

***NOW WE'LL BE OFF LIKE A HERD OF TURTLES
IN A DUST STORM**

***Saying of my Dad's after fixing a flat tire on the road.**

June Maxwell

This book was created as part of *Lifescapes*, a senior life writing program sponsored by the Washoe County Library System, The Nevada Humanities Committee, and the Department of English, University of Nevada, Reno.

Copyright©2004 June Maxwell

Frandsen Humanities Press
Department of English
University of Nevada
Reno

My Dad had been a farmer in Illinois, a cowboy in Kansas and an oil man in Kansas and Wyoming. He was educated on an Indian Reservation because my grandfather, Robert Maxwell, was a preacher and an Indian agent and ran the trading post. My Aunt Jenny Bell was his sales clerk. She was beautiful. She was gone before I ever saw her, but I have her picture. I wanted to be just like her. I knew she was smart and different than other grownups.

A teenage boy, John Houston Maxwell, stood on the platform of the train station waiting for the train to take him east to go to a prep school. My Granddad and Grandmother wanted him to go to prep school. Grandmother said, "How can he amount to anything without an education? How will he ever find the right girl to marry way out here in the wilderness?"

Granddad's Indian friends laughed as Granddad let the train go without him. My Dad, John Houston Maxwell, liked the outdoor life; he liked ranch life, the bunk house, the cattle drives, and roundups. He wasn't too worried about girls. He said he wasn't, but he was scared of them. Granddad understood, for he too preferred to stay with the ranch. He was aware of how his son felt about leaving the reservation. He understood, but Grandmother didn't understand western ways, even after all the years spent on the prairie. She had been raised in the East. Granddad promised himself he would make it up to her next time they went to town. He knew she liked city life best.

Granddad's best friend, Zake Miller, whose family owned the 101 Cattle Ranch, could always use another hand. All the cowboys there liked John Maxwell when he worked there in the summer. His mother considered this punishment, so it worked out well for every one. My Dad was overjoyed. John was really was a handful in those days.

One day the cowboys went to town to see the new girl at Harvey's. Dad went with the cowboys for coffee and pie, but not to see the new Harvey girl from California, or so he said. Granddad smiled and thought it was about time his son got interested in girls. Grandmother pretended she didn't know. Harvey Girls!



Edna Ethel Willey
1920

Mom, Ethel Willey, heard the women in the Harvey House talking about her.

"Young ladies just don't do those kinds of things."

"She goes outside the house without a hat or gloves."

"Her skirt isn't long enough and she even shows the tops of her shoes."

I wonder what they would say if she told them? If the ladies knew why she was sent to her grandparent's farm in the county of Greenwood, Kansas, from the city of Santa Monica, California, they would have something to talk about. She laughed to herself as she reminisced about her unlady-like actions. As she laughed she thought to herself, "If I had a chance I'd try it again." She was in all this trouble just because she had gone swimming in the wrong attire (a

boy's bathing suit) with the boys at the new bath house. Two of the boys were her brothers; Leo Carrillo and his brother were two others. They had dared each other to jump off the rafters of the new bath house and into the pool. The young divers climbed into the rafters to see who had the courage to dive into the pool first. Guess who jumped first and won? She scared all the little old ladies sitting around the pool with their charges. Imagine closing your eyes and jumping off into space. All the people below watched as she came screeching down into the water. She should have won first prize. The boys owed her fair and square. Instead she failed to win anything, except trouble. When the family discussed it the next day they decided to send to her grandparent's ranch in Greenwood, Kansas. She had high hopes of marrying Leo Carrillo one day, but it didn't take long for his mother to put a stop to that thought. Right after the swimming episode his mother immediately dragged both he and his brother home. It was many years before she saw him again. Mother had to apologize to her audience and then she was put on the train and sent to Kansas.

They thought by keeping her busy working she wouldn't have the opportunity to get into mischief. They helped her get a job with the Harvey Girls. They had dress codes and were strictly supervised. Not just any girl could be one. Little did any one know of the encounter to come between John Houston Maxwell and Edna Ethel Willey. The idea of being a Harvey Girl didn't intimidate my mother. For her it was a new adventure and an opportunity for more mischief.

Ethel knew she was getting long in tooth, as they used to say. But she was only 19 years old or so she said.. On one hand she figured she ought to live life to the fullest, but on the other hand she had to be realistic. She enjoyed the freedom she had – such as it

had been. Playing the field was fun. But a girl had to be careful if she was going to get the right man to live with forever and ever. Not like today, if you don't get along, just turn him in for a new model. She had to deal with what was available at the time. She hadn't been really looking for anyone since she arrived. Getting involved too soon was to lose one's freedom. Ranching wasn't her cup of tea but she could see John Houston Maxwell topping her list of best husband material. She hadn't been shopping for anyone since she had lost Leo.



John Houston Maxwell
As a young man

The cowboy, John, was no boy, no way. But did he dance? Mom certainly hoped so because she liked him. He was fun and wasn't always underfoot. He was very polite and knew how to make you feel good about yourself without being ridiculous. He always helped with her horse when they went riding without stressing the point that most women rode sidesaddle. One day he

even took her out on the range where they were branding. That was a little much.

He was always on time, never drank on their nights out or when he called. He dressed well, too. He wore a silk shirt, a matching kerchief, a Stetson hat, hand-made boots, and don't forget, a leather jacket. He also had a horse hair plaited lasso. He wasn't a handsome man, but one you could always count on. He was a reliable man. He told funny little stories to amuse her and was almost always polite. Things would happen but he could take care of them. Lots of girls liked him and the cowboys at the ranch liked him, but John was careful who he called a friend. And when he did, he never took it lightly. When he took her out he always found interesting places to go. What more could she want? Why should she wait? It seemed like she was ready to think about a husband. Maybe she would start thinking about John H. Maxwell. The name had a ring (wedding ring?) to it.

Let's check Dad's point of view.

After meeting the new Harvey Girl, he combed his hair more often. He had a terrible time with it. He had a cow-lick and it was hard to make his hair lay down. It fell over his right eye which was good in a way because it covered the birthmark on his forehead. He was self conscious about the birth mark, but most people didn't pay any attention to it. To dad it made a difference some of the time. When dealing with men he had no trouble at all. When dealing with women, children and his Indian friends he had trouble. The women would turn away and the children asked questions he found hard to answer. The Indians thought he had hidden power because of the birthmark and in a way he did. He dealt with the Indians by turning the tables and letting the Indians think he did have power. Once, during one of his escapades he shot out all the city

lights in Bakersfield, California. The Indians heard he had been killed in a gun fight.

When he showed up at the ranch a week or so later they thought he was a ghost. He had a lot of fun with that story.

Another incident occurred when a carnival came to town. That Saturday night almost everyone skipped the dance at the ranch and went to town. John and Dillard Greenwood decided to go to town for the whole weekend and got themselves a hotel room. John and Dillard would soon be brother-in-laws. Dillard was going engaged to John's sister, Jenny Bell Maxwell. They rode into town early so they could be first in line at the barber shop. They got dressed up in their finest "go to meeting boots," silk shirts and silk kerchiefs. They were dudes on the prowl. At first, not too much was going on and the carneys shied away from them because they looked like trouble with a capitol T. The "boys" were just looking for a little fun. They were about to leave and pay a visit to the local bar when they heard about the WILD MAN FROM BORNEO. He was the only known wild man in the world. They had found him in the jungle down under in Borneo. "Come one, come all, come see the half-man half-animal." John and Dillard needed no prodding. This they had to see.

STOP: Wait a minute, when you read this story, remember these innocent cowboys had been looking forward for some time to going to this carnival and made plans before they left the ranch. Others in the bunk house had been looking forward for a little devilment, too. All their plans were made for fun, not to hurt anyone. The idea was who would come back to the ranch with the best story to tell around the campfire?

The tent show was an expensive gate and they had to pay a half dollar each to go to the back of the tent where you could hear hollering and groaning and a few screams. They had already paid two bits to get in. The boys felt cheated. There were about eight or

so men, two women and maybe two or three children crowded around a covered cage with padlocks on it. There was a drum roll and the ringmaster stepped out from under a canvas near the cage. The cage started rattling and the ringmaster flipped the canvas off the cage. The wild man looked like a very big man in a gorilla costume. He was slobbering, jumping up and down and rattling his cage. He looked dangerous and it looked like he was eating a live animal. The kids screamed, the women fainted and the men were not certain what to do.

John and Dillard yelled out, "Stand back. We'll take care of this. What would happen if this wild man got loose? He's a danger to society. Think about the women and children. We have to do something."

As they pulled out their guns, the ringmaster yelled, "Don't shoot, don't shoot, he's my brother."

The guns went off.

The wild man screamed, "They killed me. Those rotten cowboys killed me."

In seconds the tent was full of people who had come down the runway to see what was happening. In the meantime Dillard and Dad lifted the back of the tent and headed to the hotel. They were laughing so hard they could hardly run. Their spurs didn't help either. At the hotel they changed shirts, bandannas, boots and hats and went back outside. People were running everywhere yelling that some crazy cowboys killed the Wild Man of Borneo. As they walked back to the carnival they heard various stories. When the officials finally calmed everyone down and the wild man had been taken to the doctor's office it was discovered that the bullets had been made of soap. Things cooled down and the boys joined their friends at the bar. It was quiet for an hour or so and after two or three beers the owner of the 101 Ranch, Zake Miller rode in and declared to one and all, "Tomorrow's a busy day. See ya." They all rode out. The next

month or so there seemed to be a lot of fence that only Dad and Dillard knew how to fix. They were good for a long time.

But back to John and the Harvey girl.

John drank many cups of coffee and tasted all the different flavors of pies at the Harvey House before he asked Mom out. This behavior was called courting, I believe. I think Mom may have been the aggressor, but he didn't know it. Of course, most men don't know they are being pursued, but underneath it all they like it and women seemed to like to be behind the scenes.

Mom was like her mother-in-law to be; she liked the bright lights and she liked to dance. I'm not sure but I'll bet she liked silk dresses and paten leather shoes, also. Dad does not know how to dance –not yet anyway.

Dad learned a lot about women in a very short time after meeting mom. He also knew that he didn't want the everyday wife most men had. Life was too short for that. He was going to learn to dance and one of these evenings he would pick a special night and surprise her. They would dance the night away.

Dad knew of places he wanted to explore. He also knew these places were not much to her liking, like the lost gold mine in Arizona, but he also knew she would be by his side as he tramped around looking. As soon as he found these treasures, which he was sure wouldn't take long, he would build her a beautiful house on the beach in Santa Monica, California. He would surprise her. Other times he thought that if he had only been born twenty or thirty years earlier he could have been a pioneer and he wouldn't have all these decisions to make. But then he wouldn't be able to have Ethel for a wife. He concluded that he had the knowledge he needed to find the right wife. So be it. He was a very wise man. Mom saw to that.

I sure wish I could have found one. Maybe they (whoever they are) have all

been taken off the assembly line before I came along. Maybe I just didn't recognize a good one when I had one.

John and Ethel got married. Dad left the ranch. He got an offer from Standard Oil Company he couldn't refuse. Mom had been doing a lot of entertaining – teas for a bunch of ladies Dad had never met before. Mom saw that Dad had the latest information on the progress of the oil industry. They moved from the ranch to a wonderful little town called Chanute, Kansas. Dad had a wonderful job and he liked it. It wasn't like the ranch, but oil was exciting and there was little inside work. No one the wiser, but my guess is that Dad had a wonderful partner. Mom was quiet, but she did many things behind the scenes.

The family started growing. First there was a baby boy, Fred; then came Wanda. I still think she was delivered to the wrong door step. Maybe that stork didn't know Kansas too well. Everything seemed to be hunky dory for the time being, but wait a little while. Maybe things will liven up a bit. Right now every thing was smooth. In fact, things were a little dull.

Dad was working for the Oil Company; Mom kept the home fires and social life going; Fred played football in high school and in the summer worked in the oil fields. Wanda was supposed to play with her dolls, have tea parties, keep her dresses clean and go to school. Mom made beautiful white dresses for her and cute little hats, if you can call them that. Mom wasn't too good at making hats. Wanda liked the ugly ones, that just goes to show you how awful they were. She wanted nothing to do with dresses and dolls. She wanted to play baseball, not tennis, swim in the creek, play cops and robbers, wear Fred's old shirts and shoot marbles. She liked Dad's old floppy hats, too. She had beautiful dolls. They were like new and the only time Mom made her play with them and wear dresses was when

company came. Wanda was a free spirit. From some of the stories I used to hear, she was a lot like Mom. Wanda was a great disappointment to Mom until she grew up. That scares me; maybe I'll grow up, too.

Dad started thinking of going to Alaska, but he didn't share his thoughts with anyone yet. He kept his dream of gold mines to himself. Fred didn't live at home any more and Wanda was beginning to be interested in boys. Mom was still thinking about Santa Monica and the beach. Living was too quiet in Kansas; they were getting to be couch potatoes and didn't even know it. I was getting tired hanging around waiting for someone to want me. When do I get to be front and center and get all the attention? Where is that cotton pickin' stork? It was January. They say it was the coldest winter in the history of Kansas. Of course! I'm coming home. It's my turn and no blizzard or icy snow had better keep my stork from arriving on time. I'll arrive in this raging storm. I can do it. I know what house I'm going to. Let me go. Besides it will give people something to talk about in years to come. You know, "Remember that storm, way back when June was born?"

Now let me see that was in 1920, January 6th. June arrived in a raging storm in a little oil town out in Kansas called Chanute. Life had been a little dull for awhile, but I showed up. Then things got a lot livelier. Poor dad and his dreams - he had to put them back on the shelf for awhile longer. His day would come he told himself and so he waited, again. I should have arrived earlier – about 10 years or so earlier.

The storm wasn't a concern of mine. I was a little cold at first, but the biggest problem was teaching everyone how to make me comfy cuddle coo. Things were a bit hazy, but after all I was new to this world. Just wait things will change.



June and John Maxwell
1920

Dad got another promotion. Mom hadn't expected this one. She was perfectly happy where she was. She was quiet and proud of Dad, but the little Kansas town where June was born was just the right size. The new promotion was to a town called Midwest in the northeastern part of Wyoming in another oil field. The nearest town was Casper, 75 to 100 miles down a rutted road. It was the nearest grocery store, too. Strange world, don't you think? We moved from a beautiful little town in Kansas to a god forsaken place. Mother was not impressed.

The highlights of Midwest, Wyoming were a trip to the post office and my mother's weekly bridge club which had the name The Jolly Dozen. Just so the men wouldn't feel left out, but mostly so the ladies could keep an eye on them, there was an evening game once a month. I thought the husbands were very smart because each one had to convince their wives they had a wonderful time playing cards. I noticed, too, that the men spent a lot of time in the kitchen passing the bottle around. I don't think their bottle was the same as mine. Dad always made special beer just for me when he made grownup beer. One time a bottle of home brew, that's what the men called it, was left on the kitchen table. It wasn't empty. I looked around and no one was watching so I took a sip. I was so right.

Grownups are a queer breed of cats. I have something more to be thankful for – thankful Dad has his own beer and doesn't want to share mine

The first few years were the longest. Wanda was the meanest and Mom was the most organized; Dad was the happiest and Fred kept his eye on the girls. Mom helped with Sunday school and organized entertainment for visiting officials. She had quilting parties and taunted the ladies with her secret recipe for angel food cake. No one could bake an angel food cake to compare with hers. She had memorized the recipe so she wouldn't lose it and so no one could copy it. You had to be very careful with secret recipes back then. When the cake was baking no one could stomp through the door even if it was muddy outside, or jar the floor or slam the door. If you did you were in trouble.



June and Ethel Maxwell
1920

When mother offered to join the choir they were so polite. The choir leader assured her she was overburdened with other duties. They agreed she would be a great help if she would pass out the programs. Why is it poor singers never hear themselves? I had a lead part in an operetta once. It was canceled. It only ran for one night; I don't know why. We were supposed

to run for three nights. Somebody said that someone had a sore throat and they had to cancel. I know I can sing. Nobody has told me I can't, so I know I can. I just don't want to. What are you laughing about?



Fred, Wanda, John, Ethel, and June
1922

My mother was very enterprising. She could make a silk purse out of anything when given a chance. She found a source of merchandise in a catalog from Chicago one day. She decided to go into business. Dad said, "OK, if you want." He reasoned it would keep her busy. Then he said, "After all, all you have to do is ask. I'll give you spending money." I don't think Dad ever figured out just way she was so mad for so long. ASK? NEVER!

She asked no more. She was going into the hat making business. God help her. There was no place to shop in Midwest. There was a movie house, a post office, the bunk house, the commissary, and a Dance Hall at one of the camps down the road. Mom contacted Chicago and found a

catalogue company that wholesaled hats. Thank goodness. In fact they would pay her to give parties and sell their hats. There wasn't a lady's shop within 100 miles. You had to go to Casper and they didn't have much to offer. At Easter time in Wyoming all the roads are snowed in. Mom sold out. Mom's lady friends were delighted. Easter was going to be a grand Sunday Hat day. Mom was a good sales lady, but she couldn't make hats. She had a Tuesday Hat Sale Day about every three months. I even got a new hat. Looking at the picture of it later I think it should have stayed in the box.

Midwest, Wyoming was an oil camp sitting over a pool of oil and gas. There were other valuable minerals, too, but I'm too young to know about that. Right now I want to tell you about the houses. They were all alike. If you didn't have a marker (not a light) you might end up in someone else's bed. I've heard rumors of such a mishap. Mother had picked our house very carefully. Dad never had to worry about that kind of a mistake. We lived on the corner of the main road which led to the post office and the post office was next door to the movie house. She picked the first house at the intersection which was next door to Dad's bosses' house. Mom asked a couple of Dad's men if they would build June a swing in the back yard. It was sturdy; it was tall and you could see it two blocks away. I looked at my swing. The ropes on the swing were made out of steel cable from the oil rigs. They were large and cold. My hands, even with mittens on, were little and cold. Wyoming is almost always cold. I had to get a box to get up onto the seat and then I just sat there. I couldn't touch the ground with my feet. So I just sat there and looked down the street. No other house on our street had a swing. I couldn't even get mad at Wanda – she was in school. The swing was outside, but I liked being inside better playing with my paper dolls which I cut out of

Montgomery Ward's catalogue. Sometimes the boys down the street played with my swing. I didn't care; they were older and bigger. They fit better and could take turns pushing each other. A swing – You would think adults would remember a little bit about their younger years. A rocking horse would have been nice or a doll house would have been nicer and would have been a place for my dolls. Not only that – grownups wouldn't listen to me. I think I'm cranky today. I'd better sneak back into the house. I'll crawl through the window into Mom & Dad's room. No one will look for me there. Maybe I'll run away and go back to Kansas. I think I know somebody there named Dorothy. I just can't remember. A nap is a good idea.

After a couple of years I stopped laughing at Why – oming. Things settled into a routine. One of the highlights of being in Midwest was going to Casper to buy supplies for the next three months. It was a city with stores that had all kinds of good things. Maybe I'll get a new pair of shoes or a new coat – or a rocking horse and of course, I always get a bag of candy. We had a Studebaker touring car. It had a canvas top and canvas windows to keep a little of the cold out in the winter. I had a bed on the floor of back seat so I didn't get too cold in the winter nor too much wind and dust in the summer. I had a fur coat, a fur hat, leather gloves, shoes to match and two pair of wool socks for winter time. I took my dolly, too. The times I liked best were when Wanda didn't come. I got all the attention and then I did not have to worry about any pranks from her. I didn't have any one to play with either, but that's the way it is.

It was fun when we had a flat tire and the weather was good. Dad didn't think much of it, but I was free to go exploring. I would find rocks to show Dad if he wasn't having too bad a time with the flat. It was fun to listen to him cuss when he hit or

pinched his finger. Sometimes he used glue to fix the hole in the inter tube. This was not ordinary glue; it was strong glue. I figured this might be a good thing to keep under my hat, so to speak. It might come in handy some day.

I was right about the glue. Wanda was taking piano lessons. She had sheet music all over and I was always the one who had to pick it up. Everyone said I was closest to the floor. I didn't say anything. I had had enough. I had an idea. For over a week I never let a piece of music hit the floor. I stowed it away in the piano bench. The next time we went to Casper I kept an eye on Dad's glue. At first I ignored it and asked no questions about it. He had laid it on a rock nearby. Then I very innocently asked Dad about Teapot Dome. It was a big rock formation towering in the middle of the prairie. It was a wonderful sight to see if you could find it. It was near the Powder River. It was hard to get people to agree if it was there or not. Maybe the Indians moved it from place to place just to confuse the by passers. Dad laughed. He wouldn't buy that and while he was busy explaining why Indians couldn't do it I sat down on his rock where the glue was laying. It was easy to put it into my pocket. The problem of finding the Teapot Dome was that the prairie was so large. It was miles and miles of open land. Even though the Dome was enormous it was just a tiny dot on the map. It was near the Powder River between the Bridger Trail, the Bozeman Trail and Fort Casper. I asked Dad if he thought the rock dome looked like a teapot. He shied away from that one and told me to go bother mother for awhile. I bet he doesn't think it looks like a teapot either. Mom just smiled. I was almost convinced that if she thought it looked like a teapot, it was one. She had one of the teapots that were supposed to look like the rock. I still own the pot. Don't ask. My own conclusion was that any resemblance between that

funny pile of rock and my Mom's teapot was purely coincidental. Teapot Dome had been a stagecoach station years ago. Many times, they say, the coach drivers couldn't find it but if they did it was an accident. I have heard a lot about Teapot Dome through the years and a man named Harry F. Sinclair, who my Dad did not like, went to jail for three months and was fined \$500 for embezzlement. They say he went to jail singing and dancing. Afterwards it was found that what he had embezzled was enough to make him about 25,000 barrels of crude oil a day. Sounds like a bargain, don't you think?

When we got home from Casper that evening, I announced that I was tired and wanted to go to bed. That gave me enough time to hide the glue while Mom was cooking, Wanda was looking for candy that was not there and Dad was unloading the car. The next day when all was quiet and no one was paying any attention to me trying to play jacks in front of the piano bench. I carefully and thoroughly glued every piece of music together into one big bundle. I put the tools and glue back into Dad's tool chest and then nonchalantly went outside with my bread and sugar midday snack. I was an angel. Wanda wasn't when she tried to get her music. She was never sure who did it but the family was happy to get a rest from her playing the piano.

Every day in the summer my brother would bring me a Hershey bar from the commissary when he got off work. I liked Hershey bars. We shared and had a wonderful time. I always had a hard time finding my mouth, so I just licked my fingers. Looking back I'm sure I was a greedy little creature. But I was the littlest thing in the family. I was all alone with all those big people.

Things were changing. I was growing. Wanda wasn't going to school any more. She had a piece of paper called a

diploma. The family was proud of her. I was too. I just didn't know it yet. Dad even let her date Mr. Eustes' son, Claude. He joined the Marines. Midwest didn't hold his attention very long and neither did Wanda. He was a cutie pie. Fred's friend, Orland Ormsby, whose family lived in Casper, not only courted Wanda but asked her to marry him. The Maxwell family was overjoyed. The Ormsby family only smiled; they were very polite.

I felt left out until I found out I had to go to Kindergarten. All of a sudden it seemed I was always underfoot. Mom made me a horrible red smock to wear to kindergarten. I have to admit there were times when her taste in fashion was a far cry from mine or anyone else. However, I was easy to find when it was time to go home.

Dad was a busy bee, too. He made trips to Casper and had meetings with Major Ormsby. I heard them once talking about sheep, but that couldn't be because Dad was a rancher – a cattleman. Seems to me I heard Dad talking about sheep once before, recently. Why? Maybe they were consulting about Orland and Wanda's future announcements because my sister was getting married.

All this reminded me of an earlier time when we moved here from Kansas. This was just like then. I bet we are going to go somewhere else. I just know it. Folks have a word for this feeling – like seeing into the future. I forgot what the word was, but I'm just so happy, there might be a change. Best of all – Wanda is going back to Kansas. Some things do happen for the best. It was getting close to autumn and school was lurking around the corner. Mom was getting out what she called camping duds. We are going some place. It seemed to me everyone was happy to get away from it all. Wanda was going to be Mrs. Orland Ormsby; Fred was getting a job back in Kansas. Dad told us this would be our last

camping trip for quite awhile. No one had asked me if I wanted to get away from it all. I was flustered. I wasn't sure of anything. I didn't know if I wanted to get away from anything, so I watched. My overalls were being washed. So was the shirt that went with them. Things were not looking good. I didn't like overalls; I couldn't button them. I had nothing to say about anything. I was their captive. Anyway, I thought it best to play their game, so I decided to go along, say nothing and be quiet. I wasn't going to question their plan – whatever it was. I wore the overalls without a murmur. Actually they felt pretty good. They were warm and the stickers couldn't get me. I could get my own way later on. The purpose of the trip seemed to be to catch fish while getting away from everything. Why did we go to the mountains to catch fish? What's wrong with the fish at the commissary? Dad came over to me later on and asked if I'd like to go fishing with him the next morning and have a fishing pole of my very own. He couldn't get off that easy, so I pouted a little as I reached for the fishing pole. I told him I couldn't. I didn't know how. He told me he had been waiting a long time to teach me to fish and tomorrow would be a good day for fishing. Did I want to go along? It would be just the two of us. It sounded like quite an adventure and I was all for it – me and my Dad.

The next morning when I got up I was all alone. I needed help with the overalls and I wanted my toast and coffee.

Wanda came along with a fish for her breakfast, but she helped with you know what. She also told me there was no more coffee in the pot. I didn't believe her. Fred came along and while Wanda held me up, Fred showed me the empty coffee pot while Mom took my picture. I didn't even have time to comb my hair. Dad came along and handed me my fishing pole. Dad and I were off to catch our breakfast. He didn't usually

fool me, but this time I wasn't too sure. He told me what to do and then left me there with a worm and a fishing pole. I was getting hungry. It seemed like no one was going to help me. Mom was kind of smiling as she worked on what might be breakfast, I hoped. I might try the fishy thing, but it didn't sound logical to me. As I was standing there I remembered Dad told me how to sing a little song or the fish wouldn't know I was there. I looked around. No one was looking. I sang, "Fishy, fishy in the brook, Junie catch him with a hook. Mommy put him in a pan and Junie eats him like (this part is silly) a little man. I'm not a man and I'm not Junie. Then I felt something tug on my pole. It jiggled. I had a fish. I yelled and cried out, "I caught him. I caught him." I ran up the hill – fish, pole and me – to our camp. I had fish for breakfast that I had caught. I can still taste him. He was great.



Wanda and Fred showing June the empty coffee pot.

The next morning I was the first up. I'd cleaned my fish last night for this morning's breakfast. Dad showed up with a big smile. He fixed my coffee for me. For the first time I was somebody. We had fish and pancakes. My fish looked a lot larger this morning than it did last night – maybe not. I better hurry. Let's see, overalls, funny shoes, the pole, and Oh, yes, and the hat. I was off like a "herd of turtles in a dust storm." Dad laughed. He remembered.

Old friends from Kansas had joined us for a day or two of fishing, but they had no one my size. I wondered why? It took most of that day, it seemed, for me to catch a fish for my breakfast the next morning. Tomorrow we were going home. I'm kind of glad because I was tired of fish. Everyone had a great time, even me. Our friends went back to Kansas and we went back to Midwest. I slept all the way home.

Things did happen when we got back home. I was going to kindergarten. Wanda and Orland were always smooching somewhere or talking about their honeymoon – in a smashing red roadster. Wanda wouldn't let me go with them on the honeymoon and Dad wouldn't help me change her mind. I vowed that someday I would have a red convertible and she couldn't go zoom zoom with me. A few years later, I did. My brother Fred was to be best man. He was taking off after the wedding in his shiny new back Ford coupe with glass windows and a windshield wiper. I accidentally slammed his car door on my thumb, but my thumb wasn't broken. I'll never do that again.

Two families – one came from the East and the other from the West. Both men were honorable gentlemen whose views of the world were primarily the same, but how they got to the same destination was by completely different roads. Each knowing he was right. No one would be able to change their minds, not easily anyway. One a

Western oil man and a rancher and the other from back East and a West point graduate and a retired Major. Ormsby was also a landowner in both Wyoming and Nebraska. He imported sheep herders from Spain and had sheep all over the place. Each man was very dominant and was lord and master of his domain. Almost – don't forget the wives. Just because they are a little quiet most of the time is no sign they didn't carry a strong stick. The Maxwells were just as haughty as the Ormsbys. The wives were ladies. They watched most of the time, but when things got too childish and out of hand, one or the other, or maybe both of them, would save the day. This was the ladies little secret, but I think everyone knew their ways. I bet the men had secrets, too. The off springs were chips off the old block. It sure sounds complicated doesn't it? I'd rather be me, the littlest, even if I do have to go to school.

My sister and brother-in-law were getting married at the Ormsby's residence. The families were having a tizzy dealing with the change in protocol. Who cares if it's the bride's house or the groom's? It will probably be theirs sooner or later. Worry about getting married, not where. This is all too much for me. I'm not ever going to get married – too much nonsense.

Everybody in Casper knew the Major always took charge of everything, even me sometimes. He was a lot easier to get around than Dad though. Poor Dad, he wasn't getting his way and he sure could cuss when he got mad and there were no ladies around. He didn't see me behind the drapes. The Major succeeded in using his plans for the wedding. Dad cooled down after they had a drink or two. It wasn't beer either and no one offered me one. Afterwards, I heard Dad mumble that he didn't like the idea of a church wedding anyway even though he was a Methodist preacher's son. Like they say, all's well that

ends well. Wanda and Orland were to be married in Casper at the Ormsby residence.

The families had a hard time dealing with the change who gets married where and why protocol. My brother, Fred, thought so, too. He left for Kansas before the wedding. Orland's younger brother was elected to be best man. He was so cute. His name was Roland. That's who I would have chosen. He told me he would wait for me, but he would be an old man if he did. I comforted him by saying I understood and I wasn't too sure I wanted to get married. He kissed me on my forehead. Maybe I was in love. I wonder what's next. I watched the lovebirds smooch and then went to listen in on Major and Dad and see who would capitulate. Mom cried and had a headache. June still watched. Mrs. Ormsby intervened, all 5 feet of her tiny self. Nothing was ever too much to ruffle her feathers. Personally, I thought the whole event was much too much, until I found out I was to be the flower girl.

I couldn't believe it at first. Mrs. Ormsby and I went shopping together. I don't think Mom liked being left out, but she had me all the time so one afternoon she could get along without me, I thought. We went to lunch and I didn't spill anything. I had a strawberry milk shake with a straw. We shopped for a dress for me and found one with a light green matching coat. She bought black patent letter shoes, no heels, and all the pretty things that go underneath and no buttons. I liked this lady; she understood the difficulties of young one's under things. She gave me a necklace from her very own jewel case. We had several luncheons after that over the years. It wasn't long before I was taller than she was. I was never a flower girl again, but that one time lasted forever. The party was long, but I made it and threw all the flowers. I acted like a big girl when they left in the red convertible; I let them go without me.

I was in a dream world for several days then it was back to the real world – without Wanda. If I'm not careful and watch myself, I might miss her. Don't tell anyone that though.

After twenty years with Standard Oil my Dad was going to retire. He said he wanted to see the world. Which, I found out later, was the United States and Alaska. Dad said the other countries of the world were too far away to be bothered with and that's why people left there way back when. To John Houston Maxwell his world was the United States, maybe some of Mexico and Alaska. He didn't seem to have an opinion about Canada. He said those countries across the ocean didn't want to see him any more than he wanted to see them. Besides that they talked funny. Also, he didn't know of any undiscovered gold mines over there. He wanted to see his world and he wanted to start with Alaska. He sounded a little childish to my way of thinking, but I'm just a kindergarten kid. So I kept quiet.

In the meantime, unforeseen things were happening. I wished I was a little older so I could understand grown ups a little better. Just because they are so smart doesn't mean they have any secrets that I couldn't figure out sooner or later. After the wedding I thought we were finished with the Ormsby's, but I heard his name a few times as I went in and out of the house. Dad went to Casper a time or two; Mom was packing. I didn't know what was going on. I was all alone. I wish Wanda were here.

Finally, the cat is out of the bag. The trip to Alaska or even around the world seemed to have been shelved or forgotten. It seems that unbeknown to me or my Mom, my Dad with the help of Major Ormsby, bought a bunch of sheep - hundreds of them and some goats. A sheep herder came with the deal. He seemed to be thrown in for good luck along with his dog. He had worked for the Ormsbys almost all his life.

All I could think of was how are we going to see Dad's world, me go to school, and Mom get to California? It was strange. Dad hated sheep. He was a rancher and a cattleman. Everyone knew that cattlemen didn't like sheep

Dad came home happy as a bird dog. Dad had found a new friend and we are moving to Snyder, Wyoming, just down the road a piece. The town was named after the man who owned it which sounds reasonable. Dad triumphantly announced that the Snyder family and the Maxwell's were the only ones who would be living in Snyder. He said it was a ghost town. I was scared. I had never seen a ghost except on Halloween. I've never seen Mother so quiet. Our house, Dad said, would have a good woodstove. We had a gas stove in Midwest. He would fix the roof and the water well with a pitcher pump was just outside the back door. If Mom wanted her flowers moved from Midwest, Old Simon, the shepherd, would help her and bring in some fertilizer, too. The front room rugs would have to wait for awhile. This was a nightmare. I wanted to wake up.

The herd of sheep and goats would be a few miles down the road and over the hill with the shepherd and his dog. Mom wouldn't have to cook or take care of them, Dad informed her. I'm sure she was joyous about that. Dad declared it was only five or six miles to the little town down the road where I would go to school if we weren't snowed in. One small drawback was no telephone. Mr. Snyder said we could use his phone if it was necessary. Who needs one of those things anyway, he wanted to know? In my opinion, at this moment, Dad's life was the closest he would ever be to being left high and dry without a paddle. He didn't seem to notice how quiet Mom was or that she had turned chalky white like a statue, staring. Her grandparents were cattlemen. She would be disowned. It was bad enough

to have Wanda marry into the Ormsby family who owned sheep in Nebraska and Wyoming, now this – living in a ghost town. I heard Mom crying. She would never live this down, but she couldn't to back to Kansas to her grandparents. That would just make things worse. Or would it?

Thank goodness we were invited to dinner that evening at the Snyder's house. That saved the moment. I was so excited. The Snyders had a little girl, too. I hoped Dad would let me play with her. Her name was Joy and she was a joy to me. We were both six years old and the same size. The similarity stops there. She was mischievous, daring, and lots of fun. I thought she was wonderful. I could hardly wait until morning to see the ghost town. The evening was nice and so was Mother. Dad enjoyed it too. It seemed as though all was going well. Dad let me play with Joy, but Mom supervised. There was a rule or two, but they were easy to live with. Dad never said a thing. I was quiet and happy.

The next day our things were moved from Midwest by moving vans from Casper. It seemed as though money was plentiful. Mom's flowers were replanted and taken care of properly. Within a few days we had a sink with a pump inside the kitchen. The wood stove had to stay, but the roof was fixed in a day or two. Two beautiful rugs were laid in the living room and dining room. From Casper a big black stove with a shiny skirt was installed in the living room to warm the house. Joy and I took my wagon and kiddy car to one of our buildings just to keep them handy, but the movers left my swing in the back yard at Midwest, which was fine with me. I shared a ghost town with Joy. What more could I ask?

The next day at Joy's house, Mr. Snyder gave us a basket for gathering eggs. Joy said it was a chore. I wondered what a chore was. I had a feeling it wasn't all good. It was my first time and I was a little afraid

of those feathery things called chickens. They smelled, too. It didn't take long, but I hoped it would be a long time before we had to do it again. We had bread and sugar just like the ones I like, but I passed on the milk. The Snyders said we could play in the whole town if we wanted. We had to keep in touch and come when called.

Joy and I took a tour of the town. We explored all the buildings. The first dance hall had the biggest windows overlooking the street. It was a pretty place with mirrors in hand carved frames. The mirrors reflected the sun and made rainbows on the walls and ceilings. We figured that there might be a better hall so we should look at all of the buildings before deciding which one we would use. This was a hard job and we had to do it right. By the time we got to the old laundry it was beginning to get dark and a little cold. The laundry was scary and dark with lots of shadows around the machinery left there. And there were cobwebs, too. We were not scared – not much anyway, but we couldn't think of any use for the laundry building. It was getting late and we heard noises. I suggested we leave this building for the ghosts. Joy agreed. We spoke loudly, "We are inviting you to stay in our laundry in the town of Snyder. If you don't bother us, we won't bother you. Let's be friends." We both thought we heard some snickering, but we weren't sure. Joy smiled and continued, "You can scare anyone you want, but not us. Just remember. You can be our friends and we will be friendly to you." After that I knew I heard laughter. Joy said she didn't hear anything. We both ran all the way back up the street to our homes. No one had noticed our absence. We left the laundry alone for a long time.

The ghost town was our play ground. The builds which had been gambling halls were now our play houses. We could do anything we wanted – freedom at last. No

one worried about us as long as we showed up for lunch and dinner and we were home before dark. Mom even left me home when she went for groceries. It was a new way of life and I liked it. I had always had someone around taking care of me or teasing me. Without Wanda I did what I wanted when I wanted. I obeyed the house rules my mother laid out for me. It was easier that way. Joy could think of more things to do in a flick of an eye than I could think of in a month of Sundays. She didn't ask anyone if she could or couldn't until she found out later there were boundaries.



June Maxwell and Joy Snyder

It was time to choose which hall was to be the rink, doll house, etc. The building with the smoothest floor was chosen for the roller rink. After getting a few bruises we decided we needed a hospital or maybe just a first aid station. We took a small room just around the corner of the bar at the roller rink. Getting adhesive tape and turpentine, iodine, and other stuff for our first aid station wasn't easy. Every time we would take a little bit of this or that our parents would question, "Did you use the last of

that?" "No," I said, "I didn't use the *last* of it." Most of the time we didn't need any of it but it was in our first aid station if we needed it.

On the wall behind the bar there was a mirror in a beautiful hand carved frame. We could watch ourselves skate round and round the room. We listened to music from an old record player we had found. I hoped my Dad hadn't missed his record, In a Little Spanish Town. We used the back side of the bar to store our skates, sweaters and other stuff.

Sometimes I would ask my Mom if I could have lunch at Joy's house and Joy did the same. We would then have our lunch at the hall where we kept our dolls and stuffed animals. Several of the halls had big windows; some had little ones, but most of the buildings weren't facing the sun. The hall we picked for our dolls and animals faced the sun. The windows were big and the sunshine came through and the mirror reflected rainbows around the room just like the roller rink building. Except this hall was larger and we had more room. The doll house hall was warmer and there were more colors bouncing off the walls. This was the right place for a cathedral window.

Joy said we should make colored water for the sun to shine through and make rainbows in the mirror behind the bar. I laughed, "How can you make colored water?" First, she said, we have to find bottles for the water. Dad didn't have any more bottles. He'd left them behind at Mother's request. I heard them talking one night about what to do with the beer. I never saw any more for a long time – not even root beer. Sometimes I thought I smelled beer around Dad, like in Midwest. But Dad declared he didn't have any more bottles to make beer. We went hunting for bottles, but instead we found a lot of boxes full of nice little jars with lids on them. They would be just the right thing. Now, what to use for

coloring? One time, Dad had shown me how the Indians used different things for coloring their art. We used iodine for brown, onion skins for yellow, beets for red. It was messy. I found some food coloring, some crepe paper and I had a water color paint set given to me by Santa Claus which I'm glad I never used. It was a lot easier than the Indian's way of painting. We made all kinds of colored water and put a different color in each jar. Joy and I carried a lot of water. I forgot how many jars we had, but we liked to say we had a hundred. Joy and I were beside ourselves with happiness. We tried to tell our folks about our colored water. We tried to tell them how wonderful it was to look at the colors in the sunlight. We got little or no response. They said they would come and look tomorrow, but tomorrow always seemed to slip right by and they didn't come.

I suggested we place them around the window. Joy suggested we make the whole window up to the ceiling full of jars of colored water. The window sill was wide so we could set the jars on top of each other. We changed them around. We put them in a pyramid. It was out of this world. We had found a way to make our own handmade cathedral window. When the sun shone through it made the room seem warmer on cold days. I had a Brownie camera at my house and I ran home to get it. Mom saw me take it and followed the camera. We finally got their attention.

Everyone was impressed until Mrs. Snyder recognized her jelly jars. Mom found ever so many missing things. Dad found his lost In a Little Spanish Town record. They also found the bandages in our first aid station. Everyone met back at the hall where we had our dolls and colored water. They were all laughing. Were they laughing at us? What was so funny? Our dance halls were neat; we kept them clean; we had a broom and always put everything away before we

and always put everything away before we went home at night. WHY WERE THEY LAUGHING?

Finally they had noticed us. They told us how grand they thought our ingenuity was and that we needed a reward for our efforts. Mrs. Snyder asked if all of us would like some ice cream. The Snyders had an ice house. Dad and Mr. Snyder fixed ribs outdoors in a pit oven and Mom made an angel food cake. Mom even sent our shepherd a plate of food and a bone for the dog. The party was different. Joy and I watched our parents enjoy themselves. While everything was being fixed they had a long talk with us about taking things without asking or at least telling someone. Things were smoothed out and we could keep our dance halls. Wouldn't it be nice to add one more hall? We would make it a place to dance. We could use Dad's record player, but we would ask first. Dancing might be better than skating. We wouldn't fall down as much. Mrs. Snyder had to have her jars back so she could make jelly next year. She also wanted them washed, so we did.

Things were quiet for awhile after that - until one Sunday at church when the Sunday school teacher told us about Holy days and Easter. Somehow between Sunday school and the kids at school we also discovered the ritual of getting painted Easter eggs in a basket from a rabbit. Who in the world would want eggs that were painted? What do you do with them? I don't like to paint; it's messy. What happens to the chickens and their eggs that Joy and I gather for her mother? We did this every day and there wasn't a colored egg in the bunch.

It took some convincing, but I soon realized I had been missing or overlooking a big celebration every year. Leaving Kansas at the age of six months didn't give me a background in such things. Midwest was out of the loop most of the time, too. I know we didn't go looking in the snow for painted

eggs. At Midwest Dad bought eggs by the crate and there were no chickens. We had chickens to eat, but they came from somewhere else. I do know we didn't have any painted eggs to put into baskets. I always got a new silk dress and new black patent leather shoes with bows and one time a fur coat and hat and don't forget - mittens. I'm going to find Mom. That's what Mom's are for. I tried to get my Mom's attention a few times, but she was busy selling hats to the ladies from Midwest. They had followed her to Snyder to buy their Easter bonnets.

Maybe Dad could enlighten me. Mom did the church thing for both of them. My Granddad was a Methodist preacher in Kansas. However, Dad, I'm told, usually didn't agree with him. Well, I didn't want any religious information; I just wanted to find out why folks were mixed up with painted eggs, bunnies, baskets, etc. What did any of this have to do with Sunday school? Poor Dad did his best but I still didn't know. I tried Joy next. She knows a little bit of something about everything. She said I should just wait and see. That wasn't funny and I told her so. She had never seen me so upset. A week can be a long time and one week from now, she said, we would have Easter. Our parents buy us Easter clothes and we get all dressed up and go to church. After church we all go outside to see who can find the most hard-boiled, painted Easter eggs that Mr. Snyder had hidden earlier. The one who finds the most eggs wins a prize. The rest of us take our eggs and go home and have a big ham dinner with lots of relatives and friends. Strange customs these people have in Wyoming, don't you think? Rabbits - I don't think I had ever seen a live rabbit. We went skating for awhile. I didn't sleep too well that night thinking about Easter and bonnets and rabbits running around dashing down holes and drinking tea.

The next day Mrs. Snyder told Mom her hens weren't laying and she was sorry

she had to cut back on her order so she would have some for her other customers. Joy and I knew about the eggs. Joy thought if we each took one egg a day we would have plenty for the school egg hunt. After all we weren't taking them; we were just holding them for Easter at the school. It sounded logical to me. Everyday we would take one egg apiece and put them in a padded box wrapped in towels and newspapers so the eggs wouldn't freeze. Sometimes I thought the newspapers smelled like beer. I just knew the place was haunted. We went to the laundry to talk to the ghosts. They couldn't have the eggs because they belonged to us. They seemed to be agreeable. We didn't hear a sound. Just to be on the safe side we offered to do them a favor if we could. We heard a giggle – maybe? Anyway, every day I delivered our eggs to the laundry just before I went home. But I made sure I was never late.

I heard Mrs. Snyder tell my mother she was missing eggs. She said she thought the coyotes were stealing her eggs. Time was running out so we had upped our take to two eggs each a day. We wanted to be sure we had enough eggs for everybody. After we heard about the coyotes we went back to just one egg apiece. My mother was upset and told Dad. Dad talked to Joy's dad and it didn't take a Sherlock Holmes to conclude that there was a wily fox in the hen house and it was 2 two-legged ones. The men laughed and told the ladies they had found the coyotes that were robbing eggs from the hen house. My Dad, Mom and Mr. and Mrs. Snyder were going to wait until the next night for the right moment. After I put our two eggs away with the others I told Joy I was sure the ghosts were in the laundry and they were getting noisy. Something was going on. I was getting scared. She tried not to pay attention; after all, there was only two days left and we would be rid of the eggs. We would be heroes to the whole school.

Both of us were pretty jittery - two more nights after this one.

The next morning our intuition kicked in. After talking it over we realized we had to be clever if we were going to stay out of trouble. So we moved our plan ahead one day which proved to be a good thing. The egg basket from the chicken shack was almost overflowing. I'd never seen so many eggs in one place before. Trying to find a good opening presentation was hard to do. After a lot of dickering with each other we finally decided to give the basket of eggs to Mr. and Mrs. Snyder compliments of the Easter Bunny. "And with all his love," we both chorused, leaving the school egg race out of it. As we waited I muttered, "Grownups had started all this rabbit stuff." That, of course, didn't go over well.

Finally, everyone had a good laugh. Mr. and Mrs. Snyder furnished the eggs, my mother cooked them and Joy and I helped color them. Mom couldn't find her cake coloring. She looked at me and I thought we were doomed again. Dad got some onion skins and other stuff. Mom retrieved some crepe paper and at the last minute Mrs. Snyder showed up with egg coloring. The men handled the stove and hot water. We were a busy bunch and it was fun. Mr. Snyder hid the Easter eggs just like before when Snyder was a busy sheep town. Everyone hunted for eggs.

I think Easter could become a good holiday. From my point of view better than some of the Christmases I've seen. The best part was the live rabbit that dad caught and brought home to us. It was alive and real. Not like Mr. Eustes, the mailman, in the Santa Claus suit. Joy and I kept the rabbit at one of our halls and called him Easter.

Joy and I took turns distressing our folks. You should have seen them when they found us in the Powder River playing in quick sand. Then there was the time I fell in the creek and my hands were frostbitten. I

wasn't fond of that mishap and I cried. We went riding in an old tire down a hill next to an embankment. It was scary and put roses in our cheeks. Dad found us just in time before we tried it a second time. We decided we had no need for rosy cheeks. We kept our folks busy, but they needed something to do to keep them young.

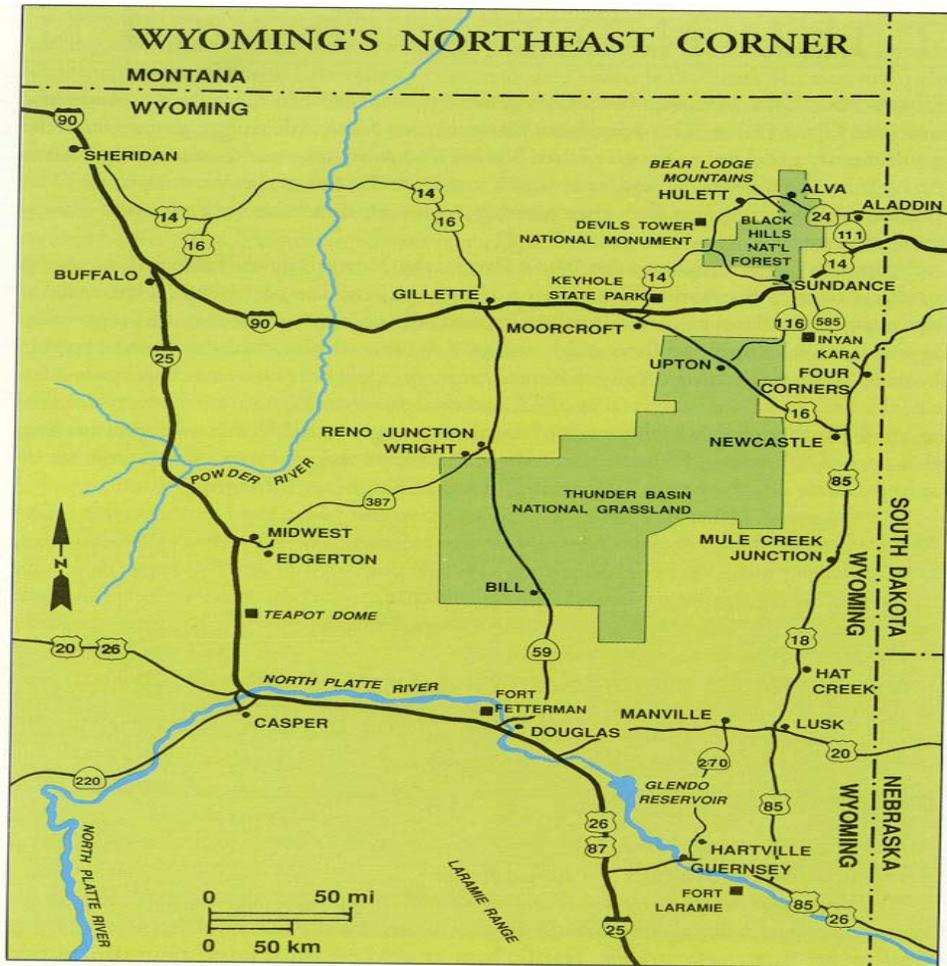
Time passed and the sheep that Dad bought ever so long ago were sheared and sent to Casper by rail with the help of the Ormsby boys and Wanda. The sheep were not caught in the Ice Blizzard of 1926. Many people died and lots of livestock died in the storm. Our shepherder and his dog were lucky, too. Soon after the sheep were sold we left Snyder. I felt ready for anything. I was ready for an adventure. If only Joy could go with me. Dad wouldn't let me stay

with her in Snyder and Joy's parents wouldn't let her go with me. If only we could have written to each other.

I found out there was a lot for me to do. I had to learn that silk dresses and patent leather shoes were the wrong clothes to wear on a long trip. It just didn't do when you're on the road; so I wore overalls and a big red hat. I think we are going to Kansas first to see relatives and Wanda, too. Next we are taking Route 66 to California. Remember California, Mom? And Dad, last but not least, wants to see Alaska. See you there, maybe.

See ya all again, real soon.

June





Aunt Ginny Bell Maxwell

Isaac Nelson
Willey
(born 6-5-
1857) and
Esabell
Gertrude
Greenwood
Willey (born
4-8-1858)



Easter Midwest Ohio
Had Handa June
1923



1924
Easter
I couldn't wear my
Easter outfit
I had a tough life

