

Tip's Story

The Recollections of Sidney “Tip” Melby

A Life on the Northern Plains

Introduction

The pages that follow gather, for the first time in one place, the recollections of Sidney “Tip” Melby — born in a sod house on the line between North and South Dakota in 1915, raised on horse and sheep ranches in the Badlands of Harding County, and shaped by a vanished world of one-room schools, working horses, immigrant homesteaders, and hard winters that could close the roads for months at a time.

Tip was a natural storyteller, and these chapters preserve his voice as nearly as the written page allows: plain, exact, unhurried, and quietly humorous. He had a stockman's eye for how things actually worked — how a sod brick was cut, how a wild horse was taught to lead, how a lamb found its mother in a band of a thousand — and a long memory for the people who moved through his life, from the cowboy who gave him his name to the stepfather who raised him, the father he barely knew, and the wife he loved for a lifetime.

The stories were set down over a span of years and from more than one source. Most are Tip's own first-person recollections; one, “The Saga of Johny Jergeson Meets Uncle Tip,” is a separate account written by his nephew. Each chapter is introduced here by a short foreword describing what the story is about and where it falls in the arc of Tip's life.

A word about the editing. These accounts have been transcribed faithfully and arranged in roughly the order of Tip's life, from his earliest childhood to his later years and his return visits to the old ranch country. Beyond light correction of obvious typographical slips, the text has deliberately been left as Tip told it. A reader will notice places

where a date might be checked, a name spelled more than one way, or a sentence tightened by a professional editor. Those changes have not been made. The aim of this little book is not a polished biography but a faithful record — the originals preserved, in Tip's own words, for his family and for anyone who wants to know what that country and that life were really like.

Childhood – Lessons of Early Life

FOREWORD

Tip begins at the beginning: a sod house on the Dakota line in the year of the First World War, built by his father from ribbons of plowed buffalo grass, shared with bull snakes that hunted mice in the attic. From there the story opens outward to take in nearly everything that shaped him — how he got the name Tip from an old cowboy named Ted Corbett, the one-room schoolhouse and the immigrant families who prized it, the violent accident that left his father Chris Cranston lame for life, the arrival of his mother on the first train into Hettinger, and the hard art of breaking wild horses. It closes with Tip at seven years old, alone on an old black mare named Nell, herding sheep for ten dollars a month. This chapter was set down as told to John Ashford in 2003, and it serves as the foundation for everything that follows. A reader may notice places where dates, names, or phrasing could be tightened or verified; these have been left as Tip told them, to preserve the original account.



Tip's Childhood Memories and Lessons of Early Life, as told to John Ashford in 2003

I was born around the time of WWI, 1915. We lived in a sod house twenty yards south of the North Dakota line in Harding County, South Dakota. The post office was Haley, but there's nothing there anymore. The sod house is gone, no signs of the house. I went back to look a few years ago, there's a huge wheat field there. No signs that anything had ever been there.

I was able to locate the place because along the boundary between North and South Dakota there are what they call milestones. Markers of red granite, about four feet tall, give a description of the sections. They are placed on the section line, every mile, I think. One of those milestone markers stood just outside the sod house. Since I could find Haley and the basement of the old Crowell place, I could tell pretty much exactly where the sod house used to be.

My dad had built the house. There was a technique used to build those places. He took a plow and plowed a straight line in the buffalo grass. You could plow a line half a mile long and it wouldn't break, just turn over in a ribbon. Then from that ribbon of sod, you cut off your bricks, and stack them where you want the wall. So you would cut a furrow with a plow and with a shovel cut lengths that you could carry. That's what you would build your house of. Sod houses were comfortable year round. Cool in the summertime and warm in the winter. The problem was that gophers and mice would want to come and live with you too. Snakes arrived to hunt the small rodents, and eventually you were living with a lot of wildlife.

I was too young to remember, but my mother told me about the bull snakes that lived in that house. The snakes lived in the attic. The attic was a small space between the sod and some kind of a thin copper board and you could hear snakes chasing the mice across the ceiling. My mother told me that one time a corner of the ceiling came down and a bull snake fell into the bedroom.

Bull snakes are not dangerous and are probably good to have around. Better mousers than cats and they get into places where cats can't go. Bull snakes are not dangerous at all, but they can get pretty big. If he

catches a mouse he doesn't have to worry about strangling it, he just swallows him. I suppose when the snakes are smaller they are more like constrictors, they have no poison whatever. Some people even make pets of bull snakes.

My earliest memories are of playing with my brother and sister there, but I can't remember much about the house. My mother told me about living in that place. Later on, I saw the sod house, but by that time we had moved to Scranton, a coal mining town in North Dakota.

It was while we lived in Scranton that my father left and my mother divorced him. She moved across the line into South Dakota and married my stepfather, Ole Melby. Ole was living on the Shaw CD Horse Ranch at the time, the Shaw Horse Ranch.

The brand they used was CD, the letters C and D on the left hip of a horse or the right side of cattle.

I am not sure where Shaw got that brand. In those days you picked brands and then applied to the State Brand Board to have it okayed. The Board had to look up every brand and compare it to others being used. Brands in South Dakota and North Dakota were all unique. But the brand used on the ranch where Ole worked was the CD.

My father's brand had been /L (slash L). His surname was Cranston, so the /L was Chris Cranston's brand.

I was born Cranston, Melby is my stepfather's name. When he married my mother he wanted me to change my name, so I did.

My given name is Sidney, but no one ever calls me that. It's always Tip. The name Tip was given to me by an old cowboy, Ted Corbett.

Ted used to come in and put me on his lap, he helped me to eat my oatmeal. Ted taught me to eat with a spoon. He taught me to eat, taught me my first words, and toddled me on his knee. Ted liked me, he worked for Cranston, my dad. At that time, I couldn't say Sidney, but Ted thought I said Tip. After that he always called me Tip. The name stuck. Everybody called me Tip after that.

Elementary school in those days consisted of a one-room school. The little one room country school doesn't exist anymore. One teacher handled all eight grades. Older kids taught the younger kids to read. By the time you got to the eighth grade you'd heard that stuff so much, you already knew it, knew all of it. American history was old stuff by the time you got to the eighth grade. In the one-room school I went to, I thought the teacher did pretty well. Maybe she could have done better in arithmetic. But she had all eight grades to handle.

All children in the school were born in this country, but born of immigrant parents. They were model citizens. Sound basic backgrounds. North and South Dakota were settled by the German and Scandinavian immigrants. Those states are what they are because of those people. In the grade schools, standardized tests, North and South Dakota are right up near the top. Education was important to those people. There were no discipline problems. I have a lot of respect for those immigrant people.

My father Chris Cranston, came from Illinois, had a couple of years of college.

Chris was a descendant of Samuel Cranston of Rhode Island. Cranston, Rhode Island is named after the family. Samuel Cranston

was the governor of Rhode Island, the first governor. Governor until 1700, then his son, James Cranston, became governor of Rhode Island. That's all I know about the Cranstons. That's where the family comes from. I think I was five years old when my parents broke up. I was old enough that I could remember the last time I saw my father.

When Chris Cranston was younger, he started off in the cattle business. He had money behind him from a big farm in Illinois. He had inherited money from his father and he could always borrow from his sisters. My father was the only boy in a large family of girls. There was going to be this bull sale, the first Hereford bulls that came into Sturgis, South Dakota. So he went down there to buy Hereford bulls. It rained and rained, very few people came. At an auction, if there are no people to bid against, the prices can be very low.

Well, my father bought all the bulls. At the sale he bought the Hereford bulls and took them north. Along the way he stopped at a ranch run by a man named Dad Elliott. Dad Elliott had two girls, Edna and Marjorie. During the night Dad Elliott became enraged, he had been drinking and he began beating up on his daughters with a horse tug.

My father told him, 'You can't do that'. But Dad Elliott was drunk. 'Well I can if I want to, they're my daughters'. So, my father took the tug away from him. Dad Elliott got a six-gun and shot my father – shot him in the leg.

Dad Elliott meant to miss him, but he was drunk and instead, shot him in the femur. It kind of sobered him up. Elliott got his wagon, loaded my father in and took him to Dickinson. The Milwaukee line

was not yet running there. It was eighty or ninety miles in a wagon with a shattered leg.

The doctor that worked on my father was named Dr. Stark. Dr. Stark was well regarded in that area. Later, the county was named after the doctor and Dickinson is the county seat of Stark County. Dr. Stark had been a Civil War surgeon and knew about this kind of wound. Instead of amputating the leg he took out pieces of bone and put the leg back together. When Dr. Stark finished, my father's right leg was two inches shorter than his left, but better than not having a leg. It was also quite an accomplishment for the doctor who had seen these wounds by the hundreds.

My father always walked with a limp after that. And, a few years later, after my father and mother had married, Dad Elliott's daughters became good friends with my mother.

I don't know why my father went west. But he arrived at a place in the Badlands called the HT horse ranch close to Medora. He went to work there and became a horseman. Eventually, he homesteaded on the state line at Haley.

Then my mother came. She was the first woman to get off the train, on the first train ever to stop at Hettinger, North Dakota. The first passenger train that came into Hettinger, my mother was on it. She came from either La Crosse, Wisconsin, or Cando, North Dakota – up close to the boundary between Minnesota and Canada. The area she was from was great wheat country. She had been keeping books. My mother had gone to a business college in La Crosse to become a bookkeeper and stenographer. Then she came west to get free land. She

homesteaded. As it happened, her homestead was adjacent to my father's.

So, my father was lame when he met my mother. He was interesting, intelligent, and she was a beautiful woman. Well, they got married.

My mother was married to him for twelve years. I'm the youngest. My older brother, and one sister are dead. My other sister lives in Manassas, right on the battlefield of Bull Run. There was another child, she was stillborn. My father buried her out behind the sod house.

It was a hard drinking time in those days. There were a lot of saloons and cowboys all drank. If you couldn't take a drink with them, you were a sissy and my father couldn't handle it. Some men could drink and then leave it alone, but my father got so that he had to have a drink.

My father had an alcohol problem and my mother finally divorced him.

My stepfather, Ole Melby, was born and educated in Norway. He left Norway when he was seventeen. Lived in Minnesota, worked in northern North Dakota in the wheat fields, then he came to South Dakota and homesteaded. Ole was quite a horseman. He came down and worked for Bill Shaw on the Shaw Horse Ranch. Their business was to break horses and sell teams to homesteaders for farmwork. Working horses.

When I was a boy all the big chutes, corrals, and squeeze chutes, were still there on the Shaw ranch. They used the chutes and corrals to keep the horses under control when they put ropes on the horses for the first time. I watched the cowhands break horses there.

You would think that growing up and being there during my childhood around all kinds of horses, that a person would have been fond of some of them. But those horses weren't tame. They were not pets. In those days horses would be run on the prairie, then castrated in the spring when they were two years old. When they were late three-year-olds, they were ready to break.

By breaking those horses – the word means exactly that – you had to turn a wild horse into a manageable beast. That was the goal. All they had ever had done up to that time was painful – branded when they were colts, castrated when they were two. Other than branding, mares had never been touched until they were three or four. Then the horses were brought into the corral, put into a squeeze chute, from there on they would have to get used to people.

Ranch hands put them in the chute and started sacking them. Sacking amounted to hitting the horses all over with a gunnysack while they were in the squeeze chute to get them over shyness of being touched. It was terrifying for the horse.

Then the next lesson was to teach the horse to lead. Well, the way you teach them to lead is to choke them down. In the corral was a great big post three feet long called the snubbing post, a log with spikes driven into it. The horse is led with a long rope and taught to lead, tied to the log. When he is turned loose, he takes off, and hits the end of that rope. Of course, when the horse comes to the end of the rope it simply up-ends him. End over end. The horse learns, by and by, that he must not do that. He must not tighten that rope. Because every time he tightens that rope it throws him down. Then the ranch hand goes out there, takes hold of that rope. The horse responds immediately when

he feels the tension on the rope. That is the way he is taught to lead. Also he learns to stand when the reins are down on the ground so he won't run away and leave the rider on foot.

If the animal is a saddle horse, you want that animal to know, when you get off his back he should not run off. You want that animal trained so that when you get off him and put the reins on the ground, he thinks he's tied. With the reins down on the ground he'll stand. He won't run off and leave you. You put those reins on the ground and he remembers that old rope. The lesson is that when he comes to the end of the rope, down he goes...That's a lesson the horse never forgets.

When I was seven years old, there was an old Scotsman herding sheep in our area. He would bring them in every night and corral them, then turn them out in the morning. He talked to my stepfather and mother about having me help out. He told them he needed someone to keep the coyotes away. He wondered if they wouldn't let Tip come down.

"I'll give him a real gentle horse," he said.

Well, I was seven years old when I went to work for old Wilson Rugg for ten dollars a month. He put me on an old horse, an old black mare – Nell was her name. Nothing would scare her. I was seven years old and they put me on a pancake saddle on top of that horse.

The saddle didn't have any horn. That's what made it a pancake saddle. I don't know what happened to the saddle horn. Maybe cattle had tugged on it, pulled the horse over. Whatever had happened, the horn was missing from the saddle.

The only time I could get off the horse was when they came out to let me go in for dinner. The sheep were corralled at night. I had just been taken away from my grandmother, I was pretty young. I never got off that horse all day. I slept up there.

Once when I was on this horse, I looked down and saw a rattlesnake. The snake was crawling on the ground, three feet long, I suppose. The rattlesnake was down there right alongside the horse. Old Nell didn't seem to pay any attention to the snake. But seeing the rattler frightened me. That snake seemed immense. I had never seen a rattlesnake before. I wasn't going to get off that horse. And I didn't.

When they came out to take me in for dinner I was asleep on the horse. Nell was grazing. Everything was fine with her.

I was seven years old, earned ten dollars a month. I herded sheep for Wilson Rugg every summer after that for five or six years.

Ole, My Stepfather

FOREWORD

This is Tip's fullest portrait of the man who raised him: Ole Melby, the Norwegian who left a country he never wished to see again, who refused to teach the boy a word of Norwegian beyond one for "shut up," and who could be by turns severe and saintly. Tip weighs Ole's hard discipline against his deep loyalty — to old Bill Shaw, to a dying grandfather, to a Catholic priest he loved despite his own prejudice. It is an honest and affectionate reckoning with a complicated, capable man. The spellings of certain Norwegian words and a few proper names are reproduced as they appear in the original manuscript rather than corrected, to keep faith with Tip's own telling.



Ole Melby was my stepfather. He was a Norwegian. Came from seacoast, fishing town, now called Trondheim. It's a place that has the only Gothic cathedral in Scandinavia. I tried to get Ole to teach me Norwegian but he wouldn't have it. He said, 'I come to the United States and English is the language.' People said he spoke excellent Norwegian. He had been to high school in Norway and was a smart man. But the only word he ever taught me was, *Haldshaften*. The word means, shut up. 'All I can tell you is, *Haldshaften*' he would say. I heard him use that word a lot.

He was a very powerful man, much bigger than I am. Probably over six foot tall. He had dark hair, not quite black haired, but very dark brown. A big hardworking man, Ole was very capable. He did not have much of an accent. Once in a while I could hear the 'v' become a 'w'.

To hear him speak, you wouldn't really know he had immigrated. He spoke excellent English, liked to read good books, mostly old classics. Ole had a rather classical mind and he would have been good in language.

Sometimes Ole was very quiet, a moody man. When he talked he never had much to say about Norway. A neighbor named Martin Booui told me more about Norway than my stepfather did. Ole didn't actually like Norway. He said rich people owned the land, everyone else was a wage earner or fisherman.

My mother wanted to go to Norway After they left the ranch and were quite well to do. They certainly had enough money, they could have traveled but Ole wouldn't go. 'I don't want to see Norway,' he said. His name wasn't really Melby in Norway, the family had a different name. He never told me what his name was in Norway, and I never asked. Some of the Norwegians maintained contact with the old country, they sent money or visited. Ole left because of the unfairness there. When Ole left, he just left, a total rejection. That's the way Ole was. He didn't care for Norway.

Growing up around him I always knew I should mind him. Why shouldn't I? There was no place to go. You couldn't run away in those days. You were on the ranch, and if you wanted to eat, you had to come back. He never bawled me out much and he never laid a hand on me. I never was afraid to come into the house. But Ole was very hard working and he worked me hard. Everybody worked hard in those days, from the time we were little.

Ole ran the horse ranch at first, then moved into sheep ranching when conditions changed. He learned the ranching business from old Bill Shaw. William Shaw was childless and thought a lot of Ole. In the early days Shaw had been to the mountain as a cowboy, he contracted syphilis and he never got cured. In later days he owned a bank in Scranton. I don't know what the course of syphilis is, but it was in abeyance for a long time. When all of a sudden the disease attacked him, it became a terminal condition. Ole was the man Old Shaw wanted to take care of him. So, Ole had to leave

the ranch and go to town. My grandfather lived on the ranch at that time and he took over for Ole.

Ole was kind that way. Later, when my grandfather was in his last days he wanted Ole. He would call for Ole.

Ole was always available to help people. Just like he took in my mother when she was in a vulnerable position and he raised me. Ole had those two sides of him, he could be furious and he could be severe. But when someone wanted help, he was practically a saint.

Ole's children lived in Huron, South Dakota, near the Minnesota line. His first wife had left him because they couldn't get along, apparently. Later on, two of his children came to live with us. Irene and Harold, Irene was the older. She and I were the same age. I really loved Irene.

If Irene hadn't already had a boyfriend, I would have courted her. Harold was a wonderful boy. Later he became a mechanic, for the Air Corps. He went to work for the telephone company in Portland and worked there the rest of his life. Irene married the only boyfriend she

ever had. Her boyfriend worked on the railroad, for the Southern Pacific in Portland. That was how Harold happened to go to Portland. Harold and Irene are both dead now.

There was a Catholic priest, Father Keller, who came from Switzerland, and he spoke French, German and English. The Catholic Church sent him out to Cox, to be the priest in the area. Ludlow, Cox, and surrounding farming areas there. Father Keller became friends with my stepfather and mother, and he had a housekeeper named Lizzie

Rhinehart. The priest and his housekeeper visited my parents from time to time. They both came from Switzerland. Lizzie emigrated with Father Keller when he left Switzerland.

There was a touching story there – Lizzie and Father Keller – somebody could have written a novel. The two of them cousins and, really, they were lovers. My mother knew it, my stepfather knew it.

When Father Keller and Lizzie wanted relief from being Catholics, they would visit this English woman and this Lutheran who didn't go to church anymore and they brought altar wine along with them. Those four people had a merry time together. It was prohibition and Father Keller brought the altar wine with him. I even had a sip of that altar wine...It was excellent wine. At some point during that period, the church told him he was using too much wine. Of all the dozens of tiny Catholic parishes, there was this one parish where the consumption of wine was conspicuous by its volume. The church cut his portion.

When they visited, I listened to the conversation for a while. I was still in elementary school. Later, my folks sold the ranch and bought a tourist camp at a hot Springs south of the Black Hills. Lizzie had died

by that time, but Father Keller was posted there for a while. My parents and Father Keller were friends for years and years.

In a way it was a strange friendship, because my step father was anti-Catholic. That was always one place you could hear his Norwegian accent. He did not call them Catholics, they were “*Catliks*.” It was a prejudice he retained from the old country, he did not like Catholicism. But he loved Father Keller.

Horses & Riders

FOREWORD

Here Tip turns to the horses themselves — the draft breeds the ranch raised and sold, and the half-wild saddle horses he and his boyhood friends the Abrahamson brothers rode like broncs when the grown-ups were away. Running through it is the bittersweet memory of a dappled-gray lead mare he wished he had kept, and it builds to his account of watching the legendary unridden bucking horse Tipperary at Buffalo. A handwritten note on the manuscript, preserved here, clarifies that “Sunfish” and “Jackknife” are bucking-horse movements rather than place names.



Ole's business was breeding horses then selling them to work the farms. But when I was eleven, the business changed. People weren't buying horses anymore the way they used to. Ole saw the change coming, sold off the herd and we went into sheep ranching.

I remember seeing the horses being driven off. There was a mare, she was always in the lead, a beautiful horse, dappled gray. The horses were leaving the ranch for good and I saw that mare leaving, and I said to Ole, 'I would have liked to keep that horse.' 'Why didn't you tell me? We could have kept it for you,' he told me.

It was too late by then, but I still think about that horse. Always out in front, she had a beautiful action. Why did they sell her anyway? I don't know why I didn't tell him.

We had Percherons. If you watch in the papers you'll see them in pulling contests. Blooded Percherons, Belgians, and Clydesdales. Budweiser horses are Clydesdales. But there is some company that is bringing around the black Percherons.

Percherons are draft horses, fast trotting. Good work horses. Personally, I like the Belgians. Huge and a good disposition. If I were to have to go on a farm I'd want Belgians.

In Montana, though, you don't really want those big horses. They're not that good with a mowing machine. You've got more power than you need. You want good saddle horses. Pulling a mower, they make it hum. Good walkers.

On the ranch, of course, we had a lot of horses some of them wild, some rideable. They were not gentle. You had to watch it when you got on. But you'd grab a hold of the bridle with your left hand and you'd stick your thumb in their eye. That hurts them. Put your foot in the stirrup, grab the bridle and put your thumb in their eye. They just stand there, then you get on. Of course, you don't know what might happen after you let go of that bridle. Anything might happen. But most of the time it's okay. Some of the time they try to throw you off. You'll know pretty well. We got so we could manage them.

The Abrahamson boys – Alvin and Johnny – used to come over when the folks were gone. We would get the horses in and have a go at it. We were twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Get the horses in the round corral. The corral had a snubbing post in the middle, we'd snub them up and get the saddle on. Then get on and turn them loose.

My friend Alvin could ride. Alvin was a good rider. He didn't have very long legs but he was like a cockleburr. The Abrahamsons were neighbors. I grew up with Alvin, he was my buddy. Same age, good friends, neighbors. Alvin Abrahamson and I were like brothers. His mother was Irish and she used to play with us, nice woman. But Alvin's mother died in childbirth when I was in the second or third grade. Alvin was only seven or eight at the time and grew up without a mother.

Even as adults we were friends, Alvin and I. Until he became ill, I used to always go back and visit him. I can't do that anymore. But in those days we competed. First of all we would get the calves, and later in our teens, we got horses and rode them like you ride a bronc. It was easy to ride calves because they couldn't do much.

We got thrown over the corral fence a few times, learned to land. Why we didn't get killed I'll never know. Kids all over the country were doing that. Oh Johnny broke his arm, Alvin's younger brother, and we had to wait until his folks came home. They asked how it happened. 'Oh we were just playing and Johnny fell down.'

We never did tell our parents, but I think they knew.

We had some good saddle horses that we rode when we worked. Those horses, we knew pretty well as far as bucking was concerned. Most horses buck straight ahead, back and forth. You have to watch their ears and where they put their head. The direction of the head, that's the way he's going to go. Puts his head over there, he's going to go there. If they put their head down, they're going to buck. If they're going to go up in the air, they've got to put their head up. You watch the head. The challenge is to just stay in the saddle.

The really good bucking horses use deception. They may put their head over here and then go the other way. Now, we didn't ride any of them. If you want to watch some of those good horses down in Las Vegas you watch the head of the horse and the real good bucking horse is apt to do anything with that head.

At the rodeos in Sunfish and Jackknife they've got some pretty good horses, I'll tell you. Kind of fun to watch them.

— Author's handwritten note on the manuscript: “Sunfish and Jackknife are movements.” (These are bucking-horse moves, not place names.)

My buddy Alvin, when he was young, was a good rodeo rider. A short, stocky, muscular man. When he was in his late thirties he looked older and could hardly walk

when he got out of his car. The really good riders are like that. And they can hang on like a cockleburr.

We used to have Labor Day celebrations in Buffalo. When I was seven years old we went to see a champion bucking horse that is still talked about in that country. The name was Tipperary and no one had ever ridden Tipperary. They had him in Buffalo and I got to see him buck.

Tipperary was a beautiful horse as I remember. They brought him out into the enclosure, led by a man on a horse. Then they walked around the corral so you could get a good look. There was no grand stand but it was a large corral, a track around the perimeter. The man on the horse leading had another horse between him and Tipperary. Took him around the track and showed him to everybody. They

saddled him out in front of the audience and blindfolded him. Putting the saddle on him, everybody could see what was going on. The bronc rider was a cowboy named Hack Rosenthal. Hack Rosenthal was going to ride that horse. The other cowboys put the cinch on Tipperary, cinched it up just as tight as they could. Then Hack Rosenthal put his back to the horse, took hold of the strap over his shoulder. He was a strong man and halfway lifted up the horse cinching that strap as tight as he could.

Then Rosenthal got on the horse, another cowboy took the blindfold off and we didn't get to see much bucking. The horse took a couple of jumps – two jumps at the most – and the saddle slipped right over his shoulders. The saddle came right off. That horse had that habit. No one ever knew what Tipperary was going to do next. Sometimes he would just throw riders off. This time with Hack Rosenthal, the horse swelled himself up and loosened the saddle right away. That was a smart horse. We didn't get to see much bucking at all. Hack went off right over the shoulders.

Winter on the Ranch

FOREWORD

A close, almost loving description of how a remote ranch fed and warmed itself through a Dakota winter that could close the roads from January to March. Tip recalls the larder laid in against being snowbound, the lignite coal seam in the riverbank, the root house dug into the hillside that never froze, and above all the women whose work and skill kept everyone fed. It is a quiet chapter about self-sufficiency and the people who made it possible.



During this time when we lived near the Willett post office, would have been in the early thirties. We went over there in the summer of nineteen thirty-three. I had just graduated from high school. I drove the cattle and stayed at the ranch before I left for college.

It was an isolated place but I didn't seem to mind. Especially in the winter it was difficult to get in and out. You had to make sure that the larder was well supplied in the fall, you might become snowbound. One winter, from the 1st of January to March the eleventh you couldn't go anyplace except by horse or by sled. You couldn't really go by sled because in the deep snow it would have been tough on the horses. It was not at all unusual for us to have a six week or two month period when you couldn't get to a store.

We never did run out of anything that I can remember. Yes, we had to make preparations. For instance, you had to make sure you had the baking powder, sugar and salt. Slabs of bacon. We had our own milk from our milk cows.

Our diet was excellent. We had several kinds of meat available and chickens provided eggs. Of course, we had hired men and they had to be fed. So, we had a wonderful diet.

You have to give credit to women. Not just on our ranch, but on all those ranches, they took the responsibility, they laid in the stores and made sure we didn't run out of anything. And the women were excellent cooks; they were always able to put an excellent meal on the table. Breakfasts were wonderful.

Even in the winter everyone put in a long day. Horses started at seven in the morning until about five in the afternoon with an hour off. But the men began their workday at five a.m. and worked until close to seven in the evening.

I remember pancakes at breakfast. Always pancakes and eggs. Usually oatmeal. Sometimes Cream of Wheat, but every morning a hot cooked cereal.

The midday meal, which we called dinner, came six hours after breakfast. Dinners were very ample with potatoes, meat, some kind of a dessert. We always had dessert. The women baked apple pie or lemon pie. Everything cooked on the old kitchen range.

The old stove in that house, the kitchen range, was not a wood stove. In that part of the country we burned lignite coal. It was a low grade, not a hard coal. We had lignite right on the ranch. A seam of coal stuck out of the riverbank and when the water was high in the spring it tore away part of the riverbank and exposed the coal. In December we could back a wagon up next to the seam and load up. It did not require mining

at all, but it was a soft grade of coal. Lignite produces lots of ashes. But, we had all the coal we wanted.

The evening meal, supper – because dinners were at noon – was every bit as wonderful. It came six hours after dinner and the men all had big appetites. They were always great, you know and the meals were similar. Meat and potatoes. I've been a meat and potatoes man all my life. And, we had lots of vegetables. The women canned vegetables – peas, corn, carrots. Even in winter we had fresh carrots because there was a root house there. The carrots lasted until February. So, you'd have fresh carrots, fresh rutabagas.

The root house was dug into a bank. In that country there were hills. The main house was built on a flat plain and did not have a basement. But the root house was cut into what had been the shore of a river hundreds of years ago. The river had shaped that land. So, the root house was dug into a bank. We had a good root house, about the size of a large room. During the winter everybody knew that if we had a fire, the root house would be the place to take shelter. It never froze in there. Dug back into the hillside with a sod roof, probably three feet of earth. Heavy beams supported all of it and inside, the temperature hardly varied. Summer or winter, it was pretty much always the same temperature.

1933, The Willett Place

FOREWORD

In the summer of 1933, just out of high school, Tip helped move the family forty miles to the Willett place — an isolated, beautiful ranch deep in the Badlands where an old stage road had once crossed the Little Missouri. He drove the cattle; his brother brought the sheep. The chapter sketches the history of the place, the half-way house old Mr. Willett built for the Camp Crook stage, and the post mistress Mrs. Owens, and it captures Tip's lifelong affection for a home that took real effort to reach.



When I was a senior in high school my folks left the Shaw horse ranch and bought a ranch called the Willett place. For a long time there was a post office called Willett, but I'm not sure that it is still there.

The stage road passed right through the Willett place. By that time the road was on the west side of the river. So their crossing must have been a little north of there. Very difficult to cross the Little Missouri river in most places because of the sand and mud. There was never a ferry it was not that kind of a river. There were times of the year when the stage coach couldn't get across because the water was too high. But it didn't take long for the water to go down.

The Willett place was difficult to get into. Difficult from either direction, east or west, because of hills and the steepness and the Badlands. But the Willett place was where the road came into the Badlands. The main road west of the Willett place went from the railroad to Camp Crook. The road didn't go through the Badlands and it was

difficult to get into the Willett place. All the time we lived there it was beautiful and nice, but hard to get to.

For a long time, all the time I was on the ranch, there was a little old lady who ran the post office. She had a little home consisting of two or three homesteader's shacks pulled up together, and that was the post office.

I lived in Harding County in those days, in the corner of South Dakota, the Little Missouri area. As a boy and a young man I was raised 40 miles east of the Little Missouri on the more level prairie, where the creeks were pretty small. All the creeks ran east to the big Missouri. Creeks became tributaries of the South Fork of the Grand River which, in turn, joined the Missouri.

The shacks at the Willett place had been moved. Probably, one of them was her own homestead shack. The woman, the post mistress, was named Mrs. Owens, Mrs. Owens was a Willett. Her father had been a buffalo hunter who had come west early in the 1870's or '80's. Eventually, he decided to homestead on this location along the river because a stage coach ran from the railroad. The Milwaukee railroad came through about 1908.

This place had been built by Mr. Willett as a halfway house between the railroad and Camp Crook, South Dakota. Camp Crook being named for General Crook who was the old Indian fighter. There had been some big Indian battles there, he had his headquarters at the camp on the Little Missouri and it became Camp Crook. Camp Crook is still there near the Willett place, twenty miles down. Camp Crook is still there in

a small way. However, transportation was very difficult, the old stage road and the freighting road came that way but did not cross the river.

The old man Willett put up a great big house. It had six bedrooms upstairs and downstairs, a big living room, a kitchen and dining room. That became our home. I was eighteen, the year must have been 1933. I still think about that.

I was eighteen when we moved to the Willett place. I drove all the cattle and my brother brought the sheep. That was a move of forty miles.

I suppose we had seventy or eighty head of cattle at the time. But we were not in the cattle business. Those cattle just happened along, milk cows, calves and some that we kept. Some of the cattle were young animals that we hadn't sold yet. We were not in the cattle business, we were in the sheep business. The sheep came with my brother and a herder, the big band of sheep. It took me two days to drive the cattle there, but I've forgotten how long it took my brother with his sheep.

The Badlands really begin there. There are many more escarpments and cuts there to the north. The Willett place is not like up there at Medora and where they have the Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Up there it's much more scenic and good farmland. At our ranch we had a small plot that could be called farmland, just enough for oats and corn. The area was beautiful because of the hills, the grasslands, and the isolation. People had to make an effort to get there. That was something I always liked about the place, the fact that it took some effort to get there

The Saga of Johny Jergeson Meets Uncle Tip

FOREWORD

This chapter is different from the rest. It is not Tip's own recollection but a story told about him — a hand-written account by his nephew Bob Painter, set down at Scottsbluff, Nebraska, in 2016, of the day in the spring of 1937 when Tip, home from college and lately the state handball champion, settled accounts in a Bowman alley with a man who had insulted him and once stolen the family's saddle horse. Because it comes from another hand, it has been transcribed exactly as Bob Painter wrote it, with all of his original spellings, punctuation, and wording left untouched.



An account by Bob Painter

Editor's note:

This is a separate, secondary account written by hand by Bob Painter — Tip's nephew — at Scottsbluff, Nebraska, on May 19th, 2016. Unlike the other chapters, which are Tip's own first-person recollections, this is a story told about Tip by a family member. It has been transcribed verbatim, with all of the writer's original spellings, punctuation, and wording preserved.

In the Spring of 1937 (I think if I remember correctly) Uncle Tip came home to the ranch in Harding County (the old Willet place) from Jamestown College for the summer break.

That previous winter he had been State Handball Champion in North Dakota.

Uncle Bill Cranston met him at the train depot in Bowman, North Dakota to take him home to the ranch.

They decided to have a few beers in preparation to go to the ranch. As they were enjoying their beers, Johnny Jorgeson began to make fun of Uncle Tip. Tip tried to ignore him, which made Johnny think Uncle Tip was afraid of him. Johnny said he was going to give Uncle Tip a good licking.

Uncle Tip said don't do it in here, lets go outside into the alley as he wanted plenty of room for giving him the whipping.

Johnny had stolen our Aunt Helen's saddle horse the previous summer. Uncle Tip had spent several days looking for the horse, the evidence indicated that Johnny had stolen the horse was why he couldn't find it.

Aunt Helen used the horse to ride to her school teaching job in the winter session of school.

Uncle Tip said to Johnny, you aren't worth much so I am not even going to make a fist. His hands were toughened up from playing handball, so he just started slaping Johnny in the face as fast as he could hit him. Johnny was never able to lay a hand on Uncle Tip.

When he got done slaping him Johnny's face looked like it had gone through a meat grinder.

The last time I saw Uncle Tip in Misula, he didn't want to talk about the story. He said he wanted people to forget about it.

If whoever reads this, wants to forget it fine, but I will never forget it, as I cherish the memory of it. It is an example of what Uncle Tip could do.

By Bob Painter at Scottsbluff Nebraska May 19th, 2016.

By way of interest, Johnny brought his cattle to the neighbors for summer pasture. I found out his plans at school and told my mother Marion Cranston Painter about the plan for Johnny's cattle.

She said “oh Johnny Jorgeson” but didn't elaborate any further. I am sure she told our dad Preston about it when I wasn't around.

Because of her knowledge of Johnny's past, I am sure their was a thorough discussion held when I wasn't listening.

Meeting My Father, 1941

FOREWORD

At twenty-six, married and running the ranch himself, Tip finally met the father he had not seen since he was five. This is the most searching and tender chapter in the book — a grown man trying to make sense of an absent, charming, alcoholic father, of his own coldness toward him, and of what is owed between fathers and sons. Tip reflects on the Cranston family name, on depression in an age that had no word for it, and on the help he himself once wished for and did not receive. We have preserved the chapter as written; readers may find moments where the account could be expanded or clarified, but its plainness is part of its power.



I've heard lots of people who were acquainted with Chris Cranston tell me that he was an exceedingly nice man. They liked him very much, he was one of the best liked men there. But, of course, he was his worst enemy. Because of his drinking.

When I was young I didn't care to hear much about him because most of it was not good news. But when I met him, later on, there was a lot about him that was very likable. I didn't meet him until I was twenty-six years old. I was managing the ranch by then, my wife and I were living at the Willett place.

Cranston had a little farm down in Illinois where he and his sister lived. The sister was my aunt Jo. Josephine was a family name, Cranstons always had a Josephine. There is a county in Oregon named Josephine. Josephine County, Oregon was named after one of the Cranston women, a direct antecedent of my father. In the nineteenth

century a surveyor loved her, but her father thought that she would be marrying beneath her and he would never give his consent. The surveyor traveled off to Oregon and named the county.

My father was a smart man, very articulate, otherwise he wouldn't have gotten to marry my mother. Although she had lots of hard luck, she was very intelligent. I resemble my father in my physical appearance. He didn't go bald headed, I don't know where I got that.

When I met my father, I had taken over management of the ranch. Ole and my mother had moved to Belle Fourche. Cranston came back west to see us. At that stage, I didn't have any respect for him. Before that I had never been in contact with him from the time I was five years old. As far as I knew he didn't even care that I existed until he came back west. I didn't really accept him. I tried to be nice and everything, but I didn't intend to become his son.

He was elderly by that time and walked with a limp. He said that after his leg was injured, 'I never was much of a man after that. Didn't have two legs to stand on.' To drive horses, or ride horses was okay, but as far as walking, he would tire out. He had to stand on one leg.

When he said he wasn't much of a man, what he meant was, as far as working was concerned. It would hurt his back, having to stand sideways. Hard lifting, he'd have to lift with one leg. He also could have meant it in another way, too. Might have had something to do with his drinking. Drinking is sometimes a medicine for depression. In those days, particularly. There wasn't any help for depression. No one recognized depression. There was an attitude that a person ought to straighten up, shape up.

Probably because there was no help for depression, there were lots of drinkers in farming communities, ranches, everywhere.

The way he said it, 'I never was much of a man after that', my father might have been saying something about himself in a sideways manner. A kind of apology, in a way.

Oh, I have often thought, I could have been more understanding. My older sister said 'You don't know what a nice father you had.' Because she was older maybe, she knew him a lot better than I did. Cranston went to live with her about six months before he died. At the time she was living in South Dakota and married to a rancher who accepted my father well.

Well, what are you gonna do? If you grow up with a stepfather who stepped in, gave you a place to eat and a place to sleep. Who taught you and worked with you.

There were times when I could have used some help. When I went to college I could have sure used a bit of encouragement, a kind word or something. Some kind of encouragement.

Ole never laid a hand on me or my mother. Why should I take him in? All of a sudden, this man who offered no help to his son shows up...Of course he never asked for haven, probably just wanted to see me.

When he came, he stayed on the ranch a while. By that time he was very decrepit. Quite old. In his eighties and in poor health. He was crippled, he had lost his teeth and drinking hadn't done him any good. I don't know if he was through drinking or not, but he wasn't as healthy as I am and I am way up in my eighties.

Ruth

FOREWORD

Tip's account of his wife, Ruth — the older girl with the Irish blue eyes he met in the college library, married instead of helping with her French review, and loved for the rest of her life. Their years together carried them through teaching at a Japanese-American internment camp during the war, a hard decision to leave the ranch so their children could be educated, and Ruth's long illness. Tip's wartime reflections on the writ of habeas corpus and what democracy meant to citizens behind barbed wire are among the most pointed passages in the book. The chapter is kept as Tip set it down.



We haven't talked about my wife, whom I loved very much, you know...I met her in college. She was three years older than me, a senior, working at the library. I can remember seeing these big Irish blue eyes.

After I graduated, I went back to Jamestown to see if I could find a job. She had come to town to review French to prepare for a teaching job in Wyoming. I had just finished taking French and offered to help her with her review. But she and I didn't pay much attention to French. Instead, we got married. There was no mistake there, I did the right thing. She was a wonderful wife.

Ruth and I did go to Wyoming to teach. We went there together and stayed for four years. While I was teaching in Lyman Wyoming...they brought the Japanese off the coast and moved them into relocation centers. The term, "relocation center" was a nice way of saying

concentration camp. Fenced in, razor wire, guard tower at every corner, machine guns everywhere. Guards at the gate, little camps and little cabins exactly like cabins at Dachau I saw later. They set up a school, there was an attempt to create a good school, but there were seventy kids in a classroom.

I didn't want to teach English there. Instead, I taught history. Someone came from Washington, D.C. to instruct us on how to teach the Japanese. One thing we were supposed to teach was democracy. Japanese have got to learn democracy. So, teach these kids democracy. Well, how are you going to teach kids democracy, when they are born in this country, they are citizens of this country, they've been uprooted. Then they are forced to live behind a fence with guard towers everywhere. They have no right of habeas corpus – protection from illegal imprisonment – which they are guaranteed in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

So what I did was ask them to tell me about democracy. You can tell me more about democracy than I can teach you. You have experienced democracy, and now you've lost it. What is democracy like?

Democracy was a lie as far as they were concerned.

I was teaching high school, seniors and freshmen. They were good students. Wonderful people. The Student body president, Ted Fujioka, enlisted in the army. A year and a half after the internment and as soon as the U.S. Army would allow them

enlist in the army, Ted Fujioka enlisted. He was parachuted into Germany and died in action.

Ruth taught at the elementary level in the school there. Up to the time she died, she was still hearing from students she had taught there in the internment camp.

At that time, we had just two kids. We stayed at a place in Cody, where a woman took care of the children during the day. Every once in a while she couldn't be available, so we took the children to camp with us. A Japanese couple watched the kids on those days.

Eventually, I had to go back to the ranch. Ole contacted me and said, 'I can't sell the ranch and I can't do the work. You've got to come back. You've got to help me.'

I quit working at the concentration camp then. Shall we call it a concentration camp? Or was it a relocation center? But after that experience I have always wondered, What good is the writ of habeas corpus if the government can suspend it when people really need it? If that is allowed to happen, as a citizen, you don't have the writ of habeas corpus. You don't have the protection of the Constitution.

Ruth was raised in town, she had never lived on a farm but she adapted herself to the ranch. Worked hard. Most of the time I think she enjoyed it. She never complained. Our problem on the ranch was getting the kids to school. The school problem was the big issue for us.

So, when we decided to move into Missoula, it was nearly all my decision, which she agreed with. The decision was the culmination of years of discussion about the education of our children. I can't remember the process, how we made the decision, but we decided to live in a university town. In a way, we were trying to solve the whole

problem with one move. Living in Missoula would take care of public school and university. Any level of education was available there in Missoula.

But, then our first girl who graduated from high school, wanted to go to Bozeman. I had come from the ranch to send her to the University. But my daughter wanted to go to Bozeman, so Ruth and I said, 'Well, let her go to Bozeman.'

She came home at Thanksgiving with an Irishman. Now, she's married to the Irishman. They've raised five kids, it's been a noisy relationship. Throw an Irishman and a Scottish girl together, and there will be some noise.

The oldest boy didn't want go to college, he went into the Navy. He is disappointed now that he didn't go to college. The second boy is a lawyer in Helena. The second girl went to the university but she just laughed at the professors. She used to talk about, "Those funny old men up there...." She went to school for two years before she got married. She had four children but then went back and graduated. The other has a doctorate from the University of Berlin and she now teaches English-as-a-second-language in the University of Nevada at Las Vegas.

Ruth taught in an elementary school after we moved to Missoula. She got cancer twenty years before she died, but Ruth did live long enough to get her family raised. She passed away in 1972.

She did substitute teaching at first, while I was driving a truck and building houses. The school district wanted to put her on permanent staff, but she needed additional certification. She had to go back to school for a retread. At the same time, I went back to the University

and I went back into teaching. She and I wound up taking a statistics class that was required to update our certificates. I remember us sitting side by side listening to a man talk about square roots and standard deviations. Stuff that

doesn't help much in teaching. I looked at her in class once, and she had the sweetest smile, and she looked a little sad. Square roots and standard deviations! Stuff we had to tolerate. After raising five kids, she already knew everything there was to know about standard deviations.

The Sheep Ranch – Herders, Coyotes

FOREWORD

When Tip took over the ranch in 1941 he made it a sheep operation, and this is the practical heart of the book: how bands of ewes and lambs were managed, why the herder's real job was watching for coyotes, and the running contest of wits between sheepmen and an animal Tip plainly admired even as he fought it. Along the way he tells the story of the famous wolf called Three Toes, the Texas trapper who caught him, and the educated shepherd and author Archer Gilfillan, who wrote it all down. It is dense with hard-won knowledge of a vanished way of life.



In 1941, when I took over the ranch, we had two men helping during the haying. Only one hand working in the winter. Plus we had a herder.

We were a sheep ranch, but when I returned to the ranch we also had a hundred head of cattle. That made it difficult. I didn't have enough hired men because you could not get help during the war. So, I sold the cattle and bought more sheep. I did keep a few milk cows.

Cattle required separate care, beyond what we had to do for the sheep. We had to feed the cattle then feed the sheep. Being short one hired man, I couldn't manage it. We were a sheep ranch and that was what I concentrated on.

When I got rid of the cattle that left us with seventeen hundred sheep, which in the summertime would make into two bands. Dividing the group makes it easier for the ewes to find their lambs. That can be

a problem until late in the summer when they know their lambs by sight.

Smaller bands help to make sure the lamb can find his mother when he's hungry, when he wants to suckle, or when she wants to. You want to keep the bands to about 900 or 1000. If the band is too large the lambs are going to starve a little bit and, consequently, dry up the ewes because they don't get suckled as much as they ought to. They should be suckled whenever they feel uncomfortable and they holler for their lamb.

The main job of the herder was to stay out there and keep coyotes away.

Coyotes were the main predator. Coyotes are very skillful and you had to know that you were going to lose some lambs. That's all there was to it and you did the best you could.

When we had direct run-ins with coyotes they always came out on the short end. We did not love them by any means. However they were there first. Coyotes were there when we came and they were only doing what an animal naturally does -- kill so that he can eat. The grazing of the sheep and cattle had probably decimated the herds of deer so that there weren't any deer there at that time. And, coyotes are scavengers of dead animals. They find them real soon and eat them.

Coyotes are intelligent and they could be difficult. An animal that knew the tricks would teach others. There were always coyotes that knew how to kill and they hunted with other coyotes. They would learn from one another. Coyotes were always watching the sheep and we, as herders, always knew the sheep were under observation. That was their

prey. The government – the United States government – had a program to provide trappers from the South Dakota Fish and Game. Government trappers used steel traps with teeth. Steel jump traps, usually called a Victor trap. They were not very successful. They didn't catch many coyotes with those

traps. Coyotes are too smart. I have tried to set traps to catch coyotes, but I was never able to. They outsmarted me every time.

It is unfortunate, but a coyote will do his best to get away when he is caught in a trap. A coyote that gets caught by a front leg is likely to twist and turn, or chew that leg off. There were several three legged coyotes in our area. A three legged coyote is dangerous because he cannot catch a rabbit, but he can catch a lamb. They were the bad ones. I always believed the government hunters did more harm than good.

Coyotes are an intelligent animal; I don't know that anybody ever outsmarted them. What caught the coyotes was the airplane. After a snowstorm when coyotes have not been able to hunt, a week of bad weather, the prairie is brilliant with snow. When coyotes go out to hunt, a person in an airplane can see an animal for miles. There is no escape for the coyote. Hunters used shotguns and practically wiped the coyotes out in the 40's and 50's. There was no escape. There was one thing that he never learned. When the coyote saw an airplane he should have hidden behind a cutbank. But the coyote would run and keep on running and the man in the airplane would get him. The coyote never figured that out.

Wolves were gone by the time I was responsible for a herd. The last wolf was captured in 1925 when I would have been ten years old. He

was a famous wolf, there was a book written about him. Called Three Toes because he had lost a toe. He had been caught in a trap and was missing a toe. Three Toes was a wily animal that caused lots of damage and he even killed horses.

A lone wolf, he was finally caught right in our area on my brother in law's ranch in South Dakota. Ranchers got together and brought a trapper up from Texas. People

around there thought they had quite a wolf. They met with the trapper, showed him the tracks, and took the man from Texas around to where Three Toes had killed. "Oh, there's nothing much to him." the Texas trapper told the people. "Nothin' much to that wolf."

So people even began to dislike the bravado of the trapper and started to cheer the wolf. The brother of my brother in law showed the trapper the carcass of an animal Three Toes had been eating on.

The Texas man said, "Here's where I'll catch him."

He didn't even set any other traps. But he knew how to set the trap, just so, and he did catch Three Toes. Well, people didn't like the trapper very well because he insulted our wolf. First, he said that the wolf didn't amount to much. Then he made it look too easy.

But the trapper caught him. A cooperative of farmers in the area was about to offer a reward, but the government says, 'Wait we've got a trapper that can catch him.' So, he was paid by the government for his work. I heard the story from my brother in law, because it happened right on his ranch. But the story is in a book called *Sheep* by a man named Archer Gilfillan. It may be out of print but it gives an account of sheep herding around the area where I was raised, Harding County,

South Dakota. I knew Gilfillan, he came out west from Pennsylvania and became a sheepherder. I was a boy, but he was a friendly man. I got to know Archer pretty well. He was a highly educated man, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, studied for the ministry. Pennsylvania is an Ivy League school and the fact that he had got his degree there was impressive.

But he worked as a sheepherder for the Peters family. I stayed with that family when I went to high school. Archer wrote his book in 1929 with stories about sheep herding and, as I said, the story of Three Toes. But he had a drinking problem and eventually that did him in – at least as far as herding sheep. Mr. Peters told me once, "Had to get rid of Archer because he didn't watch the sheep. Didn't want to." I don't know where he went or what became of him after that.

There was nothing demanding about herding sheep, as I recall. Oh, take the sheep to water at noon. In hot weather they would have to go to water. But there was nothing to do from ten o'clock until three. But it was important to stay there and watch the sheep. In hot weather when you take them to water, the sheep take a drink and stand around with their heads under one another.

The schedule of the day was not demanding, just take them to water. And, they'll go by themselves when they want to. Other than that, the shepherd had to stay in evidence so the coyotes can see there's somebody out there.

There were things a herder has to be alert for. Sheep grazed in natural grass and, occasionally, you would have to watch to see that the sheep didn't get into fields of grain.

During thunder storms, rain comes down in sheets. I've been caught in them. All you can do is stand still in a storm. Get down in front of a horse, near the front legs. The horse will shield you from the weather. She'll stay there, she won't move. In a hard rainstorm a horse stands in place with its head down, rump to the wind. You can stay warm under there.

We moved the herd to find good grass. We'd take the sheep hither and yon, rotate about every two weeks. How often you move depends on the size of the herd. Big bands of sheep may need to be moved about once a week.

Another reason to move the animals is because of tapeworm. The eggs of the tapeworm come out of the gut and fall on the grass. Sheep will pick up the eggs grazing, and so you try to keep moving.

In an ideal case, the shepherd's wagon will be on a hill where he can see around. But in much of the area where I was, the hills didn't amount to anything. So I rotated the wagon with the sheep. Moved them around in a circular pattern in order to have them in a fresh area every day. At the end of a week I moved the wagon and did not come back to that spot for about three weeks.

But, with sheep you still have the problem of the tapeworms. Even when we rotated herds frequently, tapeworms were a problem. In February you give each sheep a pill in the morning when their stomach is empty, before they have had anything to eat. The pills get rid of tapeworms. You do that every winter. Worm them every year and that keeps the worms out of the lambs. If lambs get tapeworms, then they

don't gain weight. When it's time to sell them in the fall, they are not very heavy.

Not very healthy either because the tapeworm gets all the nourishment. Parasites. Keep the animals on grass as fresh as you can, but the tapeworm eggs are always there.

Another pest or parasite were the ticks. Sheep tick. Dip the sheep once every two years and usually that's enough. It wouldn't be a bad idea to dip them every year, but we never did. Sheep tick was a problem.

The sheep get nice and fat in the fall and the lambs are off them. When there is good grass the wool grows thick, the sheep is broad across the back and they get full of ticks. Sheep begin to itch. What they do is lie down and they'll roll. Well, they do that after they have eaten in the afternoon, when their stomachs are full. You have to be on your toes then, and watch. Some get on their back and can't move. The sheep become helpless. If they roll in a low spot, a cow path for instance, they can't get up. Because the stomach is full, digestive juices come up. The sheep will drown. So you have to be watching.

That's a time when you have to watch the sheep or they'll die. You can lose them. Even in bed ground, when you let them out in the morning you might find a dead sheep. If they get on their back, you'll lose an animal. Happens often.

In a herd, you will lose a few every year. Before shearing, lots of wool, they haven't been dipped for two years, you have to be watchful. Full of ticks, all scratching and rolling. It paid you to have a man go out at night. To lose those ewes was a calamity. Nice big ewe, trouble

was she was too fat. Healthy and in good shape, but you had to watch her. Sheep tick was a big problem.

Everything has its problems. Old time professional herders were pretty smart men. They liked the life. Did lots of reading. When somebody came riding by, they'd like the conversation. But they were men who enjoyed the solitary life, as well.

Farming with Horse Power

FOREWORD

A short chapter on the daily labor of horses through the seasons — hauling hay in winter, the punishing work of haying in summer — and on the moment the machine age finally reached the ranch when Tip, taking over in 1941, bought a tractor his slower-to-change stepfather had done without. A handwritten note by Tip, clarifying the rhythm of feeding hay through the day, has been preserved as a footnote.



In the winter on the ranch, the workday of a horse went from 7 to 5. Work for the horses in the wintertime, consisted mostly of hauling hay. Hay was cut in the fields and stacked earlier. Hay stacks were away from the barn, off along the river in the hay meadows. The distance was never over three-quarters of a mile, one mile maybe. Hay was already loaded and as soon as it was daylight the horses were taken to the haystacks.

We fed them a load of hay, then they went back to load up so they'd be ready for the next morning.

— Author's handwritten note on the manuscript: “We always had a load of hay on in the morning. We fed it at about daylight, went after another load, fed it in the afternoon, went back and got another load to be ready for the next morning!”

Native hay was what we fed the horses. Blue Gramma grass and native wheat grass is probably better hay than alfalfa. If it's put up at

the right time, it is very nourishing. And, if they get enough they come through the winter in fine shape.

The combination of the Blue Gramma and native wheat grass was excellent feed. Once in a while we obtained wild peas. If there has been lots of snow and plenty of moisture, you can find wild peas. And, there is nothing that I know of that is as good for livestock as wild peas. Together they made wonderful hay. Smelled good too. So

the main work of the horses in the winter was getting their feed. When it was dry and no snow they could pull the wagon, if there was snow they'd pull a sled. The horses didn't work very hard in the wintertime.

During the summer, that was another story. Before the use of tractors in plowing and cutting grain, in the summertime horses put up hay and that was terrible work. You were limited in how long you were going to work them. But my stepfather was pretty slow in accepting the machine age.

I moved back to run the ranch in 1941. All the time my stepfather was on the ranch hay was cut by mowers drawn by horses. One of the first things I did when I moved back, I got a tractor. The work went much better with a tractor. We could do everything faster.

I taught for four years after I graduated from college, but my stepfather had heart trouble and he couldn't run it any longer. I was twenty-six by that time.

I came back to run the ranch then. He said if you've got to be here to run the ranch, I'll go to town so I won't be second-guessing you all the time. So he and my mother moved to Belle Fourche, South Dakota.

In French it's supposed to sound like 'Foursh', but everybody there calls it 'Foosh.'

1945, Selling Livestock

FOREWORD

Tip explains, with a stockman's clear eye, the long and often invisible chain that stood between a rancher and his money: shipping lambs to the Sioux City yards, the laws on feeding livestock in transit, the commission houses, the banks, and the gamble of the Chicago futures market that could whipsaw a farmer who had no control over any of it. The chapter ends with a wry, almost rueful story — a conversation in a railroad caboose with a man named Fred Lewis about a long-ago runaway wife.



We shipped our lambs to Sioux City, Iowa. The stockyards were in Sioux City. Other ranchers shipped calves and steers there.

We loaded our lambs on the train at Marmouth, North Dakota, the westernmost point on what used to be the Milwaukee line. In Aberdeen, South Dakota, the cars were switched, and from there the Santa Fe took us right into Sioux City. We were lucky we were close to Sioux City. If we had been a little further west, the law would require us to unload the lambs and feed them.

You can leave livestock on the train only so long, then you have to feed and water the animals. That's the law. A lot of the ranchers, not far from us, had to offload at Aberdeen overnight in order to give the animals feed and water. The stockmen always said that livestock didn't eat anything. Animals would drink water. But they had just come off grass. The hay available at Aberdeen was old and coarse, it had been cut in Iowa and the animals wouldn't touch it. Livestock at that stage

of traveling would drink water, but not eat. But feed was available to them, anyway. After riding in a rail car,

however, the animals were in shock, homesick, stressed. Probably suffering from motion sickness, as well.

This was in 1945, just after WWII, and when we went into Sioux City, we entered the stockyard. It was a stockyard and auction companies were housed there, in fact, once a rancher put his stock on the train and sent them to Sioux City, he had no more control over the process.

Really, there wasn't much use for you to go down to Iowa, only thing was you had a free railroad trip. You came back on the passenger train. You had the free trip, but there was nothing for you to do. All the animals were unloaded by stockyard employees. You didn't see the animals again. It got so that, as far as I was concerned, I sold my lambs right on the ranch. That way, I knew what I was getting, I knew whether I wanted to accept it or turn it down. The buyers would guarantee me so much a pound, weighed, in Marmouth. Then they took over.

We didn't start out feeding animals, then selling for a future market. We didn't have the feed. When I sold lambs, they were sold as feeders. Cattlemen all sold steers and calves as feeders. Cattlemen kept their calves over one winter, then sold the calves at a year and a half old.

Lambs always went in the fall. That was our advantage over the cattlemen. Cattlemen used to calve in April. They kept them over one winter. Our lambs landed about the same time, but we sold the lambs in the fall. We only had them for six months. So, we didn't have to feed them over the winter to keep them in shape.

And we didn't have to deal with futures. Oh, biggest gamble in the world. You have no idea. You had no idea, when you turned the bucks in, in December for

breeding, what you were going to get for the lambs, the result of that breeding. Up or down, or both. Farming is one of the biggest gambles in the world.

-- But you were taking the gamble, you stood to win or lose.

The price is being set down at the livestock auction, the Board of Trade in Chicago that's a big market. Where the price of wheat is set, price of flax. Beef, pork, lambs, all grains. And they sell futures on it. They're gambling too, but the farmer is also gambling on the futures.

When markets make the decision on a future price in December, for instance, the farmer is being whiplashed.

The market affects you, all right. Let's say that there is a wet spring in Eastern Montana and lots of grass. The price on the Board of Trade might be bid down. Somebody else comes and bets that the price is going to be way up, and he's going to make three or four cents a pound without even feeding them, just get them and sell them. Because I sold them at forty cents a pound and he's going to get forty-five cents. That's what buying and selling futures would be like.

While the markets are setting prices, banks collect interest from the farmer because he has had to borrow. On top of that the auction house that sells the animals is going to get a commission.

The selling price of lambs has to include enough of a margin to cover operations expenses and all of the finance costs. If lambs are sold for

sixty cents on the hoof, interest and commissions are going to come out of the price. In fact, two commissions. The livestock auction company in Sioux City wants a commission. The fellow that sold futures in Chicago is going to want a commission. The bank is going to want interest.

What is there left for the farmer? It cost him, probably close to sixty cents a pound to raise the animal. It's a tough proposition.

As a farmer, you wouldn't see any of that happening, of course. Usually the process is not only out of your control, it's invisible. You would sell to a livestock commission house in South St. Paul, the same company would have a commission house in Sioux City, one in Chicago.

If you sent animals to the auction house, they would not guarantee a price. They would sell the animals at auction. The farmer might not know for several days, what his livestock went for. So, people started selling them on the ranch and weighing them right there in Marmouth. One time I arrived with a bunch of lambs and it rained on them in the night. The fellow that bought them wouldn't weigh the lambs because they were wet. Well, they were going to load that afternoon. Consequently, I would have to stay there with the animals and they only left from there once a week. That meant, I would have to stay with the animals for a week where they would be on strange pasture, and pasture I didn't own. The buyer and I struck a deal, we compromised on a price allowing for the water in the wool. Both of us wanted to get them loaded.

It was to my advantage to sell the lambs on the hoof and know what I was getting. You get down to Sioux City and at the auction they would do damn near anything. They were honest, of course, they had to be. They wanted to business again next year. But supposing that in Sioux City it rained or snowed. Then, because of the storm, a lot of farmers with feeders didn't come in, and so nobody would be at the auction. If there weren't people, there wasn't much competition. The price could be very cheap.

I was taking sheep to Sioux City, Iowa, on the railroad train. Any time you have sheep on the train, you have a man or a stockman ride in the caboose, to go down there with the sheep. There were quite a few people riding in the caboose and once I rode with a man named Fred Lewis. I'd always heard about him. He was quite a few years older.

Fred Lewis had run off with Ted Corbett's wife. Ted had been married to the woman, and she ran away with Fred Lewis. Ted Corbett talked about Fred Lewis, he always said 'Lewis caught *mein Frau de friedls*'.

So, Fred Lewis had stolen Ted's wife – that would be my friend Ray's mother – and the two had been living together for a long time. I suppose I should have known it. I was in my thirties when we were taking livestock to Sioux City.

But everybody on the caboose had a little something on the hip and we became very talkative. I introduced myself to Fred, told him who my father was, who my mother was. And, in the course of the conversation, I told him about Ted, and how Ted Corbett always said about Fred Lewis, 'he caught *mein Frau de friedls*'.

Then I said, 'Whatever happened to the old girl anyway?' 'Aw', he said, 'I married her.' 'Oh,' I said, 'it's been nice talking.'

He didn't seem to have taken offense, but of course his face was long. Fred had not smiled all the time on the caboose and it was hard to tell. I meant to make conversation, I said, 'What ever happened to the old girl?'

Fred's face never seemed to change expression. I was a spry young man, he was elderly. I didn't mean anything.

1948, Life in Missoula

FOREWORD

This is the chapter of leaving the land. In 1948 Tip sold out and moved his family to Missoula, chiefly so his children could be schooled for keeps in a university town. What follows is a vivid second act: a job at a lumberyard, years of driving a truck of knotty pine over the mountain passes between Missoula and Tacoma, the craft of winter driving, a move into house construction, and a return to teaching. It closes with the warm comedy of breaking horses for his boss “Pop” Swanberg and resisting, to the end, being drafted into the Sheriff's Posse. The chapter is reproduced as written, including its long, affectionate digressions on roads, trucks, and grades.



I sold out and came to Missoula in 1948. I didn't know what I was going to do when I came to Missoula. Getting my kids to school had become a problem on the ranch. My wife had become an excellent ranch wife, but her heart was not there.

I liked ranching, I wish I were there still. I enjoyed being on that ranch, living in that house. If I stayed, I would have made some changes – dug a basement for one thing. But I liked the location and the life. It was difficult, it was hard to make plans.

You can make plans but you can't make them work. Nature...the markets – too many things you can't really control. That country is likely to have droughts. In a year of drought you don't have hay. You have nothing but grasshoppers.

I have seen that. When I was on the ranch I enjoyed several years of plentiful hay and good prices. But I told myself, *This cannot go on forever.*

Aside from the life on the ranch, school became quite a problem. I could not get my kids to school. The school was across the river. We had to board our little girl. My son hadn't started school yet. It was eighty miles to Camp Crook to the school. My daughter stayed with the teacher there.

By the time my children were school age, ranches were becoming few and far between. There were no schools and every family had to do the same thing, transport their children to town and board them. They had a dormitory at the community school in Camp Crook. The Dakotas have since consolidated their schools.

There were more people there in the early days, four or five times as many people compared to now. Everything changes. Compared to the days of the one-room school, it is possible that children are getting a better education, states are saving money. The one-room school was a good experience for me, but was not even an option for my children.

If there was one thing my wife Ruth wanted, it was for kids to go to school and to have them home at night to see them doing their homework. There were times when you couldn't get across the river, times when the snow was too deep. The kids would have to stay at school, boarding. Couldn't get my daughter to school.

Schooling for the kids was really the problem. I thought if I'm going to move I'm going to move where the school problem is solved for keeps. I'll go to a university town.

I had thought when I came out here that I might go back into ranching, but I bought a house right across the street from a lumberyard. I wasn't doing much, a little work around the house. I put in a retaining wall. Somebody must have noticed and they needed help at the lumberyard. Pretty soon they came across the way and asked me if I wanted a job.

I said, What is it? They told me I'd be working in the office part of the time and I'd be driving a truck. So, that's how I got a job with a lumber company. The job there led me in the direction of lumber and construction. I drove a truck.

I got well acquainted with a man at the company who had graduated from the Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis, a technical school for building trades – electrical, carpentry, plumbing. He was an all-round man. While I was still working for the lumberyard, he quit and started building houses on his own. I'd work with him when I had time doing carpentry and woodwork.

As a truck driver, I took knotty pine to a mill in Tacoma and on the way back brought a load of plywood. Once every two weeks I made a trip between Missoula and Tacoma. The coast has mostly fir, spruce, and cedar. At that time, right after the war, knotty pine paneling was used in living rooms and a lot of restaurants had knotty pine walls. They wanted knotty pine, we had Ponderosa and could get as much pine as was needed. We took knotty pine over there and brought plywood back. Plywood was scarce and whenever the mill in Tacoma would say, 'We've got a load of plywood for you', in Missoula we would get a load of knotty pine and take a truckload over.

The lumber yard owned a big truck, a Federal, a brand they don't make any more. The Federal Truck was assembled with the rear end made by one company, engine by another. Federal probably made the body and assembled the parts. The engine was made by Continental. The truck had a Timken rear end and Clark transmission. All good parts.

We went on Highway 10, a two-lane road all the way to Tacoma. Well, it changed when you hit Federal Way, there you came to a big four lane road, that was really something.

Out of Missoula the first pass you came to used to be the Camel's Hump. You left St. Regis then you headed for Camel's Hump, because the road didn't go up that canyon. Nowadays, the Interstate Highway goes up the canyon, but in those days the Federal government hadn't built the new road yet.

There is a sign that marks where the road used to turn off for that old pass. It was a complete mountain pass. Three or four miles up then three or four miles down. You go over that pass then immediately head up Lookout Pass, the boundary between Montana and Idaho. Down Lookout Pass, before you come to Coeur d'Alene, was a road around the lakes, which was a tough stretch of highway, as difficult as a mountain pass.

This winding part of the highway went quite a ways up, then came down again. Because it wound around, gained in elevation, then dropped, it was like another mountain pass. The highway leveled off for a mile or two before it came to the end of another lake. The neck of Lake Coeur d'Alene was back in there. The reason for the winding road

was that the highway traced the outline of the lake. It would have been much more direct to have a bridge, two bridges to cross the neck of each lake. Mr. Swanberg, the owner of the lumberyard, went with me a time or two. He claimed they were never going to build any bridges at those spots because engineers could never find the bottom of the lake. There was nothing to anchor pilings to. That was the myth of Lake Coeur d'Alene in those days, that it was too deep, almost bottomless. But it really wasn't true because eventually engineers did build bridges there.

Driving west, you hit Spokane then the Columbia River. Heading west it wasn't much of a grade at Vantage. There was quite a climb, but not so bad. Snoqualmie, again, was not so bad.

On the return trip, you had some high elevation gains coming from the coast. Starting in Tacoma at sea level. Snoqualmie was more of a grade and from the low point at Vantage Ferry it was a steep eleven mile climb. Driving the truck, I could not go more than four or five miles an hour all the way up at that point. At Vantage Ferry, coming out of there, you put it into gear and you enjoyed the scenery.

Highway engineers try to maintain the grade, that's the way highways are built. Most grades are pretty much the same. They're engineered so the trucks can tell at the bottom of the grade what gear they're going to need. We'd shift into gear, stay in that same gear all the way to the top. Not much use trying to shift. It's almost like driving on the level, the vehicle in the same gear. Except the one place around the end of Lake Coeur d'Alene, the engineering of those roads was excellent. In Idaho, however, you could hit almost any kind of a grade

passing through there. Idaho built poor roads and I don't know why that is.

Lookout Pass in Idaho was another example of a road where the inclines changed. Poorly engineered in those days, but Idaho wouldn't make any cuts and they wouldn't make any fills. The road builders followed the mountain. Whatever the mountain did they did. Lookout Pass was a long pass, I don't remember the exact distance, but the truck drivers all complained about Lookout Pass. Truck drivers had bad experiences on Lookout Pass in those days. There were places where it was easy to slip into the ditch and if you did, you couldn't get out. Idaho did a poor job. Now, of course, you wouldn't know how devilish that highway was. This new highway, the Interstate, maintains grades.

I drove the truck for about three years. But, I could see the end coming. There were lots of trucking accidents along the way. Driving the two-lane road, loaded the way we were, coming down some of those grades and around curves, and inadequate brakes. I was fortunate in not having an accident myself.

Weather was a hazard sometimes. If the weather was really bad, we wouldn't leave here. You couldn't tell what might happen on the road. You could never tell what might happen on Lookout Pass or Snoqualmie. Weather forecasters couldn't predict.

Snoqualmie was vulnerable to avalanches in those days. There was no snowshed, delays were always a possibility in winter. If the roads were icy, we had to put on chains.

But you learn tricks as a truck driver in wintertime. For one thing, you like to drive at night. It was cold, very cold. No water on the ice at

night. You have to watch ice when it's warming up and the ice is melting. You have to be very, very careful.

Your tires are warm and the tires stick to the ice at night when it's cold. You get good traction on ice then. Not as good as on the road, but better than when the ice was melting. Of course, you always had to put on chains if Snoqualmie was icy. There was a time or two when I risked it and got over. Driving without chains was a calculated risk. The colder it is, the better off you are on ice.

That was a different time as far as driving a truck. Modern rigs are sixty feet long. Ours were half that long, sixteen and sixteen. You had to gear down on the downhill slope, and if you used brakes, you tried to do all your braking with the trailer. Brake with the trailer and don't use truck brakes. Let the trailer slow down the rig.

One thing to avoid is putting the brakes on in the truck and not the trailer. That will bring the trailer right on around you. So, when you put on the brakes, use the brakes on the trailer.

You had a separate lever for the trailer brake. It was a handle near the steering wheel, right hand side. Of course it was hydraulic, getting its hydraulics from the truck.

Air brakes were coming on, but we didn't have air brakes.

I was a pretty good truck driver. I could have gotten a full-time job driving truck, but it wasn't what I wanted to do.

The clincher came when the mill began to ship the plywood on the railroad. We got carloads of plywood then. So that ended the truck driving venture. I went into construction after that. So, then I worked

at that, built houses for quite a while. Finally, I went back to teaching when I saw that I could teach in the wintertime and build in the summer.

On the ranch, I had watched cowboys breaking horses and teaching them to lead. I saw that happen again and again. I broke horses later on, but they were horses that had been used to being around people. In Missoula I worked for Mr. Swanberg, the man who owned the lumberyard. Swanberg liked horses. He owned a couple and asked me to break the horses for him.

One summer I broke a horse for him, so then right away, he wanted me to ride the horse in a parade. This was a Palomino horse. On a Sunday I went over, got the horse, put the saddle on him, taught him the neck rein. Gee, he settled right down.

Swanberg – Pop I used to call him – lived on a street without much traffic. I rode the Palomino up there right in front of Pop's house. I hollered to Pop, 'Come on out here!' And, there I was on his horse. Oh, Pop was tickled. In a day or two, he ran down, bought a brand new saddle and said, 'Oh now I'm going to get him in the Sheriff's Posse.'

In Missoula there was a parade – Labor Day or 4th of July, I don't remember – and the Sheriff's Posse rode in all those affairs. Swanberg wanted me to ride his horse in the Sheriff's Posse, and I told him I didn't want to. Swanberg was pretty insistent. Finally, I said, 'Well you'll have to get me a pair of Blucher boots from Molene, Kansas.' Blucher boots cost a hundred dollars in those days, made to order, and I said I would not ride unless I had a pair of those boots. He said, 'Let's get down and get your foot measured so we can get a pair.'

Blucher boots were cowboy riding boots made by a German bootmaker, named Blucher. You could hardly wear them out, but when they did start showing wear, you could send them back to Blucher and he would rebuild them for you. I never owned a pair, but I had seen them. When I told him I needed a pair of Blucher boots, I thought that would be the end of it. I didn't want to ride. But he was right ready to get me the Blucher boots. He wanted me to ride in that Sheriff's Posse.

At the end, I had to say, 'I won't let you buy me a pair of Blucher boots.' I didn't want to ride with those dudes. They were not my kind of riders. I thought of them as drug store cowboys. Nothing wrong with that, but I didn't want any part of it.

But Swanberg couldn't ride and he wanted me to ride the horse. The horse still wasn't ready for Pop. The Palomino was broken for me but he was not a really gentle saddle horse yet. I don't think Pop could have ridden him anyway, he was older.

I broke another horse for Pop, a mare. She was a nice horse.

Old Timers

FOREWORD

A brief, sober chapter of handed-down memory: the Texans who trailed cattle north and stayed, General Crook and the last campaigns against the Sioux, the wholesale slaughter of the buffalo, and the bitter dispossession of the people whose country it had been. Tip tells it plainly and does not look away from what he calls something “not nice to talk about.”



I heard lots of tales from Texans who came up here with the cattle. There were still some of them living. But the old timers, ones that I knew as a kid, had come after the Indians were on the reservation. However, there is a woman I have spoken with recently – she's almost exactly my age – living near Grizzly Peak. Her mother lived down around Camp Crook when the Indians came and killed a lot of people in Camp Crook. The woman wasn't living in Camp Crook, she lived south. But as I think about it, maybe it was Harding that the Indians attacked.

The woman I talked to didn't have many details about it. But General Crook came to the area then; formerly, he was a Civil War general.

General Crook's headquarters was right there in Camp Crook and he was there to get the Indians back on the reservation. The Sioux had gotten away and made one last effort to claim their country. Of course, it was their country. It was a bitter pill to swallow for those people. Their life changed completely. They had to go to reservations, couldn't

hunt buffalo. They were given cattle. Every once in a while the government would drive a herd of cattle for the Indians.

The buffalo were slaughtered for the hides. Buffalo hunters killed them by the thousands. They were professional hunters, using a buffalo gun, a 70 caliber rifle – that was over half an inch. Hunters came with teams of horses. They would open the buffalo up, anchor the feet to the ground, hook on to the hide and pull the hide off with the horses. It was slaughter, reckless and wasteful. What they did with the buffalo and the Indians is something that's not nice to talk about.

And the boys that came up from Texas...mostly southerners. Texans who brought cattle. There were still some of them living. A lot of them came to the Black Hills searching for gold. They had been Confederate soldiers, didn't have anything to go home to after the war. Nice people.

Grasslands

FOREWORD

Part travelogue, part history, this chapter follows Tip across the national grasslands that grew out of land overgrazed and abandoned in the hard years — the vast Phelan Ranch, the rich Scotsman who overestimated the country, and the Bowman-Haley reservoir that drowned good farmland, including land once held by the Jett family his sister married into. It is a meditation on what the land can and cannot be made to do.



Grasslands National Reserve is a place where you can see what grasslands used to look like. In the Badlands, it's an area very rough and difficult to get into. There are country roads, but you never know where they lead. And, creeks you won't know if you should cross. If you get out in the middle, get bogged down. You have to travel on well used roads.

Streambeds are extremely soft. Little creeks get very soft and bottomless and there are no rocks. Top soil, then there is the subsoil. Then there are the layers of subsoil. If your car sinks, you're stuck with all four wheels.

The Grasslands National Reserve is much flatter than the Badlands on my ranch. When I traveled there I ran into tableland north of Marmouth. I don't know the history of how that got cut. The river took thousands of years to cut that down.

Since the grasslands can't be farmed, it has been set aside as grasslands and park. Animals are not allowed to graze in the national park, but the grasslands are south of

the park. That national park will look the way it has looked since the days of Christ. It'll look the way it did before Columbus came.

At one time it was abandoned land and nobody was paying taxes on it. But it was being overgrazed by cattle and sheep until erosion got too bad. The Federal Government took it over, made it into national grasslands, like they did all over the west. Not only in North Dakota, but in Colorado, Montana.

When I visited the place, I liked the terrain. But it was free land by that time, cattle and sheep had overgrazed it. North of Marmouth, there was what was known as the Phelan Ranch, it was huge, with thousands and thousands of acres. Phelan ranch, north of Marmouth. Practically encompassed that national grasslands. It became land available to lease. There wasn't really any hay there but there were little plateaus. Eroded where there had been grass. That was the beginnings of the national grasslands. At one time it had been owned by old J.E. Phelan, a rich Scotsman. But he died and the land went back to the county. People went there with herds of sheep to take advantage of free grazing. Finally, became land that nobody owned. Nobody was paying taxes on it.

J.E. Phelan had been the president of a bank in Bowman, North Dakota, and he died with a lot of money. He left a nice ranch there, but he overestimated what the country would do. The land didn't cost him anything. There was no homesteading being done up there. How he got

control of it, I don't know. But he did and he made a lot of money. After Phelan died, his heirs made the land available for lease. But the land is hard, just little patches of grass here and there. Most of it is bentonite flats and steep cut banks.

My sister married into the Jett family from Virginia. Phelan had been a friend of the Jetts. After they were married, my sister and her husband Wood lived on the Phelan Ranch for a while. Now, she lives in Manassas Junction, in Virginia.

On the map you can find the Bowman-Haley reservoir. A little lake or reservoir. The Haley reservoir took in almost all the Jett ranch. The government bought the Jetts' land through the right of eminent domain and built a dam on the Grand River. The dam is not for irrigation, but for recreation and fishing. The water cannot be used for irrigation because there is too much alkali. You could raise a crop for a year or two, but it becomes salty.

The Bowman-Haley reservoir is the only water for miles. There is a place to run a boat. People from the small towns go down there to water ski.

It seems a waste of good farmland, but it might have been part of flood control of the Grand River.

Visiting the Shaw Horse Ranch

FOREWORD

The book closes where it began, on the old ranch country, as an older Tip returns with his daughter Jo to find almost everything gone — one pitch post still standing, an old water pump they carry away, the rope-burned snubbing posts vanished. From these remnants the chapter opens into Tip's clearest statement of what was lost and what was good in that vanished world: the open-handed hospitality of ranch people, the freedom of children who had little and wanted less, and the meaning he still searches for in all that hard and beautiful work. It is the right note to end on.



I have lots of memories, lots that I forgot. If they're good memories, why did I forget them? You can't tell just exactly what it was like to be there on that horse. The actual feelings of it. The horizon and the sky. The grass, animals.

What was the meaning of all that? All those people when I was young, they worked so hard. What was the use of it? They apparently had a good time. I can remember a lot of fun.

I took Jo back there twice. Once we went back to the old Shaw place. Everything was gone. One post was left, which was the old pitch post left on the corner of the old hay corral. That remained.

The old CD horse ranch, the Shaw ranch, near highway 85. The school house used to set right on 85, north of Ludlow about three miles. The Shaw horse ranch was right where Crooked Creek passes through.

Highway 85 takes you from Winnipeg, in Canada, clear to Mexico City. Here it went along the west side of the Black Hills to Belle Fourche. Ladner was just a little ways from the ranch. The ranch was straight west of Ladner, on the river.

Jo and I went up by the old house to the place the house had stood. Someone had picked up the house and moved it to Bowman. Someone lives in that house up in Bowman, now. But Jo and I found the old water pump. The pump was on the ground and we loaded it into Jo's van. It was heavy, but we brought it to Missoula with us. Later, we took it to Spokane, where my daughter and son in law have it in their yard, the old pump off the old horse ranch. Karen was born there...Now she has the water pump.

That was on the CD horse ranch, all that was left there was the corner post on the hay corral, the pitch post. So much pitch in it that it wouldn't deteriorate. Just won't rot. I was surprised that the snubbing post in the round corral was gone. I would have liked to see that again, because you can see the rope burns on those old snubbing posts. Places where a rope was snubbed up and burned the wood. In those places the wood shines.

It seemed so unusual for us to be in that country where there weren't any trees. Strange to me and I was raised there.

We didn't get over to the Willett place, but there was a hill that we drove to. From the top of the hill we could look over and there was the old Willett house. I saw the Willett place from a distance. That's where we lived for years and where Mr. Willett built his half way house for

the people on the stage coach that carried people down to Camp Crook from the railroad, in Bowman.

The river went south of the ranch. Where we crossed the river, the ground was very rocky and you could always get across in low water. The name of that spot was Salmein crossing.

That was named after Mr. Salmein, a man who came from Finland, and he was riding by himself along the Little Missouri when the river was up. He apparently swam the river with his horse and – nobody knows the circumstances – the horse came home but he didn't. There is a little spillway bridge there that can be crossed at any time during low water, but it's not a high water crossing.

Jo and I drove pretty close to the headquarters of the Mill Iron Cattle ranch, as well. It was a ranch started by financiers in Chicago. They bought up a bunch of land. They didn't have to buy the cattle. The cattle were free because Mexicans had left haciendas after the war with Mexico and their cattle ran wild. The ranch owners hired a bunch of men, gave them horses, a chuckwagon, a branding iron, and they were in business. The cowboys all came from the Confederate Army. They came west and became cowboys.

Mill Iron Cattle ranch had that area of the country and ran cattle. Those people came up from Texas. The brand on that ranch was the XIT. At one time XIT was the biggest ranch in the United States. The X stands for the Roman numeral ten. The X the I the T together means, 'Ten In Texas.'

When you think about those cowboys, how nice they were, how friendly, maybe it's because they were Southerners. They brought

southern culture. That's why in Montana, they're friendly in the ranching country, because they're from Texas.

When I was younger, living on a ranch, things were much different. In those days, we had just as much fun as young kids have today, maybe more. The fun kids have now is so commercial. Everyone has to have money. You have to pay for entertainment, you have to have a car. You never will have a car that's better than somebody else's. Someone is bound to have a better one. Shinier, more poop, better than what you've got.

We didn't have automobiles and we didn't have money. But I didn't think I was so bad off. We didn't think we had anything coming to us and we pretty much made our own way. I see kids now who have to have all kinds of toys. Bedrooms are crammed with toys.

On a ranch you're invited. People say, 'Here put your horse away. Come have some supper.' My God, living in town you don't dare visit anybody for fear you'll impose on them. You can't do that here. Call ahead. They really don't want to see you.

In Missoula – any city or town – if you have a friend who just stops in, good for him. Welcome him when he comes. You could go see him when you go by his place.