

CHAPTER XII



With our suitcases packed and a full tank of gas we departed for California, leaving behind the friends we had made and the fascinating fireflies which we had never seen before moving to Allentown. We decided to go by Washington D.C. on the way home to visit the Capitol and see the sights. Spending the better part of a day there we were able to visit the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument among other things. When we went into the Capitol building the Senate was in session and we were able to peek in on them. It was the end of May and Harriet was now a two year old toddler.

The foyer to the Senate wing had long handicap ramps and Harriet began running up and down them screaming with delight. We were trying to stop her and just as she started down for the second time a door to the Senate floor opened and out walked Senator Dirksen with his head of flowing white hair. He saw Harriet, picked her up and gave her a great big hug. I can't blame him because she was such a cute little thing. He then took her by the hand and walked her up and down the ramp once more before going about his business.

Our drive back to California was a much more leisurely trip than the one I had made in the other direction two years earlier. Richy was now four years old and neither of the kids gave us any problems on the long trip so far as their department was concerned except for one time in a restaurant where we had stopped

for lunch. The place was full of older people, what we would later call Senior Citizens, and Harriet suddenly began screaming and crying over some minor incident at the table that had happened between she and Richy. She would not shut up and we were getting dirty looks from the old folks so we finally just got up and left without eating the rest of our lunches.

We stayed one night in a motel in New Mexico that had a cement floor with no carpet or other covering. In the morning, as we were getting dressed, Harriet rolled off one of the beds and landed on her head on the hard cement floor. She cried a bit and then became very silent and her eyes had a glazed look to them. We were scared sick and rushed her to a local doctor who, after examining her, said she had a mild concussion and to keep a close eye on her for the rest of the trip. By the time we arrived in California she seemed to be OK except for a large black and blue bump on her head. Just to be sure however, Virginia took her to our former family Doctor who pronounced her hale and hearty.

The Dodge did not have air conditioning so I had bought one of those car window swamp coolers in anticipation of crossing the desert in the heat of day. It worked alright for those in the front seat but did not do much for keeping the children in the back seat cool so we soaked bath towels in water and hung them over the open rear windows and that worked pretty good. About 11:00 a.m. as we were crossing the desert and in the middle of nowhere we came up on a blond girl in shorts and halter. I would guess she was in her early twenties and had her thumb out trying to hitch a ride. The outside temperature must have been around 110 or so and I started to slow down but Virginia told me to keep going. I often wondered what the girl was doing out there as we had not seen a stalled car anywhere along the way. I also wonder to this day whatever happened to her as it did not appear that she had any water with her.

Our arrival back home was a very emotional af-

fair with grandparents gushing over the grand-children and lots of hugging all around. Since it would be a few days before the moving van arrived with our belongings we stayed with our folks and got our now vacant house in Rosemead ready for occupancy. In the meantime I had checked in with Trevor Gardner at Cal Tech and he set me up in a second floor corner office in the Cheeswright building on Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena and told me the project I was to become involved in was highly secret and involved something that would end the war with Japan. He told me the name for it was "The Manhattan Project" but nothing was said about anything atomic. I was given a "Q" clearance which at the time was the highest level of security and told not to say anything to anyone about what we were doing.

I divided my time between my office, Cal Tech and the Naval Ordnance Test Station out on Foothill Boulevard. I saw some strange pieces of hardware but had no idea what they were or how they were to be used. Two little old ladies had a diner across the street from the NOTS facility where they served breakfast and lunch, mostly to the employees from across the street. The morning after President Truman announced the atomic bombing of Hiroshima a big sign in the shape of a comet appeared over the diner with the name "Atomic Inn" painted on it. Somehow those little old ladies had figured out what was going on in spite of all the security measures undertaken.

V-J Day followed soon after with the Japanese surrender and the end of W.W.II. We were all given the afternoon off and to celebrate I decided to go flying. I rented a small plane from the Heasley Twins at the old Rosemead Airport and was fooling around over a large bean field in La Puente when the engine blew one of its cylinders and swallowed the piston. The engine came to an abrupt halt and the silence was deafening. I was about to have a forced landing and had enough altitude to circle the field once and get lined up with the bean rows. I figured I could put each of the main two front

landing gear wheels on top of a row of beans which I did manage to do but the field was being irrigated and the trenches between the rows were filled with water. The minute I touched down the wheels slid off the rows and down into the mud bringing me to a sudden halt and burying the nose of the plane in the mud. I probably didn't travel more than 10 feet.

I suffered no injuries and climbed out to look around and figure my next move. I noticed I had ended up about 300 ft. from Hacienda Boulevard and a car was stopping along the road. They had seen me come down and end up with the plane's tail sticking up in the air. I went over to them and found the car was full of Filipinos who were on their way to Los Angeles to celebrate the war's end and offered to drop me off at the Rosemead Airport on their way. Once I got in the car and we were under way I realized my mistake. They were all hootin' drunk, including the driver and I soon knew this was to be the most dangerous part of my afternoon outing.

We got to the airport in one piece and when the Heasleys saw me coming back on foot they said, "Okay Harker, where did you leave it?" I told them what had happened and they went out the next day with a flat bed truck and retrieved the plane during which process they did \$500 damage to the bean crop. Somehow the LA Times got hold of the incident and the next day a news article appeared in the local section with a headline that read, PILOT SURVIVES CRASH LANDING BUT DAMAGES BEAN CROP. As luck would have it Mom saw and read the article which of course identified me as the pilot. The story made it sound much worse than it really was and she was terribly upset but glad that I was still alive. It did not seem to bother any of the other family members, including Virginia.

My work on the Manhattan Project did not last long after the end of the war with the Japanese although considerable testing did continue at the Bikini Atoll and other areas in the South Pacific. Ray

Parkhurst called me and said that Drayer Manufacturing in East Los Angeles needed someone with my capabilities so I gave them a call, set up an appointment and was hired to assist in the design of a special tractor for use on terraced hillside farms in Mexico. I worked at Drayer for a few months on the tractor that had adjustable wheel heights so you could raise the wheels on the uphill side of a farm and lower the wheels on the downhill side. This would allow the tractor to be level regardless of the steepness of the hill. The idea was a clever one but did not work well in actual practice as the raising and lowering mechanism was subject to a lot of malfunctioning and too complicated for the Mexican farmers to understand. As a result the project was dropped and no sooner had that happened than Trevor Gardner got hold of me again and said he needed me at Aerojet to work on rocket nozzles.

I went to Aerojet and ended up in the rocket nozzle plant on south Raymond Street in Pasadena just a few blocks from where I had my first job at California Consumers. My assignment consisted of work simplification and development of special manufacturing techniques. Not long after I had settled into that position Aerojet was acquired by General Tire Company and the plant on Raymond Street became known as General Tire of California. I was soon appointed Plant Engineer at that facility with responsibility for all plant layout, facilities and maintenance.



Tooling Department in General Tire of California's rocket nozzle plant in Pasadena. I am at extreme left of photo.