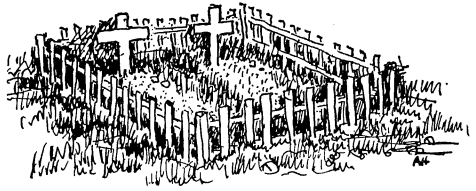


## Chapter I

# BOYHOOD MEMORIES MY FIRST HOME



My parents lost their first two children, Edgar and Leona, with scarlet fever when they were very small. Edgar died January 18, 1886, so he would have lived about three years and two months. Edna died three weeks later on February 6, 1886, so she was only fourteen months old at the time of her death. Our home was in the country, it was in the winter time and because of bad weather and poor roads it was impossible to get to town. For this reason, the children were buried in home-made coffins on the place where we lived. They were buried near the garden spot not far from the house. I can still see the neat picket fence Father built around the graves.

One morning when I first woke up, I thought I heard the dead children crying. I don't believe I was much over two years old at the time. It upset me so that I started to cry and Mother had a hard time getting me to stop long enough so that she could tell me that what I heard was a rabbit caught in a trap that Father had set along the garden fence. If you have ever heard a wild rabbit cry when it is first caught, I think you will understand why Mother had such a hard time consoling me.

Another incident that happened before I was three years old, I can well remember. Aunt Sadie came to visit us. She had no children of her own, and for some reason she enjoyed teasing me. My name being Roy, she enjoyed calling me "Roy, Poy, bad boy". Now I never considered myself bad and it hurt my feelings to think anyone thought I was bad. Like a whipped puppy I crawled under the bed and hid. I didn't come out until my mother pulled me out. While lying under the bed, I made up my mind that if I ever grew up I would never tease little boys. I am sure it was several years later before I learned when people were fooling and when they meant what they said. During my grown-up life I have known a few people that it took more than a small boy to decide whether they meant what they said or not.

I want to tell you about my first home. I was born there on December 5, 1889, about one-half hour before midnight. This is only hear-say because I don't remember a thing that happened that day. You would think a fellow could remember such an important thing as his birth. I remember a little about the house I was born in. I am sure it didn't have more than three rooms, and maybe only two. Most country houses in those days had one big room that was used as a living room with beds in one end partitioned off with a curtain. The kitchen was a lean-to built on to one side of the main building.

There was no such thing as a bathroom in those days. I can remember

being given a bath in a wash-tub except in summer when we could go swimming in the creek - after I got old enough for swimming. For the other function of the bathroom, we had a little building in the back yard.

My first bed was a home-made crib. I am sure my older brother Willie and sister Nellie had their turn in sleeping in it before I came along. I slept in it until my brother Earl was born when I was three years old. Then he got the crib and I was graduated to one of the bunk beds in the corner. They had board bottoms and straw on the boards to keep them from being so hard. I remember the wood-box behind the kitchen stove. That's where I sat and complained about being hungry while Mother was cooking breakfast.

My first home was on what is now Highway 299E about 25 miles from Redding. Since the road has been straightened out, the place where we lived is only about twenty miles from Redding. The road such as it was in those days, ran close to our house. In fact, almost in our front yard. One thing that impressed me when I was real small was the teams of four and six horses that went by the house hauling freight from Bella Vista or Redding to the mill above Round Mountain or clear on to Fall River Mills. It was not the horses or wagons that fascinated me so much as it was the bells that were on the lead horses. There was always a set of four or five bells placed on top of the collar around the neck of each lead horse. These bells were made to have a clear loud sound, and the purpose of them was to warn teams or other rigs coming from the opposite direction so they could pull out and stop at the first place in the road wide enough to pass in. Such places were not too close together. I remember being with my folks in a buggy one time when we met a four horse team. There was no room to pass so we had to unhitch our horse and the men lifted the buggy over the bank and held it while the team passed.

In those days, with good luck, a team could go from Redding to Terry's Mill or Montgomery Creek in two days. One interesting thing is that it would cost about the same today as it did in those days to ship 100 pounds from Redding to Montgomery Creek - while in those days it took two days or more and now it would be done in less than an hour.

To get back to my story of the bells I can't remember when I didn't like music and the bells must have been music to my young ears, for I remember listening to them as long as they could be heard. Sometimes a driver would stop at our house to get a drink or to let his horses rest. The horses would shake their heads to get rid of the flies. This would ring the bells which was a real treat to me. I often wondered if the horses didn't like the sound of the bells too, for when they were traveling it looked like they were keeping in step with the music of the bells.

One other outstanding point in my life was the first pair of pants I ever owned. In those days boys wore dresses until they were three or four years old. I suppose it was because mothers made all the kids clothes and dresses were easier made than pants. Another reason may have been that

if there were boys and girls in the family they could trade around and it wouldn't take so many clothes. The worst of it was the dresses were Mother Hubbard style. I am sure that if you tried to get a three or four year old boy to wear a Mother Hubbard dress today, you would have a fight on your hands. Anyway Mother made these knee-pants and put them on me by the flour barrel in the kitchen. It must have been a big day for me or I wouldn't remember the details so well.

Another incident that I remember happened when I was between three and four years old. My sister Nellie and I were playing in the back yard together. She had a small hatchet in her hands. It was one Father or Mother used to split kindling. I guess we were not supposed to play with it. I put my hand down on the chopping block and said to Nellie, "Chop my fingers off". I don't know whether I meant what I said or not, she must have thought I did for she came down with the hatchet and cut three of my fingers. She must have been good on the aim as she hit my fingers as close up to my hand as she could without missing them. She didn't cut my fingers off but she cut one of them so deep that it left a scar that has reminded me down through the years not to ask a girl to do something if you don't mean it.

The only neighbors that we had at our first home was the McCandless family. They lived less than half a mile from us. Mother took us kids and went to visit them sometimes and Mrs. McCandless came to our house sometimes. I don't remember much about them but that Mr. McCandless had a long beard and Mrs. McCandless was fat and jolly. They had two sons, Lee and Marvin, and a daughter Ella. There was a lady staying with them when Earl was born. Her name was Pearl Klinger and she named the baby Earl Pearl. While Earl was a boy, he never used his middlename because he said it was a girls name and he wasn't a girl. After he grew up he always signed his name Earl P. Wilsey.

An interesting incident that happened at our first home, though it happened before I was born and I remember it as told to us by our Mother - when her first child was a baby some company came. It was summer time so they all went swimming in the creek. While they were swimming they placed the baby on a blanket on the bank and a little dog they had lay down by the baby to watch it. While they were in the water, a mountain lion came up close to the baby. The little dog ran toward the lion barking and the lion picked up the dog and carried him off leaving the baby unharmed. Mother said Grandfather Wilsey was at the house and later when he told the story, which he liked to do, he always said the women were so scared they came running home without any clothes on.