



# *Memories of a Thompson Boyhood*

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Memory is a fickle teacher with a big eraser. It erases random patches of our lives and leaves snippets of clarity as if yesterday and today were one and the same. That is how it is with my memory of Thompson, Connecticut, and the years I spent growing up there. I was born in Thompson on a cold day in February, 1930. I must have been in a hurry to get here because my mother and I had already done all the work by the time Dr. Paine arrived. My father told him that he might as well turn around and go home, all the excitement was over. I joined my brothers William Wallace (Wally) and John Martin (Jack) in this great adventure of a childhood which I remember vividly eighty years later.

We lived in the old Mills house on O'Leary Road, but at that time it was a dirt road and it didn't have an official name. People called it Mills Road because there were three houses owned by the Mills families at one time, and we were in the middle house. The house had been built in the late seventeenth hundreds, but I don't know exactly when. I don't recall which Mills family had built it either, but I remember every detail of that house and the attached shed, and although it is no longer there it exists still in my memory as clear as the day I was born there. It was quite large and roomy, painted white with green shutters, and had a wonderful view over Fort Hill. There were four Dutch ovens connected to a huge central chimney, the stone foundation of which nearly took up the whole basement. My mother was very proud of such a lovely big house, and it was her idea to move to Thompson in the first place after my father's parents had passed away. My father's family had all hailed from Woodstock, but she thought that area was too primitive. In her mind Thompson was a more sophisticated town, so my father went along with her, but I think it was a lot for him to keep up. Those were hard times and everyone felt it. Our neighbors were the Winns, the

Mills, Nelson Beauschene, and the McKennas on the corner of Quadick Road.

We had five bedrooms in that old house, four upstairs and one downstairs. There was a large living room with a bay window, and a front parlor that we used only on Sundays where card playing and checkers were never allowed. Although we did not attend church, we had an upstairs organ where we often sang hymns on Sunday, and we always had to say our prayers before bed. In the extension there was a dining room and a kitchen. In the long shed attached to the house we had a laundry washroom that was plastered, and next to that was a three-hole toilet. None of this area was heated, and we never had electricity, so when nature called it was a cold expedition in the winter, and we always kept a catalogue handy. We never wasted a Sears or a “Monkey Ward” catalogue, and looked forward to each edition coming out with its promise of all sorts of wonderful items a boy could wish for but knew were beyond the reach of his family’s income. When all the dreaming was over the catalogues served a useful purpose in our three holer. Next was a long woodshed that long ago was also used as a horse barn with two stalls in it. I remember my mother hanging a long sugar sack out there filled with sour cream and other good things to make cottage cheese. It was like a salted semi-dry cheese when it drained and solidified, and it was nothing like the cottage cheese of today.

Jack and Wally had to “buck up” all the wood for our many stoves, but first they had to harness one of the horses and haul the wood in the wagon or sled after it had been cut. Much was expected of such young boys in those times, but I loved riding on top of a wagon loaded with wood. My chore each morning was to fill the stoves in the house so that they would be ready for heating and cooking. We had a large pot bellied stove in the living

room and that heated much of the downstairs, and a cooking stove in the kitchen. Attached to the woodshed was a wagon shed with two big arches, and at the end was a one car garage with a weather vane on the peak which could not be overlooked because it always squeaked. Nearby was a pear tree that supplied us with small but edible pears. I remember a large rose bush near the living room bay window, and a large stand of lilacs by the road. We had a lot of fun in those lilacs because it had an open center which was just right for three boys playing hide and seek with school friends.

We also had a cattle and horse barn to the left of the house with a cow shed on the back end which blew off in the 1938 hurricane. It was a very sturdy barn as old as the house, and it outlasted most of the neighbor's barns, many of which blew down in the hurricane. The beams were hand hewn chestnut and very sturdy. One day my mother wrote on the cow manger door, "Why oh why did I kiss that guy in 1924." We never knew what she meant by that or why she felt compelled to write it in the barn, but when I visited the remains of the old barn forty years later the words were still visible.

Our beautiful remodeled house burned to the ground in 1943, a year after we had moved away. My father had tried to sell the house in the late 1930's for \$3500. It included over 150 acres of fields and woodlands as well as frontage on Quadric Pond, but it took a long time to sell, and when it did we got only a fraction of the asking price. What a shame it was when the house burned down. I think it was the newly installed gas lights that started the whole thing, but no one was there at the time, not even the new owners who had just completed the renovations we had always wanted to do. Ernie O'Leary, who was just a youngster then, saw the smoke and ran up the hill from the Roland Mills house and back down to call the fire

department, but when a house is that old and a fire is that determined there is not much that can stop it. The firemen were able to save the barn, but little else. It was a fine old house, a very fine house.

My parents were hard workers and times were tough. Everything we had we worked for. We had a cow named Daisy, and two horses – Pansie and Dina. Pansie was really an “old plug” according to my mother, having belonged to my grandmother before moving to Thompson. There were also a few chickens and other farm animals, as well as fields to keep up, but my father, William Luther Arnold, wasn’t a farmer. Like his father, grandfather, and great grandfather before him, he painted, built, and repaired houses. All of his Woodstock relatives had been wood workers, mainly building wagons and wagon wheels. They had a water powered mill in Woodstock Valley for many generations, but the one son who branched out was Harold DeForest. He became famous for the work he did with Alexander Graham Bell, and I still have a picture of the two of them together in front of the National Geographic Society. He developed the vacuum radio tube which made radio transmission possible.

When times were lean which they always were, my father would go through the telephone book and call every name asking for work. Sometimes this paid off, but too many other families in Thompson were just as poor as we were, and painting a house came after putting food on the table. Many people were on welfare, but my father was too proud to take an unearned handout, so we muddled along as best we could.

My mother, Anna Altha Wallace, went by Althea and was a nurse working for Dr. Paine which required a lot of traveling all over Thompson. I remember Dr. Paine because of all the business I gave him putting me back together, and because he had an interesting little mustache. One time I

remember him stitching up my little finger and thumb which were cut so badly they nearly came off. We all worked together on the farm because we couldn't afford to hire help, and that day we were mowing away hay in the barn while my mother was leading the horse to pull the hay up into the loft from the wagon with a rope pulley system. This apparatus was fascinating to a three year old so I amused myself by trying to put sticks into the rope pulley which caught my thumb instead. My mother must have heard me screaming over all the noise of the pulley because she was able to stop Pansie and get my hand out, and my father rushed me to Dr. Paine's in time for him to save the two fingers. I still have that scar and the vivid memory seventy seven years later.

Another time Dr. Paine had to come to my rescue involved an incident with a BB air rifle. One of the most popular and common entertainments for boys of that era was shooting with BB guns. We never thought twice about the dangers involved, and practiced on innocent targets like cans and trees, rats, woodchucks, rabbits, and our invisible cowboy and Indian enemies. My friend Gussy Babbitt was a little more casual with his BB gun than I, but he even surprised me when I saw him shoot a very fat road worker who was bending over and presenting a tempting target. Gussy shot him right in his back side while we hid behind the stone wall trying to stifle our laughter. I remember him yelling, "You laffy too much, you cry bye and bye!" I guess we weren't as well hidden as we thought because he told Gussy's parents, Doris and Harold Babbitt, and his prediction came true. Gussy got punished. Fortunately my parents never heard about the incident, and I never told them because it really wasn't so funny after all.

One day while playing cowboys and Indians up in our barn, Norman Therrin accidentally shot me in the eye with his BB gun and I made such a

ruckus that my father thought I would never see again. Once again he rushed me to Dr. Paine who was able to remove the BB and save my eye. I still have the scar from that too, and a healthy respect for gun safety. Another time I fell in the barn and broke my left arm, so Dr. Paine had to set it with splints to keep it in place. To complicate matters I am left handed, and a rambunctious boy has little patience for the length of time it takes to mend a broken arm. Yes, we surely kept Dr. Paine busy.

Even so, calling on the doctor was not the first course of action for most of our illnesses because that would cost money, a precious commodity for my family. One popular method of curing all ills was the mustard plaster, and it was a memorable event unlike anything we have today. It was a HOT mustard plaster that was applied with wax paper that had come from a bread bag. It was then covered with lard and sprinkled with dry mustard, and then pinned to a cotton cloth. The whole thing was put on the stove and heated until the mixture started to melt, then it would be placed on my chest and pinned to my undershirt for the night. It was hot, sticky, and smelly, but it often produced the cure it was meant for, or so it seemed. This was not just a homemade invention – the drug stores back then carried mustard plasters all ready to go. I wonder if we might be better off if they were still in use today.

Not far down the road just beyond Roland Mills house lived Nelson Beauschene. He was a wood cutter who lived in a shanty with a shed on the side for his horse. He was French Canadian, and he was fond of drinking, but Nelson was top notch with us. He had cut a clearing out of the woods for his vegetable garden and then dug a deep cellar in the middle to store his winter food. He was generous with those vegetables too, and liked kids. He taught us how to catch trout from the brook below his shanty, and that's



something you don't forget. Unfortunately, we often found him drunk beside the road on his way home from Quadric. Eventually we would help him up to our house and we'd all sit on the porch pretending everything was as it should be. My mother would give him something to eat with cold lemonade until he was stable enough to get home on his own steam. One day he got it into his mind to kick off his boots and we all laughed when one of them landed on the roof. We had to get a ladder to retrieve it!

When Nelson was sober he was generous enough to lend us his old billy goat and wagon, and we had a lot of fun driving that ramshackled old thing up to our house or even into the village. If we thought Billy wasn't going fast enough to suit us we would tickle him between his rear legs and then he ran like a race horse, and we would be shaken about like a bingo cage. Nelson knew we were fond of Billy so he offered to trade him for whatever thing of value we could find. We really wanted that old smelly goat so Wally made a deal with Nelson to trade our mother's very fine riding saddle for both the goat and the cart. Nelson obliged and we proudly went home with our purchases, but our happiness didn't last long when our father asked us how we had managed to make such a fine deal. When we confessed, he was very angry and made us go right back to undo the great deal and return our mother's rightful property. Most of our deals ended up like that. But our mother liked to ride, and when I saw her riding around the field I was glad we didn't own Billy, especially when we could borrow him any time.

The lean times grew leaner and my mother decided to go up to Boston to find a better paying job, and consequently she was gone for long periods of time. Mr. Ballard or Mr. Forest Rhodes would drive her to Worcester or to Putnam to get the Boston train, and that first night was the worst time for

me as I was only three years old. I cried and cried for her, and I couldn't understand why she had to leave us. She was gone for long periods and it made a deep, lasting sadness in our family.

I remember my mother as a forward thinker for those times, especially when it came to physical exercise for women. She was all for it. Bernard McFadden, a well known proponent of physical exercise as a part of a healthy lifestyle, was her role model. I often saw her running around the perimeter of our fields, and I admired her for it, never thinking that she might be running off the frustration of our family's situation.

Women were seldom seen driving a car in those days. I don't know if that meant it wasn't seemly or that folks didn't think a female was capable of doing such complicated maneuvers. Sometimes men would make unflattering gestures when a woman driver passed by, and driving was thought of as a male domain. I would like to say that my mother proved to be an exception to this way of thinking, but I can't. She was a terrible driver. She asked my father to teach her how to drive, and I still remember all the racket of grinding gears as they bumped down Quadric Road. My brothers and I thought it was very funny, but I doubt if my father had the same feeling. When they returned home she attempted to turn into our driveway and she almost hit Pansie which must have scared several years off her life. Then she hit a settee near the porch and crashed into the shed. A cloud of steam rose from the radiator, the headlights broke off, the fenders dented and the wheels were bent, but we knew better than to laugh. Actually, I was scared that they were hurt, but they weren't except for my mother's pride. When she emerged from the steaming car I said: "Look what you done!" Of course it was unnecessary to point this out, especially to my father who for the first time could not blame us for this mishap. Upon

inspection my father found that she had bent the axle, so he had to hoist the car up in the barn and fix it himself. I think that was the end of the driving lessons.

We got used to our father being the main parent around our house and it was different. Our living conditions were rough, and we had no electricity so we used kerosene lamps to read by and a lantern to find our way to the toilet in the shed. Father was well read – his mother was a teacher - and I remember him reading to us for hours at a time in the evening. My brothers enjoyed hearing him, and always asked for more, so sometimes he would fall asleep before us. I think we wore him out. It was very cold upstairs in our house, especially at night in the winter. Father would heat soapstones on the kitchen stove, wrap them in newspapers, and place them in our beds to make falling asleep more comfortable. Sometimes it got so cold that our pee pots would freeze and we would have to bring them downstairs to thaw out before disposing of the contents.

Father did the cooking for us, and it wasn't too exciting. We mostly ate pancakes, potatoes, pork gravy, and seasonal vegetables. My brothers and I gathered dandelions, dock, and edible flowers in the summer. We didn't have much fruit except what we could gather from our own apple trees. Often we would peel the apples, slice them, and string them up in the attic where they would dry to be used in the winter. Then they were turned into dried apple pie for a special occasion treat. There was a large crock in the cellar where slabs of pork were submerged in salt brine, and my father would make it last by cutting off small pieces for the gravy. We didn't have a lot of meat, but in the winter we trapped rabbits in the cow pasture and it was our job to check the traps each morning before going to school.

One winter morning while Father was making breakfast he saw a large buck deer in the apple orchard behind the house. That deer must have been as hungry as we were because he was munching the frozen apples from the trees, and the snow was quite deep. Father motioned for us to be very quiet as he raised the window and aimed his gun, something we were told never to do in the house. He shot that deer before it could finish the apple. It was such a large animal that he had to use Pansie to pull it into the barn, and we got a lot of meat from it that was badly needed at the time because we were getting tired of rabbit and pork gravy.

We all used guns in those days, although Wally used ours more than any of us, and when our father wasn't around to supervise we entertained ourselves by shooting at squirrels. It is a good thing that father only found out about half of the things we did back then. We had a sink drain near the kitchen window that ran from the sink to the outside, and it was full of grease and garbage and every kind of deplorable mess, not to mention its particular aroma. One day when Wally was shooting at squirrels the gun threw him backwards right into the sink drain, and for once I wasn't the one getting laughed at. Wally was a mess and none too happy either, but we all had a good laugh over it.

Another time when we were in the kitchen eating breakfast we suddenly felt the chairs under us shaking, almost like they were shivering. "Earthquake!" shouted my father. Before we could process what that meant, it was over and we were speechless. My father went to check the barn and the animals and found that his Model A had moved sideways in the driveway. We were very impressed with the fact that so much power could occupy so little time.

One of the jobs my father had was to help Miss Ann Cunningham, who lived near the West Thompson trolley station, with any building or painting work. He did other odd jobs for her too and sometimes we got to help. She had a small house out back where a rather odd man lived, a Mr. Fenton, who happened to be a gifted artist. He painted scenes on anything he could get his hands on, and I still have a wine bottle that he painted with a scene of his little cabin in the winter. One time Miss Cunningham had my father clean out his house and Wally and I were helping him. It was a tiny one room house so full of wood scraps that there was room for little else besides a bed and a woodstove. I don't know if he had saved the wood to paint on or to burn for heat, but it was a terrible mess and a big job for all three of us. Surprisingly, we found a pouch that had \$35.00 in it, a small fortune in those days, but we didn't hesitate and gave it to our father. He turned it over to Miss Cunningham and we were each given a quarter for a reward. I wonder if my father was tempted to keep that money, but looking back I'm glad he didn't. That assurance has been worth more to me over the years than twenty five cents.

Sometimes my father worked in the shoddy mill in Quadric where tons of rags were shredded and then processed and shipped out. It was hard work and I don't think it paid very much, but when painting jobs were scarce it filled the gap. Often he would return home with clothes that still had some life to them which he had scavenged from the bales of rags. These were not clothes to be proud of, but we had to make do with many things that were hand me downs in those days of scarcity. When the winter snow was too deep for him to get the car out, he would bundle me up in a sled and walk to the mill pulling me behind. I would stay with Mrs. Munyan while he worked, and later in the afternoon he would come for me and we would

start the cold trek home. I enjoyed those rides, but it must have been quite an exercise for him, especially coming back uphill.

I worked hard myself, walking to neighboring farms to help out when I was as young as seven. I worked for Mr. Byron Teft in Quadick feeding the chickens, collecting the eggs, and cleaning the chicken houses, and that's where I first met Chickie. Chickie was a poor tiny chick that was unlucky enough to be picked on by all the other chickens at the farm, and Mr. Teft was going to wring her neck to resolve this situation. But I intervened and pleaded with him to let me have her, and in time he gave in. That day I proudly walked home with the wounded chick under my arm and we were both happy. As it turned out, Chickie became a fine layer and we were well supplied with eggs for a long time. She roosted in the hay barn at night, and whenever I called her she would come running, flapping her wings and stooping to be petted. Chickie was my pet in a time when pets were a luxury for hard working children like us, and to me this was more important than all the eggs that graced our table.

Wesley and Gusty Winn lived next door to us and they were the nicest people to three boys who missed their mother's attention. Gusty often took care of me when Mother was gone and Father was out working. They were the kind of people you could count on, and very kind to everyone. They lived through the 1938 hurricane but I think it was hard on them and they both passed away the next winter. Gusty said Wesley was more concerned about their outhouse that blew over than he was about their big barn across the road that completely blew down. One day that winter my brothers and I noticed that there were no footprints in the snow near their house, so we went over and knocked on the door. Wesley answered from inside that they were too sick to get up. We ran home to tell Mother who was there at the

time, and she called Dr. Paine. Mother went over and built a fire to warm the house because there had been no heat for days, and she stayed to care for them. Both passed away within days of each other, and I really missed them, especially Gusty. That same year our trusty horses, Pansie and Dina both died, so it was a very sad time all around.

I learned quite a lot about shenanigans from my brothers. We had an apple tree near the end of our driveway, and the apples were not very good for eating but they made excellent ammunition for throwing. It was easy to climb, and from the top we could pitch apples at unsuspecting cars or wagons going by. Mr. and Mrs. Roland Mills never did own a car, but they had a horse and buggy that was appealing as a target to Jack, so he lobbed a good many apples at the horse. This made the horse jump and run which we thought was great fun. Jack was as good at throwing apples as he was at pitching eggs, but the egg throwing was short lived thanks to the Rag Man.

The Rag Man was a regular visitor to the area and we found him to be a fascinating fellow, if not always honest. He would go door to door yelling with a strong accent, “Any rags, bags, or bottles?” and collect things from housewives, sometimes in trade. Every kind of farm recyclable found its way into the bed of that old truck. The Rag Man paid for our rags by the pound, and Wally knew that he was cheating us, so sometimes he would slip in a stone or two. I don’t know how the Rag man missed that trick because he was sharp about most things. One day we were at Nelson Beauchane’s farm down the road and asked if we could have a ride back up to our house. The Rag Man was happy to oblige and we jumped into the back of that truck. That’s when Jack and Wally saw the crate of eggs, fresh from a farm that morning, and they couldn’t resist tossing a few of them onto the road. It was great fun until we noticed that the Rag Man was going very fast right by

our house and wasn't planning to stop at all. I thought we were being kidnapped, and in my panic I leaped from the truck in front of the Winn's house, leaving poor Jack and Wally behind. I got my legs pretty well scraped up on that dirt road but I ran for home as fast as I could. The Rag Man finally did let them off, but they had a long walk home, and I think the Rag Man might have known about those tossed eggs after all. Worse still, we imagined that he might have been a gypsy ready to steal us into enslavement, and that thought gave us a new respect for him. After that we gave him a wide berth, and from then on we stuck to apples when we had a notion to throw something.

Jack wasn't always a rascal – sometimes he was worse, especially when partnered with Wally. He was sweet on a girl who lived on Chase Road named Rene, and her family had traveled all over Africa and Nepal filming places that Americans had hardly ever heard about. Her mother was related to Teddy Roosevelt and they kept a cheetah in the barn, and monkeys too. That impressed us, but Jack only had eyes for Rene. Impressing a girl in those days meant buying her things, but money was scarce in our house, so Jack had to resort to stealing a quarter from my father's dresser to buy her a Big Little Book for her birthday. We were all invited to her party which was an exciting and rare event, so we were full of wildness and crazies. Playing in the silo near the barn there was so much commotion that I didn't see the wrench that hit Jack until it was too late. It hit him on the head and made quite a scene. This cooled us all off, especially Jack, and my father had to come to get him to take him to the hospital in Putnam for stitches. That was the end of impressing Rene, but when my father found out about the theft of his money he was furious.



Jack's punishment was memorable, as was the whole party to a young boy who had never had a birthday party for himself.

Summer was a wonderful season for a boy in those days before electronic entertainment. I don't remember ever being bored. We were busy with work or adventure every day, and most of the time we did not have to wear shoes. That was real freedom. Our feet were as tough as the shoe leather we were trying to preserve, but when our shoes finally did wear out and we had to get a new pair of shoes it was a real thrill. New shoes were rare for me being the youngest of the three boys. I usually had to make do with Jack or Wally's outgrown shoes, and this was a big disappointment to me. One day I had a brilliant idea. I took my not so worn out shoes and ground down the soles on a grinding wheel! I thought this was a clever scheme, but Wally told my father and I was whipped on my legs with a buggy whip. The unfairness of the situation led me to do another desperate act. The next day I cut up the buggy whip with an axe. Once more Wally told on me and once more I was spanked, but not before I placed a pillow in my pants. I made the mistake of laughing and my father found the pillow which he removed and finished the job on my bare bottom. I did get new shoes that Fall, but the price had been more than I had counted on.

With Quadric Pond in our back yard many adventures presented themselves to three creative boys. We spent a lot of time fishing and skating on the pond as well as splashing in its cool waters despite the abundance of blood suckers, but we never did learn how to really swim. Wally was a good fisherman, and I remember him walking back home after an evening of fishing singing loudly to scare off any wild animals and swinging a lantern. He always claimed that it was easier to catch fish after dark, and I don't know if this is true but it seemed to work for him. Even though we weren't

good swimmers it didn't stop us from boating and rafting on the water. Once Jack decided to build a boat from old barn boards and it looked really keen except for the fact that it was very heavy. We had to solicit help from Pansie to get it from the yard where we built it to the water where it was supposed to float. We loaded it onto a wagon and carefully made our way down the steep slope to Quadric Pond where we launched it with great ceremony. We all jumped in and began to paddle, but of course the craft wasn't as seaworthy as we had hoped for. It leaked. That didn't stop us, and we had a grand time working hard to pull on the oars and bail at the same time. When we got back to shore we had more work to do because Pansie couldn't haul the heavy water logged boat back up the hill. It took us some time to clear another path through the woods to our fields, but at the end of the day we felt that we had accomplished something noteworthy. We didn't use the boat too many times that summer, and I think Pansie was glad of it.

Another summer task that was also enjoyable was picking berries. We had all kinds of berries – blueberries, blackberries, huckleberries, strawberries, currents, and partridgeberries. One day while picking blueberries I tripped over my full bucket, spilling the contents and all of my hard work onto the ground. Jack and Wally thought this was hilarious, and their laughter further angered me. I jumped on that pile of berries and stomped as hard as I could, smashing them into a mess of mashed pulp that turned my shoes blue and my cheeks red. To this day Jack teases me about that fit of temper on a hot summer day in Thompson.

Another way we made our own entertainment was with our cow Daisy. She was a prime source of fun and usually pretty complacent about it. Jack took an old saddle from the barn and rigged it so that we could get it

around the cow's middle, and then Daisy was Jack's cow horse. He had the best time riding her and pretending that he was in the old west, but she wasn't as fond of the experience as we were. She bucked and pitched him off in no time, but it was still a lot of fun. As with many of the things we did as kids in Thompson, my father did not know about this and I don't know if he ever did. Anyway, we never got caught at it, and despite how we treated poor old Daisy she was always a good milker. When we had more milk than we needed we sold it to the neighbors. It was all done on the honor system in those days. We would lug a milk can down to the old Indian well just below the Winn's house that kept it nice and cool. It wasn't too deep and it was really cold so it made a good refrigerator. Customers would help themselves and leave ten cents for a quart in a cup, and later we would collect it along with the empty milk can. It was a nice business. Good old Daisy was a top notch provider as well as a great stand in for a bucking bronco.

One time fate was serendipitous in delivering real horses to our field. We couldn't believe our eyes, but there were three horses happily grazing and we had no idea where they had come from. Jack and Wally lost no time in getting some rope and a bucket of grain for them, which they enjoyed very much as we led them to our barn. We were happy as clams thinking we had found a horse for each of us. My mother called our horses "old plugs," and they were pretty old at thirty five. Our great find did not last long because it is pretty hard to hide three horses in a barn. When my father saw them he was furious and made us turn them loose. Sure enough they were gone in a flash, probably heading home with a great story to tell. From then on we had to make do with the old plugs, but the memory of those beautiful horses was worth the trouble they caused.

For many years Christmas came and went with no visit from Santa Claus. More disappointing than this was the fact that our mother seldom got home for the holidays, and I missed her more than presents. Sometimes she sent us a box with heavy woolen knickers for each of us in it, and sometimes a toy, so that made it exciting to go to our Quadric mail box and hope that Mother's Christmas present would be waiting for us. I remember one Christmas when she was home that turned into a disappointment because Dr. Paine asked her to nurse a woman in town and away she went. My father took us boys in the car to see her, and we got to wave at her from the porch. I was very proud of the way she looked all dressed in white from head to toe, but I would rather have had her at home with us. We always cut a tree from our woods and hauled it into the living room, decorating it with paper chains that we had made from wallpaper. If Santa Claus had come I think he would have been impressed. We always hid the fact that Santa did not come to our house by bragging to the other kids about the toys he left for us, and thinking about it now brings back the memory of the sting of that lie.

However, there was one other time when Wally got more toys than he had ever thought possible, but it was short lived. The Reynolds who were living in the mills house were moving to their grandmother's house at Fort Hill and they had all their belongings on the front lawn. When they left with one load, Wally thought they were finished and had left everything else for any lucky scavenger that came along. That scavenger was Wally, and he dragged home an armful of toys, grinning like a miner who had just found the mother lode. My father made him march right back and put the toys on the pile before he was arrested for stealing, and poor Wally had no choice but to do so. I felt sorry for him, and for a change none of us laughed, even when he had to tell the Reynolds what he had done.

Wally and Jack went to school long before I did, or at least it seemed that way, so I spent some time with neighbors and friends when my mother was away. The Winns and Tripps at Fort Hill were often caring for me, but there was also the Munyans. Mrs. Emery Munyan, who lived across the street from the Quadic school, was one I remember. The Quadic school was only one room with an outhouse for the students, and it was heated with a woodstove and had a nice play area around it. I remember watching recess and seeing Jack and Wally, and wishing I were old enough to be a part of all that activity. Quadic was a thriving center with Jensen's store, a blacksmith, the shoddy mill, and King's Tydol Station. We bought candy at Jensen's for Mother's May basket when she was home, and I think she enjoyed it as much as we did. We didn't often shop at Otto Graf's store in Thompson, but he was good enough to carry a tab for our family and let us pay it whenever we could.

Quadic outgrew the little school house and when it closed we went to the one on Thompson Hill. My first grade teacher was Mrs. Waterman and later Mrs. Golden. They were very kind to me, and once when I had an embarrassing "accident" Mrs. Waterman called on Wally in the second grade to take me downstairs to clean me up. That's something that sticks in a boy's mind as well as a brother's memory. I also remember watching from the window of my classroom as the WPA men worked at building the fire station from stone.

The old Quadic school had not been forgotten and it still had life in it as it became the Quadic Community Club where social functions and dances were held. Sometimes we would go to watch the dancing and enjoy the activities, but we didn't go inside because my father didn't dance. My Mother liked to dance, but she stayed outside with us enjoying the

neighborhood gathering and trying to forget that she had no one to dance with.

My father had a newer car, a 1931 Ford Model A, which he had bought from Jackson Brothers in Oxford for \$49.00, and he knew how much we boys wanted to drive it. He was clever though, and when he had to be away on a painting job without the car he devised a way of keeping it out of our hands. He took the distributor cap with him! I think Jack inherited this cleverness because it wasn't too long before he figured out how to get around this snag. He simply made a new distributor cap out of a tomato soup can lid and molded it on just right so that it would fit and we could get the car started. What a time we had driving that old thing around the fields, and I was only a tyke but I had a turn at it too. I think Jack at that young age was a better driver than my mother. Driving is much more fun when there is some mischief attached to it, but looking back on this escapade it's a wonder we weren't killed. I don't think my father ever found out, because if he had I would have remembered the punishment.

One winter day we were exploring in the woods behind our house and above Quadick pond, and I was wearing a big pair of boots that were meant for feet much larger than mine. The "call of nature" presented a dilemma since it was too far back to go to the house, so I dropped my pants around the big boots and proceeded to tend to business. Suddenly we all heard a terrible growl nearby! Jack and Wally took off like lightning, leaving their poor little brother with his pants down to face the creature alone. I was sure it had to be a wildcat or a panther, maybe even a bear, but I wasn't going to wait around to see. I quickly pulled up my pants and raced for home following my brother's footprints in the snow and never looking back. We

never did see the creature, but for a six year old boy the imagination can fill in where the facts are scanty.

Kids had to be enterprising in those days to supplement their spending money, and Jack and Wally were very clever at making money with a little help from mother nature. There was a large mud hole in the road just below our barn, and after a good rain it filled up with water and was the bane of every autos existence. Many a car got stuck in that hole, and Jack saw this as an opportunity. He would hitch up our horses to the car's bumper and haul the car out for two dollars, and sometimes as much as four dollars depending on how desperate the driver was. Of course that was highway robbery in those days, but since there was no other option the poor driver would have to pay. Jack had a monopoly on that mud hole and it was a good business. The trouble was that in the hot summer the hole was hardly ever muddy, and it dried up as quickly as the business did. Jack and Wally took care of that problem by hauling water out to it and making their own mud, so many unsuspecting motorists had to part with their money again. I admired Jack for his inventiveness and it still makes me chuckle to this day. However, my father DID find out about this scheme when he arrived home unexpectedly one day, and he put a halt to it right away.

A boy living in the country absolutely had to have a tree house, and we had a grand one. It was in a tall oak tree in the back woods, and it had branches so wide that we could make a platform big enough for us all to sleep up there. My mother worried that we would fall out, but we never did even though we didn't get much sleep. She should have worried that we would start a forest fire because we also had campfires under it when she wasn't home. We dragged an old cast iron kettle from the house and used it for cooking, just like real pioneers. That was a happy place for us, and when

I went back to Thompson to visit the old place about thirty years ago, I walked out back to see if the tree house was still there. Of course it was gone, but the tree was indeed still there looking larger and wider than I could have imagined. Even the copper wire was there which we had used to pull up the ladder when we camped out at night. There was no sign of the ladder, but buried under half a century of leaves I found the old kettle. What a surprise! I dug it up and took it home with me to Westminster where it proudly resides over a new hearth holding on to old memories of campfire fun years ago.

Too soon my years in Thompson were over. However, I think my brothers would say, “Not soon enough!” This is because in truth they were not easy years and they were not always happy ones, but time has a way of easing the pain and blowing the dust out of the cracks of memory. Whether by choice or fate I am left with the peace of those growing years; the years that molded me, and the years that still wander through my dreams... the simple life that was Thompson.