

From Up the Crick

by

Mary Coleen (Burns) Buckley

who grew up on Back Street

in Midland, Maryland

For 51 years I have been "from up the crick." No matter where I have been or where I will go, I'm still "from up the crick," and growing up there has given me something that I have never found anywhere else. Perhaps, the many years have elevated my sentiments and have enlarged my crick people. Maybe I lack the balance and repose necessary to look back, my contemporary judgment may involve some errors, but I am not an outsider, and I wish to explain stirrings and impulses which I feel but do not fully understand. Provincialism has been called deadly, but I say that it is sometimes life-giving, and with imagination and enough sympathy, I hope to delineate a constancy, a charm, a freshness, an honesty in this area that I have found in no other area, a delineation having its source, not completely in a world of concrete dates and facts, but a world of reflection and memory -- my reflection, my memory of my life 'up the crick."

I was born in Miner's Hospital in Frostburg, Maryland, because there was no hospital in Midland, Maryland. Now, Frostburg is a city, quite small like all cities and towns in Western Maryland, and is situated on Route 40, the National Road, which at Grant Street in Frostburg encounters a narrow, winding road that wanders down George's Creek, an area of sixteen miles ending in Westernport, Maryland. These sixteen miles pass through the famous George's Creek Coal Mining Region which for one hundred and twenty-five years produced the best steam coal used in the United States, coal used by American warships that sank the Spanish fleet during the Spanish-American War. This region gets its name from a dirty, orangish, narrow stream of water, named after an Indian hunter. The crick runs parallel with the road, Route 36, and the C&P (Cumberland and Pennsylvania) Railroad tracks, and the crick valley lies between two mountain ridges, Big Savage and Dan's, part of the Appalachians. These mountains tower one hundred feet on either side of small settlements somewhat oddly, yet familiarly, named: Midlothian, Carlos, Hard Scrael, Shaft, Klondike, Ocean, Lord, Midland, Gilmore, Knapp's Meadow, Lonaconing, Pekin (also called Nikep) , Detmold, Moscow, Barton, Caledonia, Franklin, Westernport.

My beginnings, both emotional and physical, start in Ocean, about two miles up the road from Midland, in a gray, frame mining company home where my mother, Loretta Monahan, was born. These homes, built by the Consolidation Coal Company, were two- story wooden structures with small front porches and board walks beginning at the front gates of wooden fences and ending at the back porches. There was always an outside spigot where the miner would wash off the heavy mine dirt before he entered the home. The homes were picturesquely identical from the front-porch flower boxes to the backyard gardens, clothes lines, sheds, and apple trees. The board walks were scrubbed religiously, and many times I heard about Mrs. Blake who not only scrubbed the board walk every Saturday but also the pigs that she kept in the farthest part of the backyard.

Between Ocean and Midland was the Consolidation Coal Company with its massive tipple, a solitary symbol of the great heyday of the mines, the empty, rusting coal cars, the red brick powerhouse, and the road sign "Beware of Sinks," that we took for granted because we knew that we lived our days atop the mines where our grandfathers, uncles, and cousins had dug out

their livings. The coal banks that stood among our pine, dogwood, birch, and maple trees were commonplace, hardly noticed.

I grew up in Midland, my father, Francis Patrick Burns, was born there, and since most writing is some form or another of returning or looking back, this will be just that. My life was family, a long-tailed family, I had nine aunts and uncles and eleven first cousins who lived in Midland. My uncle Jim and aunt Langie -- my brother couldn't say Aunt Agnes and somehow melded Agnes and Langhan together and came up with Langie -- lived across from us, First, they lived directly across the railroad tracks from us when we lived in the Pink House, actually painted pink, and then they lived across from us when we moved onto Back Street, directly behind them. This move is my first memory of Leo "Toad" McNeil who always seemed to be a part of my young life, The Ort brothers owned a bakery and had two railroad cars of flour that, at that moment, they couldn't afford to unload. Toad bought John Orts house on Back Street to enable them to unload the flour. He did so only because my father and mother agreed to move into it.

Aunt Biddie and Uncle Frozie (John) Monahan lived up on Chicken Hill Aunt Helen and Uncle Pat Manley lived on Paradise Street, and Uncle Thomas Burns lived with our cousins, the Reillys, on Big Lane. Uncle Pat and Aunt Kate Monahan lived farther down on Back Street. I also had twenty-two aunts and uncles and forty-four first cousins who in different stages in their lives had moved away from Midland prior to my birth. My sense of family grew in that big white frame house on Back Street. The stone walk that bordered the street, the silver-painted chain fence that enclosed the large front yard, the red brick garage walk fenced in with white rose bushes leading to the double-car, red brick garage, the cherry tree and apple tree that canopied the back of the house, the sloping backyard that ended at an embankment of the crick, the orange-blossom bush in the bottom of the yard, the lilac and forsythia bushes on the other side, the tall cedar tree in front of the house, the four pine spreaders protecting the lattice work of the huge front porch, the cement walk that led from the front gate straight to the front porch and curved at the tall tree to lead to the back porch, the flower garden between the break in the cement walks, the wooden swing and glider covered with striped-cretonne cushions, the wicker rocking chair and ferneries -- I loved it all.

My life was also church, Saint Josephs Roman Catholic Church, which sat on one of the highest points in town. Church Hill began at Main Street, crossed over the cement crick bridge and the C&P Railroad tracks, arid passed the white-frame Methodist Church, halfway up the hill, It then curved around the stone retaining wall until it reached the top of the hill, the macadam parking lot, the center of the complex that contained the rectory, the school, the convent, and the church, all cream-colored, green trimmed frame buildings. A circular driveway, majestically edged with tall pine trees, fronted the large, square rectory with its deep, front porch. The trees protected the rectory from the weather and from the school children because its grounds were off limits to us. The rectory, like the parish priest, was a thing set apart. I recognized its beauty and was awed by its mystery. One square building housing the first four grades sat at the back of the parking lot with only a narrow dirt road separating it from the hill of half-overgrown coal banks. Directly across the parking lot was the convent-school church complex. The convent jutting out to the side was surrounded on two sides by a pillared porch where I can still see the black and white garbed nuns silently sitting in green, latticed-back rocking chairs saying their rosaries or walking the distance of the porch intently reading their required daily "Divine Office." Connected to the side of the convent was the other school building with grades four through eight. These classrooms had windows on the one side that faced the coal banks, but the other sides were the convent wall and the back of the church. On these structures I built part of the strong, firm structure of my life. Particularly, the Church. My memories are as strong, as straight, as enduring, as fresh as the tall trees that surrounded St. Joseph's, and they ring as clearly as the bells from the bell tower of the church, a connected but yet distinct part. The crossed-topped bell tower reached one hundred feet into the valley's sky and held three bells. The inscription on St. Joseph's 2000-pound bell reads, "St. Joseph, deliver this church from lightning and storm." It was donated by Reverend Don Luigi Sartori, an Italian nobleman and first pastor of the church. The inscription on the Blessed Virgin's 1000-pound bell reads, "Holy Mary, protect and defend this church from all evil," and St. Brigid's bell reads, "St. Brigid, pray for your Irish people." These bells rang out at 6 a.m., 12 Noon, and 6 p.m., signaling the time for the "Angelus," a prayer that we said, and even Mrs. Blake was known to stop scrubbing to kneel and pray when the deep-toned bells rang. They called us to weddings, to funerals, to happiness, to sorrow. They kept teaching me over and over the things I loved and the order

that I needed and savored.

The church, an A-framed building with a stained-glass circle above the door of the main entrance, had a wide center aisle and narrow side aisles with pews between. Each family rented its own pew, \$6.00 per year, and ours was Number 24 on the left-center aisle. The main altar rested in an arched, recessed area, and on the wall above the recess was a stained-glass circle larger than, but identical to, the one at the front entrance. Marble angels knelt on either side of the top level of the marble altar, guarding the center tabernacle. The Blessed Virgin's altar was to the left and St. Joseph's altar was to the right. The golden sanctuary lamp dropped by a golden chain from the ceiling to the center of the sanctuary, burning constantly to remind us of the mysterious truth of the Divine Presence, and an ornate, white communion rail separated the sanctuary from the body of the church.

Here, in this church, I learned that I was never alone. I was baptized here, my godparents and cousins, Leon Langan and Elizabeth Monahan, took me to church to be christened Mary Elizabeth by Reverend John J. Brennan. Father, looking at the small baby, said, "You're not going to put that long name on that wee baby, now are you?" And he proceeded to name me Mary Colleen, a gesture prompted more by his love for Ireland than his concern for my size. I made my first confession here, not without incident. My brother Cyril walked me to church where Sister Atala, the first and second grade teacher, met us and one by one sent us into the confessional. Father Brennan had died in February of that year, and Father Luke R. Stephens, from the Capuchin monastery in Cumberland, Maryland, was serving as interim pastor, until the Archbishop appointed a new pastor. The Capuchins were a source of wonder to us with their beards, cowls, and brown robes belted with the three-knotted cords. After I went to confession, I walked to the middle of the marble altar rail to kneel to say my penance. Then I remembered! I hurried to Sister Atala to tell her that I had made a bad confession and had to go back. She didn't question me, just agreed. I went outside to tell Cyril to wait, and as I did, Father Luke walked out the church door. I walked over to him and told him. He said that he could "undo the sin there. So I said, "I forgot to tell you that I had a fight with Rose Marie Stakem," He went through the motions of absolution and I went home, sainted and relieved. By the way, Rose Marie's brother Jimmy became a Capuchin. I made my First Communion and was

confirmed at St. Joseph's, I was married at St. Joseph's, my children were baptized there, and my parents were buried from there. A very positive part of my life was St. Joseph's and what I gained there, its tremendous laughter and peace, has fortified me again and again in my attitude toward the world, has brought me to the certainty that the love of people and God promises nothing but that love.

My life was also the community, everybody in it because there were only about 1,000 of us: Scots, Irish, Welsh, English, and a handful of Hungarians. Italians lived in Frostburg and Westernport, but we were midway, thus Midland, between them and didn't really know them. Everybody I knew was white, and everybody I knew spoke English. As a matter of fact, practically everybody I knew did the same thing on the same day of the week.

Monday was always wash day. Daddy's white shirt collars and cuffs soaked in a bleach solution in a white, porcelain basin on the cellar floor. I often helped to fill the washer with hot water, holding the rubber hose deep within the washer, while Mother shaved off the Octagon or Eels Naphtha bar of soap into the washer. Then, I filled the two rinse tubs with cold water. The process was long and tedious, but the best part was threading the wet clothes through the wringer, being careful not to get them too close to the edges nor letting them curl around the wringer. Otherwise, it meant backing up the wringer and wasting time. While one load washed, Mother put the rinsed-and-wrung load on the clothes line, and when a line was full, I jabbed the line with the grooved end of the wooden clothes pole and pushed the wet clothes as high in the air as the line would allow. Mother and I folded the dried clothes on the kitchen table, then dampened those to be ironed and rolled them like jelly-rolls. I believe that Mother ironed everything but socks and kitchen rugs. The dampened clothes stayed in the oval wicker clothes basket until ironing day.

Tuesday was ironing day. I was allowed to iron handkerchiefs, pajamas, tea towels and pillow cases, but the intricate shirts, flowered and plaid linen table cloths, cotton blouses, and dresses belonged to Mother. A wooden clothes rack fanned out above the kitchen radiator and Daddys shirts were carefully slipped through the long arms of the rack until they dried, looking like half-dressed, but well-dressed, scarecrows. The ironed clothes were carefully taken up the

back stairway, laid on the bed in neat piles and later placed neatly in dresser and bureau drawers.

Wednesdays and Thursdays were free, do-as-you--please days, although there was always something to do, particularly during spring and summer. Grass had to be cut, flowers and vegetables planted, gardens weeded, windows washed, porches scrubbed. Mothers of large families baked two days each week, and some opted to clean upstairs on Thursday and downstairs on Friday.

Friday was cleaning day. Mother always threw open the windows to let the fresh air in and then began her routine. First she cleaned my brother's bedroom in the back of the house, the room that always got that cool summer breeze down the hollow. Cyril's room had the door to the attic, just a small structure built out over the back porch roof. Cyril's brown suede marble bag hung from a nail in one of the rafters. Next, my parents' bedroom and then mine, and finally, the bathrooms were cleaned. Mother dusted her way down the open front stairway, and then the enclosed back stairway. The downstairs rooms were dusted and vacuumed after all the throw rugs had been taken to the back porch and snapped in the wind. The kitchen was left until last. Mother scrubbed the linoleum, placed rag rugs over the linoleum, and newspapers over the rag rugs. I never could understand this last move but that never bothered Mother. She kept on doing it. If the weather were warm, Mother scrubbed the walks and porches, scrubbed them with hot soapy water and a broom and then hosed them, I loved to do this especially in my bare feet.

Saturday was baking day: homemade bread and rolls, chocolate, coconut, and lemon pies, lemon sponge cake, cinnamon buns. My daddy's favorite was devil's food cake with thin, made-from-scratch, caramel icing. Saturday was also confession day. We took our baths in the early afternoon, put on our better clothes and trekked up Church Hill for our session with the Confessor who knocked the nonsense out of our souls. Like a trip to the dentist's office, no matter how bad I felt going in the confessional, I felt better coming out. Besides, our parents never asked us whether we needed to go or not. They just assumed that we did.

Sunday was church day. Masses were at 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. and the rest of the day was

a quiet, stay-at-home day, unless the family decided to go for a ride in our Studebaker. Daddy always bought Studebakers. If we stopped at a restaurant, Mother always ordered turkey, and, without fail, told the waitress that she had a disease and could eat only white meat. I never considered it lying because if Mother had a disease, she had a disease, and I had better believe it. If we stayed at home, the Sunday dinner was roast beef, Saturday's baked bread, and Uncle P. C. Greene. Uncle P. C. was a jeweler, not in competition with Cartier or Tiffany, but, nevertheless, a jeweler. Across the front window of his small jewelry store in Lonaconing was a sign that read P C — and a six-inch slash of green paint. He just happened to drop by every Sunday always wearing a high, stiff white collar, a black suit, probably the only one he owned. As soon as he arrived and settled himself, he'd take out his gold pocket watch, check the time, and insist that I play "Over the Waves" on the upright, Kingsbury, cherry piano. Every Sunday I told Uncle P. C. (my mother's uncle not mine) that I didn't know this selection so he listened to some other piece. I hated this Sunday ritual, but he lured me on with a promise of a diamond ring for my eighteenth birthday and a larger one each following year. I did get one diamond, but it was so small that I would have had to live hundreds of years before anybody would have noticed. He was an uninvited Sunday-after-Sunday supper guest, but he was family, and I can still catch a glimpse of this old man who sat quiet, smiling, almost uncommunicative, within the shadow of my mother who could say without hesitation, "Oh, hell's fire, here comes Uncle Pete," and then meet him at the door with tenderness and sadness.

Another constancy in my life was neighbors, always the same. The Blairs, the Brysons, the Atkinsons, the Wards, the Shearers, the McGowans, the Robertsons, the Taylors, the Cunninghams, the Steidings always lived on my street, and Annie Pittman, a short, fat, gray-haired woman lived next door in a small, white-washed frame house with a front porch hidden by a wisteria vine. The three-room house was heated by a black pot-bellied stove in the center room and Annie's house was good for at least one flue fire each year. She had a flower garden that bloomed almost hysterically. It was a constant source of irritation to my mother who bought hot-house flowers each spring. Mother's flowers prospered but not as gloriously as Annie's, whose flowers were the result of seeds taken from my mother's garden. Annie was a hypochondriac and was given to screaming at the first pain. Uncle Jim Langhan once remarked

that "anybody who can yell that loud can't be too sick." Most of my superstitions came from Annie who told me wild stories of seeing six white horses in the sky before her father died. She completely convinced me of the meaning of dreams long before I ever heard of Sigmund Freud. Dreaming of muddy water was a sure sign of impending danger, dreaming of babies meant death, dreaming of death meant good luck. I depended upon her for weather reports, cures for warts, and a heavy head of hair, guaranteed by cutting my hair every Good Friday. She rubbed snuff and chewed tobacco and would stand on her back porch and spit for yards into the garden. Perhaps, this was the secret of her successful garden. My mother swore that it was.

Annie was a gullible woman and I took every advantage of this. Once, when she was feeling especially poorly, she came over for some pain medicine. She was never just plain sick but was always at death's door. I went to the bathroom medicine chest and took out two Bufferins. As I handed her the B-marked pills, I told her that they were Daddy's personal, monogrammed pills and that she should take only one at a time. She followed my directions and had a complete cure. I suppose we picked on Miss Pittman because she was there, always certain to react, often overreact to our irksome and protracted annoyance. Annie was as colorful as her scarlet sage, gladiolas, zinnias, *asters*, and roses.

Often, one is too close to her generation to realize fully what is happening, but there was one thing I did realize fully and that was my friendship with Chloe Robertson. I saw what Chloe saw, felt what Chloe felt, grew as Chloe grew, although not as tall. In our little chores -- Chloe had more because she had two brothers and six sisters -- in the games we played, in the dreams we dreamed, we inhabited a world, vastly different and more splendid than anybody else. We found ourselves absorbed in a world of timeless enchantment with baby-dolls, paper cutout dolls, scrapbooks of movie stars, tea-parties under the apple tree in the backyard, stringing colorful crystal buttons on Gert Beveridge's front porch. Gert was a seamstress and had boxes of magical buttons which we made into magical jewelry and remnants of colorful material which we made into colorful baby-doll clothes, We lived imagined adventures of skating in Sun Valley with Sonja Heine, of dancing with Van Johnson or Gregory Peck on a moonlit terrace by the ocean. We shared secrets of boys we liked, bits of gossip we heard. We spun tales that grew like snowballs rolled by children. We pretended that we didn't believe the

spooky tales about Florence Goodrich, the parrot woman, who could breathe fire out of a burn and who was the only person we knew who owned a parrot, and the "Veil Woman" who prowled at night, but the mere suggestion of their presence kept us closer at home. We also steered clear of Koontz Mansion where Raw Head and Bloody Bones, the resident ghost, would get us. We often walked the road that turned up the way from Paradise Street and lead to St. Joseph's Cemetery but avoided Devil's Corner, the section of the graveyard reserved for those who died "out of the church" or who had committed suicide.

We waded in the crick, we strained sand through old window screens in order to make more perfect sand castles. Sometimes, a tuna fish sandwich at our house was followed by chocolate cake with sea-foam, white icing at Chloe's house, for Mimi (Chloe's mother) baked the best cake in town. We squandered hours riding our blue Goodyear bicycles. Even a bicycle became a challenge, and I mastered the trick of holding on to the handlebars while standing with one foot on the seat with the other leg high in the air behind me like an accomplished ice skater. Chloe was more conservative and more lady-like. She didn't even get dirty.

We wandered through the woods, walked the railroad tracks, collected and swapped Hoffman Ice Cream Company Dixie-cup lids that contained movie stars' pictures. We went to every show that came to town. The show changed three times each week: Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday. Sunday's show was usually the best. Wednesday and Thursday's were usually old ones and Friday and Saturday's were Westerns. We didn't like Westerns and thought that Gene Autry wore his pants too tight, but we did like the serials on Saturday, especially Flash Gordon. We liked Shirley Temple but not as much as Sonja Heine whose movies we eagerly awaited. She was our dimpled idol, we suffered when she suffered, and we triumphed when she triumphed. Things always turned out fine for Sonja. The leading man always sang to her. She always had that final fabulous skating routine amidst ice-laden branches. She never fell down, but we certainly did worry about her. Chloe and I found our young way through lovely things. Whatever it was, we did it together. The world seemed magical with promise to us as we hurried through our young days as friends, always together, up the crick.

So many of the things about the crick that I remember are the perfect prescriptions for

the downhearted, The crick's perpetual constancy lies at the roots of my thoughts. I can still hear the early morning whistle of the C & P passenger train as it neared Midland at 6 a.m., the shrill whistling beginning as the train made the turn at the ballpark and continuing until the train reached the red-painted depot on Railroad Street, one street above our home. The train stopped only long enough to pick up those who worked out of Midland and to load and unload mail. The heavy coal-fired engine pulled the two passenger cars and caboose and coughed out its funnel of black smoke as it moved slowly on to the trestle, inched across Church Hill and, gaining speed, disappeared around the corner past Ocean Mines on the way to Frostburg. One of the legends of the area, the reason for large families, centered around this early train. The old story has it that while 6 a.m. was too early to get up, it was certainly too late to go back to sleep. The railroad tracks and the trestle provided much entertainment for us. We walked the tracks to school and church; we crossed the tracks to go almost anywhere because they cut our town into two parts. We placed pennies on the tracks so that the train would flatten them and always waved to the engineer, the caboose man, and the important railroad officials on the Big Bug Car, as if they were close friends leaving forever.

The C&P trestle was our Disneyland. It spanned the crick and stood about fifteen feet above the water. The trestle's flat-topped, solid black metal sides stood, at their highest point, another ten feet above the tracks. On both sides of its crosspieces were one-foot ledges where we separated the brave from the cowardly; the brave stood on these ledges when a twenty-car coal train roared across. The thundering cars shook the trestle, blew coal dust on us as we held on desperately, knowing that we had the fierce courage to face death with a jest. But Jo Jo Stakem was the most courageous of all those who "took on the trestle." He bet his friends that he could stand on the highest point of the trestle, spit, and beat his spit down to the crick. Jo Jo spat, jumped - and broke both his legs. We also wrote messages on the trestle: love messages containing the traditional heart, the anonymous initials, and the broken arrow. But we never knew who wrote the dirty words.

Our lives were as constant, as directed as the women's un-admitted competition to be the first to hang out Monday's early morning wash on the backyard clothes lines, beginning with the bleached white shirts and bed clothes and ending with the kitchen rugs, all hung so as to

hide the underwear. I can still smell the clean, phenomenal odor of the soft towels of spring and touch the frozen towels of winter.

Winters were long and cold, and I remember rolling Turkish towels and rag rugs and tightly placing them at the bottoms of doors and windows, banking the furnace for the night, kneeling and quickly saying my night prayers, jumping into bed and under the covers, and falling fast asleep. Winter was hurrying in the morning to the bathroom, heated by an extra, small gas stove, getting dressed there, and then hurrying on down the cold, enclosed back stairs to the kitchen where the open oven door allowed the heat from inside to take away the morning chill. Most mornings meant getting to St. Joseph's Church for 7 a.m. Mass, required for choir girls, all the girls in grades four through eight, when it was a Requiem Mass. Singing in the choir was mandatory even if we couldn't sing because quantity substituted for quality, and even the quantity was limited. At times, maybe only ten young girls sang the Mass, hungry because we had to fast from midnight on in order to receive communion, receiving because not doing so pointed out a sinner who was not in the state of God's grace. Of course, one could always claim to have taken an accidental drink of water. Some mornings, we desperately tried to stay awake, and sometimes warm if Boatsman O'Rourke, the sexton, didn't have the coal-fired furnace roaring early enough. We were totally unaware that the entire world didn't sing, "Dies irae, dies illa," at that early hour of the morning. The Latin never fazed us because we were taught Gregorian chant from the third grade on. And we always did what Sister Antoinette, the organist and choir director, told us. Sister had a vigorous grasp of child psychology and iron lungs. She was the adult and we were the children, and she had the power to make us believe by her masterly and incontrovertible logic that coming to church at 7 a.m. each morning, like death and taxes, was part of life. I remember total fear when I slept in or Mother slept in and I missed Mass. I knew I would "get it" when I went to school, Undoubtedly, I missed the demure twinkle in Sister's eye that I discovered later in my life, I recall these cold, early mornings, so cold that I lacked the reverence and the sensibility to the sublime.

The walk home from church was a very quick one over deep- crusted snow that pricked my legs, and when the trestle tracks on the C & P Railroad were snow covered and slippery, I walked across the ice on the crick and on home for breakfast. This too was constant: toasted,

homemade bread that burned on the edges because it was too thick for the toaster, hot cocoa with always some in the bottom that didn't dissolve, Quaker oats, and summer-made peach preserves or King syrup. The cream in the milk bottle had frozen, pushed up through the paper cap, and was sliced off for my daddy's coffee.

After breakfast I walked back over the same route to St. Josephs School, hung my snowsuit on the hook in the cloakroom and placed my galoshes directly underneath, We never seemed to question the over-insistence upon technical details. Our school days were as orderly as the ink-well desks we sat in. Our pencils and straight ink pen rested in the ledge at the top of the wooden desk, and our oil-cloth covered books rested neatly in the compartment under the desk tops. Small rectangular wooden stools were placed on the floor under the desk tops of those students whose feet didn't reach the ground. Mine didn't. Our school mornings began with the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, with morning prayers, and then the Baltimore Catechism. We were little theologians who knew where we came from, why we were here and where we were going. But one of my classmates, Vinci Monahan, had a more realistic outlook. Father Brennan, preparing us for our First Communion, asked the class, "What is the end of man?" Vinci's hand shot high in the air, and when called upon for the answer, profoundly said, "His feet." Incarnation, Beatific Vision, Transubstantiation --these were among the mysterious truths that we handled and these were the answers to any serious questions that we had as children. I never had doubts and never knew anybody who did. There was no conflict waging in my soul. Besides, I was too busy.

Be it math or religion or geography or penmanship our standards were imperatively high. I can still feel the pen as it scratched along the white, satiny paper. Too much ink from the ink-well made blots on the paper, so I learned to use, very carefully, the blue ink blotter before and after I wrote. The nuns frowned upon innovation in penmanship, and we had to write as the nuns wrote; perfect Palmer method. All the nuns that I had as teachers in grade school wrote almost exactly the same. They must have practiced the circles, the sweeps as much as we did, and they must have completely rested their writing arms on the desk, too. To this day whenever I make the number 5, I find myself saying, "Down and around and a hat on his head." I still mentally say it in a sing-song manner, I remember how difficult it was to keep

margins on un-margined paper. We drew faint pencil lines that we later erased. We were reminded constantly that anything "less than our best was failure and for years I believed that the Parable of the Talents was written exclusively for me. When a student did a particularly stupid thing in the classroom, the nun stepped to the window, threw it open, and in the idiom of the area, loudly proclaimed, "Take him out in the coal bank and bury him," or with absolute abandon for the supposed sensitivity of today's educator would comment sarcastically when handing back a student's paper, "They shot a man like Lincoln and let you live." We listened intently, and if we happened to miss an instruction, we were told to "get the coal dust out of our ears."

I was fascinated by Sister Patricius, the principal, and "Black Susie," a long, black strap that Sister didn't hesitate to use or at least to threaten to use. It is strange how we become indelibly impressed with specific occurrences. Sister Patricius used to visit classes and frequently teach. One class in American History I'll never forget simply because I did forget some of the facts. On a test I placed Bunker Hill in Baltimore, and I was sent to Sister Patricius. At the moment, I didn't know the reason and merely figured that I was the one sent with the note because I had been especially good that day. Nuns habitually rewarded good behavior with work: carrying notes, washing blackboards, straightening chairs, dusting shelves, window ledges, and desk tops. Well, I proudly walked up the aisle to her desk and said, "Good morningster." We always combined our daily greetings: morningster, eveningster, and no amount of correction changed this, Sister read the note, looked at me, and somberly asked, "And where did I tell you Bunker Hill was?" I immediately remembered.

One other time I had an encounter with Sister. There was an open field at the bottom of Church Hill. In the corner of the field was a "chinning bar," a forerunner of today's parallel bars. Instead of swinging by my hands as little ladies should, I hung by my legs. Naturally, my dress went up over my head. Several others did the same. Sister sent an older student to tell us to go to her immediately. Not me! I cut out of the field, down the tracks, across the trestle, and on home, pretending to be very ill. My mother swallowed my lie until my brother showed up at the door with orders to return me to school. In those days the parents always sided with the nuns. It was automatically assumed that the children were wrong, and punishment at school meant

further punishment at home. At this point, my memory of the incident fades. Perhaps, it was too impassioned a moment to remember. Perhaps, it contained too little to preserve it from oblivion. However, Bunker Hill and immodesty embody my entire image of Sister Patricius.

I revel in my memories of sliding down the coal bank on cardboard sleds at recess and hurrying home for my noon meal so I could hurry back to slide some more. I remember the stinging red ring of chapping around my calves caused by snow getting down in my rubber galoshes during too many trips up and down the bank, We rolled snowballs from the top of the playground to the edge of the hill and sent them smashing down through trees and bushes into the crick. We built igloos from hundreds of snowballs, and flopped backwards, with arms outstretched, into the snow, making angel wings. I can still see and smell the long, tan, cotton stockings and sopping wet woolen mittens and gloves drying on the radiators during the long afternoons of geography, art, "Evangeline," and penmanship. School was over at 3 p.m. unless it was our turn to wash the blackboards, always from top to bottom, to clap the blackboard erasers out the window, to straighten the desks into a military line. Then, on home.

As soon as we got home from school, we grabbed a bite to eat, maybe sugar bread or syrup bread, or jelly bread and a glass of milk. We changed our school clothes for play clothes and headed for Squirrel Neck Hollow, a hill up behind the crick, to skate on the Frog Pond. If the hollow was snow-covered, we put on our skates at home. If not, we'd sit on a log at the pond. I pretended to be Sonja Heine, but I was too cold to believe it, and besides, my snowsuit with its suspended pants and hooded jacket bore little resemblance to her skating outfits. The pond was circular with a diameter of no more than ten feet, but a young child can enlarge and embellish anything. Bernadette Winner, who lived down Back Street, must have thought that it was quite huge. Without looking behind her, she put her one leg in the air and the edge of her blade gouged me in the right eyebrow. I hurriedly skated home, down the hollow, up Back Street, around our walk, up the two steps to our back porch, and opened the back door, all the time blood running down my face. My daddy was seated at the supper table. Mother looked at me, barked, "You're late for supper, again." The purest love is the most exacting and I had broken one of the rules: Be home on time. I lost nothing in my life by believing this. But I do have a scar in my right eyebrow.

Supper was a family affair. Up the crick we had breakfast, dinner and supper; lunch was something we had when we wanted a bite to eat between meals or what we carried in a brown paper sack. We children had to get washed up before we sat down to eat. Our daddy was not only the head of the household but the head of the supper table. At least, Mother allowed him to think so. And all food began with him and then was passed to us. After supper I helped to redd the table, Mother washed the dishes, and Cyril and I dried them with striped-linen dish towels that had been dampened and ironed with the same care as Daddy's white shirts. It was a long time before I caught on to Cyril's game of "let's have a race to see who can dry the most." For years, Cyril also had me fully convinced that I had to be twelve before I could drink a milk shake. I was only old enough to have a chocolate rickey, Homer Noel's name for chocolate milk with ice in it. Cyril pocketed the extra money. Homer Noel and his mother Bella owned the local confectionary store and gathering place. They managed to have a successful business because it was the only one in town. God knows that I can't think of any other reason, unless it could be Homer's dog that he scatted away with a swipe from the same dish towel that he used to dry glasses.

Of an evening we would sled ride down the hollow and if the snow were firmly packed, we could start at the top, cross Squirrel Neck Hollow's wooden bridge, cut across Back Street and make it to the railroad tracks with no concern for traffic because there really wasn't that much. On the final run of the evening, we hooked together an "eastern" by holding on to the feet of the rider in front. At time, the more daring among us skied. Our skiing was unique for our skies were barrel staves, our poles were stripped tree branches, and our Alps were coal banks, but we had the daring and exuberance of Olympian down-hillers. The knitted cuffs of our snow pants and jackets were frozen stiff, our faces, hands, and feet tingled with cold, but we stayed out until the time allotted by our parents, and then pulled our sleds home by the ropes attached to them, set them up on the back porch, readied for the next day.

After lessons were completed at the kitchen table, we were allowed some time to listen to the floor model, oak RCA radio in the sittin room. We laughed at Fred Allen, George Burns, Fibber McGee, The Great Gildersleeve, and Jack Benny, and we believed that Dennis Day was the best singer in all the world. I listened, but didn't always understand when President

Roosevelt spoke to his "fellow Americans." I knew that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost comprised the Holy Trinity, but somewhere in a close second were Christ, FDR and John L. Lewis. Although there were no pictures of the last two in my house, I knew that I had better be aware of their importance up the crick. One night Mother turned on the radio, and there was a shrill squeal. She tried several times and each time the same thing happened. So she unplugged the radio and called her nephew Jack Monahan, who could fix anything, and would, for Mother. Upon investigation, Jack found a mouse wedged between two tubes, and every time the radio warmed up the mouse got enough voltage to shock him but not kill him.

Chloe and I especially enjoyed It Pays to be Ignorant and roared with laughter at such questions as "Where's the Brooklyn Bridge?" and almost died with young giddiness at a panel members follow up question, "Who built the bridge, Mr. Howard?" I marvel at our simplicity but they were great days for simplicity. We never analyzed our present nor worried about our future. We were children who for the most were at peace, were free, and not locked up inside ourselves.

With young joy we waited for the holidays. Thanksgiving meant two days off from school, a live turkey, perhaps won in a raffle at Dempsey O'Brien's bar, and Miss Pittman or Uncle Jim Langan chopping the head off the turkey, soaking the turkey in a wash tub of scalding water, and laboriously picking out the feathers one by one. Thanksgiving was eating in the dining room, a lace table cloth and linen napkins, the good china and silver, getting all dressed up for the meal. It was roast turkey and bread dressing, "smashed" potatoes, homemade cranberry sauce, homemade rolls, and minced-meat and pumpkin pies.

But Christmas was most special. The live tree, so carefully decorated by my daddy who hand-pressed each icicle that hung on the very end of the branch, ceremoniously reigned in a corner of the parlor, a part of the house set apart from everyday life. The tree was never taken down until after Little Christmas, the sixth of January. Christmas Eve was Midnight Mass when we performed in the choir what we had practiced every Sunday afternoon. We sang with joy the Introit of the Mass, "Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te," (Thou are My Son, this day have I begotten Thee,) and ended with a young, stirring rendition of "Hark the

Herald Angels Sing.' This, of course, was after we were old enough to stay up that late and after Sister Charitine, third and fourth grade teacher, had informed us that there was no Santa Claus.

Christmas was eating the first piece of fruitcake after Midnight Mass and sucking an orange through a peppermint stick. There was a special gift each year, perhaps a new Lightning Glider sled, a new pair of skates or a bicycle, but each Christmas was the time for a new paint box, a tin, rectangular box with eight, tiny squares of glorious colors and one paint brush, a new box of crayons, a pencil box, new books, and a stocking full of oranges, tangerines, and nuts. It was hard tack candy and boxes of chocolate hidden in closets and under parents' bed. My mother often told the story about once during the wee hours of the morning when she awakened my daddy because she heard mice. Not mice at all but my brother Cyril under the bed, lying flat on his belly eating the hidden candy. Christmas was a handful of fun and a heartfelt of joy.

On New Year's Eve we waited for first-footers, for this custom of the Scottish people had also become ours. The house had been cleaned thoroughly. The flowered chair covers in the sittin room had been washed, starched and ironed as were the lace doilies for the arms and backs of parlor chairs and couch and drum-top tables. The lace curtains had been washed and stretched on the adjustable, wooden curtain stretcher edged with straight pins to hold tightly the hems of the curtains. This process totally exhausted my mother and her extensive swearing vocabulary, but those curtains came off that stretcher as stiff as winter's frozen towels, The fine lace tablecloth in the dining room matched the lace-curtained double windows, dominated by Mother's huge, healthy, Boston fern. Mother periodically placed wet tea grains in the fern's dirt, her special formula for success. It worked. One felt poinsettia, attached to the window lock, hung on the bottom center of every window in the hous. Freshly scrubbed hooked rugs covered the carpets on the floors of the sittin room, the parlor and the dining room, and rag carpets covered the kitchen linoleum. A fresh-pine spray on the front door greeted the first-footers after they passed through the blue-lighted cedar tree and spreaders in the front of the house. Daddy took his decorating very seriously. The first person to enter the house had to be a man, preferably a tall, dark-haired man, because a woman first-across-the-step was bad luck. The first male was always given a silver dollar.

St. Joseph's bells loudly rang in the New Year, and I still feel the warmth of my parents' kisses and wishes for a Happy New Year, as much as I can still feel the warmth of my bedroom with its wallpapered wall, its step-up closet, its crucifix, its oak vanity, dresser, poster bed, night stand, and rocking chair, as I reluctantly went to bed soon after midnight. A picture of the Blessed Mother hung above the silver painted radiator, There was no clutter in my bedroom. It was as neat and well ordered as the white chenille spread and as comforting, eternally feminine and lasting as Grandma Monahan's yellow and white double wedding ring quilt.

On New Year's Day, the calendar was turned, never the day before, and most families served kraut and pork because the pig is a rooter and will root out evil. I remember my home as a perpetual open house.

Winters slowly melted into springs and I continued to build happiness on certainties. Deep, ice-crusting snow jellied into dirty slush, pussy willow bushes birthed their fuzzy babies, the crick rose from the mountains' runs, and Lent was here. The long days of Lent when we knew with infinite faith that giving up our bags of penny candy or the show, as movies were called, at Harry Ward's Opera House, or a thick chocolate milk shake at Homer Noel's place guaranteed God's favor. With the dynamic convictions and zeal of missionaries we ransomed pagan babies with our pennies, earned through denial, by dropping them in the small, cardboard box on Sister's desk. God alone knows how many "ransomed pagans" are roaming the world with names like Mary Margaret, Myles, Noreen, Geraldine, Colleen, and Hugh.

Lent also meant Friday afternoon Stations of the Cross, an interminable devotion for the young. Every Lenten Friday, our mothers made us, with absolutely no consideration of the weather, go home for our dinners. This was neither nutritionally nor spiritually motivated. Like Monday morning's wash we were part of our mothers' competition. Our coming home to eat gave them the chance to clean us up: a clean uniform, washed face and hands, brushed hair pulled back with bluebird barrettes, our best sweater or coat, good shoes if the old were shabby. Most female parishioners attended Stations of the Cross on Friday afternoon, and I guess that a clean child was a status symbol. If cleanliness is next to Godliness, we were certainly virtuous on Friday afternoon, as we stood, knelt and sang "Stabat Mater," as clean and

sparkling as the armor of a crusading knight. Fourteen times we knelt and answered the priest's prayer, "We adore Thee O Christ and we bless Thee," with "Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world." It was a long service, particularly long for a Friday afternoon. I played mental games during Stations. I'd try to see for how many stations I could stare at one object. I'd think ahead to the next station, somehow hoping that that would speed things up. Seven down, seven to go. And then I'd have a moment of piety and weep with the women of Jerusalem. I particularly liked Simon of Cyrene and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, and was really fascinated with the Sixth Station as Veronica made her way through the crowd to wipe the face of Christ. Although I was young and wanted to play on Friday afternoons, the phrase 'ignominious death on the cross' made me realize, at a very young age, that life would not be all play.

Lent ended after the long hours of Holy Week, with the 'Gloria' of the Mass on Holy Saturday and the ringing of the great deep-toned bells of St. Joseph's that had been silenced since Holy Thursday. Easter Sunday was the day for our new Easter outfits which we wore even if it meant freezing. I remember pastel coats, new dresses, and fancy straw hats with grosgrain streamers. We were as neat as our new black patent leather or even white leather shoes that matched perfectly the snow that was often on the ground. Our small one-button, white-gloved hands held small leather purses that usually contained an embroidered handkerchief, a pair of rosary beads, and very little else. Lent was over and we attacked our Easter baskets like "starving Armenians," whoever they were. We ate chocolate bunnies, robin eggs, marshmallow peeps, jelly beans, and we played with our stuffed bunnies. One special one of mine wore a kilt and a plaid hat, and I loved him even though he was a "Scotch" bunny. Toad McNeil gave him to me.

My youth was now an unbroken happiness of anticipation of the spring that would bring forsythia, lilacs, lilies of the valley, tulips, dogwood, pienes (peonies), longer days. The crabapple trees would bloom simply because the Catholic children needed them to make May crowns for the statues of The Blessed Mother that were in our classrooms, all four of them. We took about six inches of string and looped the tiny, pliant stems of the blossoms over the string, and then pulled them into a circle. At times, we interspersed lilacs between them. Often, Mary's

crown was top—heavy, but we looked lovingly at our art and breathed its delight. Mary stood in a circle of lilacs, tulips, wild honeysuckle, and dogwood brought from our woods and yards and sometimes from neighbors' yards that we passed on our way to school because in our childish innocence we saw no evil in stealing flowers for Mary's shrines. We walked, like high-wire artists, across the gas-line pipe that paralleled the Hollow bridge, and we threw big rocks into the swollen crick. We chased the snake-beaters from the frog pond up the Hollow and scooped up frog eggs that provided our science study for weeks and was about as close to the reproductive system as we ever got. Spring was freshly whitewashed rock foundations of homes. It was the real chance to ride the Christmas bicycle.

We stayed out later in the evenings playing "Kick the Can," a combination of soccer and "Hide and Seek." One person would stand, usually against a telephone pole, count to a hundred, make certain that the can was in the middle of the road, then go look for all the hidden friends, catch one, race back, and whoever kicked the can first won. We divided into teams to play "Watch the Moon Skip the Rocket." One team would hide while the captain went back to the other team and drew directions in the dirt to the hiding place. The other team spread out, always within yelling distance, and upon discovering the other team yelled, "Watch the moon skip the rocket." There was no time limit; the fun was in the search. "Coxey's Army" had to be played either in the daylight or under a telephone-pole light. The players formed a wide ring around the person who was captured. They held hands tightly while the person would attempt to break through. It was a circular version of "Red Rover," with the entire team taking on one person.

Spring was hopscotch and jump rope. Jump rope demanded speed and endurance and we had both. We had our individual jump ropes, usually a tweed rope held with colorful wooden handles. Individual challenged individual to matches determined by time. But we had the real fun with a long piece of clothes line. Two girls ' for some unknown reason jump rope belonged to the girls would hold the ends of the rope and one of the favorites was a game where the rope holders would chant

Mable, Mable, set the table

Don't forget the red—hot pepper

and increase the speed until the jumper missed, counting jump rope games were played to the rhyme

Maggie, Maggie, where is Jiggs?

Down in the cellar eating pigs.

How many pigs did he eat?

Here, the jumper would count out as long as she could last.

Whoever could count and jump the highest number was the winner.

An element of romance was added to one counting rhyme.

Down in the meadow where the green grass grows

There sat as sweet as a rose.

She sang, she sang, she sang so sweet

Along came and kissed her on the cheek.

How many kisses did she get?

The names of the jumper and the boy that she liked at that time were inserted into the rhyme.

Our romances were very many but short and mostly imagined. There were not enough of us in Midland to pair off because that would have jeopardized our games. We ran in hordes and, of course, our parents would not have had it any other way.

Spring was the first thunder that 'woke the snakes.' It was spring rain hitting the tin roof of Pa Steiding's shed in the empty lot next to our house, Pa planted a garden in that lot and often shared a glass of ice-water, ice-tea, or lemonade with my mother. Mother always knew when Pa was thirsty, and Pa always knew when Mother wanted spring-green onions and summer-red tomatoes. Spring was the first day of May when a freckled person was "to get up before dawn, go outside, make the Sign of the Cross, wet the face with the morning dew to make the freckles go away." I did but they didn't, May 15 was the day my daddy began to wear his straw hat. Spring brought large, square, cardboard boxes of new peeps that filled the local post office with nosey children whose "oh's" and "ah's" mingled with the constant chirping of the peeps and must have made the postmistress, Florence Blair, avidly thirst for winter's quiet.

Spring was also the time when we deviled Miss Pittman by repeatedly asking her if the rain would hurt her rhubarb.

Families planted backyard gardens with lettuce, carrots, radishes, squash, and placed the Burpee seed packets on little poles at intervals in the garden to identify that parcel of the garden. We put away our galoshes, snowsuits, mittens, hats or toboggans as we called them, and took out our sweaters, ankle socks, play clothes, umbrellas, and rain-coats. We filled the streets with children riding bicycles and balloon-tire-scooters. For hours on end we played dodge ball, jacks, marbles, and pick-up sticks. We had yoyo and paddle-ball contests. Our days were days of spontaneous enthusiasm as unpredictable as sunshine.

We wanted to be always at concert pitch, and we liked to climb a mountain now and then. But we lived in the valley and so often did our emotions. We had to face spring floods and Diocesan final examinations. The crick was often kinder to us than the Diocese. A flooded backyard or cellar was easier to live with than the thought that we were taking the same examinations as the children in Baltimore. We knew the depth of the crick but what came in that sealed envelope from Baltimore was a still pond with depth unknown. There were no excuses. We either passed or we stayed in the same grade, and being "kept back" in school was, like Baptism, an indelible mark that time could not erase.

The crick touched my life at many points but my memories of it are strongest when it was flooded. I remember walking over to the Hollow bridge to see how high the water was. Although we were warned repeatedly to stay away, we paid no attention. Somehow or other we trusted it; perhaps we had spent so many hours with it. My mother always feared water, saying that while fire could be controlled, water couldn't. One spring when the crick was high, my brother and my cousin, Joseph Kenney, decided to be adventurous. One stood at the bottom of the crick bank behind our house and one stood on a big rock under the middle of the bridge. They had found a log and placed me on it. Joseph, standing at the embankment, let go and I shot down the crick to Cyril who stopped me. Mother happened to go out on the back porch to hang up a tea towel and heard our laughter. She walked to the embankment and the rest belongs to that part of history catalogued under, "Remember when. . ." Wilbur Crowe from

Paradise Street was even more daring. He rode an inner-tube down the flooded stream from the bottom of Paradise Street on down past the Hollow bridge. The water was so high that he had to duck at the cement bridge on Main Street at the meeting of the waters. We cheered Wilbur on every wave of the way.

The water receded, examinations were soon forgotten, rented books were turned back in, school uniforms were washed and put away with the hope that the wearer did not outgrow them by next fall, and the newness and energy of summer came. There were still Requiem Masses during the summer for the nuns wielded the power, even in the summer, to enforce attendance, but our days were ours, intimate and carefree. Close friends became closer, and Chloe and Noreen Murray, who moved from O'Mara's Avenue to Back Street, and I threw blankets over double clothes lines, cut out paper Sonja Heine dolls, and played uncountable games of war and old maid. Once, Noreen fell in the crick and was terrified to go home because she had been warned about playing in the crick. Mother saved the day by drying her clothes and calming her fears. Noreen had two brothers and one sister, Patsy, who often wanted to tag along and would tattler if we didn't let her. Most days we managed to shake Patsy because we were the big kids.

Our summer ocean was the "sulfur crick," and we piled thousands of stones upon thousands of stones to build a dam, thrilled with a depth to our knees. And we even charged admission to those who had not been in on the construction of the dam from the beginning. A hundred rocks was the charge, and we counted every one. We wore rubber bathing slippers to protect our feet while we often swallowed the dirty water, full of open sewage.

All churches in Midland, the Methodist, the Presbyterian, and the Catholic, had summer picnics at the Celanese Pool in Cresaptown, Maryland, about ten miles down the road from Midland. Somehow or other, the Methodist child went to the Catholic picnic, and the Presbyterian child went to the Methodist picnic. Even on the crick it was important to know someone. And sometimes, we even exchanged "best friends" to get to a picnic. Most of us weren't particular about what we packed in our lunch sacks: a minced ham sandwich, a store-bought Ort's cake, a banana. We piled in the back of a truck or the back seat of a car, carrying

our swimming clothes in a rolled towel. We could always bum food from one of the families that packed a veritable summer banquet, or we could spend our dollar on hot dogs, Hohing bottle-company orange drink, or a chocolate imp, ice cream covered with chocolate and on a stick. I remember these picnics, but more vividly I remember the sunburns because these picnic days were the only days that we spent almost entirely in bathing suits. Noxzema and corn starch were the remedies, not completely effective, and even a cool sheet touching a burned back made us wonder if our day in the sun was worth it.

We walked in the woods and talked to those men in town, often unemployed but rugged, trustworthy and ingenious, who were cooking their Mulligans. A Mulligan was a progressive con game. The men would talk Buzz Dilfer out of beef bones. Then they would subtly threaten Frank Wilson, the bread man, and the beer-truck man of a boycott of their goods if they didn't contribute to the cause. The vegetables they "borrowed" from the women's cupboards. They placed the beer in a cold mountain run, lit a fire, cooked their Mulligan, and relaxed in the glory of a Midland spring or summer. No matter how far I walked, or whom I met, I never was scared because everybody knew everybody else.

We picked violets, wild roses, and flags (irises). We dug for anise roots, we tore off birch-bark, we searched for waxy spearmint leaves, we picked raspberries, and we chewed them all. We drank homemade root beer and birch beer and ate salt-sprinkled sour apples that puckered our lips. We swung out over the coal banks on grapevines, young Tarzans and Janes, creating our own adventures. We jumped the shadows of the coal trains as they passed. We stole cakes from the racks in the back garages of Ort's Bakery where they were placed to cool. With the boldness of youth we took them to the side window when Arch Dixon was working because he would squirt icing on them from his huge wax-paper funnel. At times, we "printner" (Crick for pretty near) got caught. We played Batman in Buckshot Stakem's deserted slaughter house but forgot to ask permission and had our first encounter with the law. We were questioned by the State Police, taken before Tailor Tom Stakem, Trial Magistrate, and ordered to reimburse "Buckshot" for the hundreds of dollars' worth of damage that we supposedly did. Our parents refused to pay and that was that.

We had high-pitched enthusiasm for baseball games that were held on Sundays, and every town of considerable size, around 1000, had its team and its rooters who didn't hesitate to question any umpire's call with passionate hues of partisanship and sometimes downright ignorance. We made extraordinary statements backed with fierce assurance and lion-hearted convictions that the umpire was such a cheat that "he would steal Christ off the cross and go back for the nails." While Robert "Lefty" Grove from Lonaconing was pitching for the Boston Red Sox, the crick people were home rooting for their teams in the George's Creek League, and Midland people were the often unruly fans of the crick. Delicate, feminine women like Rose Byrne, Kate Atkinson, Alice and Trellis Winner could turn into over-enthusiastic Brooklyn Dodger-like fans at the crack of the bat or any time any player came up against the following lineup:

Pitcher Patty Corrigan or Shooky Rogish

Catcher Boogs Rogish

First Base Leo "Toad" McNeil

Second Base Jack Kirk

Third Base Hooper Hyde

Short Stop Owen McCutcheon

Left Field Billy Stevens

Center Field Spike Dunn

Right Field Yellow Horse Graham

Managers Frank Burns

Dick Stakem

In our opinion, this lineup was equal to or better than any major-league baseball team at that time. Although at times rowdy and undisciplined, when they took the field to play the game, they became totally serious and professional. One of the few things that they did take seriously was baseball.

Summer was also the time for weddings and bull-banding. We would stand across the road that the newly-married couple had to pass on their way from church, and they had to

throw their change to us. We wished them luck in proportion to the amount of money that we got. Summer was lying in the glider and reading a book, being lulled to sleep by the rhythmic swing of the glider or the hum of a fly. It was camping out over-night in the backyard with Miss Pittman keeping watch over us because Mother was afraid something would happen. It was roller skating on rough macadam streets or pulling the weeds in our front walk and garage walk. Once Cyril and John "Possum" Cullen pulled half the weeds and put them on top of the un-pulled ones. They told Mother that they were too tired to sweep the walk, and she said that they had certainly done enough, paid them, and then began to sweep. They had to finish the job the next day. Some summers we would soak the weeds with gasoline. It worked but it was messy.

With childish gullibility we believed all the stories about how big the firemen's carnival was going to be this summer. We colored and expanded everything beyond its limits and envisioned elephants and roller coasters. Jokie Monahan, a member of the volunteer fire department, always promised at least ten rides. Jokie stuttered and his te--te-ten rides often meant a small train and nine ponies. We did end up with pony rides and swings that tossed us in a circle out over the crowd of people standing up street. A shabby, squeaking ferris wheel took us to the top, the highest point in town, and we squealed with fear as we looked out over the game stands, hot-dog stand, the paddle wheel and bingo for those adults given to gambling. Our dollar didn't stretch far beyond the first hour. But there was always the chance of "sponging" more from our parents if they were over street. And then the big parade! Fire trucks from Shaft and Lonaconing and Frostburg and even areas away from the crick drove down the main street, a quarter-of-a-mile long, and a few bands. The Anon Band from Frostburg and the Blue Angels from Westernport, played and marched between the truck.,

The people who came with the carnival fascinated us, for we did not live with men with tattoos and women with bleached hair and heavy makeup, women who didn't wear enough clothes to pad a crutch. There were whispers about "hootchie'-kootchie shows," but those tents were off limits to us and opened long after we were asleep. Of course, only the "visiting" firemen would dare to attend, for our lives paralleled those things we believed in, and a "hootchie-kootchie show" wasn't one of them or so we were told with obviously deliberate

discretion. Our lives were continuous delightful adventures balanced between freedom and discipline, the freedom to do what our parents allowed us to do and the discipline that followed if we didn't.

Life was always new to us, and we greeted it with a surprise as lively as autumn. Autumn brought the new school year, perhaps a new teacher if we were in the odd-numbered grades because we had combination grades, but rarely a new student. I can't recall anybody moving away, but then not too many new people moved in. The new school clothes excited us, but it was a short-lived excitement because the uniforms were required the third week of school. We envied the public school kids because they could wear reds and greens and plaids, and we had to spend eight years in blue and white.

Autumns brought church suppers and a temporary "ecumenical movement," born out of expediency rather than toleration, because Protestants had roses, asters, snowballs, and vases that the Catholics needed for their suppers and Catholics had tomatoes, potatoes, homemade pickles, and corn that the Protestants needed. And each needed the other to come to the supper to assure success. Again, like Monday morning's wash, the women's race was on: to bake the best lemon meringue pie, the best cherry-walnut cake, the richest fudge, to crochet the fanciest doilies, to make the best pot holders and aprons, to sell the most raffle tickets for the grand door prize. Church suppers were always best during election years because all candidates were there, sometimes even gubernatorial candidates, because they didn't dare to try to garner all those votes. We looked at them in amazement and wondered if they really were such good liars that "they could make Samson's rock (a large rock in the area) seem like a blue bird's nest." We dressed in our best Sunday clothes and our best Sunday manners.

Our life in autumn was a swirl of color, pouring the rain down on browning grass, drooping scarlet sage, and roses, getting the first load of lump coal for the winter. We smoked the corn silk of the corn stalks, and we shared our treasures at corn and potato roasts. Sometimes we even quietly paused and admired the blue skies of October as we chewed the white silky bloom of the Indian tobacco and spit the bloody red juice that it produced. In order to see the full wonder of the colored leaves of autumn, we walked the long Rock Road to Dan's

Rock, stopping at the spring above Paradise Street to fill our Mason jars with cold, mountain water. Hurriedly, we passed the house where the man had killed his wife and children, but not without taking a quick look at the sideyard grindstone on which, according to those who knew, he had sharpened the very knife that he had used. When we reached Lewellyn's farm, we knew that we were about there. Finally, the rock with its rugged cliffs hiding blueberry bushes loomed before us. We climbed to the top where we could see Frostburg on the one side and the winding Potomac River away down below on the other side threading its way through the farm valleys of Maryland and West Virginia.

At autumn's height it was classroom bulletin boards of pressed, paraffined orange, yellow, and red leaves. But most of all it was waiting with limitless plans for Halloween. There were no store bought costumes nor trick-or-treating nor jack-o-lanterns. Halloween was the time to be bad, to soap car windows, to raid gardens, to throw old cabbage heads on porches, even to push over outhouses. The professionals among us "tick-tacked." We took old wooden spools, notched the edges, tied a long string around them, wrapped the string around the knotted spool and then "let it rip" across the windows of rooms where people were sitting quietly reading or listening to the radio. We raided Miss Pittman's dying rhubarb patch while chanting like cultists:

A cat has kittens

A dog has pups

Hey, Miss Pittman

Is your rhubarb up?

We picked on the defenseless but didn't show mercy for the mighty. John Ort, local bakery owner, chased us all over town for frantically rapping on his door and then hiding, continuing the same thing over and over. We started Halloweening early, and the bravest among us walked through the cemetery defying the dead by daring to walk over their graves. Halloween was our Walpurgis night; we exorcised our demons and settled down for another long winter.

Equal only to the excitement of Halloween was the excitement of a "shootin' match." The

"crick" person was a lover of sports and a "shootin' match" was one of his favorite. Shootin' matches produced a profound impression upon me, never to be effaced. I remember the cold, the chill of the day, but I remember most the drama and the excitement and the crowds. The matches were held at the Midland ball park during late autumn or early winter because the birds, barn pigeons, were tougher then; they had molted their feathers during the summer and they were no longer feeding their young. Shooting homing pigeons was illegal but the crick people found the loophole: barn pigeons were not homing pigeons even though some had been trained to do just that. The singular difference was distance, for the barn pigeon couldn't travel the long distance and return as did the homing pigeon. If the shooter missed a trained pigeon, the trapper would frequently throw a homing pigeon into the air to circle the missed bird and guide it back to the barn or coop. Some shooters had street pigeons from Baltimore crated and shipped by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to Cumberland and the C & P Railroad to the crick. Jack Evans of Lonaconing bought as many as 200 per month for practice at a cost of two-for-a-quarter. Shooters trained for months for a match, gradually increasing the number of birds each day, beginning with five birds and ending with as high as fifteen the week before the match.

A "shootin' match" was a very serious, momentous event that involved a formal, written contract between the opponents. The shooters decided the number of birds to be shot at and the amount of money to be won. The number of birds at a really big match would usually be twenty-one birds to each shooter, and the amount of money was usually determined by the expertise and popularity of the shooter. Pots ranged from \$500.00 to \$5,000.00, the shooter putting up a certain amount and his rooters making up the rest, and for each \$10.00 bet, the better was taxed \$1.00 to help to defray the cost of practice birds and match birds. A hat was also passed. Many people bet on each shot, and much money was gambled on those chilly afternoons.

Many homes on the crick had backyard pigeon coops and training birds for the matches were serious business. Each trainer had a wooden trap just large enough to hold the bird, and a string was attached to the trap to enable the trainer to open it. When he did so, he would "brush" the bird: beat it with a newspaper or paper sack. Some trainers used dogs or rocks to

chase the bird when the trap opened. The trainer numbered his birds according to their flight patterns. Was it a low driving or raising bird? Did the bird fly to the left, to the right, or straight ahead? Then, if a shooter were missing a bird that flew to the left on the day of the match, the trainer would place all such "left-fliers" in the trap, for a shooter shot at his opponent's birds. Also, if a bird were a "loss," not killed, the bird would fly home, and the trainer would send a runner home for the bird to bring it back and re-trap it. According to crick "authorities," Danny O'Brien from Midland holds the trainers' record for re-trapped birds; at one match he managed to use the same bird five times. The crick shooter shot at the world's best birds and had thousands from which to pick.

The physical boundary of a "shootin' match" had to be a forty-yard circumference. Each side had a judge and a timer, and there was a final judge, chosen by a toss of a coin, who kept time, and, in case of a disagreement, made the final decision. The shooter approached his spot, up at the Scratch, twenty-five yards away from the trap, with his gun-carrier who also pulled the string for the trap -- but only when the shooter was ready. Up to this point there was no time limit. The shooter had to hold the gun below his elbow and away from his body until the bird flew. Two men went to the trap, placed the bird in it. Good trappers knew good tricks. They were known to flour or talcum the bird's wings so that when the wings moved, a cloud of dust distracted the shooter. At times, they added a few extra feathers on the bird's back to confuse the shooter or used a pin or carbide on the bird's bottom to guarantee speedy flight. Using white birds when there was snow on the ground created the same effect. After the trap was opened, the shooter had thirty seconds. If the first bird didn't fly, a second bird was used. If the second bird didn't fly, the shooter scored a "kill." The bird had to fall within the forty-yard area, and, if somehow or other, it 'crawled' out, it was a loss. Therefore, each shooter had a "runner" who ran after the dropped bird to retrieve it before it got out of bounds.

A "shootin' match" was a very dramatic occasion and some shooters were more dramatic than others. Simon Arnold, who showed real class, brought a big tent to the ball park the day of the match, a tent that held chairs and a cot where Mr. Arnold would lie "belly down" between "turns." Some form of shelter, usually an automobile, was provided for all shooters to keep them away from the noisy excitement of the crowd, to keep them calm. It was a very solemn,

memorable moment: the shooter walking to his position, his gun-carrier walking beside him and the long wait for the trap to open. The shooters were memorable, too. There was Jack Evans, several times mayor of Lonaconing and owner of the Lonaconing Water Company. George "Bubby" Llewellyn shot as did Francis "Tug" Hughes, who was especially strong on the last five or six birds, and Gashouse Johnson, John Hersick, Louis Cesnick, Joke Ralston, and Arch Cameron. There was Graham "Flab" Gray, a barber, and later a candidate on the Independent Ticket for the Presidency of the United States. And, above all, there was Leo "Toad" McNeil. One of my early memories of Toad takes me back to the Midland ball park. I was very young, but I walked out to home plate and presented Toad a bouquet of flowers. What the occasion was I do not know. But I remember it. Toad was born in Elk Garden, West Virginia, but his father moved the family here so he could work the mines. There were four sons: William "Boney," James "Chase," Leo "Toad," and Ashby, who didn't get a nickname. There were three daughters: Agnes, Mary, and Margaret. I know little about Toad's education, but I believe that he went to St. Joseph's School for a few years; at least I believe my daddy told me that he did. Toad was not Catholic, but he insisted upon giving the nuns their Thanksgiving and Christmas turkeys and he always wore, attached to his long underwear with a safety pin, the many religious medals that the nuns gave to him in return for the turkeys.

Toad lived most of his life in Klondike, Maryland. It was a typical mining town in some ways. The unpainted houses were very close to the narrow, pot-holed road, dirtied by the mining trucks. Most homes had chicken and pigeon coops, and gardens in the backyards, and the town sat atop the middle of Big Vein Mine No. 7, about sixty feet below. At one time, Klondike was about 75 percent foreign. Up the crick this means that the person didn't come from the British Isles. Also, there were three black families who lived there. This in itself was unusual for the crick, but what was even more unusual, their children spoke fluent Hungarian and could sing the Hungarian folk songs.

Toad's eldest brother, Ashby, ran a grocery store in Klondike. Like many of his fellow townspeople, Ashby was also known to drink a bit and allegedly could put both arms through the steering wheel to prevent him from falling over and still manage to bring the car home from

a long distance and place it perfectly in the garage. Brother Chase once drove the family surrey-cart to a chicken fight, but he came home on foot because he bet on the wrong chicken and lost the horses and the surrey-cart.

The McNeil's leased a coal mine in Woodlawn about a mile down the road from Klondike. The mine, No. 6, became known as the Cheese Mine because the miners bought their food at Ashby's store and all he had for their dinner jacket, the lunch bucket, was cheese, so the miners carried cheese sandwiches.

Toad worked Mine No. 7 for a short time, drove mules with a bull whip, but because of his baseball ability, was signed by the Baltimore Orioles and was sent to one of their minor-league farm clubs in Beckley, West Virginia. Toad soon came home because, as he said, "Damned if they were trading me off like a mine mule." After Ashby died, Toad took over the family store and continued the family custom of allowing the Klondike people to get food "on tick" during lay-offs, strikes, and the Depression. Most people paid him back as crick people usually did. Eventually, Toad's grocery store turned into a grocery store and saloon. Although Toad never drank, he loved frequenting the bars along the crick and setting up everybody in the bar. However, he would not give an extra piece of candy to the child buying a nickel's worth of candy in his store. Here, he was strictly business. According to my daddy, Toad knew how to do two things: play ball and make money. His store books were examples of great simplicity. They read, "Took in and Paid Out," two columns that told it all, just amounts but no other clues.

Toad is like a series of photographs or flashes to me. His unfailing presence and charm were an important part of my young life, and I'm afraid that he might suffer harm from too definite an expression. He was steadily consistent, determined to live simply. He didn't need a fancy house, considered an outhouse ample for his needs, but his widowed sister Mary insisted that he install a bathroom before she agreed to come live with him. All year long in Klondike Toad wore long underwear, a flannel shirt, a sweater, and heavy trousers, but he was a dapper dresser when he went to visit. He never owned a car but always had somebody available to drive him where he wanted to go. Perhaps, this afforded him companionship.

Toad was a solitary figure coming up our front walk, a tall, angular man always happy to see my mother, to pat me on the head or lift me high in the air, I went to major-league baseball games. in Pittsburgh with him, Daddy, Glenn, and Goat Morgan. I recall visiting him at the white, sterile University of Virginia Hospital where he had had sinus surgery to help relieve the respiratory problem that plagued him throughout his life. I remember being in his store in Klondike where whatever candy bar or bottle of tonic I wanted was mine. I'll never forget my excitement as he killed bird after bird at a shootin' match. I knew that any ball that was hit near first base, his long, gloved arm would reach and catch. Toad was a splendid man for a child to know.

And yet, running through his life was a strain of elementary wildness: shootin' matches, chicken fights, guns. He kept a baseball bat under the bar for protection, and at times used it when the customers became rowdy. The Holy Rollers rented a church in Klondike. Toad didn't like them, bought the church, evicted them and then sold the church to a more traditional denomination. He was a man of contrasts, always surrounded by picturesque characters, by dark-clothed miners, by visiting gypsies whom he feared, by Klondike foreigners that he often didn't understand, by Republican Party leaders whom he didn't hesitate to use and manipulate. And yet, he was most at home, tending his small store, hunting with his hounds, sitting at the kitchen table with his shy, ladylike sister Mary.

He looked at the world from a workaday viewpoint, was more an observer of life who didn't enter into its doubts and conflicts, His was a winsome reflection of life. Simon Reilly, a lawyer and Toad's friend, won a sizable settlement for a miner with black lung. Toad happened to meet Si on a street in Cumberland and shrewdly said, "Hell, Reilly, you have them all coughing up in Klondike."

Strangely enough, I don't remember much of what Toad said. He grew increasingly deaf, but Daddy always maintained that Toad heard what he wanted to hear and he was stone deaf until "a nickel hit the bar." He did buy a hearing aid, and the salesman had a clock in his office that Toad could hear, but when he came home he couldn't hear. Toad commented, "That s.o.b. must have used Big Ben."

Evidently, he thought his own thoughts, looked at the world from his own eyes, and had unvarying loyalty to his friends. He knew his own area from top to bottom, from the United States Senator's office to the chicken-fight pit, from inside the Republican arty to the hungry miner on strike. His presence was never obtrusive but it was always there. Perhaps, Toad was summed up best in an article that appeared in the Cumberland newspaper, April 13, 1919, a report of a shooting match between Toad and Joke Ralston. Toad lost, but the match was, according to most people, the closest and best ever held in the county, Ralston won by one bird. The reporter wrote, "But if McNeil still has confidence in himself he will be given another chance for a comeback to try for championship of the county. However, McNeil is a good sport and doesn't kick at fate."

Down the road a piece from Toad's place in Woodlawn was the House of Morgan, a saloon and grocery store, owned and operated by Ike Morgan. Everybody on the crick has a story or two about Ike, a ready wit who could impart into a familiar word or situation a racier significance than it had possessed before. Once a young boy bought some peanuts from Ike and began to shell them, dropping the shells on the floor. Ike scolded the boy, "Damn it, kid, can't you see that the old woman just scrubbed the floor?" The boy said, "Well, I bought them here." Ike quickly asked, "Well, what the hell would you do if I sold you a laxative?"

Ike's father came from Wales but Ike was born in Frostburg. He opened his saloon in Woodlawn in the early thirties, and it soon became the favorite gathering place for locals and drummers. His wit was nowhere more unmistakable than in the handling of his stories which are terse to the point of severity, yet wholly adequate. Everything necessary is told but with an economy of word and phrase. When once asked if things were slow in the Klondike-Woodlawn area, he replied, "Things are so slow that the crick runs only three days a week."

Ike was quick to poke fun at his wife Mag. Mag disapproved of Ike's drinking and one night she had her brother hide behind a tree where Ike had to pass coming home from one of his toots. The brother saw Ike approaching and began his attempt to frighten Ike. "This is the devil, Ike. This is the devil, Ike. I've come to warn you." Ike, without hesitancy, said back, "I know. I married your sister." Another time Mag and Ike had had a fight and Mag left home -- just across the road to relatives. Ike dressed up like a woman and went out to sweep the steps.

Mag hurried over to see who Ike's new woman was. A customer came into the saloon one night and hollered to Ike, "Hey, Ike, Mag is down on the Klondike bridge drunk." Ike loudly announced, "A case of beer to the one who goes down and knocks her off." In an attempt to slow down Ike's occasional binges, Mag reminded Ike that "a rolling stone gathers no moss." Ike quickly answered, "Yeh, and a settin' hen has no feathers on her ass,"

One day Ike took his sons for a ride to the Youghiogheny, and they asked their father the origin of the water's name. Without any hesitancy he explained to the boys how the Yough was named: "an Indian and a white man were riding in a canoe. The white man stabbed the Indian and the Indian said, "Yough." The white man stabbed the Indian again, and the Indian said, "Yough, again." And that's how it got its name."

Although Toad McNeil feared the gypsies who for several summers camped out in the area, Ike met them head on. When they would come into his place of business, they would come in groups in order to distract Ike so they could steal. They would pay him for some items, but Ike calmly ordered them to put down their Abrahams and said, "I want for that stuff you've got down in your bosoms."

He once asked one of the area's leading and informed citizens if this area were a direct air route between Washington, D.C. and Pittsburgh. The man said that he really didn't know, but there were a great many airplanes that crossed daily. He asked Ike why he was concerned. Ike replied, "Well, I'm worried about those Rooshins, but hell, when they see what the strip-miners have done, they'll figure that somebody beat them to it."

In response to the question about whether there were any nuts in the area, Ike remarked, "When you cross that bridge down the road, they're all nuts." Ike was simply a delicious specimen of humorous characterization. Somebody once asked Ike if he ever went to the church directly across from his saloon. His irreverent reply was, "No, and if half of them over there came over here and paid me, they wouldn't be going either." He made fun of life and yet he thoroughly enjoyed it. He made fun of Mag and yet he loved her. Nobody else dare say a word about her. He was a good father to his two adopted sons. His was a good-natured kind of fooling. Ike's stories have been repeated over and over on the crick. He joked without effort

and he was one to whom life seemed good. For many, he was a welcomed companion for an idle hour and made exaggeration seem more lifelike than accuracy. Many of the things that he said were the natural things to say, too natural for anybody but him to say. A customer once asked Ike for a straw. Ike looked him straight in the eye and said, "There's a broom full of them over in the corner." Ike saw things with wonderful clearness, and his effect lingers in the mix not as sayings but as pictures and situations. We crick people liked to laugh and we richly rewarded those who could make us do so.

Our lives were refreshing for their nonchalance and lack of sophistication. Although we were provincial by circumstance, we were simple by choice. Looking back, the years seem to have had the touch of a fairy's wand, a calm, deliberate quality of enchantment, a perfect faith that everything was going to be fine. I grew up with people who wherever they looked could see a manifest absurdity and clearly perceive life's perversities. They were possessed of exceptional good sense, insight and integrity, and their nonsense was often the most effective weapon of their sense. My years with them were years of wonder and delight without limit and years of stability that kept my young mind and heart at peace. They were the years between the wars, I knew about Black Jack Pershing, the Marne, Chateau Thierry, Ferdinand Foch, St. Mihiel and the Argonne Forest, and if I happened to forget, my daddy's mustard-gas cough reminded me, but the horrors of Pearl Harbor, D-Day, Bataan, Corregidor, and Hiroshima existed only in the mind of God. The real growing up was yet to come, but I remember the "crick."

Looking back, what I remember most are the people. The people up the crick were alive at all points, men and women of their world and withal optimists. They lifted exaggeration into a science, and although they were always unexpected and incalculable, they were not buffoons, They had retentive memories and a queer original humor, They were happy, good-natured, intelligent, fair-minded, good Americans, many whose old land was still their true land and the one for which they yearned. There were those, particularly the Irish, who could never completely cut the ties with the homeland. Although they had never seen Ireland, they insisted that they were Irish. Michael Reilly was born in Wales, and his daughter Theresa maintained that if this were so, then he was Welsh. He angrily argued, "Goddamit, if the cat had kittens in

the oven, would you call them biscuits?" And Simon Kenny always claimed that he had committed only one mortal sin in his life: he had lived in England for a year. Many of the crick people were quaintly put together and had a certain distinctiveness of character. The mountains, after the fashion of high things, have always been individual, and they have nurtured individuals.

In the modern jargon, they were survivors; they coped. Oh my God, how they coped. Often the first thing they had to cope with was their names. People who grew up being called Peter Weaver Hancock Kelly or Brigid Petronilla McGoye had to cope. At one time in Midland, there were five *first* cousins: Simon Kenny, Simon Creegan, Simon Reilly, Simon Carroll, and Simon Burns. These five boys had an uncle, Patrick Kenny, who was studying in Baltimore, Maryland, for the Catholic priesthood. Patrick's roommate was coming to visit during the summer, and after having been given all the directions to get to Midland, he asked, "But when I get there, how do I find your house?" Patrick answered, "Just find the first snotty-nosed kid and say, "Hi, where's your uncle Pats home?"

And then there were others. Creepy Kroll lived in my town along with Scotty Orr, Bootsy Carr, Clem Stakem, Hen Spiker, Tarkey Eagan, Sap Truly, Gumleg Truly, Red Oak McGowan, Dukes Robertson, Bub Robertson, Crusoe Robertson, Nooks Ravenscroft, Frinky Thompson, Smoke Jeffries, and Mike Monahan. Mike was quiet, somewhat out of keeping with the average and conventional point of view and manner of behavior. As a result, most of what he said, and it was very little, was irresistibly comical. Mike had never been out of the crick area to amount to much, but he was drafted during World War II, and as things often happen, he was sent to Casablanca. Another Midlander, Jack Eagan, happened to be with the Army in Casablanca at the same time. Jack was walking down a Casablancon street when he saw Mike approaching. Imagine the scene: two men from George's Creek meeting on a street in Morocco. Mike approached, hands clasped behind his back, and passed and in his nonplussed way said, "Hi, Bud," and continued on his way. Everybody was "Bud" to Mike whether in Midland or in Casablanca.

Across the street from my home was the barbershop. Blackie Cavanaugh was the barber. On Main Street was the butcher shop and Buzz Dilfer was the butcher. When I was sent to the

store, I was told to "tell Buzz Dilfer to give you six lean pork chops and don't try to slip in a fat one" During the hot days of summer we followed after Webb Waddell's ice truck begging for a piece of ice. We marveled as he dug his heavy metal tongs into the sides of the square of ice, just big enough to fit in the icebox; and swung it into the house. Then there was Mose Shearer, one of the town's most happy-go-lucky fellows. When he would get a drink or two too many and be three sheets in the wind, he would slowly meander down Back Street, circle his cowboy hat above his head, and loudly roar, "Forty years a cowboy and never once stepped in cow sh—."

The local opera house was owned by Harry Ward. Harry and his wife Lisarah were anything but poor, but perhaps a bit frugal. Instead of taking the bus, Harry would thumb a  hiding Lisarah behind a bush until a car stopped. Always the gentleman, Harry would open the door for his wife as she appeared from the bush. His opera house had a long flight of wide stairs leading to the theater. A group of youngsters wanted to go to the show one night but couldn't come up with the price of admission, twenty-five cents. One suggested, "Walk up backwards, and the dumb SOB will think you're coming out." Harry's tremendous size, gruffness, and frugality made him easy prey for the young.

Verl Ash was the grocer and the mayor. As a matter of fact, he was the only mayor that I remember. My father was always city clerk and tax collector. He received \$.05 on every dollar of property tax, but then there wasn't that much property in Midland.

Town meetings were held the first Monday of the month and the Mayor and City Council took their elected jobs very seriously. Daddy neatly typed the minutes for the town ledger and also sent out neatly typed letters and tax bills on the official town stationery. I was not allowed to go near the heavy, black Underwood typewriter that rested on the desk in the sittin room, but I did. The town's officials, like the town's people, performed all their duties earnestly and energetically.

Life in the crick valley was life indeed, life as real, as simple, as constant, as familiar as the current of the crick. The unpretentious things of life were the most important. How very much we had: love and understanding and wholeness within the family, the church, the