

MEMORIES OF A YAKIMA CHECHAKO OF 1889

recalled by

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Ichthyologists tell us that the salmon has a definite life cycle which Nature compells it to run. That is, when hatched from an egg, deposited and fertilized in the headwaters of a stream, it begins a journey which, eventually, takes it to the sea.

After four or five years residence in salt water, when it achieves its maturity, there is a reversal of its urge which impells it to take to fresh water again, swim as far as it can upstream where it hands the torch of immortality to the next generation and passed out of the picture as a sore-backed dog-salmon. This cycle is repeated forever and forever, amen.

Then the evolutionists assert that man originated in a one-cell organism which evolved with ever increasing complexity and specialization until it acquired reason and intelligence and the ability to walk on its hindlegs. But, notwithstanding the distance traveled, most of us have hung onto superstitions, instincts and urges, and a few of us to vestigial remnants which prove our lowly origin.

Taking these contentions at their face value, it seems to me, that I, nearing my seventieth milepost, am dominated by a throwback which makes me wish to imitate Salar the salmon. That is to say that, I have a desire to backtrack part of

Life's journey, and demonstrate the retentiveness of the human brain concerning people and events which occurred between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-six.

This may be of little interest to anyone but the writer, an occasional psychologist, a surviving pioneer or his descendants, but stick around awhile and see what you make of it.

In October, 1889, ~~immediately~~ ^{SHORTLY} after passing my twenty-first birthday, I developed a hunch to leave my home in Illinois and depart for what was then Washington Territory. I can give no reason for my move other than I had sufficient money, but I thought of it one day, and on the next, was on my way. But I am inclined to believe that I had inherited a streak which had urged my ancestors through Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri and Illinois, a streak that made them ever curious to see just what was on the other side of the hill.

Anyway, I started, and my trek had none of the glamour of the ox-cart or covered wagon days as I made it on a second-class ticket on a railroad train.

I rode in a day-coach from St. Louis to St. Paul, and from there occupied a niche in a crowded colonist sleeper attached to the second-class section of a passenger train on the Northern Pacific Railroad.

This method of travel did not have much on the old wagon train except for speed, and that I did not have to walk while urging on the motive power. The car contained berths and seats, but there was no upholstery or bedding.

This deficiency was overcome to some extent by the purchase from the newsboy of a cheap mattress and sharing its resiliency ~~xxxxx~~ with a coal-miner on his way to Roslyn who had some blankets.

Before leaving St. Paul I tried to provide for sustenance during the approaching four day journey by buying from a bakery across the street from the depot enough food to fill a large paste-board box. But my selection was not very good as I soon found that I had bought too many pies. Most of these were, subsequently, dumped out of a car window. After that I descended on lunch-counters which were available at division points. But I found it unnecessary to warn the expert with the razor-like butcher knife who sliced the ham for the sandwiches, "not too much ham ~~please~~ please;" and Arbuckle seemed to have a corner on their coffee supplies.

The car was crowded with men, women and children who were responding to Horace Greely's advice, "Go West, young man, and grope with the country," and they were as friendly as people usually are when they find themselves in strange places. The adults were after free or cheap land, but that goal meant little to me as I had never worked a day on a farm, nor did I have any intention of doing so. Land might be Old Opportunity knocking at my door, but he would have to knock me down to get in, as he listened like hard work to me.

While, ~~there~~ today, there are said to be odors and perfumes that have sex-appeal, I'll guarantee there were none of them in that car. The only smell I can liken it to was that of the steerage on an Alaskan steamer but, even that was not quite so bad. It was a mixture of odors arising from cooking on the range in one end of the

car, blended with the aromas arising from human skins which were short on soap and water. For several days after landing at my destination that smell stayed with me.

Well, after four days of enduring olfactory shocks, including much locomotive smoke; listening to the incessant clicketyclack of fisplates and rails; viewing all points of interest as Pompey's Pillar in the Bad Lands; changing time at Mandan, North Dakota and at Hope, Idaho; passing through Spokane Falls as it was arising from the ashes of the 1889 fire and where Dutch Jake, Doc Brown and Joe Warren were beginning to make history and Louis Davenport was making flapjacks; crossing the Columbia River where a large sign among a bunch of shacks advised the onlooker, "Keep Your Eye On Pasco;" through Kennewick which was starting to emerge from sand and sagebrush by virtue of the Konnewock Ditch; passing through Kiona, Mabton, Prosser Falls and Yakima City, we rattled into North Yakima about 10.00 p. m. Saturday, October 26, 1889. There I unloaded and was destined to remain for the following five years. A bystander at the depot assayed correctly my financial standing and he directed me to the Bartholet Hotel, a second-class hostelry directly across Front Street. There I stayed that night.

YAKIMA COUNTY.

Yakima County, at this time, covered a lot of territory. If my memory serves(and I am depending entirely on memory for all statements in this chronicle, as I have no notes or documentary evidence, not have I been in the county for more than thirty years) the county extended across the Yakima Indian Reservation to the Klickitat County line, and must have included all of the Yakima Valley to the mouth of the Yakima River, and Kennewick and Horse Heaven to the south; then east across the Moxee to the Columbia River, including Crab Creek, where Billie Pond, he with the whispering voice, had a ranch; then north to the Kittitas County line, which must have been half way to Ellenburg which was thirtysix miles up the Yakima; then west to the neighborhood of Cowlitz Pass, including Tieton Basin, Wide Hollow and, possibly, Bumping Lake and Longmire Hot Springs; also the Ahtanum Valley beyond Soda Springs. These boundaries may be a little off, but not to any marked extent.

This vast territory was covered with sagebrush and bunchgrass, the latter providing feed for cattle that was unequaled by any other forage crop. Timothy, alfalfa, rye-grass could not hold a candle to it for caloric values. To a tenderfoot from the bluegrass region of Illinois bunchgrass looked like mighty trifling stuff but not so to the cattle. Generally it was scattered in tufts but I have seen it growing thick enough in places to be cut by a mowing machine.

The soil was volcanic ash, and without visible signs of water, sagebrush would grow in it to a height of ten feet. The term "ash" was no misnomer, and water from an irrigation lateral would creep through it as it would through wood-ashes. It was so fine that when it was raised by the feet of a driving team it would sift through a canvas coat, a flannel shirt and the underwear of a driver during one day's journey. What it could do when mixed with the right amount of water towards producing alfalfa, potatoes, hops fruit, was a revelation to immigrants from the Middle West.

During even these early days, when the settlers were focusing of their minds on fruit, they were becoming aware ~~in~~ the benefits of air drainage. They found that an orchard planted on a slope, giving the cold air a chance to drain to the lowlands, added a few days to each end of the growing season, reducing the menace of late and early frosts. That prolongation of exposure of fruit to daily sunshine at an altitude of about seven hundred feet added much to the market value ~~of~~ of the crop in the way of color.

But at the beginning of the period of which I write, it was basically a cattle country. The only sheep men I can recall were the Cameron Brothers of Yakima and the Crofton Brothers of Klickitat. Prior to the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad

the cattle that were ready for market had to be driven across the Cascade Mountains to Seattle or other Puget Sound points. I recall hearing Joseph M. Baxter, a member of the firm of Baxter & Sharkey, relate how they tied sticks across the horns of the steers to prevent them entering the narrow by-paths opening from the driveway on the coast side of the range. On one

trip with steers they met a pedestrian carrying his blankets, who, instead of hiding in the brush as the cattle approached, merely climbed and sat down on the top of a fence. Some of the cattle stampeded, broke their sticks, and were lost forever in the thick underbrush. Joe thought he was quite a fighter, so he galloped up to the man, calling him every name he could think of, and demanding that he get down off the fence so he could lick hell out of him for being such a damn fool. The fellow did not reply, but he broke off a twig and hung up his hat; broke off another and hung up his coat; broke off a third limb and hung up his pack; then he slid down off the fence and gave Joe the worst trimming he had ever experienced. Joe, telling it, guessed that fellow had a perfect right to sit on any fence any time or any place.

The cattle business was such a cinch that all a rancher had to do was to get a few cows, a bull or two, and let Nature do the rest. But he must be careful in his selection of she-stock that they be not too prolific.

It was all right for a cow to have twins occasionally; but when she began to traipse in with triplets or, possibly, quadruplets or quintuplets, that was carrying fertility a little too far. That would make the neighbors raise quizzical eyebrows and hint about birth-control. As they had no Margaret Sanger to whom to appeal they mentioned the possibility of a rope draped over a limb as a contraceptive measure. Usually, that was effective.

But the stockmen, whatever their increase, made no provision for feeding their cattle through the winter. They just let them rustle, enough of them coming through each spring to make it profitable. Then the winter of 1889-90 ⁸⁰⁻⁸¹ came along with its hundred straight days of sleighing, which changed the whole picture. The

The cattle froze and starved by the thousands and men, who thought they were worth fifteen or twenty thousand dollars in the fall, knew they would be broke in the spring. Then there was no paternalistic government to succor them, and all they could do was to tighten their belts and charge off their losses to one of those damned things no one could avoid. I heard in the stores and saloons that winter much discussion of the approaching debacle, but the nearest to a bellyache was the expression of a wish that a chinook wind would come a trifle early and save them from complete disaster.

That chinook wind was always a source of wonder to me. I have heard winds called chinooks in Montana and Idaho but they were nothing like the chinooks which came up the Columbia and Yakima rivers.

The chinook came from the south, felt cold to me, but the way it would cut down snow was something miraculous. One day would be winter, and the next, it would be spring. I believe it is said to originate in the Japanese Current, which strikes the coast near the mouth of the Columbia; but whatever its source, it does its part repelling Old Man Winter. But, if it came at all, it came too late to save the cattle in the spring of 1890.

I never heard of a shortage of irrigation water during these years. The early settlers had their private ditches coming from the streams, and the largest I recall was the Schanno Ditch which conducted water from the Nachez to land near Yakima City. The first canal to be built was that of the Northern Pacific which was completed in 1894. *which*
It was built to irrigate land that had come with the land-grant, and like ~~hell~~, " ~~it~~ would be all right if you could get water on it."

This canal conducted water through Parker Bottom to the Zillah and Sunnyside country, and it covered additional land which was open

for filing. While I did not file on an acre, if I had used all the rights to which I was entitled as a citizen of the United States I could have become a land baron.

There were many "rights" the first being the one wherein Uncle Sam would bet the settler 160 acres of land against sixteen dollars that he would starve to death before he could prove-up at the end of five years. Then there was a pre-emption where by he could shorten the period of residence to a mere six months by paying \$1.25 per acre for his land; a timber culture of 160 acres by planting so many acres-twenty, I believe- to trees; a desert claim of 640 acres by getting the required amount of water on it. Then, if he was hoggish, he could cross the Cascade Range and file on 160 acres of timber. Water from the big canal to irrigate

an acre of land was worth \$45.00, and at the beginning, the canal company would trade enough water to irrigate an acre for an additional acre under the canal. This canal was the first big one to be built in the west, and we glibly recited its dimensions, "forty feet wide on the bottom; sixty feet wide at the top." I recall that among its builders were Katz & Smith, who were with Nelson Bennett when the Stampede tunnel was bored; and among the engineers were C. R. Rockwood, C. N. Perry and George Sexsmith, who afterward went to the Gila River Project in Arizona and the Imperial Valley in California, and are thanked by Harold Bell Wright in the preface of the novel, THE WINNING OF BARBARA WORTH. I read a notice of Al Katz death in Salt Lake City only two years ago. He must have been a very old man.

There were many ditches which came out of the Nachez, the largest being the one which watered the town-site of North Yakima and provided power for the manufacture of electricity. Then there was the Ahtanum, which watered many ranches, and the Wenas Valley which secured some of its water through a ditch taken out of the Nachez by John Stone. Of the Cowychee I recall little other than it contained many small trout and, I believe, supplied water for a project sponsored by a Californian by the name of E. C. Burlingame. During its construction Burlingame ran out of money for a pay-day for his laborers, and the sheriff had a hard time persuading them that that was no hanging matter.

The Nachez was my favorite stream, as it contained many

big trout, and was the first into which I cast an artificial fly. Above the mouth of the Tieton, which flowed into it about seventeen miles up the valley, there was a point which we called Horseshoe Bend. It was a great place for trout, and while fishing there I have had many nine-foot double leaders snapped off by trout ^{which} ~~who~~ were not fooling. One thing I did not like about the place was the many rattlesnakes. You had to watch your step, and every place you put your hand, or it might be on a rattlesnake. I am told that near there, now, is a town named Nachez.

Further up the Nachez there flowed into it the streams named the Nile and Rattlesnake. Still further up there entered Bumping River, which had its source in Bumping Lake.

I reached that point one summer on a horseback trip taken with Will Thornton, Billie Allison and Ed Merwin. But we went up above Ellensburg first, up the Swauk to Peshastin and Nigger Creek to where the town of Leavenworth now stands. There was no Great Northern then. We then returned and forded the Yakima near Thorp and took the Packwood Trail up the Manash-tash, and hit the mouth of Bumping River from the north. From there we went up stream to Bumping Lake. We got some salmon eggs from an Indian fishtrap on the river, and from an Indian dugout canoe on the lake Ed Merwin and I caught about a dozen salmon-trout which were at least two feet long. I recall that at the foot of the lake there was a cabin erected by surveyors who, even then, were investigating the reservoir possibilities of the vicinity. One of them had told me of a

cache in the floor of the cabin and on investigation we found several cans of tomatoes. Boy! Did they taste good after about two weeks of a fare consisting of trout, grouse, sow-belly and Bannock bread. Grouse were so plentiful that we never wasted ammunition on them, just killed them with rocks. After a few days of a grouse diet, they would ⁸amost make me gag to see them fly up.

We followed a trail on the south side of the lake, and when we were in the foothills of Mt. Ranier, somewhere near Cowlitz Pass, I decided I had had enough of camping-out. The others wished to continue, so they drew me a map of the trail through Tieton Basin, provided me with some Bannock bread and fried bacon and away I went for town. I thought I would make it the second day, and the first night I camped, my lunch not tasting so good, I threw it away. A day or two later I went back looking for it, but could not find it.

I got into Tieton Basin all right, but could not find the trail out for three days. Every trail I took, going in the right direction, eventually pinched out into cattle trails. I backtracked many times, finally discovering that the trail, instead of going straight across the bed of a ~~dried~~ ^{FORMER} lake, turned to the left. After that the trail was easy to find, but I was so anxious to get out that I climbed the mountain in the afternoon with a July sun on my back. This resulted in my horse giving out, and I had to walk and lead him, both of us almost famished for water.

I kept plugging along after dark as there was a full moon,

and I could see across a wire fence what looked to be a lake in the moonlight. I found a rock, threw it towards the lake and listened hopefully for a splash, but it only thudded on an alkali patch that looked like water. After while I found myself dozing as I walked along, so I unsaddled my horse, hobbled him, and curled up in my blankets to wait for daylight.

I slept little, as my mouth was so dry that I could almost light a match on my tongue. When daylight came, I started looking for my horse but had to trail him because the sagebrush was about ten feet high. I found that the horse, as soon as I had turned him loose, started just as straight as a die for a beautiful spring which was not more than a hundred yards from where I had stopped. While I bathed and gulped that water in restrained sips, I marveled at the superiority of equine intelligence over that of man in that kind of emergency.

From then on I had no mishap and was soon in town. But, contrary to my expectations, I was not much interested in grub. Everything I looked at seemed to have an aura, and appeared to be hopping up and down. I verily believe that one more day of my experience would have found me running around after my tail.

Another trip I made was with a team and buggy in company with Jake Eshelman across the Indian reservation to Goldendale. It took us more than two days, and we camped one night near the tepee of old Tennewash from whom Jake bought the last

buffalo robe I have seen.

I think we entered Klickitat County near Bickleton. At any rate, we stopped one night at a ranch in either Happy Valley or Paradise Valley, at a ranch where they had neither milk nor butter, nor little else. I have often wondered why some jackass had to apply a celestial name to such God-forsaken spots, but they will do it every time.

On our way to Goldendale we met an itinerant preacher by the name of Holman. If I am not mistaken he had a son who was an editor on the Portland Oregonian. But Brother Holman had been to Paradise Valley and he was properly peeved. He told how the brethren had assembled to meet him, the new preacher, and how one old brother hitched up his chair and drawled; "Brother Holman, we-want-to-axe-you-just-one-question. Be-you-in-favor-of-a-organ?" It seemed that the church members were about to split on the question, whether they should have a Story & Clark organ or not.

This trip was made in 1893 when money was almost an unknown quantity. I remember Jake borrowing one hundred dollars from an old man by the name of Pike, at Goldendale, and it was forked over in the form of five twenty dollar gold-pieces. All Jake had to do was to give a note bearing twelve per cent interest, that being the current rate.

But, in 1894, I had a broker in Tacoma assemble six hundred dollars for me, an amount I just had to have, and I had to pay a premium of one hundred and fifty dollars for its use for six months, and I gave a federal government due-bill

for more than nine hundred dollars as security. In reality, I had it only sixty days but the premium stood as was. That was surely cutting a fellow off at the pockets, but at that, the broker had to seek out about half a dozen plutocrats before he assembled ~~II~~. *THE LOAN.*

I recall little else of this trip except that I killed two brants[?] while crossing the reservation and missed a coyote not over fifty yards away, after taking a dead-rest with a model-73 Winchester rifle. But I do remember a little episode which occurred at Centerville at the home of an aunt and uncle.

They had purchased a heating stove with an isinglass door which, at the time, was a novelty. They had as a visitor an old gentleman by the name of Downer, peace to his ashes. Brother Downer chewed tobacco, and in the gathering twilight he could see plainly the fire through the isinglass, and he attempted to spit in it. His gob of tobacco juice hit the isinglass, and as some of it flew back into his face he concluded he had missed the opening. A little later he tried again, pursing his lips a little more, and raising his sights, but the result was the same. Then somebody explained the difficulty and spoiled all the fun.