

## WE HAD EVERYTHING

by Bernard Milton Otness  
1982

We were rich, at least I thought we were. Well, maybe not rich, but well off. Everything seemed to work perfectly, but maybe it was because I was the baby of the family and the others....a very dear Mother, a strong Father who had overcome tragedies in his early life, an ever loving sister Mabel, an older brother Lester, who could make the most interesting playthings without cost and then brother George, who was my body protector. This combination made my life easy and I didn't have a thing to worry about....I let the others take charge and I just had fun! Everything seemed to work perfectly, but as I look back it was because of the above mentioned team's effort.

We had a hand dug well, equipped with a bucket, rope and pulley. This pulley was a marvelous invention as a person could pull down on the rope to get the bucket up....surely alot easier on the back and it never wore out or broke down. We really owed alot to this part of our operation. I never recall the well being frozen in the winter, as was a real threat for those depending on a pump. We could depend on having water although it was hard to come by I am sure.

Mother had other conveniences too, such as a brass scrub board and a couple of tin tubs....one for the first wash water and the other for the rinse. The former tub was also used for our Saturday night baths which we took in Mother and Dad's bedroom, warmed for the occasion in the wintertime by a small pot-bellied stove. Being the smallest and youngest member of the bath party I was usually last to enter the tub. I never recall the water being too cold so the kitchen stove must have been supplying warm water as needed.

The coal oil lamps were easily maintained. The wicks had to be cut occasionally and the soot removed from the chimney glass, but that again was none of my worry.

The winters were rather long and there was a lot of snow cover. The precipitation averaged 20 inches a year and this fell mostly in the winter. I recall 35° below zero at times and our house was not insulated. We boys slept upstairs and it was cold. George helped keep me warm, but Lester slept alone. We had no heat in the rooms upstairs, but I'll never forget Mother coming up with warm bricks covered by woolen underwear scraps. She was always checking to see that we were well.

Mother was an excellent cook and I can picture her small pantry where she worked up such good bread, cookies, cakes, lefsa, flat bread etc. The potato water-yeast starter jar was always alive and produced the best tasting bread imaginable. The wood-coal cook stove was just right for cooking. Dad was a good provider for food and made it clear to us that an Otness never gets sick as we eat right; he also said an Otness is always honest and never ended in jail. He was a great reader of good literature and seemed to know about every country in the world, he wanted to know it all.

Although we didn't have much in material things but we certainly made it up in other ways that count.

Brother Lester, the eldest, was a boy of action. He didn't have much to work with, but somehow he managed to keep us all entertained. He made swings, sling-shots, darts, whistles (from willow limbs), sleds, stilts, toboggans, wagons, skis, wooden cars etc. One of his favorite accomplishments was the "Hide For Your Life". This was a pulley and a rope from the barn top to the ground. It was a real thrill holding onto the pulley and hoping for a safe landing. Another good game he had was "Cracking The Whip". This was accomplished by lining up a string of kids holding hands and running in a circle. The bigger kids would be in the center. Centrifugal force caused the kids on the end of the line to run really fast....faster than they could, so they would go head over heels. To get real action the big boys at the center would stop and pull back to get "cracking the whip" action.

Other toys that fascinated us were made from building blocks, match boxes, thread spools and rubber bands. Finding the hidden thimble was great sport as were the usual pastime games of Tag, Anti-over, Numble Peg or playing catch with a ball. Horseshoe pitching using old worn out horse shoes tested our control. As we grew older, we went for baseball, football and basketball. George said we were not very good at these, but I recall he was really good in the skilled sports....but was an athlete who would rather spend his times on books or studying. He used to urge and implore me to take my books home and study with little avail.

A big event in our early life was when Lester got a couple of bicycles. These had been in a wreck and considered worthless, but Lester fixed them up and one was real good. The other one was a lemon and George got this one. I finally inherited these. They were handy in going to the "mudpond" swimming holes. I don't see how George could stand having me on the bars - it would be difficult to ride a bike alone on those roads. Speaking of swimming holes, it must have been a real worry for Mother. Kids were getting idphtheria and many diseases and also several drownings occurred.

My older brothers Lester and George were great for me, but I also had sister Mabel. We all had her and we think she is the best sister of all times. My first recollections are times spent with May. In the spring we would go back in the hills and pick wild flowers....Lamb's Tongues, Buttercups, Pussywillows, Lady Slippers, Grass Widows etc. I know Mabel took care of me as Mother was ill at this time. We would catch bees in glass jars and explore the marvels of nature. To catch a bumble bee in a hollyhock flower was a great accomplishment.

When I started school I really wasn't ready, but I had Mabel to help me. We had to learn poems in those days and Mabel always saw to it that I learned my lessons - this also goes for spelling and arithmetic....I had a private counselor. Dad called May "Mool". They were so close.

Recalling the earlier days would not be complete without mentioning Ray Steven. Ray was older than we were and was unstable. I suppose he was an idiot. He went "all out" and I am sure that Lester got a real bang out of him....perhaps leading him on.

In 1918 when I was nine years old we finally had a well dug 80 ft. deep and put in a hand pump....we were gradually getting modern. In 1925 after Lester graduated from college he insisted that we go all out and rebuild and install plumbing. We hired a carpenter, plumber, electrician etc. but Lester was still the main cog to get the job done....he did not go to work on his own until the job was done.

Just preceding this time Mabel had graduated from high school and went to Lewiston Normal summer school and taught eight grades that fall, did the janitor work and everything at the Aspidale country school. I know those kids got a good education as Mabel was immediately in demand as a teacher.

When I was about 12 years old I ran into some bad environment. His name was "Len" and he came from eastern Montana. He was from a large unruly family....a real tough kid. He had a lot of ideas so we were busy building shacks, caves, hunting etc. One winter we were out hunting for rabbits with 22 rifles. Len stole some twist chewing tobacco from his Dad. I was never so sick in my life....I had to lie down for about an hour on a snow covered straw stack. Some kids would dig holes and roof the tops and have a stove and chimney. It was Len's favorite trick to put a sack in the stove pipe and stand on the top door. The only time I got fired in my life is when we were out picking strawberries....we took our bedrolls and found jobs wherever. Anyway we were in Viola mountains picking strawberries. The owner told us to put the little ones on the bottom and the big ones on the top. We were picking down the row next to the owner who was also picking. Len said, "put the big ones on the bottom and the little ones on top". We were fired on the spot. I'll never forget one time we were putting up a chicken wire fence when a piece of the wire hooked him in the white of his eye. There he stood with about 15 feet of eight foot wide chicken wire dangling from his eye. I was able to fish-hook it out and we went right on with the project.

One cold, wet winter day a friend of mine said we should take his Father's workhorse team and ride out to the Moscow mountains....he had relatives there and they would see to it that we had a good meal before our return home. The horses were at Jaborro's barn and were skinny with sharp back bones. No one was at the farmhouse when we got there....we were wet, tired and sore riding bare back, but had to continue back home....I was never so galled in my life.

One Sunday I took Len to Sunday school with me. There was a lidded coal heating stove in the center of the room which we were sitting around. For no good reason Len lifted the lid and with his hand full of soot, wiped it across the face of a rather missy type kid next to him. I had just about had it with him. He was strong and a good farm hand and we used to go haying in the summer. Len quit high school in about the sophomore year and joined the Marines. He wrote me from Guam that he was homesick and could smell the new mown hay....it was that time of year. Len was in the Marines in the Pacific in World War II and I am sure he gave a good account of himself.

George, in his account, told of the Influenza epidemic of 1918. I remember one time I had a temperature of 104° so was told to go home from school. I met another kid outside, who was also told to go home. He told me the best thing to do was eat some cabbage. There was snow on the ground, but we uncovered some edible cabbage in a field near home and spent the day there eating it....how did he know about vitamins?

Some other events I remember include a fall I took from the highest poplar tree in a row of trees. I grabbed a top limb that was too small....it broke and I still get the falling sensation which seemed to take a long time. I remember hitting the ground. George said our German neighbor lady Martha Clowgon (sp) helped carry me home. I had no after effects except for perhaps my mind!

Moving pictures were coming into use and we had a projector and an animated strip showing a man getting on a diving board, diving into the water then out and back on the diving board. We ran it over and over. I wonder what light was used to project the image.... perhaps a candle. It was a great show....usually shown in a bedroom or barn loft; curtains, fake tickets, ushers, popcorn etc. accompanied the picture.

Our family Sunday dinners were real productions. We met at various farm houses, but usually at Grandma Ed's house. Getting there was often by an old flat bed truck which was rough riding. The women prepared great meals, and real cream ice cream was made for dessert.

Bonfires provided alot of entertainment and also some bad burns. I remember we used to shoot pigeons, rabbits etc. with sling shots or perhaps trap them. We would dress them....wrap in mud and cook as the Indians did. I never recall being able to eat any of these....no way to chew the tough meat, but I have never tasted a better baked potato than those we took out of the coals.

Our folks were very good about helping others and we had several staying with us at times. Our dear cousin Violet was one. While there she was given priority on all the goodies. It seemed to me that she was brought Oranges, Hershey bars etc. by others. I remember waiting in line to get the Orange peel or the Hershey wrapper (it smelled so good). There was no animosity shown by any of us children....we all loved Violet.

The Douglas family was also frequent callers. Those were the cutest kids....it all seems like a dream now. Their Father Roy worked at the Moscow hotel and brought home newspapers, especially on Sunday. Brother George just had to get these to read so we had a constant appointment to visit and play with Louie, Warren and Gordy.

I will never forget when brother George asked our Mother if he could have me. He has done his best to take care of me ever since.

I know we were all brought up to be honest in all things. The conscience of "inner man" as Dad called it, is very strong in our make up thanks to our Mother and Father's efforts throughout our earlier life. Words cannot adequately express the love and virtues of our Mother....I must leave this to our memories.

As George said in his write-up, this seems to be from the "I" standpoint....but how else can it be depicted....so for what it's worth.

Dear Marian,

Nov 22

I hope you and your family enjoy these childhood memories of Moscow from George and Bernard. They were written in the early 1980's.

Thank you for your help and I wish you a very nice



holiday season.

Jane,  
Maez



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