

My two oldest children and I were in my former home, Spooner, Wisconsin visiting my parents when my husband Jim O'Connell called to say we were moving to Potlatch, Idaho.

We had lived in Coeur d'Alene for nine wonderful years. We had made many friends and anyone who has lived in beautiful Coeur d'Alene would hate to leave it. But we were in the midst of the depression and my husband was to be the office manager of Potlatch Lumber Company - - a step up from woods auditor.

Jim said he had been to Potlatch and we had a very nice house and his salary was more, probably \$25 or \$50 more. That was the way things moved in 1931. How we managed on \$250 a month I'm sure I don't know. But we were a happy family and all our friends were in the same financial situation.

I left Wisconsin and my parents to return home by train to Spokane. Our house was sold and we drove to Potlatch, a nice little town surrounded by hills and forests.

Mr. Laird, who had been manager there for 25 years had died and Mr. Irwin replaced him. After 9 months Mr. Irwin was transferred to New Jersey and my husband was made manager.

We moved into the home built for the manager's family 20 years before, a very comfortable and lovely house. I well remember how my live-in maid and I would move breakables on Dan's wagon each day. The house had 75 built-in drawers and innumerable cupboards.

We had our clothes in the closets and drawers and cupboards filled. One evening four men carried my grand piano down the street, (a block away). My husband had wooden horses placed along to rest the men carrying the piano. One was a pianist (John Wagner). When they stopped, he played a tune, right out in the road.

The day the furniture was moved by truck all could be placed and we were at home, all settled. This impressed me as a perfect move, never to be repeated.

My husband had a company car as well as our own car in a steam heated garage. The house was steam heated as well as heating the water tank assuring us constant flow of hot water, no furnace, the steam from the mill and we had old fashioned radiators.

I am really getting way ahead of my story. My first impressions were of a very unique town. All of the houses, stores and property was owned by the Lumber Company, except the Chevrolet garage, which was owned by Felix Stapleton. The largest center in town was the Potlatch Mercantile Company. You could buy anything you needed at that store managed by Bert Ferguson whose sartorial perfection would have been expected in a store like Marshall-Fields. In fact, he had traveled for Marshall-Fields before he came to Potlatch. Each department in the store was capably handled. Mrs. Fredrickson in Ready-to-Wear, Earl Compton in Hardware, etc.

My first impression as we came into Potlatch was the board sidewalks. I hadn't seen them since I was a little girl in the early 1900's. Then my husband told me the streets were named after trees, the slogan - Potlatch Lumber Company owns everything. Pine, Larch, Cedar, Oak, Elm and Maple.

We lived on Nob Hill, a block having 4 holes of golf was in the center, houses surrounding it. The downtown was in a valley. You passed the mill as you came into town and then to the right a two story office building. All downtown was heated by steam from the mill. On the left, a good sized gymnasium, turn the corner to go to the confectionery. Most of the years we lived there it was owned by two families who were friends of ours, the McMillan's and later the Wardrups, up the hill was the hospital, Dr. Gibson and Dr. Thompson and a few nurses and one floor of rooms for the ailing and surgery.

There were several nice homes further up that street, a brick home where the Eagons lived and also a dormitory for Japanese workers. At that time there were about 20 Japanese. Some lived in that vicinity in small homes. My daughter Patty, (Mrs. Robert McLaughlin) told me they had outdoor toilets and a wagon came at night and emptied the drawers in back of each outhouse.

Coming back to Main Street, there were a few neat little houses and pretty yards, then the Library and then the hotel. Across the street was the "Potlatch Mercantile". The second floor was the Furniture department managed by Joe Cada and a beauty parlor. In the front were two large apartments. One of the apartments was at one time rented to the Johnson family, the father was with the highway department. Their daughter, Rita was studying violin and later played with symphonies. Later the Wakeman's moved there from their house on Nob Hill and still later the Hegerstons. Matsons moved into the Wakeman house and the Hudsons into the Hegerston which was next door to our home.

The war took many of the young men to enter the service of our country. They employed many women to keep the orders filled among them my friend, Eva Tobin.

My two children, Patty and Dan were growing up. Patty played the drums in the band. Dan was in the third grade and in March, 1935 we had a dear little girl, Kathleen, now Mrs William Kramer who lives in Spokane. In July 1936 we were blessed with a precious little boy, Jerry. Jerry lives in Portland and has two sons to carry on our name. Patty lives in Mountain Home, Idaho. Her husband is an attorney and one son is practicing with him. Two other sons, Jim, an architect and John with Ford Motor Company of Seattle. Two daughters, Mary teaches at the air base school in Mountain Home and Ann is a senior at University of Idaho.

Our oldest daughter Patty went to St. Paul's school in Walla Walla. A lovely year for Patty, she decided she liked Walla Walla and would like to go to Whitman College, which she attended for two years. She then decided to transfer to University of Idaho at Moscow to be nearer home as I was not too well. In her senior year the war was over in August and she met and became engaged to Bob McLaughlin, just returned from the South Pacific as a Captain. They were married in Moscow the day after Patty graduated from the University and we had the reception at the Delta Gamma Sorority house. Bob still had college to finish and law school so they lived in Moscow for four years in the Veteran's village and then Bob started his law practice in his home town of Mountain Home, Idaho where they still live.

The year before that Dan went to Shattuck School in Faribault, Minnesota for his junior and senior years of high school. In fact he graduated on Sunday and we flew back to Spokane (my first flight) and attended Patty's graduation on Monday morning and she was married on Wednesday.

Every summer for a number of years there would arrive a number of boys who had graduated from Eastern colleges to work in the mill and eventually become lumber salesmen. Some perhaps went on to be successful in that endeavor but my husband said they did not know how to work, such as is required in a saw mill.

One young man recently married, from Boston, came and his wife followed later. I shall never forget them as they were really unsuited to the life in a western lumber town. Jack wanted to be a lumber salesman and I believe he still is but his wife had the idea he would be able to accomplish that feat in a matter of a few weeks. My husband gave them one of the prettiest houses on Nob Hill and what did they do! Buy some second hand (or 10th hand) furniture, just enough to get along. Sort of like camping out. The bed, just springs and mattress was put on the floor. Nancy had lived all her life on Beacon Hill in Boston and met Jack, who was in the Navy, at the Service Club where she was hostess. It was love at first sight and they were married shortly after and he was out of the Navy and came to Potlatch. All Nancy could cook were brownies and she made a batch each day. Jack came home and fixed hamburgers. Honest! Once or twice a week they would get a sitter for their little girl and drive to Moscow and have dinner at the Hotel. Finally they went to the coast and eventually to the Chicago area where he was a salesman for Weyerhaeuser Sales Company. The marriage did not last. Jack is in Baltimore. Nancy still lives near Chicago. I did stay over night with them when they lived in St. Paul and she had taught each of her three children to care for their rooms and learn to do duties around the home. As she said - she wanted them to be more prepared for the menial tasks about a home than she had been.

After the Dr. Gibsons and the Thompsons left Potlatch, the Gibsons to the coast and Thompsons to Moscow. They were at retirement age, we had a Dr. Murphy for several years. He had a young wife and two daughters. One daughter married a local boy and the other was an air line stewardess and died in a crash near San Francisco. The Murphys were divorced but later remarried and I believe the doctor is dead. I do not know where Kay is.

On the road out of Potlatch on your way to Moscow were a nice row of homes. The Hearn's had a lovely old house with a beautiful flower garden and a spring in the back yard. Mr. Hearn was originally from England and came to Canada and was employed by the railroad. He was ticket agent for a little railroad that came into Potlatch. One could never meet a more charming host and hostess than the Hearn's. They had two fine boys and also raised Setsua Matsura, who learned to help Mrs Hearn about the house. He is now a dentist in Detroit, Michigan. Roddy died young and Phillip lives in Virginia.

The Stapletons had a nice home not far from the Hearn's and several others on the same road.

We had a regular Saturday night get-togethers. There were four couples. The Ferguson's, Wakemans, Stapletons and O'Connell's. The men played pinocle and women played bridge, always followed by a lunch about 11 o'clock.

When the teachers came to town they were immediately members of a club called "Polida". Po for Potlatch, the 'l' for Latah County and Ida for Idaho. The town people were invited to join. We met once a month and put on amateur plays, followed by an evening lunch.

Speaking of the Mercantile, there was a jewelry department separate from the store, fine hardware run by Earl Compton. Fred Schnurr was head of the meat department. r. Ferguson went to market in Seattle and San Francisco and the ready-to-wear was quite nice. r. Stapleton was the druggist. In fact it was a very complete and well run store. Next to the store was a lodge auditorium. I remember the Eagles were very prominent as well as Eastern r and Masonic Lodges. Then came the Chevrolet garage and a block further the Community church. It was a beautiful church, all paneled and a full basement for church suppers and weddings, funerals and high school graduations all were held in the spacious church. This lovely church burned to the ground about 1942.

The schools in Potlatch were very good. The teachers could not apply unless they had two years of experience. There was a dormitory for the women teachers and also one for the men. They employed a cook, but did their own housework. A very fine inducement, also I understand the company paid good salaries.

At the height of the depression the lumber market was very low and the mill was closed due to lack of orders. I'll never forget the kindness of the Board, everyone could stay in their home, rent free, until the mill started again, also given credit at the Mercantile. Early everyone stayed and knew there would be money coming in later.

There were some very ambitious men who bought farms in outlying districts, they did their own work before coming in to work at the mill. They have long since retired or died and their families live on the land they worked so hard to acquire.

There were many Scandinavian families that came to the northwest to work in the lumber mills or logging. They were very energetic and made good citizens, raising large families that went on to college or businesses elsewhere.

A few miles away was Onaway, a general store and quite a nice settlement of Italians. One family, the Guernseys had a store there and I well remember the girls. One went on to college and is married and living in Grangeville. One married Joe , his parents bought the dairy, formerly owned by the Gambles' son-in-law, who is now sales manager in Los Angeles with Carnation Milk Company. Yes, our milk was homogenized and we had chlorinated city water.

There was the townsite department that kept the houses painted and plumbers to take care of the plumbing problems, all salaries paid by the company.

Also the bank was owned by the company. My husband was vice-president at the time they sold the bank to Idaho First, which has banks all over the state. Hart Hanson was the manager for many years. His father-in-law owned the barber shop in the hotel.

One interesting thing I did not know until we left Potlatch in 1951 was that my husband hired some men who had been in prison. I do not know who they were but Jim told me they became fine workers and good citizens and never committed a crime in our little town.

We were fortunate in having some local musicians who added much to the culture of our town. Betty Hegersten and Gerry Anderson had fine voices and put on some splendid programs. Pauline Jacobs, whose husband was doing his first job as a young doctor, for several years played piano as I did. Also Vera Alsterlund who still lives there sang at many funerals, weddings, etc. Then the school added greatly by giving plays and having a good little band with green and white uniforms, with a large P on the sweater. One of the shy young boys was asked what the P stood for. Anything you ever asked Arnold he would say "I dunno". His answer when this man said "Are you from Portland?", Arnold said "I dunno".

My children used to bring some of the country children home for lunch on a cold, snowy day when their sandwiches were frozen. I really did get the idea of a hot lunch program. I had read the government would match what the children paid and as I recall it cost each child 10¢ and they had a 20¢ lunch. Mrs. a farm lady who was an excellent cook took over and it was indeed a success, believe me we had to have a well balanced meal and always fresh milk. I hope it is still active. The lunch was on the second floor of the gymnasium.

One Sunday as I was coming from church, the Community one- Mrs Ferguson came running it to tell me that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. My husband was in Chicago and he called to say he would take the evening train. He arrived a few days later and some of the men working in the mill were very much against the Japanese that were good workers. One night someone killed a Japanese man, hitting him with a pipe. I remember Jim went to each house that night and said they must leave as soon as possible. They were such kind people but their lives were in danger. Most had relatives in Spokane. One family had two attractive daughters, one was to be married soon to a young Japanese who just graduated from pharmacy at Washington State University. They were on their way to Hawaii to be married and her father had used up all his savings to give her a lovely wedding. Several people have been to Hawaii and have seen her. Her father-in-law owns many drug stores in Hawaii.

We all went to the town beauty shop. I recall sitting sitting at a meeting in the back row and looking at everyones hairdo. Exactly the same, the days of the marcel waves. We all looked just alike.

My son Dan was in college, Patty and Bob were married and all in Moscow. Dan went on to law school and Jerry and Kathleen went away to boarding schools for their last two years of high school. Jerry went to Shattuck as Dan did and Kathleen to the Dominican Convent in San Raphael, California.

The year both children were away to preparatory schools, Jim and I were alone and lo and behold we were transferred to Lewiston, Idaho in 1951. Thus ended my twenty years in Potlatch.

I still say they were the best and the happiest of my life. I was 34 and my husband was 38 when we came to Potlatch. I think all historians will agree that those years are the best of our lives. We had comfortable living, a really charming home which we shared with others. Our New Year's Day parties were special. Many friends from Moscow came over icy roads to our annual party. It started by singing carols around the piano.

We were richer by two more children than when we arrived in 1931. I lost both my parents in 1936 and Jim lost a beloved brother. So we had joy and sadness which after all is what makes living a reality. I can still see us all singing around the piano and the joy of the radio. We made our own bread and ice cream and the children brought college friends home with them. Patty and Dan were in college those years.

I have only the dearest memories of those years and I hope some still remember the O'Connells because we loved our neighbors and the little town was always there to do for others in their time of need.

Now I am 80 and sitting here on a gloomy Sunday, October 1977 and remember those wonderful years. One thing I failed to mention and that was that we were a very loving family. My husband loved me dearly and that is something very special in one's life. It everyone has that precious love day after day.

Alta O'Connell