COX FAMILY -- 1993

Sunday, June 27, 1993 -- a Central Valley afternoon: since we won't be able to attend the 1993 reunion due to money and vacation-leave constraints, and will have to reschedule ourselves for 1996, we will forward this. When the news of the development of the Harold Lloyd birthplace reached us last winter I wrote a collection of personal memories as they pertain to Burchard as a community. They still lack a lot of being done. They'll get to Burchard eventually, and I hope to publish them in the near future, if I ever get them right. While doing that, I decided to start a similar collection for the family. A lot of the following paragraphs are transferred from the Burchard memories, and some of those will mean a lot more to the family than they would to the community at large. These writings could represent us at the 1993 reunion. Here they are.

My family's property was a very big yard and it stretched from what was then the dirt road in front of our house, Cass Street, back west, downhill, for most of a city block to the fence row west of the house. That fence row forms part of the city limit boundary. I found out early on that our land was about five acres. As soon as I was old enough to go out of the house and walk around by myself, I had the run of this expanse.

One summer afternoon in 1947 I was killing time wandering around -- and I came upon the rank of beehives that Dad maintained under the Chinese Elm trees north of the house. I also came upon a large stick. This made a good solid sound as I pounded it on the tops of the hives. The residents of the hives were highly upset with this intrusion, and they all came out to see what was going on. I also found out what was going on.

My sister was there, she says, although I cannot remember that fact. Her memory of this event is sharper than mine is otherwise. She remembers the sun suit.

My sister remembers that I was wearing a yellow sun suit. I guess this was full of bees, and so was my hair. I can remember running south up the embankment toward the house, yelling as loud as possible. My next memory is of Mom peeling the sun suit off me, and scraping off layers of very mad honey bees. I can remember her standing in the kitchen in front of the mirror that filled the door in front of the drop-down ironing board, pulling curlers out of her hair so that the bees would come out with them. I don't think I was still yelling as the flush blade of the paring knife went down my forearms, scraping out stingers as it went. The bee venom caught up with me as Dad and Mom and I went on a car trip from Pawnee City southwest on farm roads to Summerfield later the same afternoon, making me too sick to finish the ice cream cone they had bought me. I have always been leery of stinging insects.

While I was born five and one-half months before the assault on Omaha

Beach, my memories of World War II are very sketchy. One of the major radio news commentators in the United States then was H. V. Kaltenborn. His voice had a magnificent drone that will be part of history. I can recall Mom having the little Motorola radio in the kitchen tuned to his broadcast in the late afternoon and I heard him as I marched around the dining room table thinking, usually out loud, about everything.

There is something about a New Year's Eve when it is the turn of a decade that makes it worth remembering.

The first New Year's Eve that I can remember at all was when we saw in 1950. The folks had decided that I could stay up through midnight with all the grownups and see in the new year. I had just turned six. Mom and Dad had called in Margaret and Marie Tegtmeier and their parents, Bill and Sophie Tegtmeier, and Elizabeth and Frank Simon. I don't recall if Maureen Tegtmeier and Yvonne and Wiladeen Speier were there. I installed myself in an easy chair beside a six-foot Christmas tree in the front room beside the cathedral radio to watch the grownups do what they liked best -- sit around the dining room table and drink beer and play Canasta. The hours rolled on, the tree, with its lights long since unplugged, finally tipped over, and I sat there happily watching the evening develop. Dad came over and pulled the tree upright, midnight arrived, and everybody split.

Election Day was a holiday in its own unique way. Presidential elections were major big time. I was born, baptized, and raised a Republican and I grew up in the days when we all liked Ike or, most of us, that is.

Six weeks before my fifth birthday Mom and Dad went down to the fire hall where the Plum Creek Precinct polling place was and confidently voted for who would the next day be President-elect Dewey. Maybe it's just as well that I can't remember the mood of the outcome of that election. I do, however, remember the first political conversation I was ever in; one day I asked Mom what was wrong with President Truman. "He has his head stuck in the sand, like an ostrich." Oh.

The medium-sized black beetles with red chevron stripes on their wings who frequented the outside basement walls of the house in the autumn were Box Elder beetles, known in our family as "democrat bugs," spelled with a lower-case "d." Interestingly, a lot of our neighbors were Democrats, and we all loved each other like family. Politics around home in those days was rather mild. My own eventual political affiliation was so far away in the future then that it was unknowable, like a science-fiction story of far-future history, like Frank Herbert's "Dune."

Mom and Dad always worked as part of the election committee which maintained the polling place on the big day. Such duties always included lighting the big stove in the fire hall early in the morning -- in that climate, Election Day was usually cold, cloudy, and dry. A few days before

the election Dad would bring home big sample ballots of all the issues on the ballot, printed on cardboard, big enough to mount on walls like posters. That gave me ballots to mark on with pencils while I lay on the floor. So I knew how to vote when I was still in primary school, just old enough to read. Voting became a religion, the reality to be achieved when I finally turned twenty-one, a long time in the future.

In the very early 1950's and farther back for a good many years, Dad served on the town board in Burchard. This means that at times he took a turn at driving the maintainer, to blade down the ruts in Burchard's streets. Time to refer to the index: the "maintainer" was a road grader with a partially-enclosed two-seat cab for the operator. I was no longer a little boy when I finally absorbed the fact that all road graders might not have cabs, and that they might be known as "road graders" rather than as "maintainers."

One summer afternoon, clear and hot, I spent the hours riding around town with Dad, looking behind as the deep, hard ruts disappeared under the grader's blade, and forward down the steel arms of the grader and, below them, at that satisfyingly big, long blade, and the soothing feel of its lower edge planing down the solid, dry mud of the streets of Burchard. The old diesel engine made far too much noise in the open cockpit for any degree of conversation; my mind wandered as Dad drove the machine, nice and slow.

This grader ride had to have occurred in about 1952; the two earlier years were dark and rainy, a time when all of those ruts were manufactured.

On what will my mind wander, while the grader pushes south down the hill behind the schoolhouse, on Gage Street? At that young age I still had traveled no farther west than North Platte: there is a place out there, very far away, that everybody knows about, called California. What kind of people live there? What would it be like to be out there and know some of them? The family TV set and my introduction to the original Mickey Mouse Club and all those little Californians with mouse ears were several years in the future. Maybe I forgot that I have cousins around Ventura. I knew them. But still.... I visualized some anonymous person saying: "there's a lot of nice people out there." Was that prophetic? Forty years later this memory would reassemble itself in my office, beside the computer in which I process data regarding health insurance for dozens of thousands of California children in custody cases, in the eighth-most-populous Nation-State on this planet. And I sit there, remembering. One day back there, back then, in a little town on a long, hot summer afternoon, there was a long, spidery yellow road grader with a nice big, roaring diesel engine and a long, heavy blade, and some rough streets. And my Dad and I....

Television found its way into our lives rather slowly. Beginning in the very early 1950's there were a few TV sets in town, all of them either owned or maintained by Joe Ruzicka. We spent a lot of evenings with Margaret

and Marie Tegtmeier and sat with rapture in front of black-and-white TVs that Bill Tegtmeier had gotten from Joe Ruzicka. Dad and Bill Tegtmeier were always together on Friday evenings to watch: "The Friday Night Fights are ON THE AIR!" I think Dad's motive for getting a TV set for us was, as if he needed a motive, to provide a place where he and Bill Tegtmeier could convene to watch the Friday night fights. These were the days of Sugar Ray Robinson and Ezzard Charles. Saturday, December 31, 1955, was clear, very dry, and unseasonably warm for Burchard for that date. It was shirtsleeve weather by afternoon. And at about 11 AM, I walked home from Downtown to find the red pickup of radio-and-TV technician Frank Weiss parked in our front yard. Frank Weiss was aloft above the roof of our house, mounting a very tall tower on which was bolted a TV antenna. In the box of the pickup was a very large red pasteboard crate with "Emerson" printed on its sides. I stood there and pushed my head against the crate and told myself, out loud: "I'll be damned!" That evening, Dad, Mom, Margaret and Marie Tegtmeier, and I sat there and watched the TV version of "Gunsmoke," then Jackie Gleason and Audrey Meadows and, finally, New Year's Eve in Times Square in New York. On live TV! This changed our lives. The cathedral radio still sat there in the living room and the Motorola was still in the kitchen, but something else had pre-empted both of them.

In the spring of 1956 I became acquainted with the original Mickey Mouse Club. I joined the legions of young boys of the United States who had a crush on Annette Funicello. I think that Annette Funicello defined my concept of what California would be if I could ever get there. It's too bad that she did not personally answer the big, long fan letter that Bill and Jack Rinne and I wrote to her and sent to the Disney Studios, along with the Standard Oil road map of Nebraska with Pawnee County and Burchard outlined with a red pencil. They sent us a postcard with a black-and-white picture of Johnny Tremaine. That was TV, and it was the third quarter of the 1950's. It was also Dick Clark, and Red Skelton, and Ed Sullivan, and "What's My Line?" Mom was no longer following "The Romances Of Helen Trent" and "One Man's Family" so religiously. A couple years later, I would personally resurrect the Motorola and the great radio for myself.

As I think back on this now, I can reflect on how I finally became Californian, and the fact that Annette Funicello now lives in the Los Angeles area 450 miles south of us, married with grown children, and is suffering from multiple sclerosis. My thoughts are with a fine personality that I never met, although I finally came to be part of her geographical world.

For a time I was a newspaper publisher. There was the Burchard Weekly Planet. Somehow in the early spring of 1956, I got the idea that I could use the new Smith-Corona manual portable typewriter that Lawrence Transue had sent me, to really do something. The television Superman was affiliated with the Metropolis Daily Planet and some friends of mine were hawking the Lincoln Journal: ("Link - UHN Jurr - NUHL Pay - PUHRR!"). Okay. Let's join the movement. I hand-wrote the paper, typed it on the little Smith-Corona using a lot of carbon paper, and thus I had a town paper. I

recall that the Page One feature of Issue #1 focused on a 1955 return to the archaeological digs of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and I learned how to spell the name of a desert dry wash known as Wadi Qumran.

I soon got media coverage from Max Martin and the Pawnee Republican ("Young Editor Busy At Burchard"), and I acquired some notoriety. I marketed the little publication by a means that worked very well for the time and place -- I walked around town and told everybody that I had a weekly paper for them to read. I had a list of subscribers rather fast; I guess people believed in the paper. At that time Jess Ray was the school superintendent and he adopted the paper to use for a high school project. Immediately my weekly appeared on legal-size paper, mimeographed, and Jess Ray was telling me he wanted me to lower the price from 5¢ to 2¢ a copy. I told him "no way" and he immediately halted the high school project of publishing my paper. I think it was at about that time that I decided to give the project up and the weekly paper became history. During its short life a few issues of the paper went to Belgium. Through Viola and Elmer Rinne I had met a man who was visiting from a town called Overpelt. I don't remember learning from the visitor where in Belgium his town was, but I acquired the address and he got a few issues. I wonder if any of them ever actually found their way to him. Somehow I can remember, about a year later, in an inexplicable fit of self-punishment, burning all of the file copies. I wish I had never done that. In so doing I destroyed one of the very few notable things I did as a young boy in Burchard.

1952

As I come to know Virginia's family and recall my own, I am reminded occasionally how it is when one says what one knows, when one shouldn't be saying anything. ("It's A Family Affair": Sly And The Family Stone) There was a time in the autumn of ~~1951~~ when my sister came home one evening and announced: "Guess what?! I have a date with Bob Utermohlen!" Bob had recently gotten the position of teaching the junior high school grades at Burchard. "Don't tell anybody!" Jerry did tell somebody -- he cannot recall who. The word got back to the home area, and Jerry was rightfully chastised. In the far term, no worry. Bob will need to correct me on some of these details, but I recall that his Chevy had a rope with which the passenger-side door was tied shut. This was before the days of computer-driven cars, passenger trains, airliners, etc.

? It was a '52 Chevy. No problem w/ the doors.

What follows here is my memory of radio and TV from the late 1940's on for about ten years. I tend to bury things in detail. Sorry about that.

I lived through my very early years with radio and I have always been oriented toward radio for a good share of my contact with the world, although I spend maybe 40 or 50 hours a week in front of the TV in our home, or watching TV in the Torch Club. My earliest recollection of radio is of the cathedral radio that stood in the living room of our house in Burchard. It was a GE and I cannot, obviously, remember what model, etc., but it stood three and a half feet tall and weighed about one hundred pounds less than

its mass looked. It was hollow inside except for the huge cone speaker and the electrical hardware above that, behind its face, that drove the machine. It was a three-band, as I recall, and I think the non-used band might have been AM long-wave. The other band that the folks never accessed was FM; there were no FM stations within reach of us till after I had grown up and was leaving home. But the radio produced a sound that would make an audiophile proud, with that very large cone speaker. It was unencumbered by any other speakers in there with it, and everything inside the chassis was simple. On: power: tune it in: and go. With that radio I grew up with WOW, KFAB, and whatever else was tuned in before I was old enough to dial the tuner for what I wanted. It was like the family TV of later years, always on in the evening, and during the day, if we were all home to listen. Its output was always there droning away in the background. I knew of the news people of WOW and KFAB, both stations in Omaha which I know are still there, the radio personalities' names, and when they were on air time. Through that big speaker, as well as through the little Motorola in the kitchen, I heard H. V. Kaltenborn.

Through both of them I heard the soap operas. The names of those programs are like the order page in a catalog of old-time radio cassettes. If you can remember them and if you can afford them, there they are. Just order. Mom's all-time favorite was "One Man's Family," suppertime on weekdays. Nobody can ever forget the adventures of Father Barbour. The weekday afternoons contained: "Just Plain Bill," "Lorenzo Jones," "Stella Dallas," "Young Widder Brown," "Backstage Wife," "Lone Ranger," and Claude Rains's program of what was then old-time radio. The mornings were: "The Romances Of Helen Trent," etc. Saturday mornings were filled with "Jukebox Jury," on KFAB.

The evenings were a little different. We had: "Mr. Keen, Tracer Of Lost Persons," "Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar," "Dragnet," "Boston Blackie," and Red Skelton. And on Sunday night was: "Big Town," and the program that always began with: "Call for Phil - lip Morr - risss!".

On a Monday night in the summer of 1955 I was there, ready, when the network that KFAB was affiliated with (NBC) began: "X Minus One." That was my favorite experience in radio of that time. The first episode I recall was the first one that I heard, hunkered behind the swinging kitchen door to isolate myself from the folks and the cathedral radio in the front room. This same episode is on the order list from the old-time radio cassette catalog. "Dr. Grimshaw's Sanitarium" is a fine half-hour to hear before you walk around in a gloomy, gray summer evening in the big yard outside, reflecting on what you just heard. The episode fit the mood of the evening. That was new radio for its time, and was sure new for me.

Early-morning weekday radio brought "The Breakfast Club" with Don McNeil (sic) from Chicago; you got to listen to them march around the breakfast table. That was followed by Arthur Godfrey.

Godfrey had all the talent anybody could want. I think maybe the dim

beginnings of my need for a warm climate that would eventually send me forever away from Burchard lay in my infatuation with his star, Hale Loke. She was my first knowledge of Hawaii. I fantasized about her and Hawaii day and night for years. Arthur Godfrey and Hale Loke could do no wrong. Then one day shortly before the cease-fire in Korea Godfrey went off the deep end; he fired Hale Loke and he fired Julius La Rosa ("I guess that was your swan song, Julie."). I vividly recall Mom reading the newspaper articles of this nightmare to Dad and I as Dad drove the miles of the mail route. (The newspapers destined for the route's farm patrons were our biggest source of print news.) That is how my early days of radio led to the first downfall of a hero, for me. Anybody who could do such a heinous thing ought to lose his pilot's license, or something. (Godfrey almost lost his, once. He buzzed the control tower of the airport in Teterboro, New Jersey.)

Thinking back, I can remember a lot of programs from the great radio and the Motorola. One of the fondest for me was late on Saturday afternoons during the first couple years of the 1950's. It ran fifteen minutes, I believe. It was The Hormel Girls. They were public relations and radio advertising for George Hormel and Company out of Austin, Minnesota. I believe they were a twelve-member chorus that sang and recorded the same set of songs that was aired every week. If I remember a song about "Clear the aisle and never smile at Mr. Crocodile," and "packin' my grip, and gonna make the San Fernando Valley my home!", my only association with any singer is with the Hormel Girls. Well, a very, very long time later I went and found the San Fernando Valley for myself, then my ten-speed and I went and found it again. Somehow I will find some tapes of the Hormel Girls, if Virginia and I have to go and find Austin, Minnesota, in the process.

There are a number of people that I know, many of them older than I am, that religiously remember "Gunsmoke," but they can't remember anybody other than James Arness. That is unfortunate. The radio characters that I remember for "Gunsmoke" are: William Conrad as Sheriff Matt Dillon, Georgia Ellis as Kitty, and Farley Baer (sic) as Doc. We listened to radio "Gunsmoke" for quite a few years. And I still think of those radio actors as the people of Dodge City when I think of "Gunsmoke." Seeing Arness and Amanda Blake and Wilburn Stone and all the men who were Chester was a treat -- I actually SAW them. But that made no excuse for forgetting William Conrad, Georgia Ellis, and Farley Baer (sic), especially for people who were older than I was when TV "Gunsmoke" came along.

Mom and I saved the cathedral radio in the summer of 1963. Mary and Bob were living in O'Neill, Nebraska, and the radio was stored in their basement. We had been visiting there for a week and it was time for us to drive the famous little blue '56 Ford back to Burchard. We loaded the cathedral radio in the trunk of the Ford and it made the fast trip across Nebraska with us; from O'Neill into a summer dawn, through Atkinson (a song called "Forty Days" on KOMA on the Ford's radio). That trip took us southeast through Johnny Carson's home country for our breakfast in Norfolk.

The great radio spent the next couple years in my bedroom. I wish I

still had it. Some losses of family heirlooms are painful due to being irreconcilable. Not quite so with that great old radio. Its ilk can be found in today's market of memorabilia. It will be done.

(As I understand, it was on this same radio that Mom and Dad sat at home one night in 1936 and listened to WLS and heard a young announcer named Herb Morrison announce the arrival of a great airship, the Hindenburg, at its mooring mast in Lakehurst, New Jersey.)

In terms of lost heirlooms, some are not replaceable, while the cathedral radio will be. There was a mantle clock that had come down through Mom's side of the family. This had come to me through Aunt Laura, Mom's older sister. This clock was about one hundred years old when I took charge of it in about 1961. It kept time for me in my bedroom in the Burchard house through my senior year of high school in Summerfield. It stayed there waiting for me until I made the recovery trip in June of 1980 to bring whatever was left of my stuff southwest to southern California. With the help of Rod Baade and Sharon Allen Baade and Larry Boward, that clock was shipped to Oxnard along the South Coast between Malibu and Ventura. Then it rode north to Sacramento in a North American Van Lines truck in October of 1980. Somewhat the worse for wear it survived until Norma and I tried to maintain our moveable household along Auburn Boulevard in Sacramento in October of 1984. In our time of vulnerability this old irreplaceable clock was ripped off by the drug-using friends of Norma's children and was totally lost. This places a terrible, unremoveable shadow of loss in my life and it deeply affected Norma, who could do little to divert the attentions of the thieving friends of her children. Therein sits a bitter point in my past. This makes me glad that at least, the cathedral radio might, and will, be replaceable. There is no stigma of irreconcilable loss hanging over the radio. It will be replaced, with joy.

Before I venture out into the Northern California rain for a New Year's morning breakfast (1993), I need to recall what it feels like to have somebody come home. In 1953 I was waiting for Tom to come home. He had been in the United States share of the occupation of what had become West Germany. He had been based in Mannheim. This was somewhere south of Bremerhaven, or so Bill Tegtmeier told us. One night in 1953 I was in my bedroom admiring the one-page advertisement I had clipped from the Saturday Evening Post that showed the license plates of all of the states of the United States and the provinces of Canada when I heard a commotion at the front door. Mom and Dad were yelling: "Here's Marie ... and Margaret ... and ... TOM!" That sound sent me very quickly from the bedroom to the front door, in about three steps. There was my big brother in his Army uniform, looking a little bit dazed. The next few weeks were full of memories, Army talk, as beautiful as it is, and the art of catching up on family and town affairs. Dad had a son with whom he could compare Army details. Dad had spent the Untied States' share of World War I in a camp in Deming, New Mexico, while Uncle Clay saw the festivities of Chateau Therie (sic) and Belleau Wood. But there was Army talk to be shared. I can recall now how good that felt.

Tom sent and brought home a load of Army shoulder patches, and thus I had one of my numerous collections. Mom sewed some of them, along with a set of Tom's Corporal stripes, onto a brown jacket for me and I had one of Tom's Army caps. I wore this outfit around Burchard with a justifiable amount of pride and it became my marque, so to speak, even when I tried to run home from the Saturday night free show in the Legion Hall in a driving rain, wherein all the outfit became totally soaked. I can recall Doris Hart and company turning the flat Army cap over and over on top of a stove trying to dry it out.

I don't recall very many instances of total fear in my young years, but I do recall the terror of polio. This memory was intensified recently by my watching an episode of the television series called "Homefront." The episode focused on polio in the Cleveland, Ohio, area in 1946. The story in the episode turned out benign, but my memory of polio is not benign. The folks were in terror every year regarding the possibility of my contracting the disease and I can recall many times when Mom and Dad would refuse to let me go outside. "You might catch it, Son." Remembering back from more than forty years later, I realize how accurate their fears were. It was a terrible time of justifiable paranoia well founded on fact. The hospitals in and around Lincoln were full of iron lungs and everyone made sure that their children saw the machines and the people in them. HIV is no more dreaded now than polio was then, and polio was a lot more explainable. You could visualize it. Jonas Salk was a true hero of the 1950's. I will never forget the night when the media networks announced his development of the vaccine.

To respect my love of transportation, a few thousand words about the little blue '56 Ford:

With the rural mail route Dad had to replace the car at least every other year, sometimes yearly. All but a few of the sixty-one miles of Dad's route were on dirt roads in a land of black prairie dirt. In terms of pedology this land surface is known as Brunizems -- the black prairie. That means mud, if there ever is enough wet weather to create wet roads. I remember a lot of such weather. When the roads were too muddy and bottomless for a regular car there was always a Ford Model A, or a Jeep. The last new car that Dad acquired was a 1956 Ford Mainline two-door sedan, the color of which was, according to the dealer's book, Glacier Blue. (And the dealer was Cecil Davis in Pawnee City.) Dad died in early July of 1958, so the car already had eighteen months of mail route mileage on it. It still ran like a top. Ford's products were very reliable. Mom and I inherited the little blue '56 as our wheels. Mom was a very good driver and a fairly good navigator. In navigating, what she lacked, I could quickly fill in. The car went everywhere.

As I went on through high school with my need to fulfill my share of

the motorized wheels that any high school student must have, the Ford was there, and Mom came to know the driving talents of all of my school friends; when it came my turn to drive, they had our Ford and the keys, and Mom worried hour by hour regarding how good a driver each one was, and what shape the Ford would come home in. In retrospect there never was anything to worry about. The car always came home, with me in it, and some gas in the tank, and the keys always ended up on the end table in our living room. Bill Rinne and the professional driver Jerry Allen came to know the little Ford well, and they knew its every whim and mood. Mom was famous among my crew as the only person in the community who was so particular that she would always have an increasingly old car rebuilt, retuned, and made like new again, whatever the cost. Mom and I always knew the right mechanics and the reliable garages. The blue Ford got older and its mileage piled up, and all my driving friends knew exactly its resonating speed, where the wheels would shimmy, the frame would vibrate, and the car would feel like hell, and beyond which, by another mile an hour or so faster, it would smooth out and hold the road like a champ. There were a lot of times when the car had to take us somewhere at a time when Mom didn't like the idea of driving, and I didn't want her on the road, when Jerry Allen was there. Jerry was a professional driver, a race-car driver with images of a very fast oval road in Indianapolis in his dreams. I lost track of the times when he drove the Ford for Mom and I, as I navigated. Having Jerry Allen at the wheel felt like being with Dan Gurney, Roger McCluskey, or Bob Bondurant.

In good conditions Mom loved to drive, and she had no queasy feelings about going anywhere. Let's remember the time when she came to meet the bus in Beatrice on a dry, warm Friday evening in the fall of 1963 so that I could spend the weekend in Burchard. It was a very dry, very clear, very warm Indian summer evening: full moon. Going east past Virginia and Lewiston on Highway 4, KOMA plays a new record, the latest effort by Bo Diddley: ("I look like a farmer, but I'm a lover -- can't judge a book by looking at the cover!"). This was a good clear Friday evening to be on the road. Mom was particular about the finer things in life, like trying to stay somewhere around or below the legal speed limit. After about two miles of Bo Diddley and the beautiful evening air and full moon ahead of us: "How come I'm going eighty miles an hour and I haven't done anything?!"

"Mom, just listen to Bo Diddley's beat, and look at that road! That feels too good to slow down!" Oh. When the little Ford felt good, it ran very smooth, and it could produce a lot of speed.

There is always somebody in your life whom you wish you had really appreciated, but, somehow, you didn't, until it was too late.

Grandma Cox's house was on the next property south of ours in Burchard. I don't know how old the house was, but it was there during the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century. Grandpa Sam Cox had built the house, I think, so he and Grandma Cox could come to Burchard after living on the expanse of the hill a few miles southeast of town. Dad was born in the house on that hill. If I remember the history right, the Native Americans who visited Grandpa and Grandma Cox around that house were Pawnee. All of these memories are subject to whoever can correct them, for detail.

Dad and his brothers and sisters grew up in the two-story house in Burchard. The house was given an unwanted ride on a Sunday in March of 1913 when the tornado visited the town and established its dominance over the humans in the community, and all of their sturctures. The house was picked up, twisted sideways in a few directions, then set back down. The doors in the place never sat squarely in their frames after that day.

There is a family story about Grandma and all of the kids, including Dad, sitting around the kitchen table in that house having noonday dinner one gloomy day when someone was attempting to pass a bowl of peach halves to someone else around the table when the maneuver was rudely and violently interrupted by a baseball-size hailstone coming through the window to land in the bowl of peaches, replete with shards of glass and its own mass of ice.

During an electrical storm one night in early 1950 the house took a direct hit from a bolt of lightning and the resulting fire started in the south (side) porch and gobbled up part of the house. I don't think Grandma Cox ever fully recovered from that trauma. She was right there, gamely leading us in a procession south along the path from our house to hers the following morning which was still overcast and wet from the recently-passed storm. She would show us what the lightning and fire had done to her house. Just before this, we had gathered on the front porch of our house to meet Grandma and hear her first comments about what had happened. She handed a crisp, crumbly black piece of something to Mom. Mom handed it to me and said: "look, Son; this was a billfold!" I held the black substance and looked at it blankly and -- crumbled it in my hands! Why is it that we take so damn long to grow up? Maybe I could wonder what memories Grandma Cox took of me into her next life, but, maybe I'd better not.

A farm tractor was brought in to pull the charred skeleton of the south porch off of what was left of Grandma's house, and the whole place was rebuilt, carefully, thoroughly.

Later in 1950, Grandma became ill and was taken to the farmhouse of

Aunt Ada and George Martin northwest of town, beyond Lewiston, where she died about a week later. I think she was eighty-nine years old. I could dimly understand why Grandma Cox was lying on a living room couch out at Aunt Ada's farm, getting sicker. Dad kept saying: "Son, that's my Momma lying out there." I began to understand.

I was an obstreperous little boy, and the way I acted did not represent the way Mom and Dad raised me. I was a brat in my own way. I can recall running around Grandma's house tearing up sheets of newspaper. Grandma followed me, saying: "Well, I guess I'll have to pick up what my little grandson threw all around here." Somehow, I knew what I was doing. But: Why? I'll never know. Maybe your dim memories come out of the past when you try to remember things for a family reunion paper. Maybe that is when they should come out.

I do remember Grandma Cox.

It was either when she graduated from high school or shortly thenafter, Mary acquired her little Decca three-speed phonograph. About the time I was in kindergarten I discovered this little brown phonograph with its lightweight metal tone arm, and the huge library of 78's that Mary had accumulated. The platters were stacked, in their jackets, inside the vast depths of the piano bench. In retrospect, Mary should have waited several more years before letting me have access to the Decca. Maybe it and some of the records would have lasted longer.

I spent countless hours learning the names and the sounds of Gordon Jenkins, the Andrews Sisters, Glenn Miller, Margaret Whiting, Artie Shaw and Horace Heidt, and a whole lot more. I can dimly remember Mary telling me that the sharp little thing in the end of the tone arm was "the needle," and it wouldn't last forever. You had to be careful what you did with it. And don't **EVER** drop anything on the turntable when it is turning with a record on it. Because the tone arm and the needle are also over it then. Late one afternoon I was playing Mary's copy of "Gloomy Sunday" by Artie Shaw. I was not more than seven years old but I already knew that "Gloomy Sunday" was rare, and the song had been banned in the United States years earlier, allegedly because the dour lyrics promoted human suicide. Those lyrics didn't sound that dour to me, I thought, as I sat there in front of the Decca, fondling the amputated tongue of a leather shoe. Whoops! Damn! The shoe tongue dropped onto the head of the tone arm, about eleven grooves into "Gloomy Sunday." I picked up the tone arm and stared at the record. Didn't look too bad. Then a piece of record about the size of a peanut fell out. That was about forty-three years ago and I still owe Mary a replacement copy of "Gloomy Sunday." I have not forgotten, and neither has Mary. We will find another copy, somewhere, somewhen, somehow. I don't know what killed her copy of Horace Heidt's "Horisticato" (sic) but it got broken and I do recall Tom and I taking the shattered platter out to the ash pile behind the chicken house where we burned trash, for its ritual incineration. The burned vinyl looked strangely brown and fluffy.

I really don't like yard work. After Dad died and it was just Mom and I, after 1958, I had to do it all. As I word-processed a long time ago, our property was about five acres.

In the very early 1950's Dad bought a huge power mower from some source that I can't remember. It had a big four-cycle Briggs & Stratton engine and one leading wheel. It roared like a Cessna. As Dad steered this big machine around our yard, I followed and watched the clippings spray. Dad later took the skirt off the mower's deck to keep the underdeck clear. I think Dad sold what was left of it and bought the orange self-propelled Homco in about 1956. After he died in July of 1958 I inherited the Homco.

In 1959 and 1960 I tried to earn money using the Homco to mow yards around town, but the transmission kept falling out of the mower, and it was -- HEAVY.

In the spring of 1961 Mom and I bought the Wards Gardenmark in Beatrice and then I could really mow. The Gardenmark wasn't self-propelled, but it was light, and there was no transmission to keep falling apart. I mowed and mowed and mowed. I hauled gasoline up from Herb's in one-gallon red cans, and bought motor oil. Paul Tegtmeier regularly sharpened the blade in the blacksmith shop. I bought plugs from Herb, and he put them in. I came to hate gophers the way pioneer farmers and ranchers hated prairie dogs. It wasn't the job I hated; it was just the drudgery, and the godawful humidity of eastern Nebraska. (And my native-California friends keep complaining about what they seem to think is "heat," on their own turf, when they don't know what humid heat is, and some have the thick temerity to try to assert that moisture content doesn't make that much difference. It DOES, and I guess you can't describe a mountain to a flatlander, or western Kansas to a mountaineer. This topic has killed many a conversation in a place a couple hundred yards northeast of here. I wish they could have been there with me, in those days. That's okay. I'll make them read this before it goes to Burchard.)

I made more money shoveling snow, whenever the winter produced enough snow to shovel (it didn't always). At least the winter air in Burchard's climate was usually dry, not humid.

The bitterness lies in the fact there was old, heavy junk in the inaccessible weed patches in our acreage, and Mom and I didn't have the mobility to haul this stuff away. We could never get any help from anybody in the town who could have helped. Herb couldn't muscle this stuff up. It was heavy -- old rusted iron and sheets of roofing tin and ancient wads of barbwire. Everybody had their own concerns to take care of. The junk stayed till I was gone, then it stayed till Mom was gone.

There were a lot of trees in our property, some of them elderly and very big. They had to be pruned from time to time and I had what passed

for a stepladder, and two or three saws. But when I tried to borrow a power saw from even the best and truest of my friends: "No. If we can't be there to help, and, with your eyesight, the chainsaw gets out of hand, you could have a mess." They could be there, as we were with each other a lot of the time, but not when it came tree-pruning time. You're on your own, boy. I don't feel bitter in this memory, just a little disappointed.

Burchard always was a community where everybody helped each other out. But as the twentieth century rolled into its second half and kept going, the help dwindled. There just weren't that many people left. When you couldn't do something for yourself and there actually was somebody who could help, you were thankful.

Some of my high school friends shared with me their opinions of cherry-picking. Maybe I'll leave those creative, rich comparisons in my own memory. It truly was a tedious, messy job. And the seeds were always bigger than the fruit was thick. And the birds were always there first. In the first years of the 1960's the thicket of cherry trees down west by the hedgerow grew old and began to die off. So Mom spent some time reflecting on memories of picking and canning cherries, and making and freezing cherry pies. And I spent absolutely no time feeling bad about the passing of cherry-picking time.

Another memory is the gargantuan, spreading apple tree on beyond the pear tree. This oddly-shaped arboreal personality was spawned by Uncle Sam Cox and some of his grafting. He called them Wolf River apples. They were very big, irregularly-shaped, and were yellow when ripe. And the yellow jackets always watched us so they could see the humans start for the tree, looking hungry, and hurry up and get there first.

April 17, 1993, 1:43 AM: Sacramento:

Thinking of becoming Californian after a long period of time of migrating from Nebraska to Arizona and back again, then to California, brings up the idea of the fine art of being homesick. Sometimes it includes culture shock.

There was a little touch of culture shock in going to school. For me that occurred in March of 1950. I had recently become six years old and the third period of school of the 1949-1950 school year would start with March of 1950. I would start in kindergarten then, under the care of teacher Emily Krofta. My memory of that morning involved walking north along the west side of Pawnee Street with -- of course -- Maureen Tegtmeier, on my way to school for the First Day. It was a clear morning. I was in good hands for that critical first moment.

A noticeable culture shock occurred when a number of us had to relocate ourselves to Summerfield in September of 1959 to finish the three remaining years of high school which we would never spend in Burchard. The town and the school system of Summerfield took us in as new immigrants, and the culture shock lasted for a nervous hour or so on the first day.

I really felt the culture shock in September of 1962 when I migrated northwest to Lincoln to start at Nebraska Wesleyan. That was really out of town. The weekends were holy, and they saved my idea of having something familiar to cling to. For all of the three Wesleyan years, I religiously went back home for the weekends, especially when such a weekend meant being able to sit with Mom and listen to Lyell Bremser and the Cornhuskers.

In September of 1965 when I transferred to the Lincoln city campus of the University of Nebraska I was 21 years old and I knew then that I was making all of my own moves. The shock became a challenge. If it was uncomfortable then that made it all the more worth it. Having the big black five-speed Schwinn made it all the more nice. Nobody could have wanted a finer vehicle to commute with.

When I moved myself and all of my efforts to Arizona in August of 1967 the shock finally became real. The three months with Jack and Mary Rinne in the trailer court in Mesa in August, September, October and the first few days of November of that year were a holding pattern for me. The climate, landforms and people were vastly different; I was still yearning for the lady friend I had had in Lincoln earlier in 1967, and I had finally brought the ten-speed to the Southwest to be with me. On the first Tuesday of November in 1967 I finally drove that machine 110 miles southeast to Tucson, a town I had never before laid eye on, and that was a real migration. My first view of the city was of a town hiding from view ahead and to my left behind the freeway on which I rode and hidden behind the palm trees and cactus, visible only through the increasingly loud signal from its radio stations. The sun sank below the sawtooth ridge of the Tucson Mountains to the right. I had started that ride a couple hours before the first light of desert dawn, nursing the flu, and I was tired by now. I desperately wanted a big comfortable town I could settle into like I had settled into Lincoln in the early 1960's, and call it home forever. (Ironically, that was the day that the happy citizenry of Tucson voted the equally happy Jim Corbett into the mayor's office in their town. He was the mayor with the yellow suit who could quaff a couple fifths of bourbon and, thus appropriately gassed up, gleefully try to bite the thighs of any lady he could see. I remember that he and I hit the scene at the same hour, and I get some uneasy memories. I hope I did more for that town than he did.)

There I drove my own reaction to culture shock. I actively, deliberately, made that place my home. I finished college there. It's too bad the place was one of the worst job markets in North America at the time. The town made its living by all the people taking in each other's washing, so to speak. So I starved out of Tucson in December of 1972 and paid Amtrak to haul me back to where I had come from. So they did, with the help of Frontier Airlines on the Denver-to-Lincoln segment of the retreat.

After settling back into the Lincoln-Havelock area for a time, I found myself with the Rinnes on their folks' farm during one full-moon night in the early summer of 1973 and sitting in the farm living room of Mary and

Norm Rinne watching the slides of Arizona that Jack and Mary had brought back from Phoenix. My memories of Tucson came roaring back like a seismic sea wave. The Tucson memories were still as fresh as the fragments of a road accident, scattered all over my mind. I got up from the living room and walked out to the concrete blocks that surrounded the well outside the Rinnes' kitchen, sat down with beer in hand and looked straight east to the rising moon to the left of the barn, and sat there and cried. That was documentably my very first dose of true acute homesickness, ever. The sorrow and grieving were for Tucson, not for Burchard. Burchard was original home, and it was real and six and one-half miles southwest, behind me. But Tucson was the loss, and it sat in the desert fifteen hundred miles behind me. It was now unreachable. I eventually recovered from that loss after coming to California, but that memory will be there forever. Crying really isn't that much fun. It isn't that easy to do.

Early on a Saturday morning: May 8, 1993: sitting here, and remembering being in the dining room of the house in Burchard:

I think the Tegtmeiers were there for a Canasta game and I was there, wandering around the dining room and living room with a black-and-white cartoon book from the Disney Studios. The time would have been some night in 1949 or thenabouts. The chandelier over the dining room table was on, lighting up the card game, but no other lights in the house were on; they weren't needed. I had the run of the place if I so chose. The pictures in the book dealt with Mickey Mouse and Goofy and a long line of alligators, or were they crocodiles? I had nobody but myself to answer this one, and I don't think it ever got answered. I looked at pictures of long jaws snapping shut on somebody, but I was never sure who. I wandered around the room with the book and wondered about the long jaws.

There is a book that I am a lot more sure of (again, about 1950): I inherited this from brother George, I believe. It was "Huber, The Tuber." It was published by the United States military and it dealt very bluntly with tuberculosis. I am very glad that the human population of the country then did not know that this disease would come around again, infecting much of the United States, because a political mood in the country in the 1980's, and earlier, had us believe that it was okay to forget the immense and brave efforts of five or so decades earlier to innoculate everybody against a disease that was easily preventable. In later years, nobody cared. So -- it came back.

Huber the Tuber was a tuberculosis germ that had found his way into a human host and had gone on an odyssey around the body of the host, having all the destructive fun that he could. The illustrations in the book were world-class. I sat and read this book over and over for a thousand times through several years. Later, as I grew older, the book disappeared. I would give a lot to have a real copy of it here now. I would lavish over it and then deliver it to the University Of California-Davis Medical Center about two miles southeast of here in Our Town. Yes, I remember Huber the

Tuber. I do recall knowing at the time, as young as I was, what the message of the book was, and it felt so good to know that our country had vanquished tuberculosis and would never have to worry about it again. World War II had taught us that. We would never be so care-free as to let it come back again. Would we?

A couple weeks ago I watched "Murder In The Heartland" on network television. This was a trip that I could not miss.

I do recall Mom and I spending a night with Tom and Sandy in a basement apartment in North Omaha in late January of 1958 -- it was near Fort Omaha, on Fort Street. The memory straggles back that we were there for the diagnosis that I had sustained a retinal detachment in my left eye, and we were there to learn what the hospitalization would be, and when. That made us a little short on words and humor. The immediate news was the adventures of Charlie Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate. Thanks to the radio media we knew that they were still free and were in the area -- somewhere. They could do any damn thing they pleased, and they would gleefully carve up anybody that they encountered. We didn't know where they were and we sat in the basement apartment of Tom and Sandy, and we were as scared as at any time I have ever known. Later we would learn that they spent that night with C. Lauer Ward and his wife and maid in Lincoln, and the results of that night would be found later. In the meantime, Mom and Tom and Sandy and I sat in the basement apartment in Omaha in abject fear, and we shared that fear with everyone else on the Plains.

I have known some fear in my life, but I have never known abject fear like that two-day period any other time in my life. We knew that Dad was at home alone in the Burchard house. We could not communicate with him because all the phone lines were buried in calls. I laid on a couch in the downstairs apartment of Tom and Sandy, accompanied by them and Mom, and I laid there and stared at the wall and I was -- AFRAID.

I live in a town and in a time when there is a dissolution of society and a very real reason to be afraid of whatever can happen, but I could walk to the Torch Club if it was still early enough to walk there on this Friday night (now Saturday morning, May 15, 1993). But on that night in January of 1958 in Omaha there was no question of walking up that stairway and trying to go anywhere. It was total abject fear. We did not know from minute to minute whether Dad was still alive and in one piece in the house in Burchard, one hundred miles south of us. The fear was all around us; it walked around us and covered up every visual aspect we had of Tom and Sandy's downstairs apartment. It was very dark and very cold upstairs and outside. We sat there. KFAB kept us thinking about what was happening. The radio was on, and there was no word of the safety of anybody in Burchard or anywhere else. I recall us driving south toward Burchard the following night, and the fear was everywhere. It came at us through the windshield of the car; it was alive and it defined the dark outside the car, and it was there around every corner of the two-lane highways. I am not exaggerating. I am trying to

re-create the actual feelings.

In the 1990's in the United States the idea of a serial killer and his/her buddy being loose among us carries a vastly smaller amount of fear. We are desensitized to fear and violence. These occurrences are commonplace in our world, and are worthy of Page-2 headlines. Not so in early 1958.

The impact on our family was that C. Lauer/Ward was the ~~brother~~ cousin cousin of a very close friend of ours. He was Fred Ward's ~~brother~~. That hit very close to home. Memories do not diminish. They are forever, in vivid detail.

About eight years later when Rod Baade and Sharon Allen married each other and the people of Bennett became more familiar with the people of Steinauer, Burchard and Summerfield, we heard more about Bob Jensen and Carol King. I learned through the 1960's, as I came to know the people of Bennett, when not to mention Bob Jensen and Carol King and farmer August Meier in any way, and when not to let myself say, act, or think anything that might bring them to mind. They were the two people, plus one more in the person of August Meier, who would come to represent sudden loss in the communities around there. I spent thousands of hours in and around Bennett in the latter 1960's and early 1970's, a guest of Rod Baade. The names of Carol King and Bob Jensen were never, EVER, mentioned. There is a thing called respect.

I still have not been able to make my California friends hereabouts understand this. I doubt that I ever will. They weren't in Bennett. They weren't in Lincoln.

There was the night of June 25, 1959. Mom and I had been watching the late news on KOLN-TV in Lincoln. It was to be the night that Charlie would go to The Chair. The news commentator on Channel 10 told us to go outside at a certain minute and watch our street lights. We did. The light on the pole north of the house did exactly what it was predicted to do. At a certain moment it dimmed. About thirty seconds passed. The street light dimmed again. The dimming persisted for about three seconds.

That concluded the proceedings. Mom and I turned around and walked back into our house. It was a very clear, quiet night. I can remember hearing no sounds outside.

Is there a catharsis involved in word-processing all of this detail? At this moment, that is exactly what I feel. Maybe I react to the nonstop violence in our current events. And I also react to the economic recession with no foreseeable end that has come to dominate the life of California. When I came to the Nation-State nineteen years ago, a few days after the 1974 driving of the Indianapolis 500, I committed my life to the place. It burns very badly and very permanently to see it go this way. Maybe hearing "Little Deuce Coupe" on the radio beside me right now is appropriate. Like an anthem of what almost was, and should have been.

Sunday, June 13, 1993: about halfway between Burchard and Lincoln sits the casual southeastern-Nebraska town of Adams. When I lived in southeastern Nebraska, Adams was known as the one town in the area that was "dry." To have a beer, one had to travel east down the highway to Sterling. Mom's side of the family were Adams people.

I recall a weekend day in about 1949 when we were visiting Polly Klein, a dentist. As I word-processed above, these people were Mom's side of the family. His home was a large house on the west edge of Adams where the road crosses the bridge and ascends to the higher prairie land west and southwest of Adams. Polly Klein's house was a big house. For some reason that I cannot recall now, we were there with Polly Klein and spent the day. Polly Klein was planning a remodeling and expansion of his house; there were pasteboard models of the structure that his house would resemble after this work was done. I sat in the living room of his house and fondled these models with gusto.

Somehow we found our way to the gravel street in front of Polly Klein's house in the brilliant noonday sun to look at his new car. As I recall, this car was a red station wagon. It wasn't very big -- and its sides were paneled in honest-to-the-deities wood! It was a woody! I can recall hunkering down beside the wood panels of the port side of the new station wagon and admiring the panels. Then the loud voice of my cousin Gene Lee yelled at me to "get away from the side of that car, Jerry! You might scratch it!" I backed away from the woody, and I never was close enough to Polly Klein after that to maintain a conversation with him. The woody was very new, and it was very precious to Polly Klein. I can honestly word-process that I had no premonition that "woodys" would someday be the motor vehicle of choice of a certain sub-culture of people who would frequent the beaches of the Nation-State that would be my Home. This was the California beach life. It existed along the Pacific shore from above the Big Sur south and southeast past Ventura, where Madge and Gene Lee lived, and Madge still lives today, on down past Point Dume and Malibu toward the Santa Monica Pier (a heartbreakingly beautiful country known as the South Coast). Gene Lee had no idea that this lifestyle would exist, and neither did I. But I came to live there, and I saw the world of the Beach Boys and Brian Wilson, and the Pacific shore. I drove the ten-speed to this shore many times, and rightfully congratulated myself on being there. I wish there was a woody here now for Virginia and I to drive south to find Madge. Madge would love this. To feel like this is part of being Californian.

As they exist so far, these are the memories that I will send back to the 1993 reunion. Mary and Bob are scheduled to be here in Our Town next weekend, and I plan to send this manuscript back with them. If I think of anything more to add, I will. In the meantime, this is it.

While we have not been known as the Saints of San Joaquin, we will find our way to Burchard in 1996. I want to show Virginia the land where men wearing red play football on autumn afternoons, the land of ringneck pheasants

and barbwire fences, where the hailstones come bigger than California oranges and the summer clouds grow long, black tails twisting toward the ground.

Our thoughts are with you. We'll see you in 1996.