

## HOGBACK

When we moved to the Locket Gulch place in the winter of 1934 I found myself in a new school district but since the year was half over it was decided that I would finish up the year in town. The next fall I started in the fifth grade at the Oregon Trail School that was originally named Hogback. It was located about a mile from Snake River on the Oregon side. The old Oregon Trail crossed the river at the original Fort Boise site in Idaho into what is now the State of Oregon and up over a little rise (hogback) then across the school yard. The wagon tracks were leveled out and obliterated by the time I enrolled there.

Oregon Trail was a two room country school teaching or at least containing kids from the first through the eighth grades. There was one row of desks for each grade and in grades with lots of kids they installed double desks. One room was for grades one through four and the other room was for grades five through eight. Big folding doors separated the big and little kids. Study time for each subject was forty-five minutes and then fifteen recitation. Recitation time was rotated so that three grades were trying to study while the fourth talked and created confusion.

I don't know when the tradition started but when a new boy came to school all the old boys chased him during the noon hours and recesses unless it was basketball or baseball season. I was pretty lucky because the new land was being settled and the Dust Bowl victims were flocking in so I was the new kid for only a short time. The penalty for getting caught was being tossed into a pile of russian thistles but at least you could quit running.

The school uniform for boys was bib overalls or jeans with both knees and sometimes the seat patched, shoes in winter with at least one floppy sole and a blue cotton shirt with the elbows out. The girls were generally better dressed in well worn cotton dresses, hand-me-down coats with the sleeves an inch or so short and brown rolled down cotton socks in the spring and fall or twisted up and screwed on in the winter when it was cold. Also runny noses were generally uniform through out the year.

Lunches were home made bread sandwiches with either a deviled ham or pickle relish sandwich spread. There was no fruit except maybe an apple or peach in the fall. Usually at all school Christmas programs we got an orange a bit of hard candy and a few peanuts in the shell.

Our school sports program consisted of marbles, basketball and baseball for the boys with jump rope, hopscotch and jacks for the girls. The outdoor basketball court was a flat spot pounded hard by bare feet with the

boundaries and free throw line scratched deep in the dirt with a stick. We didn't use the free throw line much, you just about had to bleed to get a free shot so most of the fouls were settled in favor of whoever could threaten the most and yell the loudest. Baseball was serious business. Our nine man team consisted of all the boys in the big kids room that were big enough to swing the bat. We were fierce and we were dedicated and we were good. We could and did beat all the other country schools, Owyhee, Big Bend, Wade and Cairo Junction. We had three bats one light weight and two heavies and one ball that was a little lopsided. Just like in the big leagues, a ball knocked over the fence was a homer and in our case a game stopper because the Owyhee ditch was just over the fence and we had to chase the ball and fish it out of the water.

One day the Nyssa High Freshman ball team came out to play a game - what an eye opener that was. Always when game time came we played ball. This time we were all set to go but they started warming up. They had several bats and a bunch of balls and an honest to goodness coach who wore a felt hat. We'd never seen a baseball uniform up close before and shoes with spikes were clear beyond us since about half our team were barefooted. I can't remember the score but we won by enough that they understood that it wasn't just a fluke plus we homered several of their new balls into the ditch. It surprised them a little to see our whole team throw everything to the wind and run hell bent for the ditch to fish the ball out of the water.

I only lived a mile and a half from school so on good days a couple of neighbor boys and I walked to school. We had a bus that wasn't much fun to ride. It was homemade, top heavy and mounted on a Model A Ford pickup and it didn't always make it all the way without a flat or a breakdown. A few times there was enough water in the bottom of the Owyhee ditch to freeze so we skated to school with clamp-on skates, now that was tough going because the skates didn't stay on very well and we skated mostly on our ankles. Our shoes were usually thin and limber, we'd tighten the skates until the shoe sole would buckle up and then we'd take off for a quarter mile or so 'til we lost them again or fell through a thin spot. We usually got there cold and wet but we got enough attention to make it worthwhile.

Surprisingly, discipline wasn't much of a problem for our principal, Albert, grades five through eight, or his wife, Phyllis, grades one through four, HOWEVER, Albert was called to Vale, the county seat for a meeting one day. The big kids were given assignments and told to be good. That was a pretty big order for us, you know the ones who were more inclined to look at it as a day off. We didn't tumble to the fact that Phyllis was watching us through a crack in the big folding door until late in the day. She didn't miss

a thing, she had a photographic memory and she told all. Albert returned just before school was out for the day, took the report from Phyllis the squealer, he walked to his desk and took out a big wooden paddle that he kept there. Tension was beginning to mount. He walked into the cloak room and closed the door for a moment. It was quiet in the room, he came out and called the first boy in the eighth grade row. He closed the cloak room door and it was quiet again but suddenly there were two loud whacks and an ear splitting scream, he opened the door dropped a large splinter that had broken from the paddle and called the next eighth grader. One by one two whacks a scream and we never saw the victim again. Since I was about two thirds of the way down in the fifth grade row I was in pretty much of a state by the time my turn came but I figured I could scream as loud as any so went to take my medicine. I stepped into the cloak room and was surprised to see the first eighth grader still there with Albert. They instructed me with grim expressions to bend over and grab my ankles. Suddenly there were two whacks and a scream that was almost but not quite mine. Albert had been whacking the wall and the eighth grader had been screaming.

John S. Marshall

(This is one of the short stories included in the 166 page booklet -with many pictures- written by my husband. I think it is a good illustration of writing many short stories and using them to form your life story. It is a story of life in a very small rural school during the 1930's. This school was called "The Oregon Trail School" located in Malheur County, Oregon. The building still stands and is used for a Grange Hall and many community activities. CEM)

