

CHAPTER II



I was in the sixth grade when the great stock market crash of 1929 occurred leading to the terrible depression of the early 1930's. By this time Bud and I were now calling mother Mom and dad Pop. There was all kinds of talk among the adults about famous people and others jumping out of windows to their death on Wall Street and wealthy people losing their entire fortunes. This did not mean much to Bud and me, but we were very much aware that something akin to catastrophic had happened.

We were among the lucky families however as Pop did not lose his job as so many others did, but took a 50% cut in his salary. By this time he was a trust officer in the Security Bank at Sixth and Spring Streets in Los Angeles where he had been working for a number of years. After the Dr. Kilpatrick fiasco he got a job designing electric refrigeration systems for ice plants and became an architect in the process. He built an office on back of our one car garage, that had a crushed rock floor, and set up a drafting table and desk. The office had a cement floor.

I used to enjoy watching him making drawings using his drafting set and inking in the preliminary pencil lines he had drawn. On his desk in that office he had a glass jar of some kind that was shaped like a wine glass but without a stem and had a flat base on it. The jar was filled with some kind of light blue violet powder that glowed in the dark when it was shaken. I

used to play with that by the hour and was always mystified by the thing. I never did learn what kind of material that powder was. He also had a small glass of BB shot on the desk that he used to clean his ink pens by pushing the point up and down in the BB's. I was absolutely fascinated by his T-square and see through triangles along with the other items and tools he used, including his pencil sharpener. It was a cone shaped thing with a hole in the top into which you placed the pencil end and then twisted the pencil 'round and 'round.

His drafting and architectural ability is what led him to the job at the bank as an appraiser in the Trust Department. He would often have to go out and appraise properties and sometimes would take me along. These included houses, commercial buildings as well as vacant land. I remember one time when we went to Indio for the purpose of appraising a date ranch and we drove on the old wooden plank road through the sand dunes. The sand was always shifting so it was not practical to build a regular road. By using the planks the road could be re-routed as necessary to avoid the sand dunes.

Mom did a great job of economizing during the depression by carefully planning meals that would provide enjoyable left-overs and we ate a lot of chicken and soup. Pop would buy live chickens and then bring them home for slaughter and cooking. There was an old tree stump in the back yard that he used for a beheading block and he would let me watch as he chopped the chicken's heads off. Mom would then dip the body in boiling water which made it easy to pull the feathers off, a job which she sometimes let me do.

One day I talked Pop into letting me be the executioner. I held the chicken by it's legs and laid it's head on top of the stump and then with a hand hatchet I lopped off the head which caused some sort of muscular reaction in the chicken and it jerked rather strongly. This scared me and I let go of the legs whereupon the

chicken took off flying and traveled all the way across the yard until it collided neck first into the wood board fence leaving a large bloody splotch where it hit. That blood stain on the fence lasted for years as a constant reminder of my botched execution.

It was about this time that they bought Bud and me a pair of live bunnies for Easter. One was white with brown trim and the other was white with black trim. I chose the brown trimmed one and Bud got what was left, the black trimmed rabbit. Pop was assured by the person he bought them from that they were both males so we named them Pete and Pat. Mine was Pat and Bud's was Pete. Pop built a rabbit hutch for us and we began the monthly process of going to the feed store for rolled oats and alfalfa.

One day when Bud and I went out to feed and water them we noticed that Pat was pulling fur out of the pouch under her chin and making a nest. You can guess the rest. Pat was a female and pregnant and in no time at all Bud and I were in the rabbit business. We took care not to make pets of the little bunnies that came along with regular frequency because we knew they were destined to end up on the dining room table as an alternate to chicken and pot roast. We did allow a couple of females to reach maturity for use as producing does. Old Pete never had it so good and managed to keep at least one of them pregnant all the time.

As the brood enlarged it was necessary to build more pens and Pop, as usual, was up to the task and in time the whole rear of the back yard was devoted to the rabbit operation. We finally reached the point where our output was more than we could eat so Bud and I began selling some to neighbors. We skinned and gutted them before delivery and made enough to help pay for the feed we had to buy. One Sunday Uncle George and Aunt Mame came for dinner and we had rabbit which prompted Uncle George to launch in to a lurid story about the time when he was in the merchant marine and they ran out of food and had to eat the cats

they kept on board to kill the rats. That really went over big with Mom.

Just at the time we were going great guns, disaster struck. The neighbors across the street had two police dogs, named Nanette and Manfred which they kept in their fenced yard. The dogs were not vicious and we used to go over and play with them once in a while. Anyway, one morning as I went out the back door to feed the rabbits before going to school, I was met by entrails and rabbit remains that were scattered all over the yard. Nanette and Manfred had got out in the night and came over and wiped out our entire rabbit population putting an end to that fledgling business. I remember crying at school and when the teacher asked me what was wrong I said, "The police dogs got all our rabbits."

While I don't recall any bread lines in Alhambra during the depression I remember seeing pictures of them in the large cities like New York and Chicago. I think the west coast fared better than the east in those days. About that time, the then well know wrestler Ed Strangler Lewis, built a restaurant on Main Street in Alhambra and he was always there to greet his customers. We ate there often and I was quite impressed by the burly, big and fearsome looking guy.

When the 18th amendment was repealed putting an end to prohibition in the early 1930's Ed Strangler Lewis was the first in Alhambra to get a license to sell beer. It was a rather weak potion compared to today as it was limited to 2% alcohol. That beer sold for 5 cents a glass and the day he opened his beer sales there was a line of men a block long waiting to get into his place for their first legal glass of beer.

Bud and I were fascinated with wrecks and fires and every night when Dad got home he was greeted with the question, "Did you see any wrecks or fires today?" As I look back I have come to the conclusion that there were either an awful lot of wrecks and fires in those days or else Dad made them up to appease our

appetites for disasters. Mother used to say we were both a couple of Calamity Janes.

As I entered the seventh grade some strange things began happening to us kids. The girls began developing obvious lumps on their chests where their beautiful breasts would eventually be and we boys began getting fuzz on our pubic areas. Our manhood's began growing longer and thicker than the finger size things we were used to and spontaneous erections began occurring without warning, often at the most inappropriate times and much to our embarrassment. We had lots of nightly emissions while asleep, commonly known as 'wet dreams.' This was the beginning of puberty which heralded it's arrival by our cracking voices.

As our sexuality developed so did our interest in the female body with particular emphasis on the area of the genitalia. It was the original days of show and tell, you know, "You show me yours and I'll show you mine." Any time an accidental or intentional glimpse of the private parts of a female happened it was referred to as a 'sight' and we were always asking each other if we had seen any 'sights' lately which led to some really lurid descriptions embellished no doubt by the teller's vivid imagination.

Due to the nature of women's undergarments at the time, there were ample opportunities for 'sights.' Boys would fasten mirrors on top of the toes of their shoes in an effort to look up the girls dresses but the girls, and some women, soon got wise to that effort. Some guys who were old enough to drive autos even went so far as putting mirrors on the floor of the car on the passengers side, usually to no avail. Many of the autos in those days had front doors hinged at the rear so the door swung open at the front and this created many opportunities for 'sights' as the gals spread their legs getting out of the car. Therefore the rule was to always watch for a female parking a car and then get in a position in front of the car for a good look when she opened the door and stepped out. While a lot of sexual

experimenting went on I seriously doubt that we did anything that kids of that age haven't been doing since Adam and Eve began fooling around in the Garden of Eden.

One day, around this time, a kitten we had threw a fit. It ran around crazily, yowling and foaming at the mouth. Pop finally caught it, put it in a gunny sack and drowned it in a washtub of water. When I asked him what caused fits he said, "it comes from playing with yourself." If he was trying to scare me his tactic worked. In those days it was common for people to tell children that masturbation caused you to go crazy or blind. We kids wondered, if that were true, how come the world was not full of crazy blind people? It was definitely not the age of enlightenment and a lot of kids needlessly suffered from guilt as a result.

We used to spend some of our summer vacations at Alamitos Bay in Long Beach where the Harris family had a large bay front beach home. On the ocean side of the isthmus the city had built a long board walk atop a wood bulkhead to keep the ocean where it belonged. Due to the constant moisture the boards had shrunk leaving cracks of a half to an inch between them. We kids dug the sand out from under the walk opposite a vacant lot and then proceed to make a cave under there large enough to sit up in. We would lay under there waiting for women to walk past overhead with the hope of seeing a "sight" up through the cracks.

One day an empty five gallon glass jug with a cork in it washed up on the beach which we picked up and took to our cave for an experiment. It was agreed that anytime we had to urinate we would go to our cave and pee in the bottle to see how long it would take to fill it up. It was finally full before the end of summer vacation and not knowing what else to do with it we would sit there admiring our handiwork. By the next summer the jug had disappeared and I often wondered what the person that had found and taken it thought it was.

Several years before that while Mom, Pop, Bud

and I were driving down to the bay something happened I will never forget. We were on Ocean Avenue when Mom said, "what's wrong with that plane," and we looked up just in time to see a Jenny biplane cross the street in front of us just clearing the telephone lines when it turned, knocked the chimney off a house and nose dived into the vacant lot next door. Pop stopped the car and we ran over to the crash. Pop helped the two guys in the plane out of the wreckage. Both survived OK but the pilot had a broken bloody nose and all his passenger's front teeth were knocked out. That was the first of many plane crashes I witnessed over the years.



Ramona Grammar School before it was destroyed in the 1933 Earthquake. School was built in 1910.



Louise Magill my first true love in the 8th grade. Note the wide belt and pocket flaps on my corduroy pants!