

Chapter XI

DEBUT INTO SOCIETY



The only thing to go to in the community where we grew up was the dances held at the Calkin's place in the loft of a barn. Mr. Calkins had built a new barn and put a dance floor in the upstairs. I went to a few dances there soon after I had graduated from knee to long pants. Father had gotten the lady that used the red light to light her house to give us older kids some dancing lessons, so when it came to the dancing part I could do pretty good for a hillbilly kid. I found out though that knowing how to dance wasn't so important as knowing how to talk to girls. Now if I ran into a boy that I hadn't seen for a few days or if I met a new boy, I could tell him about going coon hunting a few nights before and the dogs got after a skunk the first think so we had to give up and go home, or I could tell him our old sow had a litter of ten pigs, I could bet him that old Dolly could outrun his horse or that I could beat him in a game of marbles. But when it came to talking to girls - well, just what did you say to them.

On two or three different girls I tried, "It's been a nice day" or "How's your family?", or "What grade are you in school?", and "Do you like to dance?" That kind of talk didn't make me very popular with girls and I about decided dancing wasn't for me. I liked music though, so decided it was worth the twenty-five cents it cost just to go and hear the music. I thought I was in love with one girl but I never could get up courage enough to say anything to her about it so my feelings all went to waste. I remember I bought twenty-five cents wroth of candy to give her one time. Then I got to thinking if I went by her house to give it to her, what would I say? I decided I had better eat the candy. After I had eaten a couple of pieces, her brother came along so I gave him the candy and asked him to give it to her for me.

After I went to work on the flume and had money of my own, I began to go to dances at Bella Vista. The dances there were quite large. In the

summer time they were held on an outdoor platform and people from all around the country, as well as from Redding attended. By this time my sister Nell was a young lady. Some of the men working on the flume tried to shine around her but she would have nothing to do with them. John Setzer who ran a cut-off saw in the factory at Bella Vista started to court her. He would come up to the flume house with his horse and buggy and take her to dances. Later they were married.

When Bill was home, he and I would sometimes go to the Bella Vista dances together. We would ride the six miles down the flume on a raft and then walk back after the dance was over, getting home just about in time for breakfast. Then we would work all day. By evening we were dragging our feet and ready to go to bed.

Some of the girls from Bella Vista, daughters of the bosses and would-be society class, let it be known that they didn't want to dance with "hillbillies" like us. They only wanted to dance with men who were office workers and had nice white hands. It hurt my feelings but we stuck to our class and learned to have a good time without dancing with them. I even got to the place where I could tell a girl that she was the prettiest girl at the dance and such talk as that.

I guess I shouldn't have felt that way, but in later years when all of the hillbilly Wilsey boys were considered somewhat successful, it gave me a feeling of satisfaction to learn that some of the girls who thought we weren't good enough to dance with, married men who were not so successful even though they did have white hands.