye and vinegar. We used the copper wire instrument that came in the Paas packages to move the eggs through enough dye baths to render them totally brown. When we were satisfied with our masterpieces, we stood them in the holder that was formed by punching out pre-stamped circles in back of the box that was folded to be a tray. When the eggs had dried by being held in that holder, we would them, fairly unsuccessfully, try to apply paper 'tattoos' to the eggs, tattoos that came with the dye set. That we failed year after year was irrelevant. It was the intention and the action of trying to do it that counted. We knew we were succeeding.

Then after going to Sunday School, we went home, got our Easter baskets, changed our clothes and hopped into the family chariot for an outing. It was a breath-holding time, we're going out to roll Easter eggs and roast wienies and roast marshmallows and mom is there and dad is there and we are going to be alone out there, just the four of us, going where ever we want to and have a dozen eggs to recklessly waste however we wish. [I just phoned mom to ask her about which day we did this Easter Egg roll because part of my brain can scarcely believe she'd allow us to do it on Sunday. Saturday seems more likely. When I asked her point-blank did we roll eggs on Sunday, she allowed as how "my family didn't see anything wrong with doing things like that on Sunday." i.e. she didn't answer my question. What she did was provide a rationalization for having done what she "knew was wrong". My anxiety about it was based on my memories of her vehement refusal to do anything on Sunday. So we sinned. And had a grand time, as the faces in these photos show. Yay, dad.

The roll itself was a simple process. We hunted around until we found a high sand dune that had a long -at least long to us- clear pathway. We'd take an egg or a stick and trace a straight, more or less, path from the top of the dune to the bottom, hoping that it was smooth and straight enough to guide a hard-boiled,

tattooed, dyed egg from the top of the run to the bottom. It never worked that way, but that didn't detract from our intensity in laying down the track. After we, with dad, had designed the course, we'd go with our eggs, carefully divided exactly evenly, to the top of the run. There we took turns. Always, exactly, one after the other, never two in a row. And always in turns. That was how things were done with those parents, excruciatingly equally divided portions.

The egg would start out slowly and we'd be tempted to sort of push it along its way to get it going. But the law of gravity was fairly dependable in that quadrant of Uintah Valley so most of the time we could rely on it. By the time the egg had gone about half way down the run, it was jumping just a bit into the air and spinning wildly, the tattoos whirling like dervishes. By the time the egg had done 3/4 of the way down the track, it had picked up so much speed that it was jumping a foot or so into the air and jumping 3 feet in a bound. This is where things usually started coming apart. The shell would be crack and start disintegrating. The last time the egg landed after its wild career down the narrow track, the shell disintegrated, just blew off the white. The egg spun violently, wildly, so the shell peeled off with a thin layer of boiled egg attached, leaving the bare yolk exposed to the abrasive sand. In the end, even the yolk disintegrated and exploded, leaving only sand-coated fragments that weren't even trying to clean off to eat. It was exciting to send our eggs, one after the other in turn, down that Olympic-sized track, seeing each one disintegrate into spinning, shattered fragment.

### Home-made Earmuffs

Vernal winters are bitter cold. The altitude and latitude give the Uintah valley cold temperatures that are frequently in the teens. Standing outside on the road in the morning waiting for the bus in that kind of temperature is cold business. Walking home a mile after school is worse.

The most humiliating thing mom ever did about clothes -and she did more than one- involved this bitter cold. We were living on the Ashton Place, and mom and dad must have had a tough time paying the mortgage and making ends meet. I don't know how or whether his frequent job changes contributed to their financial straits. Winter clothing was expensive and since our resources were so limited -we were just plain poor- they didn't have money to buy good winter gear, or buy any gear this particular winter. So mom found ways to get by -with good intentions.

First, we wore long-handled under wear. That was a good start although they became mildly uncomfortable because they got baggy after a day or so.



Remember that we only bathed once a week on Saturday and wore the same clothing all week unless it got dirty. The next layer of clothing was long sleeved shirts and levis. We also wore those mid-calf wool socks that wouldn't stay up without the garters. They held the socks up but were embarrassing. To finish off just before we went outdoors, we put on some non-descript, hand-me-down winter coats and mittens that did a fair job of keeping our fingers warm. I always wanted to have gloves like the city kids but mittens were warmer because you can close your hand inside the mitten and keep them warmer than in glove where each finger is surrounded by cold.

We didn't have winter hats with ear flaps so our ears were painfully cold when we walked home from school. I don't remember whether we even had a car at this time but it wouldn't have been used for something as trivial as picking kids up from school. We had feet and could walk. So in the first grade we walked home in the snow. A mile and a half.

Parenthetically, the fact that little kids could walk that far alone revealed something important. Our country has lost that innocence that allowed little kids to walk without any fear more than a mile through town and then practically deserted farm land. Mom did not worry that something bad would happen. I never felt any fears about a person harming us. It wasn't even a consideration. In fact, I felt like I could go to any adult if I needed help. They took care of little kids. Now, I realize that wasn't entirely true even then but it was much more true than today and the fact that we were not cautioned to watch out for adults shows it. We knew several ways home and were only in any kind of danger when a vehicle passed us on the road and that was only a risk if we were out in the roadway. But cars were rare so even that risk was minimal. Today a parent would be derelict to allow their small children to walk a mile alone everyday. Even in Vernal. Times have changed, evil doers abound and live everywhere and unprotected little kids are just that.

Back to the frozen ears. Mom noticed how cold our ears were and she knew the temperature. We doubtless complained and cried because they were so cold. Pink and cold. It was bitter cold without ear covering to provide some protection so she did the only thing she could think to do with the resources that she had. She took the fur collar from an old coat and cut it into 2 inch wide squares. Then she cut two slits in each square and threaded a length of webbing through the slits to make ear muffs. These fur blocks could then be positioned over our ears and the belt could be tied under our chin. An entirely satisfactory device to protect them from the cold.

I was mortified. There was no way I would be seen in public with those things on. Even in second grade I would have died from embarrassment if I had appeared at school in those things. The ridicule one would experience would be enormous. I obviously had to wear them in the morning when I went out of the house and while I stood by the side of the road where mom could see me waiting for the bus to come. But as soon as I got on the bus with those horrible things on, a cat call or two erupted. I pulled those hateful things off as fast as I could and stuck them in my coat pocket. I would have thrown them away if I had dared but I had to put them on when I got near home. To get home without them would have resulted in severe punishment.

I don't recall how I developed this acute sensitivity to the disgracefulness of poorness but it was there and I am embarrassed even at this moment by it. Those earmuffs were terrible humiliation even though mom meant well when she made them.

## Venison Roasts

Mom had a way to cook venison roasts that masked the musky flavor that bothered some people. Which really was a problem I discovered later when I ate a roast cooked by someone who didn't know how or didn't care to mask the gaminess. In fact, I had no idea until I was a teenager that venison is disliked by some people because of its gaminess. Her roasts and steaks were delectable.

I don't know what spices she used but there were several. The one I remember was laurel leaves. Called "bayleaf". Her method started with a hot cast iron skillet on top of the stove that looked like this. The door behind her would be the door into my bedroom. She'd dredge the roast in mixture of flour with lots of salt and pepper it. After it was coated white on both sides and all ends, she would drop it into the hot skillet to sear it. This required the stove to be stoked hot to heat the skillet that much. Searing created a nearly-burnt crust of over-cooked



Figure 21

meat that would hold the juice inside the roast. There was a loud sizzle when the roast was lowered into the pan with lots of popping and splattering that produced the most delicious smoke. After she was satisfied that the down-side was sealed she'd take a large cooking fork, stab it deeply into the roast, pry it off the pan and flip it onto another side. She repeated this process until all sides were seared, i.e. showed a shiny hard brown surface. T

She'd then add her other spices and top off the roast with a couple of bayleaves. Actually, they may have made no difference in the flavor but it was part of the ritual and we'd remind her if she forgot. They were from Schilling and came in a narrow Schilling-red box. After the roast was properly seared and decorated with spices, she would pour some water into the skillet and cover it with a lid, put the thing in the hot oven and roast it until it was nearly done. I don't know how she knew when this point was reached. Then she'd fill the skillet with fresh vegetables. These consisted of quartered potatoes, carrots, occasionally celery, and onions that she tucked around the roast until the lid scarcely seated. When she opened the skillet later, the meal was excellent.

When the skillet was opened, the steam flowed into the kitchen, filling it with a savory smell that made my mouth water. She'd cut the roast into pieces and serve it up on plates with generous helpings of vegetables. We'd sit down, say grace, and indulge. More than I could eat most of the time, but the flavor was wonderful. Gravy was made out of the drippings and the left over amount was saved to be served on bread for another meal as a way to stretch the meat.

## Candy and Gum

Infection Control was a name that was decades away from Vernal or small communities like it. So stores that sold candy in bulk had large candy jars sitting in rows on shelves, low enough that kids could see them and reach into them. Most of the candies were one or two for a penny, and were un-wrapped. You took your pennies or nickel in, took as much time as you needed to look carefully at all of the sweet colorful offerings and finally made you decision. A momentous one. Then you took the metal lid off the jar and reached in to take what you had chosen. These items were carried in your hot sweaty palm over to the counter where the shopkeeper or clerk had been carefully watching you for the whole time. You laid the items of the counter while the person pushed them out flat on the counter, the better to count them. After adding things up, using a scrap of paper and a pencil if the number got too big, the clerk would tell you how much you owed. You would

laboriously count out a penny at a time on the counter so the clerk could see that you were being honest. She re-counted it anyway and scooped it up, sorting it into the right slots in the cash register drawer.

The stores also had wrapped candies and gums. There were fancier and more expensive.

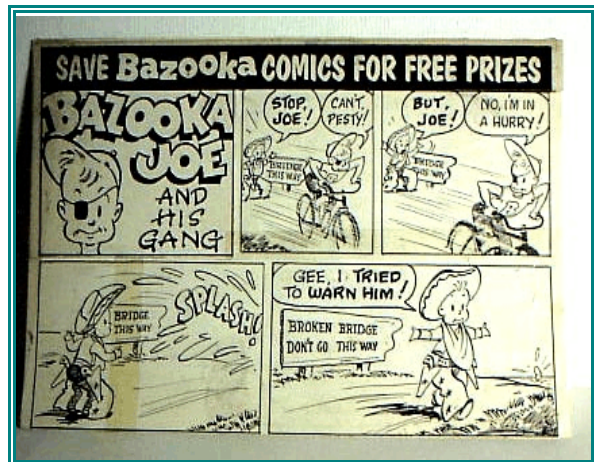


Figure 22  
<http://theimaginaryworld.com/bug75.jpg>

Fleers Bubble Gum was a penny apiece and Bazooka which was larger was two pennies. We only bought a 2 cent apiece gum or candy when we had a dime. Five pennies weren't many. We stretched them by buying the two for a penny variety of hard unwrapped candies.

Tootsie rolls of the large size were available in Grandma's store. Five cents for this monstrous roll of chocolate candy that was scored into bites that were too big to chew. I didn't see the smaller pieces until we lived in Seward. Nancy and Sluggo advertised this candy, appealing effectively to little kids who read those comic books, dreaming of the joy of having a tootsie roll.

### Pickles and Alchemy

Pickles are cucumbers that have been abused. With chemicals that harden the walls of cells

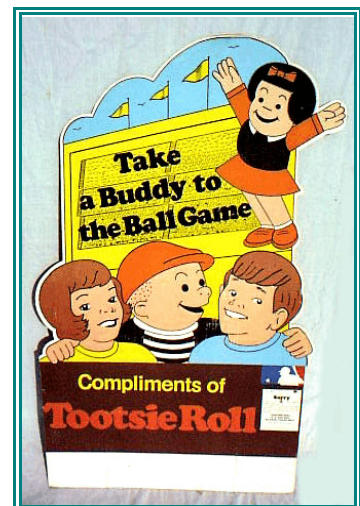


Figure 24  
<http://theimaginaryworld.com/dlsp61.jpg>

and replace the natural juices with a spicy mixture of diluted vinegar. Alum is the principal chemical for transforming the cells, and affects cucumbers like formaldehyde affects mammalian tissues. Making of pickles takes time and a great deal of work. And seems to involve a small amount of magic or luck.

Mom raised cucumber plants in Vernal sufficient quantities to harvest enough small cucumbers to make a batch of pickles. She did not use the large cucumbers that were cut up and made into chips for the table. Those were prepared with grandma's recipe. These large cucumbers were peeled, scored on all sides with a fork, cut into wheels and set into a bowl of water, vinegar, sugar and black pepper for a few hours, sometimes with slices of pickles. For pickles mom preferred baby cucumbers about 3 to 5 inches in length. It took several days to collect enough.

I don't know her recipe and don't remember all of the details of the process, but I remember that it took much longer than bottling fruits and vegetables, the only measure of time I had for food preparation. In contrast to her uniform success with canning, she was challenged by pickle-making, the only thing she didn't seem to master in the kitchen. She was an excellent cook. When the pickling process didn't work, the cucumbers would simply spoil and grow a foamy mold on the surface of the brine, or the pickles would taste funny or they would be mushy. She achieved all of those results along with good pickles.

The first surprise about pickle making was that the pickles weren't cooked. It was a cardinal rule about food preparation otherwise was that it had to be cooked thoroughly. So it was a violation of that rule to simply wash the little cucumbers and start the process. Turns out that there was no risk, but the violation of this otherwise rigid rule was conspicuous. We learned and lived rigidly by rules. After the small cucumbers were washed and the stem end cut off, they were put into a pickle crock which was covered with a mixture of water, alum and I don't know what else. There was a formula for letting the filled crock sit for a number of days after which mom drained the liquid off, holding the cucumbers inside the crock. The dinner plate she set as a lid over the collection was used to hold them in place while she tipped the crock on its side to drain the liquid off. The liquid she re-filled the crock with was a different mixture than the previous one. This draining and refilling was done several times.

She used her mom's recipe for the pickle spices. Dill that we grew in our own garden was the chief flavor since these were "dill pickles" but there were celery seeds and seeds of other kinds, including some the size of peppercorns that

weren't. After she had mixed the spices in a bowl, she put them in a small cloth bag that she boiled them for a while on the stove. That liquid was the last that was poured over the cucumbers to flavor them. The seeds and the liquid were poured into the crock. The dill weed from the garden was hung upside down in the grainery to dry and kept there until it was needed, adding its aroma to the mixture of metallic fertilizers, musty mouse smells and oils and kerosene. In the end, we had pickles even if mom had to get them from her mom.

### Parsnip Patties and Salmon Loaf

**P**arsnips are funny looking roots, knobbly, long and white, that look a bit like horseradish except that a parsnip is as bland as the horseradish is wild. We grew them out behind the privy, which probably sounds awful but I don't think there was contamination of the roots. Later: I guess I am rationalizing there, aren't I. Why would anyone plant a vegetable for the table along the side of the pit of a privy that was filled with you know what? We worried about the distance of the privy pit from the well under the house but the vegetables in the soil didn't seem to be a problem. Another thought: remember how in the orient human waste -euphemistically termed "night soil"- is spread on gardens as a fertilizer? The vegetables and people do fine so perhaps there is no problem after all. All I know is that they were just planted there out of the way, behind the privy by the horseradish plants on one side and the strawberry patch a ways to the north. Mom used them regularly as part of our diet but the only way I remember them being prepared was as patties. She probably used them in stews but they weren't memorable there. Actually, they aren't memorable at all. Ask Dick - he hates them.



Figure 25 Lost UFL

To prepare the patties she would peel and section the roots and then boil them until they were soft. Being a bit fibrous they didn't fall apart in the water like potatoes did. After they were softened, mom would drain the water off, holding the pot over the sink, lid tipped just a bit to allow water to flow out while she carefully avoided the swirling steam. She'd pour the parsnips into a large bowl where she mashed them into a pulp with a fork. A couple of eggs, salt and pepper

were mixed into the mass after which it was divided into quarter-cup portions on a sheet of waxed paper. They were flattened and dipped into saltines she had crushed gently in the wax paper. Then she fried the patties in a hot skillet to brown the outside and firm them up after which they found their way to our plates. I didn't mind them, though they weren't exactly favorites but Dick didn't like them at all. A couple of years ago I bought a parsnip and left it on his doorstep. He never said anything about it.

The salmon loaf was basically a meat loaf prepared with canned salmon instead of hamburger. Mom bought a medium sized can of salmon which she mixed that same way she mixed a meat loaf. The salmon always interested me because the bones were present, but had been chemically reduced during canning to a chalky substance that could be eaten. The bones in catfish and trout, the fish we caught and ate, were hard and sharp and not eaten so these mysterious bones seemed sort of dishonest or magic or both. The term 'loaf' probably came from the fact that the stuff was cooked in a bread pan so the result was shaped like a loaf of bread.

## Soaps

Soaps figure prominently in any household, modern or not. Hand soap for the sink, soap for the dishes, soap for the laundry. Dad had a special need in this

**EVEN GRIMIEST HANDS  
COME CLEAN AS THIS!**

LAVA routs tough dirt like magic! Amazingly mild!

**BEFORE** **AFTER**

ORDINARY WASHUPS never get hands like this clean. But LAVA'S creamy lather holds thousands of tiny scrubbers. Rout's toughest dirt lightning fast!

WITH LAVA, even grime ground into skin cracks, round nails, vanishes! Yet speedy LAVA'S amazingly gentle. Get plenty for the family.

**IN 30 TO 50 SECONDS LAVA gets hands cleaner than Ordinary Washups Ever Can!**

On our Ranch, we all use LAVA SOAP! Can't beat it for cleaning hands!

★ Rich lather, in hardest water!  
★ Amazingly gentle, even for tots!  
★ Saves towels! No more smudges!

**LAVA SOAP**

**SO USE THRIFTY LAVA WHENEVER YOU WASH! - GET 3 BARS. FOR BATHROOM, KITCHEN, WASHROOM!**

Figure 26

regard because mechanics use oils and greases that stain the hands. The color didn't really bother him except when he went to church. He'd like to have more or less respectable hands so he'd scrub them harshly, using a nail brush to try to remove dirt. I see him sitting in church intently using a small pocket knife to work on his nails, gouging more of the black grease.

He used a substance called "Goop" to remove the heavy grease. It was a wonderful stuff because in the can it shook like jelly, and had a powerful, sweetish hydrocarbon odor that filled your space when you used it. Then he used soap to remove the goop that had dissolved the bulk of the grease. He preferred to use "Lava" soap, a soap that was compounded with finely ground pumice. The bar was gray, rough like fine sandpaper, and did the job. Insofar as it could be done.

The preferred soap for bathing was LifeBuoy, a sweeter smelling soap than Lava that didn't have the abrasive powder.

This ad includes a pitch for a book about baseball from the era when baseball really was the "national" sport. I did know about baseball but it wasn't played much locally. Softball was preferred for some reason. The concept of a "national" sport was unknown to me. Camay and Lux soaps also were used for bathing but I didn't have any sense about why one or the other was used. Probably sale prices dictated which bar would be purchased the next time was needed.

The soap for washing dishes was Dreft. It was a Proctor and Gamble's soap that wasn't a soap. It was synthetic and was intended to wash about everything, including your underwear or glasses.

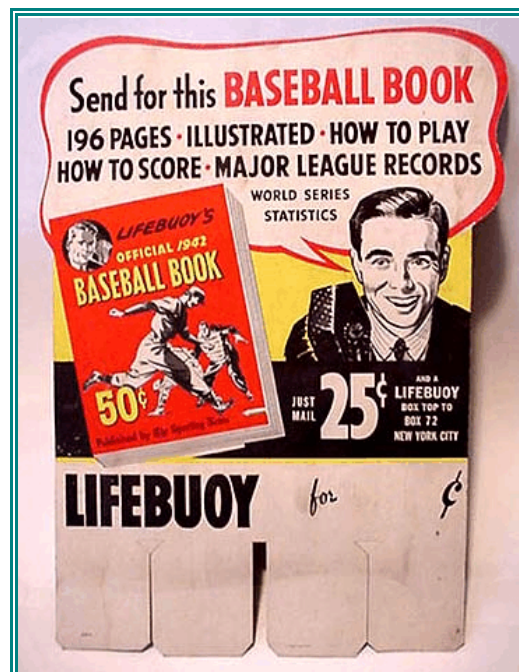


Figure  
27<http://theimaginaryworld.com/bl017.jpg>

## Tularemia, Trichina, Bovine TB and Brucellosis

Looking at the list of infectious agents that were present in our environment out there on the farm makes me feel today like I've been living in a sterile room for the last 50 years. The stuff we contended with was pretty amazing. Looking at our Vernal



life from this perspective changes my perception of my tour of duty in the Amazon basin. I've generally viewed it as a time I spent in a nasty infested environment that was different than the one I had experienced before, but that is not accurate. Look at the things described in this section and you'll see that mom had to spend as much time tending to these nasties as I had to down in Brazil. There were some really evil things lurking around every day.

Tularemia, known scientifically as *Francisella tularensis*, is a nasty bacterial disease that is carried by rabbits. They get it from ticks like these. Infected ticks can also infect a human directly so ticks posed a variety of threats to us all. That is why mom would make us take all -all- our clothes off after we had been out in the desert to hunt for ticks. When she found any she checked to see if they had already buried their heads in our skin. If not, she would just pick them off and crush them or throw them into the hot stove. They were not allowed to escape. If their head was buried, she would not pull them out because that might break the head off which would always result in at least a minor local infection. Instead, she put oil over the insect to cause it to withdraw its head to go hunt for air. I still have a couple of scars from tick heads. Some people heated a knife blade to drive the tick out but the heat affected the person as well.



Figure 28 Ticks

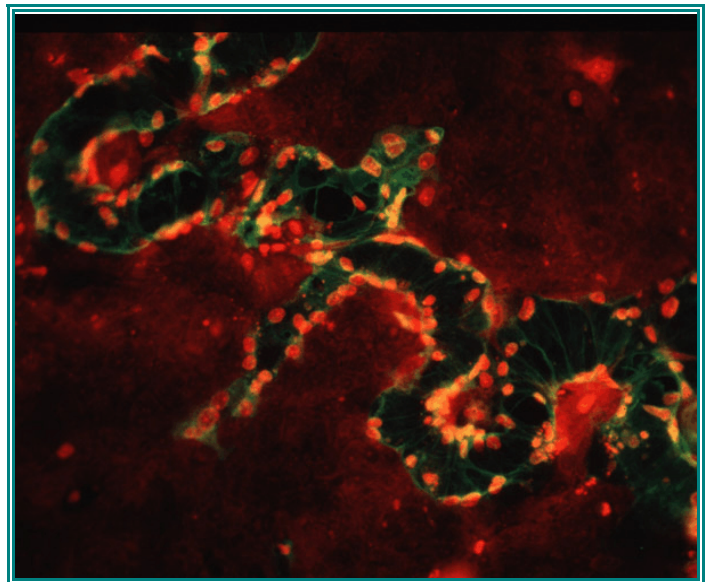
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/imagepage/1254.htm>

The concern for tularemia was particularly vivid one spring. For reasons that I don't remember, dad and some of mom's brothers brought home a tub half full of cotton tail rabbits they had shot that day. I don't know whether the rabbits were known to be diseased but they were handled as if they were. We obviously needed the meat. There must have been a higher than usual concern for tularemia because I specifically remember that whoever cleaned and skinned and butchered the animals wore rubber gloves, something I didn't remember seeing done before. We were ordered sternly to stay away while this job was done so that we didn't touch the skin and guts. I don't know where the offal was put but imagine it was buried out in the back acre somewhere. After the rabbits were divided, they were

thoroughly cooked. At that point, they were safe to eat and we did eat them. All. But that need for stringent care to avoid disease reminds me of how careful we had to be in Brazil to avoid infestations. I obviously was lax - getting worms 3 times, and amoeba two times.

Back in those days, the FDA hadn't gotten itself as involved in livestock production and regulation nor in the monitoring and grading of meats as it is today. Actually, that is sort of an irrelevant statement. Because the FDA has no authority to regulate what families do for themselves so what we did with those rabbits or grandpa's pigs was none of the FDA's business in the final analysis. But that doesn't mean we didn't know and didn't care about the diseases the FDA has worked to eradicate or at least control.

Another of the nasties is trichinosis, a disease carried by pigs. When a person eats meat with these critturs in it, they migrate through the stomach lining and set up permanent house-keeping somewhere in the body, one of the favored places being the heart muscle. So guess what happens 15-20 years later - the person develops heart abnormalities and keels over from a heart attack. That is precisely the risk posed by the Chagas Disease of Brazil. Funny parallel. Had to sleep in a mosquito net to avoid attacks by the "kissing" bugs that were the vector.



**Figure 29 Trichinella Spirosis tracks in muscles cells**  
<http://nema.cap.ed.ac.uk/nematodeESTs/Trichinella/TrichinellaWeb.html>

The way to reduce the risk to the eater of pork is to cook the heck out of the meat. There is no risk of contamination through the skin so cutting up and preparing the meat for storage or cooking did not require rubber gloves. But before eating pork, it had to be thoroughly cooked. No rareness at all. Heat was the way to ensure that these organisms did not set up housekeeping in a person. After careful cooking the meat could be eaten without any anxiety about becoming infested.

## Stick in the eye

**I**t is a miracle that I did not lose my right eye. The details of what we were doing at the time of this accident are lost in memory but the basic facts are not. I was running outside the house with a sharp, foot-long stick in my right hand, playing some game with Dick. The stick was probably a sword or spear. Something went wrong. I tripped and fell but didn't let go of the stick. The end of the stick jammed into my right eye. Miraculously it slipped off the globe and gouged the bottom of the eye socket. It hurt badly and bled a lot but no permanent injury was done. I probably didn't even get a visit to Dr. Spendlove in spite of the severity of the injury. People just took care of everything they could at home. Today I would have had a speedy ride to a doc-in-a-box. I can't tell which situation is better for the kid.

About this same time I had to have a "sty" removed from one of my eyes. By Dr. Spendlove who spent a lot of time with me. This sty was a growth on the top edge of the bottom eye lid. As it grew it prevented the lids from fully closing, was a thing I felt all the time, and it was an irritating visual distraction. The procedure was done in his office while I lay on an examination table. Dr. Spendlove put yellowish drops in the eye to deaden it and after a short time took something that looked sort of like a narrow nail clipper with a threaded screw through the middle. He opened the jaws of this thing wide enough to fit over the sty, held it down over the thing while lay on my back, watching. Then he turned the thumb-wheel. He tightened it until it clipped the sty completely off. Perhaps my memory of the device used is inaccurate. I know I was scared and I feared I would be blinded by the procedure.

Mom did something unusual for her in this situation. I had resisted having the sty "cut" off my eyelid even though it hurt and made me look funny, particularly since Dr. Spendlove prescribed some greasy yellowish ointment that mom applied twice a day. That earned me a few more comments at school. She thought it should come off and for a reason that I don't know today, instead of just strong-arming me -which would have worked again- she chose to conciliate and finally bribe me. She told me that after I had the sty removed I could go to the store and pick out an album of 78 rpm records. My very own.

After the procedure was successfully completed, I looked for a long time at the albums of records and finally picked out a set that had three or four 78's. Woody Woodpecker. The thing that clinched the deal for me was the fact that there was a cartoon book in full color in the album with the text of what was being spoken on the records. You could read along, which makes me suspect that my "choice" was perhaps more guided than free. Whatever, I loved that album. Mom still has it at 2821 N. The way you knew to turn the page was to hear Woody laugh a funny laugh.



Figure 30 Woody Wood Pecker  
<http://cgi.ebay.com/aw-cgi/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=1073545168#DESC>

There was pain later that mom treated with what was a common remedy in those days, over-the-counter paregoric. This was a sort of joy juice that moms used to quiet kids, ease pain, stop diarrhea, prevent car sickness, and generally have control of any situation involving kids. It's anhydrous morphine. You could buy 4 ounce bottles over the counter. It has an odd sweetish-flavor. Mom would put a teaspoon in a quarter-cup measuring cup and fill it with water before giving it to us to drink. [This is the same stuff I used in the Amazon to control diarrhea.]

It's odd isn't it that a narcotic, even a mild one, was dispensed so freely but this was the tail-end of the wide-spread use of laudanum and cocaine - which is why Coke is named Coke though the formula today obviously doesn't include it.. This practice persisted into the 1970s because we got some in Bloomington for Liz Hart who had a major intestinal problem. At that time, one could only get 2 ounces and had to sign a narcotic log and present ID but it was available. The problem for the DEA was that it was a simple matter to cook the anhydrous morphine to drive off a molecule of water which converted it into the more powerful morphine. Today, paregoric is only dispensed on the basis of a doctor's DEA-issued prescription.

## Measles and Chicken Pox and Mumps

**B**y my memory, I had measles three times. There were German Measles and Red Measles and you should only be able to catch each one once, but I skillfully did one of them two times. The drawback of the measles was being locked in the bedroom, blinds pulled so the sunlight didn't bother our eyes, itching

like crazy, and wanting like crazy to get out. The good part was that we didn't have to go to school. Because of the risk of transmission to other kids. Which is actually a funny thing when I look back at it. Because in those days before vaccines moms were practical about the reality that most kids were going to come down with most childhood diseases. So they, with great wisdom I think, would send their own children -after school of course- to homes where they knew there were kids with measles or mumps or chicken pox. Just to get the darn diseases taken care of in a time of their own choosing. In those days there was far less anxiety about kids getting these "childhood diseases" and if the timing was somehow right to get measles over with, then send the kid over to get him or her exposed so it can be over with. Today I fear there is a sprt of hysteria about getting childhood illnesses that were so common back the.

It interests me to read last week -2002- that some brilliant bunch has determined scientifically, and with a heck of a lot of money I suspect- that kids who were raised in the yeasty environment of corrals and farms ended up having more reactive and helpful immune systems than kids raised in sterile town houses. Duh.

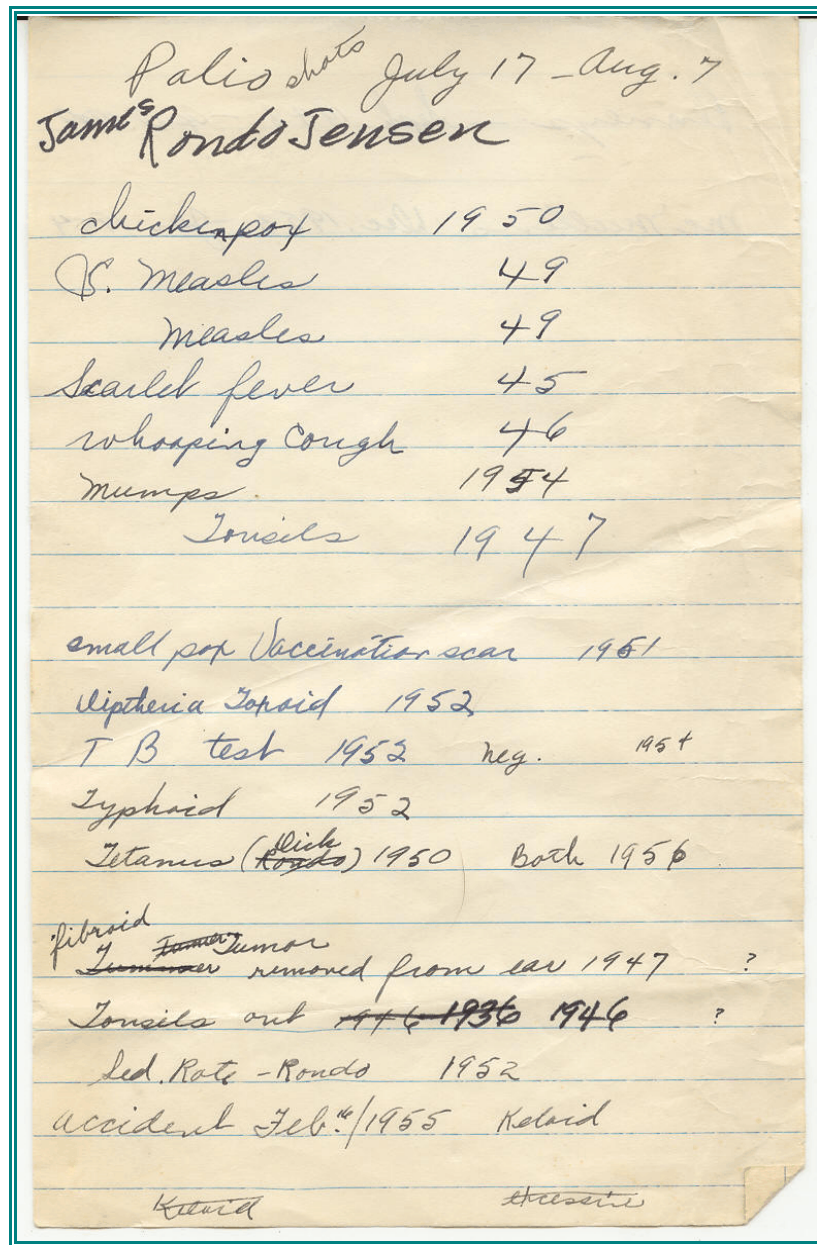
Dick and I somehow avoided the mumps in Vernal. We had measles and chicken pox, the latter being strange with little red spots of watery blisters, but never came down with mumps. As little kids we had no insight into the risk to males of mumps but mom was concerned that we get the disease over with before we entered puberty. I didn't realize it at the time. So in Seward she engineered our exposure to mumps. The infected kid was my friend Jay Clapp, the son of the Episcopal priest who stood on his front porch of the rectory adjacent to the church on Sunday after bidding goodbye to the last of his flock, with a beer can in one hand and a cigarette in the other. That always struck me, given my fundamentalist background, as something a 'good' priest shouldn't do. I liked him, however, and ate at his table many times. Where I was introduced to 'succotash', the combination vegetable dish that I thought was just a silly word that Sylvester the Cat probably made up.

The oddest thing about eating at the table was the way food was served. In my own home, dishes of food were set on the table and passed around for each to help himself to. In this home, the family originating in Connecticut I believe, the father, not necessarily Father, had a pile of plates stacked in front of him. He grandly served the meat and vegetables one plate at a time after which it was "handed around" -not passed- to whoever was getting it next, starting, of course,

with mother who sat directly opposite father. This process took several minutes while the father queried each kid as to which foods and how much of each was required. Fairly pompous way to eat, particularly in Seward, of all places to stand on such silly formality.

Later I found the history of my diseases, if I can call it that, that mom kept which contains an accurate -I assume though I'm not entirely sure- listing of diseases and years. It is attached here, and re-appears again in a discussion about vaccinations. The first thing to note about this list is mom's ambivalence about calling me James. You can see that she obviously wrote my middle and last name first, and then, as an after thought squeezed my first name into the inadequate space before Rondo.

Isn't that weird? She doesn't know whether she likes the name she gave me or no. That was a constant source of pain for her. I think she regretted giving me the same first name as dad because of reasons I have to admit I don't understand. Why should it be a problem if the son and dad have the same first name? Lost of people do that but she



regretted it. To this day, 60 years later, she refuses to acknowledge my first name. She will die without having ever called me by the first name that SHE gave me. Something is wrong there, not majorly, but diseased nonetheless in my estimation. She has never, not one \_\_\_\_\_ time called me by my first name. Understand, please, that it is not an accident, that it is intentional. Then try to figure out why it is such a big deal.

Remember that in those days her faith -according to mom many years ago- preached about the naming of babies, instructing people that they should give the babies precisely the names that they, the parents, chose to call the babies by the remainder of their life. That's why Dick has the unusual appellation "Dick A Jensen". They didn't want to call him Richard so they named in "Dick", and they needed a middle initial but apparently couldn't agree on a name, or couldn't find one at all, so picked the first letter of the alphabet to stand in its place. Since the "A" was not an abbreviation for anything, they did not use a period after it. So you see my point: if they were that meticulous in the choice and design and spelling of his name, I assume they did the same thing with my name, so why in the world can mom not use the first name that she so carefully chose years ago during that era of brainwashing? Folklore has it that in the early of years of me Mabel did call me "Jimmy" but mom brought that to a screeching halt, though I never discovered why - nor did I actually wonder about it back in those years when Mabel was still around to share the facts. [The fact of the matter is that there are profound psychological explanations for this phenomenon and I don't want to even begin to think about them.]

Back to the childhood diseases in Vernal: I had a full spectrum of them as you see here: measles two times in 1949 when I was in first grade in the spring and second grade in the fall, scarlet fever when I was three, i.e. still in Naples while dad was off playing war, whooping cough when I was four so dad may have been home by then, and chicken pox when I was 8. I fortunately avoided diphtheria it did appear occasionally in tow, scaring the crap out of me. Similarly, I avoided getting tetanus and typhoid fever, two more nasty diseases. Tetanus was known as "lock jaw" and was noted to be a horrible disease that resulted in death by asphyxiation due to the whole body paralysis that resulted from the toxin. I was aware of one or two kids from Central Elementary school who dies from this nasty disease.

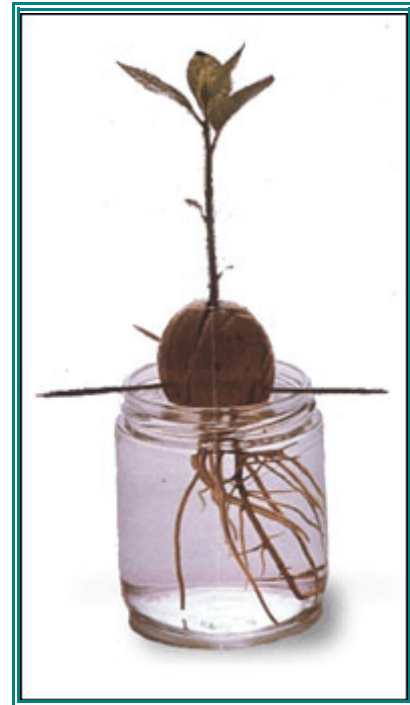
## Avocado Seeds and Carrot Plants

**M**arie, a kid off the desert, loved avocados. She never saw an avocado tree in her life but she loved the fruit. I have speculated -fruitlessly-ha-- about where she could have acquired such a taste. Later she and I had a little chat about where she first learned to like avocados and where we lived she did this trick with the seeds the first time for us. She is quite sure she never ate one until we lived in Seward, and I am quite sure that we did this trick in Vernal. Believe who you will. We could both pass a lie detector test.

There is no doubt that avocados weren't a staple of her diet in Rainbow and I'm not sure where she would have first encountered them and developed a taste for them. These were the old-fashioned, true -as opposed to the new hybrids that look right but taste wrong- Haas avocados with the rough black skin that broke like wood. She'd treat herself to one on occasion. She'd take it home and cut the pointed end off with a paring knife. Then she'd take a small spoon and dip small bites out of the flesh, carefully scraping the hard skin, until it was empty. I think she'd eat the whole thing right then. They weren't used in salads and I don't know whether dad even liked them, but she did. I don't know whether or not I liked them at the time. I love them today..

The fascinating thing about an avocado to me was its seed, and enormous monstrous seed. As a farm kid, I was used to seeing seeds of many kinds but they were the small dry dark things that were buried carefully in the dirt and watered with irrigation water. This seed just shouted to be examined and played with and cut open to see the germ and tasted. That was a principal part of our experimental armamentarium, sort of like being a dog or cat who have no other investigative method. I played with these seeds more than once, doubtless puncturing my hand with the knife when it slipped during the attempt to use it to split open the two halves. The hard flesh somehow looked attractive but the taste was bitter.

There was a wonderful experiment that mom did for -or with- us several times. She'd take three toothpicks -not two- and an empty pimento cheese glass -



**Figure 32 Avocado Seed Plant**  
[http://www.avoinfo.com/about/2000\\_24.php](http://www.avoinfo.com/about/2000_24.php)



those are what she used as juice glasses, though it was pretty fancy talk to refer to them as "juice" glasses. They were just small glasses. In any event, she'd get one of them, three toothpicks, the avocado seed and a large needle or nail. She would use the needle or nail to put three holes about equidistant around the avocado at about the same level. Then she'd insert toothpicks into those holes and would be careful to not break them off. When they were in place, she'd fill the glass with water, sit the avocado into the water so that it rested with its toothpicks on the lip of the glass, and put it in the window to grow. She did not peel the crusty brown skin off the seed.

Growing anything for a kid is agony. The excitement created by the parent about what it's going to turn into fills the kid with anxiety and he just can't wait to see the plant that is reported to come from the seed. But it grows so slowly that the kid can scarcely stand it. These seeds were no different. We'd watch it every day for a while until we forgot about it. But one day mom would call us and point out that the husk over the giant seed was starting to split. That meant that the germ was growing and so we'd watch it every day for a while, until we forgot about it again.

Then at some point mom would call to tell us that there was a tiny green sprout erupting from the top of the seed -ah yes, the wide end of the seed must always be up, not down in the water- so we'd run to see and sure enough, there it was. We knew sprouts. These plants, said dad, were dicotyledons, which meant that the first sprout out of the seed had two leaves instead of one - a monocotyledon. There were indeed two small leaves. Over time, the tiny sprout would grow into a lanky skinny plant that was set into a pot of soil. It would get a foot tall and then something would happen to it and it would be thrown out. The trees would not have survived any winter I lived in so the point of the exercise was simply to see the germination and growing that happened each time.

In a similar vein mom did some plant magic with fat carrots. I mean 'fat' carrots, ones that were an inch and a half in diameter. She'd take one of these, cut off the top three inches and then scoop out the center of the cut end of the carrot, leaving the stem-end intact. Excavating a small cup without cracking the outside of the carrot. After she had made the hole large enough, she would use toothpicks again. This time she didn't need a needle or nail because the carrot was soft enough that she could just push the toothpicks into it. After placing three toothpicks equidistant around the carrot, she would make a sort of harness out of string that hooked onto the three toothpicks. This harness was suspended from a

nail in the wall, or tied somehow over a window. But it was upside down, and the cavity created on the cut end was filled with water and kept filled. The growing that took place in this situation was out of the bottom of the carrot. It would produce the fluffy green leaves that carrots produce, which would curve upward, reaching for the sun.

### Chipped Beef and Pimento Cheese Bottles

Mom's Rainbow diet doubtless did contain a lot of dried meat. I asked her yesterday if they actually dried any beef out in Rainbow and she said they did, only they did it somewhere in Naples. She said it was in the fall and they stayed in Naples with someone who had a basement in their house. The meat was somehow prepared in the basement for drying. Grandma would take it outside in the morning to lie in the hot sun, turned as necessary, until it was dry. Mom said she doesn't have much memory of how it was done because she was just 5 or 6 but she remembers that her mom would preserve meat for the winter this way. She doesn't remember how it was cooked.

I imagine that her recipe for chipped beef was learned from her mom, using some of commercially prepared dried beef. We didn't dry beef so when mom wanted some, she had to buy it in the store. It came in small glass containers like small pimento cheese glasses, i.e. without a shoulder, and were sealed with a metal lid. She'd take the leaves of dried beef out of the glass, cut it into strips and drop it into a white gravy she cooked in a large cast-iron skillet. She did much of her cooking over the years in cast-iron skillets. Then she'd make dry toast in the oven and sit us down for dinner. The gravy that was well-peppered was spooned over a piece of dry toast and that was dinner. Actually very tasty and memorable. I'd like some right now.

The other source of those small glasses was Kraft pimento cheese. She loved the stuff and would treat herself to it on rare occasions. That's how I viewed it, a treat for her, not something for us kids. In reality she probably needed to replace some of those small glasses anyway. Us kids did break things so she had to replace what was broken. It made sense to satisfy her appreciation for this stuff at the same time she frugally replaced glassware. She ate this on crackers or bread. We shared a bit of it with her but didn't appreciate it as much as she did.

## Comic Books

Living in a time and a region that was untouched by television and modern electronic media meant we had to rely on primitive forms of entertainment, i.e. the radio, Saturday movies, out-dated magazines, the Sunday comics and comic books.

After we could both read, Dickie and I were each allowed to pick out one comic book that mom and dad would subscribe to for us. An exquisite gift for many reasons. It was agony to pick out the one we really wanted to receive. A wealth of candidates and no reliable metric to tell us which one would make us happiest each month when it arrived.

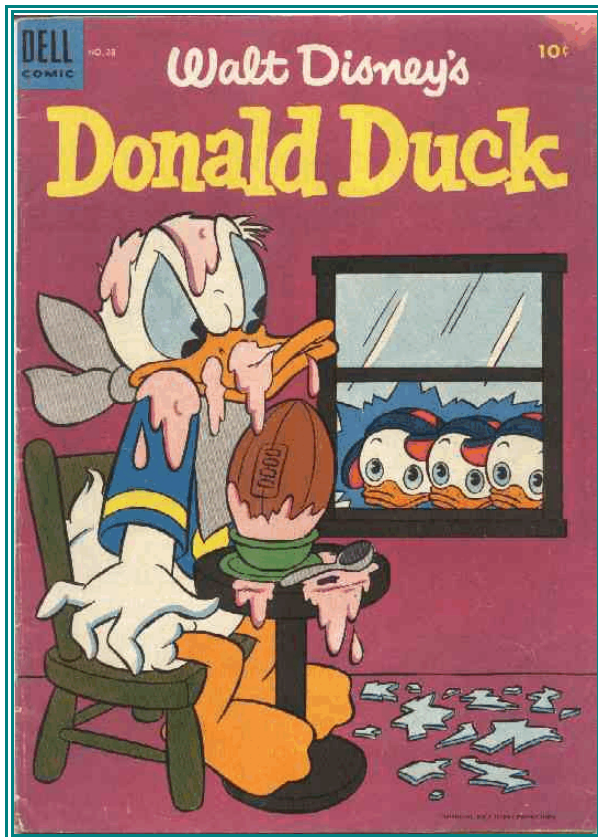


Figure 34

<http://www.twolizards.com/disney/Disney-Comic-books.html>

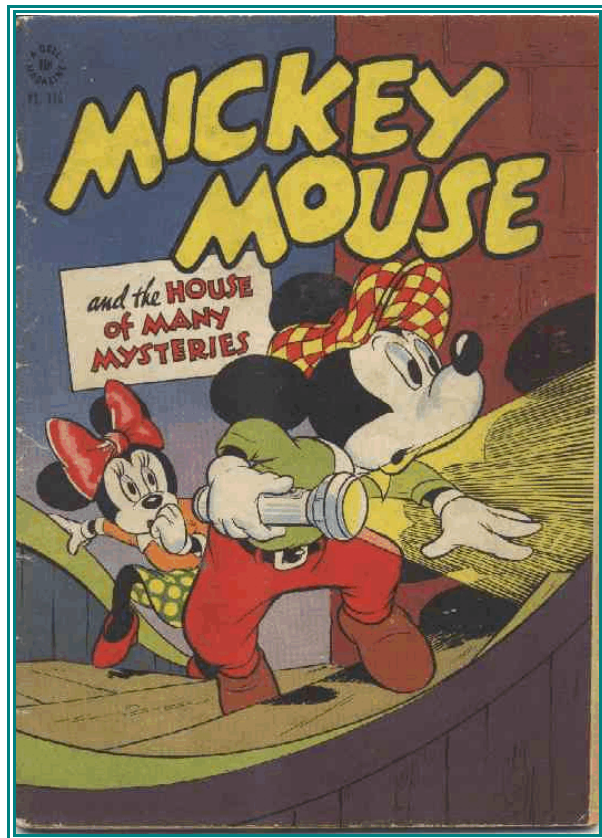


Figure 33

<http://www.twolizards.com/disney/Disney-Comic-books.html>

Finally we each picked one of the Disney characters - probably because those were mom's preference. It is remarkable how little free agency we had in spite of her

attempts to make us think that we were the ones in charge of our decisions. The arrival of the comic books in the US Mail was a momentous occasion. The mailman delivered our next issue, folding it carefully in the mailbox out by the road so we didn't see it until one of us was sent out to check the mail.. Everything stopped for that afternoon while we solemnly and earnestly read our new comic books. Several time running. Time stopped, barking dogs weren't heard, Mr. Johnson mowing his alfalfa field disappeared. The sun stopped shining while we laboriously went through these miracles. Our own comic book. Brought to us by the mailman. Paid for by mom and dad. The ultimate mystery.

After we finished reading our own, we would negotiate with each other to arrange a trade so that we could prolong the solemn thrill of reading new comic books. Today that transaction seems simple enough. It should have been a pretty simple thing to say, "Here, I'm finished, can I read yours now?" But it was not easy. There were a kind of rules of engagement that governed how we entered into parlays about loaning our prized new comic book to the other. We didn't argue about whether we would sit at round or rectangular tables, but only because we weren't familiar with the subtleties of diplomacy. It didn't matter that we had nowhere to go and nothing else to do and each wanted badly to read the other's new comic book. The bargaining probably had as much to do with the fact that there wasn't anything else as interesting to do out in the country as quietly debate the merits of who should give in first, who should cross the bedroom to the other kid's side and lose face in the process, especially if the Cooper kids couldn't come over to play. So we savored the negotiations and filled time with them. Finally our avaricious need to read the other's comic book overcame our principles. Prudent, again. Morals undergo rubber twists during times of need I've noted, starting at age 5 or 6. When we tired with the endless, fruitless parlays, we just handed the comic books straight across so we could savor the joy of deciphering new images and words, eating up another portion of what otherwise was a dull hot afternoon. We got to read new books and to practice our negotiation skills. Double benefit of these subscriptions. Neither helped ultimately.

These comic books were preserved in a pile on our respective shelves and we re-read when weather was bad or we were otherwise bored. Sometimes when mom was in the mood, really more a matter of money I suspect today, she would let us pick out a new comic book at the store when she was shopping. That way we added to our hoard of worn dog-eared magazines. There were more rules, however, about which comic books we could read.

Censorship has a long history in my life and I accepted it as normal. Turns out I was pretty pragmatic about my morals. To not accept the choices offered to me was to not get a comic book. That simple. Ain't that the way with life now? So I liked mom's choice of comics - a lot. Actually, I did. Anything by Disney or Walter Lanz was acceptable. The off-limit comics were ones that portrayed violence which even included the Three Stooges. That was one I didn't get, particularly since the Roadrunner did more violent things to Wily Coyote than Curly ever did to Moe. How could she say it was bad for Curly to slap Moe, but that it was OK for Wily Coyote to be blown up with dynamite or fall a thousand feet again and again? But I wasn't too severe in my morals, and I kept my reservations to myself lest I lose the chance entirely of getting another new comic book. Even Superman was off limits.

### Merkley Park and picnics

One of the early settlers of the Uintah Valley was named Merkley and his name was preserved in a park that was located somewhere north of Vernal. Being as young as I was, I really didn't have a clear sense of where things were. I just got in the car when told to, and went wherever mom and dad were going.

Merkley Park was a pretty big deal in Vernal. It wasn't so far away that it was too far away to go out there for a picnic. I remember going there for picnics with our family as well as for outings with the school or church. I don't really know what the larger group was but I know we did go out there with a lot of people that I didn't know. Actually, there wasn't much of a difference between a church group and a school group.

The park was typical high mountain desert and had trees and lots of flat space for throwing blankets down to sit on. There were firepits to roast wienies and then marshmallows. The fun time was in the evening when the fire shone brightly in the darkness, making the area around the camp fire safe and special. This image is from dad's miscellaneous collection of stuff. It is unlabeled so there is no way to know who these people are. The fact that he retained the photo suggests there are friends or family here. Somehow it looks like a scout outing, or some formal group.

The sandstone cliffs that surrounded the park were fairly high and I heard a story at school that fascinated me. It made me want to be 10 years older because I heard stories from dad and grandma Merrell about Indians. The story got about town that some one was exploring in the mountains up above Merkley Park in the small caves that pocked the red sandstone cliffs. In one of these caves this lucky person found an Indian burial with some Indian artifacts. What I remember specifically was that the guy found some pots. For some reason I was envious and wished I were old enough to be able to go up there and hunt for more of them. I knew there were more out there just waiting to be found.



Figure 35 Merkley Park