

## Chapter III

# BUZZARD ROOST and COW CREEK HOME



In the spring, Father went back to his job at the mill above Round Mountain and when school was out he moved us up to Buzzard Roost so we could be close to his work and he could come home every week.

The place called Buzzard Roost was about a half-mile west of the present Round Mountain store. It consisted of Pehrson's Hotel and Saloon and Berg's store and Post Office and about three or four houses. Father rented one of the houses for the summer for us to live in. The Post Office was called Round Mountain but the place was called Buzzard Roost. Some old timers said the way it got its name was one day as the horsedrawn, daily stage was passing, a well known passenger noticed several drunks leaning over a rail fence. They were quite liquored up and trying to relieve their stomachs. The passenger remarked, "those drunks look like a bunch of buzzards roosting on a fence". From then on the place was known as Buzzard Roost, though the official name of the Post Office remained Round Mountain.

The Saloon was the nearest one to the mill and on week-ends there was always drinking, gambling, and fighting going on so Mother kept us in the house or yard. People used to say Mr. Pehrson made two barrels of whiskey out of each one he bought by adding water and tobacco. I don't know whether it was true or not, but I sure know it made lots of men drunk. I saw so many drunk men that summer, I was glad when fall came and we could get away from there. I don't remember too much about what happened that summer. We went to summer school for a couple of months, but not long enough for me to get through the second grade.

One day there were about fifty Indians going up the road on horseback. They had been to some kind of meeting and were going back to Modoc County. Some of these men had long braided hair and some of them had long feather war bonnets on. They stopped for a while. We kids were scared and stayed in the house until they left.

Mr. Berg, the storekeeper, was a kind old Jewish man. He used to give us a stick of candy once in a while. His was the typical county store. He had the pot bellied stove with three or four spittoons around it. There were nearly always some men sitting around the stove, whether or not it was cold weather. I was too young at that time to know anything about politics, but I am sure from what I heard of the talking and spitting around the pot bellied stove, that all the political questions of that time were debated and settled there.

There was the old-time coffee grinder on the counter and when Mother

would buy a pound of coffee, Mr. Berg would pour coffee beans in the grinder and after he had turned the handle a few times, the coffee would come out ready to use. Then there was the candy barrel and the cracker barrel and a lot of other things that came in barrels behind the counter. In Mr. Berg's store, you could buy anything from a spool of thread to a set of harness for the horses.

During the summer, Father made a deal to buy the place on Cow Creek which became the Wilsey home for over 50 years. We moved there in time to start to school in the fall of 1895.

Father had gotten some pigs and chickens and we had a horse but no cow. We were pretty young to work but Willie, Nellie, and I all pitched in and helped Mother get the place cleaned up and in shape to live in. We helped to take care of the pigs and chickens so we would have more to eat without having to buy it, and in the spring we helped plant a garden. My brother Lawrence had been born by this time, making four boys and one girl in our family.

Mother never had a doctor when any of her children were born. Granny always came to visit us about the time a baby was to be born. When Lawrence was born, I began to wonder where babies came from. Granny being the kind of person that always had answers to a little boy's questions, I asked her. She said right off without any hesitation that God made them and the stork brought them. I thought I saw a little twinkle in her eye when she said it, and I am sure that I had a suspicion that she wasn't telling the whole truth. I believed the part about God making babies all right, but I suspected that Granny did the bringing because the babies showed up about the same time she did.

A few months after Lawrence was born, our old bay mare, Dolly, had a colt. I remember going out to the barn to see it. The colt's legs were so long he couldn't get his mouth to the ground. I wondered how he was going to eat when about that time he began to get his dinner. Then I saw that he didn't need to reach the ground with his mouth. His legs were so long that I could have walked right under his belly if he would have let me. I remember thinking to myself, "Now if a stork brought him, he had to be a pretty big stork". Granny had gone home by this time so I couldn't ask her how a stork could carry a colt with legs three feet long.

Not long after this, I think I was between seven and eight years old by this time, I was out to the barn by myself and ran onto an old sow in the pen that was in the act of bringing her babies into the world. She had four little pigs sucking on her. I began to look around to see if I could see the stork that brought them and before I knew it there were five pigs sucking on her. I decided to watch closer this time and all at once a little pig popped right out of her and began to look for a teat to suck. Then before you could say "Jack Robinson" another one came. By this time I knew where baby pigs came from, but I didn't know how they got to where they came from.

I guess it was some time later before I learned that. At that time, I knew that potatoes grew in the ground and other things grew in different places. I even knew that chickens grew in eggs, so I figured that little pigs must grow inside their mother. Later I learned that my figuring wasn't far from right. That day I also figured out in my small brain that if that was where baby pigs came from, it was very likely where baby colts came from even if their legs were long, and it was also possible that was where baby boys and girls came from. I made up my mind that when Granny came back to visit us, I wouldn't tell her what I had learned. If she wanted to believe that storks brought babies it was alright with me.

I still believe that part Granny told me about God making the babies is true. Man has done some wonderful things since I was seven years old. In that time moving pictures, the phonograph, radio, television, the automobile, the airplane and thousands of other things have been invented and perfected. Man has orbited the earth and will soon no doubt land on the moon and return. He has also discovered the atom and invented a bomb that can wipe us all off the earth. In spite of all this, man has never been able to make a baby and put life in it without the help of God.

In my life time, I have heard a lot of people claim that they didn't believe in God. If any intelligent person would sit down ten minutes and study his hand, I don't see how he could help but believe in an all wise God. Suppose he had made our hands without thumbs. Try and see how many things we couldn't do without thumbs. Suppose He had made us without fingernails, or suppose we didn't have joints in our fingers. God himself said in the Bible, "The fool saith in his heart there is no God".

Granny was a very religious woman and I got most of my early religious training from her. Her favorite song was "I'm a Child of the King. I'm a Child of the King. With Jesus my Savior, I'm a Child of the King". Granny was a Methodist of the old school and very strict. Some way she instilled in me a feeling that God was like a policeman standing over me with a club ready to hit me if I did wrong. Her stepsons, as well as her own son, grew up to be bitter against religion. I have heard my own father say that if all people were Christians we would have hell on earth.

Uncle Charlie, who grew up to be an old bachelor, used to enjoy telling a story on Granny and her preachers, as he called them. Methodist preachers used to serve several small churches as they rode around on horseback to take care of them. Because of this they were called circuit-riders. Granny always kept them at her place when they came to serve the church nearby. One day when a minister came, Granny sent Uncle Charlie to the barn with him to help take care of his horse. According to Uncle Charlie, he kept a bottle at the barn and he got the preacher to take several drinks. In fact, the preacher drank so much that Uncle Charlie had to put him in the manger to sleep it off. When Granny scolded him for what he had done, he said they laid Christ in the manger when he was born so it ought to be all right to lay

a preacher in the manger.

I remember hearing my father, as well as my uncles, say that Granny was so strict she wouldn't even let them play on Sundays. This is no doubt at least part of their reason for growing up opposed to any kind of religion. There must be a happy medium between being too strict and not strict enough when it comes to raising kids. We tried the medium angle on our five and they all turned out pretty good. Our four daughters are all active in Christian work. Our only son was twenty-six when we lost him. About the last thing he said to me before he went was that he wanted to thank us for raising him the way we did.

I remember hearing Granny talk a lot about her family while I was very young. She always stood up for them regardless of their faults. I don't remember Uncle Dick because he died before I got a good start. Granny said he married a girl that lived in a "red light house". I never could figure out in my small mind why any one would want to use a red light to light their house. The coal-oil lamps we used didn't give much light, and some way I knew a red light gave even less light. I think I had seen a red lantern. Anyway, Granny said she figured Uncle Dick's wife poisoned him so she could get his money. I never heard her say how much money he had, but if he was like his brothers, he didn't have enough to be worth killing for. This same woman that used a red light to light her house married another man and lived near us for a while when I was about ten years old. She was the only woman I had ever seen at that time that smoked cigarettes. She rolled her own and she used to roll six cigarettes every night before she went to bed so she would have them to smoke during the night. Speaking of smoking, reminds me of my experience in smoking when I was pretty young. We brothers, plus some neighbor boys, tried to smoke everything that was smokeable except tobacco. We never tried tobacco because we had been taught that it would make us sick. Granny even said we might die if we smoked tobacco too young. I know I wasn't about to try it if it was that bad. Kids in those days were just like they are now - some of them. If they had that kind of training and were not willing to believe it, they had to try a cigar or cigarette to see if it really would kill them. I remember seeing a neighbor boy smoke his first cigar. He had stolen it from his dad and wanted to prove to the other kids that he was tough. Before he had smoked very long, I thought he was going to die. He got so sick that I think he would have been glad if he could have died.

We used to cut up dry grape-vine limbs about the size of a cigarette and smoke them. We smoked dry leaves of different kinds rolled in wrapping paper, also corn silks and about anything else we thought might taste good. We soon grew tired of that kind of smoking and for some reason I never had any desire to start smoking tobacco. Today I don't know the taste of tobacco, only through what I have gotten second-hand. I have often thought that maybe a good way to keep kids from smoking would be to have some

harmless substitute for them to try on, then maybe they would get their fill before they got in the habit. While we were on our smoking binge, we were lucky enough to never burn the barn down or start a forest fire.

I think one other reason I never smoked was that my father smoked a pipe and we used to say he smoked once a day. He started before he got his shoes on in the morning and quit when he went to bed at night. He smoked Dixie Queen tobacco that came in a can. Each can cost a dollar, and a can just lasted him a week. He only made sixty dollars a month in those days and spent four of it on tobacco. We didn't have too much to eat at times, and as young as I was, I figured four dollars would buy quite a lot of food. Today when I see both father and mother smoking a cigarette and kiddies with their toes sticking out of their shoes it makes my heart ache for the kiddies.

Our well where we got water for the house was in the front yard. It was an open well and we drew the water from the well with a bucket on a rope. The rope ran over a well wheel. When the bucket was full it was a pretty good load for me. The well was twenty feet deep. On wash days it was my job to fill all the tubs and fill an extra barrel so Mother wouldn't have to draw water. Wash day was quite an ordeal at our house. It was done pretty much according to an old "Kentucky receipt" which went something like this - spelling and all:

1. bild a fire in back yard to heet kettle of rain water.
2. Set tubs so smoke won't blow in eyes if wind is pert.
3. shave one hole cake soap in bilen water.
4. sort things, make three pile - 1 pile white, 1 pile cullord, 1 pile work britches and rags.
5. stur flour in cold water to smooth and thin down with bilin water.
6. rub dirty spots on board, scrub hard and bile. rub cullord but don't bile - just reench and starch.
7. take white things out of kettle with broom stick handle then reench, blew and starch.
8. spred tee towels on grass.
9. hang old rags on fence.
10. pore reench water in flower bed.
11. scrub porch with hot soapy water
12. turn tubs upside down.
13. go put on clean dress - smooth hair with side combs - brew cup of tee - set and rest and rock a spell and count blessins.

The only thing Mother added to this routine was that she scrubbed all the floors in the house each wash day. Our floors like most houses in those days were made of rough boards. Mother's floors always shone after she got through scrubbing them. Another part of the receipt she didn't live up to was to rest and rock and count her blessings. She didn't do this anyway until she had gotten something to eat for a bunch of hungry kids.

We always kept a bucket of water in the kitchen to drink and for other uses. We had a rule that whoever used the last water in the bucket had to go to the well and get a new bucket full. This rule was just among those of us old enough to draw water. We always tried to work it so the other fellow would have to get the water, but Mother acted as referee and saw that we each did our fair share.

The well had to be cleaned out once or twice a year. We always did this when Father was home or when some other men folks were there to help. It took about a half hour steady drawing to get the water all out of the well, then my job was to get down in the bottom of the well and shovel the mud, empty cups, and other things that had been dropped in the well into the bucket. Then the men would draw it up. To get down in the well, I stood in the bucket and hung onto the rope while they let me down. They drew me up the same way.

One time the water got to tasting bad so Mother got a looking glass and reflected the sunlight down into the well. The water being good and clear, you could see everything that was at the bottom of the well. Right in the middle of the well was a dead toad lying on his back. You can be sure we didn't drink any more well water for a while. We packed water from the creek until we got help and got the well cleaned out.

We used the well as a refrigerator in summer time. We would put the milk and butter in a bucket, tie a rope to it and let it down until it just touched the water. That way the butter would keep hard and the milk would keep sweet and cold for meal time. In later years, father bought a hand pump and put it in the well and closed the top. I never could see much advantage in a hand pump over a bucket. They were both work as far as I was concerned and you could get a good fresh drink quicker with a bucket.

Butchering was always an interesting time when we were kids. We always fed up seven or eight hogs so they would be ready to butcher about Christmas. Uncle Charlie, Doc and Jim, all bachelors, lived in a cabin close to our place. Father always got them to help butcher. We kids had them save the bladders out of the hogs. We would put a straw in them and blow them up and when they dried they made good balloons. After the hogs had cooled a couple of days, they had to be cut up. The hams, shoulders, and side meat were all salted down in boxes for two or three weeks, then hung up in the smoke house and smoked for a week. Then we would have hams and bacon enough to last a whole year. We always had sausage and spare-ribs until we tired of them. Then there was the lard to render out. After the fat was cut up it was put in a big iron kettle hanging in a tree. A fire was built under it and the grease cooked out. Then it would be put in five gallon coal oil cans to cool and we would have lard enough to last a year.