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# My Life on the Mojave

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June LeMert Paxton

antage



*Daxton*

*My Life on the Mojave*

*Vantage*



*A Candle Versus a Spotlight*

The sounds of desert night are creeping in from the darkness outside the cabin. The yellow flame of the candle glows steadily; it is the only light in my home tonight. It seems a big undertaking for one candle to light so large a room, yet cheerfully and courageously it burns on, unmindful of its limited power.

Have you ever felt weak and inferior because your gift to humanity seemed such a trifle and of little importance? I have. Yes, I've said to myself, "What is the use of trying to give of my limited supply and my meager talents? What possible light can my contribution shed on the world's mental darkness?" Tonight I have had one of these low-ebb moods.

But now the candle burning there shames me! Its light glows steadily nor does it compare its power with a more brilliant one. And those words of Shakespeare rise above the night sounds to shake me out of the murkiness into which I am sinking. "How far that little candle sheds its beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world!" A candle and a good deed—they link up, somehow! I can be as the candle, for who am I to shirk my responsibilities because I am not a greater power?

Even as the glow of the candle brings its light into a humble home, so can I continue to do my task and hope to bring light to another, who, like myself, is in mental darkness, where only the sounds of night are creeping in.

There's a courage born with the morning;

There's a faith that grows with the day;

There's a peace that creeps in with the twilight,

Where the big heart of the desert holds sway.

## Chapter 25

## LOSING A "SON" AND GAINING A SON

After John moved into his own cabin, his stay on the desert was of short duration. Very soon his mother became homesick for the city, and John, left by himself, was lonely and discouraged. When we learned that his place was for sale, two of Edward's friends began planning to buy it for a quiet retreat whenever they had time off from their work. What was our surprise, however, when my niece, Geneva Gordon Weber, and her husband George came up from the city to tell us that they had bought the entire acreage, including the two cabins! Though surprised, we were pleased that the place had passed into friendly hands. The Webers named their place "Powam," an Indian name meaning "a place to rest." Their new dog they named "Wampo," which, it seems, is "rest" in reverse.

Later, I learned that John had finally gone back to his native Texas, and so it was that the boy who had called us "Ma" and "Pa" Paxton drifted out of our lives. I would not be happy if I failed to give John much credit for the success of the early part of my venture here on the desert. He was quiet but encouraging; he was understanding and loyal.

In June, 1937, Adelaide was married to Charles Fremont Doran. It was only natural, of course, that she should be greatly missed in the home, and yet we all shared her happiness. At last we could claim a son, and we were proud of him. They started buying their little home in Eagle



Rock, a twenty-minute drive from the parental home, and moved in at once.

Instead of feeling a sense of separation from them, we joined in the effort of making their home a happy one. It was this event that inspired me to write a poem, the sentiment of which I hope many mothers will share and enjoy.

### *To my Son*

I held her closely in my arms,

A cuddling, loving babe,

Who never tired of lullabies,

Or childish tales, or serenades.

In childhood days she came to me

To ease her hurt or ill;

Such problems for a little tot

Require a mother's skill.

Ever so sweet, yet serious,

Those adolescent years;

And I, her mother, was the friend

To calm disturbing fears.

Time has flown and I have found

She was not mine to hold alone.

Yet, from the gods good grace I won,

For I have her—and you, my son!

## Chapter 26

### "WHITE GOLD"

Looking back on the last two years of the thirties, I can recall how Edward's interest and real enthusiasm grew with almost every trip to the cabin. For one reason, money was less scarce and he could indulge in various projects that he was eager to undertake and see completed. He wanted to make the desert retreat more homelike and convenient by the time of his retirement.

Then there were Harry Miles and his wife Mabel, a very likable and well-to-do couple about our age who had bought the Byers homestead three miles to the east. To see them happily experimenting with various hobbies about their new home did much to encourage Edward that the years ahead could be spent up here with interest and increased health. The advent of a radio, whose battery was kept up by a windcharger, brought beautiful music to me and, to Edward, news of the world. Little by little he was being won over to the great open spaces and the rural ways of life!

The first two months of 1939 were a momentous period at "The Joshuas." Edward took that time in order to be on hand during the exciting experience of drilling for water. As yet there were not many wells in the valley, and quite a number of those attempted had resulted in failure. We had great confidence in our well-driller and in the fact that we were in line with a proven underground stream, yet always there was some anxiety that the involved expense might prove futile. For some reason I seemed not to share Edward's concern over the outcome. Warren's Well and another one just below us had proved successful at a depth of 160 feet, and, although they were on lower ground, I had great faith that we would be as fortunate.



Almost everyone to whom we talked advised our drilling at the lowest point of our acreage, but that would have meant having the windmill in our front yard. As usual when there was a problem to work out, we went into a family huddle. This time Adelaide held out for a location above and back of the cabin. We have always been glad that we came to that decision. The windmill not only looks better there but also is much closer to the big storage tank, which is high enough for a good gravity flow. And, at that, we went no deeper for a good stream of water than the wells on the lower level.

With the advent of our own water supply—"white gold" on the desert—other improvements followed in rapid succession: bathroom equipment, running water in the kitchen and service porch, and, in the yard, handily placed hydrants. We wanted enough growing things to keep us interested and yet not so many that caring for them would become burdensome.

Today, as I look at the first picture that I took of that miracle in the desert—our well—I am filled with gratitude for the abundant supply of good water and, too, for the broad grin on Edward's face as he held out a cup of pure, cold water!

## Chapter 27

### DESERT ASSOCIATES

After the Swiharts, the teachers who were the first occupants of our guest cabin, received a promotion and moved away from the valley, we had as friends and tenants an interesting series of families. The first were the Mussetters, who stayed while Mr. Mussetter worked with the geodetic survey party in this vicinity.

In July and August of 1939 the Jim Wrights lived there. The Wrights were formerly Kansas farmers; and while staying in the guest cabin, Jim built the fence around the several acres of ground which encloses the two cabins. They became real desert enthusiasts and built a home five miles to the east, where later grew up the village of Joshua Tree.

That same winter of 1939, Paul Fober, a very sick World War veteran, was brought to the guest cabin by his doctor and his nurse, Betty Smith. I was not in favor of his staying, as I thought we were still too isolated from immediate help; but as Betty planned to remain with him, we decided to hope for the best. It seemed that we had never had so many days of overcast skies as during that winter. Perhaps it just seemed so to me, as I wanted to see Paul taking advantage of the sunroom that extends along the southern exposure of that cabin. Continued cloudy days kept his spirits low, and from his bed he could see very little of interest to him. It was on one of those dark, tempestuous days that I wrote the following lines:

### *Storm of the Soul*

Today the rain comes beating down  
 With driving wind and roar;  
 Today I would not venture out  
 Beyond my cabin door.

I see the shrubs lashed back and forth,  
 Rough shaken by the gale;  
 'Mid hours so bleak, my spirit weak  
 Seeks calm to no avail.

Tomorrow's sun will shine again;  
 The storm will be no more;  
 Then with the light, my heart all bright,  
 I'll swing wide my cabin door!



Sunny days finally did come for Paul. Roaming up and down the valley, observing in detail the plant and animal life, he learned to enjoy and appreciate to the fullest many things that most people overlook. It was on one of his more strenuous hikes that he discovered the five brass plaques the geodetic surveyors had placed on Paxton Ridge.

Paul was what one might call an "intellectual recluse." During the four years in which he lived on the place he made the acquaintance of very few people. On pleasant days he would put some fruit in his pocket and, with cane in hand, start out on some uncharted jaunt; towards dusk I might see him slowly wending his way back to his cabin.

Besides the people who came into our lives as a result of the guest cabin, another couple, whom we met in quite a different way, became our friends: Paul Grimm and his wife Tillie of Palm Springs. One fall day, while I was window-shopping along the main street of that renowned village, I dropped into Paul's studio. The artist was not in, but my resting in front of those beautiful paintings was a treat. Thinking that the artist would soon be returning, I sat there enjoying the lovely pictures. Still no one came; but before I left, I felt the urge to write a few lines. When Paul Grimm read the poem published in several of the newspapers with which I was associated, he came to the cabin in person to thank me for the compliment given him.

#### *The Artist—Paul Grimm*

I've never met the man, Paul Grimm,  
Nor know whether he be stout or slim;  
But as I stand before his scenes of desert life  
Depicting peace, or courage born of strife,  
All mortal feelings fade away  
And I am part of that—that Life.

Mere man alone could wield no brush  
To evoke this mood, this awe, this rush  
Of feeling time cannot bedim.  
It must come from the brush of Spirit—  
Spirit within the man, Paul Grimm.

On Christmas afternoon (1939) Paul and Tillie came to see us. Edward was still here, not having returned to Hollywood as soon as the rest of the family. As the four of us were sitting in our sunroom, a full red moon came calmly up to the north of east over the distant ridge. At that exact moment, to the south of west, a dazzling sun was dipping low beyond the Morongo Pass.

Edward turned to Paul and said, "That is a wonderful picture; why don't you paint it?"

To that, the famous man replied, "A Master Artist has made that picture, and no human can do it justice!"

#### Chapter 28

##### WHAT THE LITTLE BIRD SAID

When Edward took an extended vacation in January of 1940, in order to build a sturdy home for the water-storage tank, there was very little to disturb our minds. We were feeling, however, a bit of suspense in regard to the safe arrival of our first grandchild. I had not been too well that winter and thought it best to stay on the desert until the last minute before leaving to be with Adelaide when the



baby came. Her doctor did not know within several weeks the date of its coming. Nevertheless, she was somewhat anxious and a little concerned that I would not be with her.

Previous to this, while the Dorans and Evelyn were at the cabin, the five of us had written on slips of paper our suggestions for names for the baby. After due deliberation, the one I offered was accepted in case it was a girl.

On Sunday night, January 14, I saw in a dream a calendar the size of one wall in my bedroom. The figures were large and distinct. In the row of dates in the Saturday column, I saw that one number—20—was printed a different color, and in the space was written, "This day the baby comes."

The next morning I told Edward and Doleta about the dream and said that we would be going down to the city on Saturday, the twentieth. Our suitcases were ready. The Saturday mail arrived as usual about eight-thirty, but there was no word from the Dorans. Edward usually had confidence in my dreams, but that morning he was somewhat perplexed and said, "Mother, I'm afraid the little birds got their wires crossed about the twentieth."

To this I replied, "No, they have never been mistaken, and we had better be on our way!"

We had scarcely finished our morning chores when Frank Bull (of Bull Springs) drove up and said, "At six o'clock this morning a telephone message was left for you at Dennis Lilly's store. Your son-in-law phoned to tell you that he had taken his wife to the hospital." (Dennis and Belle Lilly had bought the little grocery store after "Matty" passed over.) We learned from Frank that Mr. Lilly's car was out of order at the time the message arrived, and he had to wait until a customer would arrive who could deliver it.

Edward and I arrived at the hospital in Los Angeles about two o'clock, where he left me while he drove over to the home in Hollywood. I found Adelaide in high spirits; everything seemed to be going along nicely. At five o'clock

Charles went out to get some supper; and no sooner had he left than the whole situation changed. By nine o'clock Adelaide was so miserable that we called the doctor. To near relatives a doctor often seems unsympathetic, and that was my reaction when he said, "There is nothing to do, Mrs. Doran; the baby may not come until tomorrow."

She was dreadfully discouraged, but as soon as he had left, I reminded her of my dream and said, "Don't worry, dear; that baby must be here before midnight!"

At ten-thirty P.M., Patricia Adelaide Doran arrived! Since her initials are P.A.D., we began calling her Paddie—a good Irish name.

## Chapter 29

### AN UNEXPECTED JOLT

A few months after Paddie's birth, Doleta, feeling strong enough to carry on alone, bought ten acres adjoining us on the east from Jim and Camelia Hudson's undeveloped homestead. She in turn sold the upper two acres to the Kiner family of Pasadena. During the summer Doleta moved to her own home—about the distance of a city block from my cabin. I then disposed of the goats and hens, as I no longer had need of them. Not long afterwards, we experienced a disturbance of an unusual nature. As soon as our lamps had been lighted one evening, and we had settled down to read, an earthquake of major proportion began rocking our cabins. My first thought was to get the gasoline lamp out into the sand, for fear it might be tipped over and the gasoline ignite from the fire in the open grate. As I hurried out into the yard, I could hear Doleta calling and coming over to my place. The ground swells were so severe that the Joshua trees rolling with the earth looked as



if they would never stand upright again. Twice I tried to get back into my cabin, but the heavy stone fireplace chimney and steps swayed back and forth menacingly. I could hear the Indian pottery falling from the mantle and visualized all kinds of destruction taking place within.

As soon as I could get safely inside, I set most of the breakable things on the floor, picked up some blankets, and got the car from the garage. The tremors persisted; since we could not tell how severe they might become, we got in the car and drove up to the Kinners. There were four of them, besides their house guests, so with companionship we felt less alarm about the quakes. Throughout the night we all slept out of doors, Doleta and I in my car and the others in makeshift beds. The next morning we learned that in this valley there had been no serious damage; the quake seemed to have centered around Brawley and Westmorland in Imperial Valley, doing extensive damage there.

I saw very little of Doleta after she had moved into her own home. Soon she was able to resume, and finish, her university course in Arizona; and she has since been teaching in grade schools in other parts of the desert.

## Chapter 30

### IN RETROSPECT

Progress changes things, and it is better so; and yet I usually have a sentimental reluctance to give up the things that have been an important part of my life. In the summer of 1941 Harry and Mabel Miles, realizing they were too far from their rental properties in Long Beach, sold their desert home, and we bought their gas range and Electrolux refrigerator. I was grateful that Edward insisted on my having these improved facilities, and yet something

of the old pioneer spirit went out the door with the departure of the homemade cooler and the cookstove. Both the range and the refrigerator could be operated with butane gas, which was available by that time. The range meant that I no longer had to bring in wood and kindling with which to build the fire to do the cooking; no longer had to keep feeding the fire lest it go out. And with refrigeration came many food-saving devices, better buying plans, and the cold drinks that help to make warm weather more enjoyable. I realized, of course, that modern things were an improvement, yet the challenge that the old way evoked had helped in many ways to make me stronger.

At that time I began submitting a column to *Live Wire*, a weekly newspaper published in Banning, California. Soon after accepting that assignment, I undertook to furnish a full page in a monthly magazine, *Ghost Town News*, published by Walter Knott of Knott's Berry Farm. Thousands of people from every state have visited and enjoyed the delicious food prepared at Knott's in Buena Park, California. Mr. Knott has been remarkably successful in recreating a typical ghost town on his famous farm, where sightseers find education, entertainment, and inspiration. My close association with the editor, Nicols Field Wilson, for the more than six years that the magazine was published, was of real value to me. On the page, "Drifts From The Desert," I was allowed to furnish and arrange whatever pictures and material I thought would be most pleasing to their readers.

In looking over my files I have run across a column on one of the pages written in the form of a letter to Dorothy Kittridge Sall, who had remarried and was living in Los Angeles. From reading it you may be able to glimpse a bit of the "pioneer" life that she and I had enjoyed together.

"THE JOSHUAS"  
August 2, 1941

My dear Dorothy,

Did you, perchance, get any of the telepathic mes-



sages that I sent you yesterday? Goodness knows you should have, for I traveled alone back into the canyon and rested again under that big pine tree high in the mountains where you pitched your tent when you homesteaded Echo Bend. For a few hours I lived over a part of the time we spent in that blissful quiet. Through the pine trees the wind hummed the same wistful tunes; the grass was like soft green carpet around the hillside spring. Everything seemed the same, as wild and unfringed as when you first went there! So many memories crowded in, dear, and for some reason I shed a few tears; but they were tears of joy, thinking of the many days that we spent in happiness learning the real beauties of nature. Even yet, Dot, I cannot picture you back in civilization—you were such an integral part of that place.

I think the Indians who lived there years ago came back in spirit to greet me; perhaps some of your Comanche and my Mohawk ancestors dropped in on the reverie. I can believe, dear, that they came to tell you and me that worship of the Great Spirit Father is still man's saving grace, and that the peace and joy one finds in nature cannot be improved upon.

You will come back some day to stay, Dot. It seems to be in the Eternal plan—and that is as it should be! Or so it seems to your

Juney Joy

#### *A Philanderer*

As night comes on and shadows creep  
Across the boulders bare and bleak,  
There looms a tree, a tall pine tree,  
Who waves an arm that I may see.

Though darkness settles 'round his head  
And breezes sing, "Tis time for bed."  
Yet still that tree, that tall pine tree—  
Methinks he winks an eye at me!

### Chapter 31

#### OF MIND AND MATTER

A telephone message in October, to the effect that my brother Ralph had passed over, came as a great shock, for the message came before I got a letter in the regular mail telling of his illness. I left my cabin early the morning of the funeral and, as I drove through Beaumont, picked up his daughter Thelma. Together we went directly to my brother's home in Pasadena. I rode to the cemetery in the family car. Perhaps because we had been in the presence of death, my sister Emma asked, "June, does our mother ever come back to you bringing the perfume of white gardenias?"

It was rude of me to answer as I did—and, later, I was sorry—but I replied, "Oh, no, our mother never comes to me that way!" It wasn't so much the words that I used, but the tone that implied, "Now don't expect me to believe that!"

After the services I did not attempt to go to my home in Hollywood with the family because I wanted to get back to the cabin before the night came on. Although my Buick coupe, ten years old, was in good condition. I still had twenty-three miles to travel through lonely Devil's Garden and the Morongo Canyon after the ninety miles on Highway 99.

By the time I arrived home, the fall chill was in the air. Before I tried to rest, I built an energetic fire in the open



grate. After putting on my pajamas and getting ready for bed, I made a cup of hot chocolate and, with no other light in the cabin, sat down in front of the glowing fire.

It was a dark, quiet night; the only sounds in the cabin were the tick-ticking of the mantel clock and the spurting noises made by the flames renewing their energy as they licked the burning logs in the open grate. The simulated eyes of Jude and Judy, the twin owl andirons, were bright from the flames behind them and appeared to be watching the shadows that flickered back and forth on the low ceiling. As cars turned the bend in the road from the east, their headlights threw a narrow beam into the cabin. The beam would dance on the wall for a second and then disappear.

It is a privilege to sit alone in a quiet place for a while; one needs to get into closer relationship with his inner self. This inner self is the real you and the real I, but most of the day it is hidden behind a mask which badly misrepresents our finer and better natures.

As I relaxed, my mind traveled back several weeks to a letter I had received from an editor in Riverdale, California, asking me to write a full-page poem for his magazine. He wanted it written in heroic verse, about forty-two lines long. It was to be called, "Turning Wheels in Desert Sands." I had mulled over the idea for several days after receiving the request and had decided to ignore it. First, as I have previously stated, I have never had training in writing poetry and was sure that I did not know what heroic verse is! Second, how could I know how the editor wanted the subject matter treated under that title?

But now that I was in my cabin, relaxed and comfortable before a warm and friendly fire, a deep urge to get paper and pencil came over me. Almost before I realized what was taking place, there on the arm of the hearth chair I was writing line after line of a poem that kept coming into my mind. Perhaps an hour or more passed; I do not know, but the logs had burned low and were crumbling into the

bed of red ashes. From out the blackness of the night an owl sent out to its mate a belittling hoot about our wrought-iron Jude and Judy; the derision was lost on the desert air, however, for the ears of the andirons were closed for the night. Then I realized that I was quite weary. It had been a long, strenuous day, and as the clock chimed out ten-thirty, I got up to go to bed. As I walked the few feet to my bedside and sat down to remove my slippers, Something urged me to go back and write four more lines. Just four more lines! Surely I could do that much! With the faint flickering light from the grate, I added those lines to the last verse.

I think I shall always regret that, as I finally laid down the poem, I did not reach over in the darkness and touch something that might have been on the nearby library table. For just as I started back to bed I caught the fragrant scent of white gardenias! Where could it have come from? There was no mistaking it!

The next day I typed the poem and sent it to the editor, Moton Holt, who used it in the November, 1941, issue of *The Covered Wagon*.

#### *Turning Wheels in Desert Sands*

The desert sands have lain for countless years  
And watched Time's progress made through joy and tears;  
Have watched the wind sweep o'er the wild domain,  
And counted clouds that seldom brought the rain;  
Watched sun beat down across the arid way,  
Seen soothing breezes usher out the day.

Long days there were when only beast did roam;  
Then Indian tribes moved in to make their home.  
Some made their camp beside a mountain spring  
And caught their game with arrow or with sling.  
To many gods these ancient tribes would plead  
That rain and sun might bring their every need.



The Spirit-Father whispered low, and then  
The desert took to heart these red-skin men.

Over sands the faithful burro, load on back,  
Carried water, food, and miner's pack;  
And by his side, with a surprising grace,  
The miner trudged with shrewd, bewhiskered face.  
Each day he looked for that transcendent thrill  
When gold he'd find in "that thar hill."

Then wheels came rolling over desert plains;  
The wheels came moving covered-wagon trains.  
Weird tales of wealth and fame reached out to beck  
And lure the most adventurous on this trek.  
But desert sands and red-men were not kind;  
Too oft a lonely grave was left behind.  
Yet some brave hearts will always find a way,  
And many a forty-niner came to stay.

Since man must find a way to earn his bread,  
The wheels of progress once again were sped.  
This time man brought the water to the sand,  
To make of it a rich and fertile land;  
And now on many a former sandy space  
Is garden green, and fruit to fill the place.

Again the Spirit-Father has been kind,  
And left no arbitrary rule to bind.  
The Indian still may rove the desert tract,  
The burro plod along with with load intact;  
The covered wagon now many change its speed,  
Or man take up the hoe to fill his need.  
And everywhere upon these Western lands  
The wheels of progress turn in desert sands!

## Chapter 32

### "THE BEST LAID PLANS—"

In December Edward was again at "The Joshuas" on his winter leave—his project this time being to improve the inside walls of the cabin. He suggested that, when he drove down to the city on the sixth to buy knotty-pine boards, I might go as far as San Bernardino with him. Osa Fisher's husband had passed over the previous year, and since she was quite lonely I went down occasionally to be with her. Once in Los Angeles, Edward wanted to see some of the railroad men. Sunday morning he started to drive down to the roundhouse but had gone only a short distance when, realizing that he did not feel well, he turned back to the house. That was December 7, by coincidence the fatal day of Pearl Harbor. As he walked into the house, he suffered a severe attack of coronary thrombosis. Our next door neighbor, Mrs. Souleck, at once drove over to San Bernardino to get me, and the following day Edward was taken to the Santa Fe Hospital in Los Angeles.

Time passed and the holidays came on. While we were deeply concerned about the heart attack, Edward was getting along nicely and his doctor allowed the immediate family to have our Christmas party in his room. "Paddie" was scarcely two years old and understood very little about Santa Claus, but she was delighted to "deliver" the packages to each one. Her grandfather would read the name of the recipient and hand her the gift, whereupon she would hurry to bestow it and rush back excitedly to his bedside



to get the next one. The contents of the packages had very little interest for her.

Edward longed to get back to the desert. He passed his hospital hours making plans for the future development of his project here. One day, after he had been telling Adelaide of his plans, she said, "Daddy, you must not go back there to live; you will be too far from a hospital and doctor."

To that he replied, "Honey, I would rather be back there and live six months than to live six years in this busy city!" Those words were almost prophetic, because he did return to the cabin—but he did not live quite six months.

On Monday, May 4, he passed over during a second heart attack similar to the first one he had experienced.

In the late afternoon of May 3, Edward had lain down on the daybed in the sunroom; he was not feeling well. After an hour or so I became uneasy and asked Paul Fober to go to the Lilly store and phone Dr. Leonard at Twentynine Palms. The doctor came at once and remained with us until midnight. Soon after lunch on May 4, Vada and Jim Wright, having heard that Edward was ill, came over with a bouquet of lovely red rosebuds from their garden. As cut flowers wilt quickly on the desert, Edward told me to put them in the refrigerator, but Vada insisted that they were for him to admire. The two joked awhile, as was their custom; but as she and I left the room, he called me back and said, "Mother, we must do something and do it quickly!"

With that remark he turned his head, looked out of the windows to the south and east where he could see his favorite mountains and unobstructed acres of Joshua trees. He looked at them with deep satisfaction and quietly passed over the Great Divide. I kneeled down to pray, but even as I did, something told me that my efforts would be in vain. I knew that from that moment I would have to carry on alone.

The funeral services were held at the lovely Church of the Recessional in Forest Lawn Memorial Park, in Glendale,

with the Masonic railroad men and our dear friend Dr. C. D. Williamson of Twentynine Palms conducting the services. Interment was on the beautiful, sloping garden there, near the Wee Kirk o' the Heather.

For one who had always enjoyed health and activity as had Edward, fifty-nine seemed too young an age to leave this earth plane. At fifty-nine one is usually planning big things for the future when he can live life more leisurely. Robert Burns, the great Scot poet, wrote, "The best laid plans of mice an' men gang aft a-gley, and leave us naught but grief an' pain, for promised joy." And so it was with us.

I remained in the city two weeks and then came back to the cabin. It wasn't an encouraging future to face. Throughout my desert experience my brothers Ralph and Edward had been wonderful moral support, ever ready to improve living conditions in and around the cabins. Now, within six months, both props were removed. Even so, I felt that my place was here. I realized that problems would confront me; I could not expect it to be otherwise. But there still remained the Great Teacher to show me how to solve those problems and how to face each coming day.

Old Joshua trees

Gnarled and weather beaten

Leaning over against wintry

Winds and summer blasts.

## Chapter 33

### A NEW START

Fortunately, the summer of 1942 was an unusually busy one for me. Edward had planted a small orchard between



the tankhouse and the cabin, thinking that it would be interesting to see what kind of trees would do well in this soil and climate. The regular watering of these trees and other plants and shrubs, coupled with household duties and writing, proved so time-consuming that I had no daylight hours in which to be lonely. In July, Edward's only sister, Gladys Kobel, of Kansas, came out to spend several weeks with me. During the evenings Gladys would enjoy helping me water, at the same time reveling in the amazing sunsets, or thrilling in the early dusk to the cry of a coyote straying near the enclosure. After taking care of the young orchard two summers, however, I found the task was beyond my energy and gave the trees away.

On the other hand, I began to assume more obligations in the field of writing. Nichols Field Wilson, editor of *Ghost Town News*, called me to Knott's Berry Farm to see a preview of the original cyclorama called "The Covered-Wagon Train of '66." The huge, realistic picture done by Paul Klieben was ready to go on exhibition in one of the large buildings. Mr. Wilson wanted me to write a full-page poem describing in detail that courageous journey from Texas to California. Incidentally, one sees in the picture in the foremost wagon a small child who later became Walter Knott's grandmother; she was still living when the painting was made. A countless number of local people as well as tourists have gone back again and again to see that awe-inspiring picture and to listen to the fascinating monologue that accompanies its showing.

The first winter after Edward passed over was unquestionably the most lonely of my desert winters, because I had grown accustomed to looking forward to his visits every other week end; now I had to learn to make my plans without him. Paul Fober was absent from the guest cabin much of that winter, also. Claud and Charlotte Guinan, however, were always my faithful standbys; when, after a hard rain, the old lake bed was too slippery for me to attempt driving over it, Claud could manage to get his car through

the chaparral to my cabin. One morning as I was wishing mightily that I had some citrus fruit for breakfast, I heard the familiar chug-chugging of Claud's old car. There he came with a sack of oranges, explaining that house guests had brought them a lug and Charlotte wanted to share with me.

Another incident that seemed providential at the time occurred that winter when I was out of fresh meat. Perhaps I wished aloud, for when I went to lock the back door for the night, there nearby sat a nice fat cottontail. I interpreted the coincidence as a "before-ye-call-I-will-answer" response to my desire. Although I had often watched John dress a rabbit, I had never done it myself and felt somewhat disconcerted with this "answer" to my need. It seemed, though, that to show my appreciation I should make some attempt at shooting it; secretly, I hoped the rabbit would scurry away when I stepped out of the door. I got down the four-ten shotgun; and, as I walked out, he did run a short distance; but I could still see the bush behind which he was hiding. I fired, and there lay my supply of fresh meat for the next two days!

Occasionally, in the late afternoon, I would become too lonely to spend the night in my cabin. Taking my little Buick, I would make the drive up the old Cold Water Canyon Road to the Guinans. I have never decided whether in my attempt to drive that road I was being actually brave or just foolhardy. In case the wheels were to get out of the ready-made ruts through which one had to drive, the car could bog down hopelessly in the sand.

As I went along in the deep shadows of the nearby mountain, I would keep up my courage by repeating aloud, "God get me there safe and soon!" Returning home the next morning was easier, because the momentum of the car carried it downgrade with little effort on the part of the driver. Today that canyon road is well surfaced, leading up to the village of Pioneertown, where many Western movies are made. Newcomers to the valley would little realize,



I know, the misgivings of the homesteaders who were obliged to make their way through those sandy roadbeds.

*So Dark the Night*

In the darkness of the nighttime,

When the moon is still too new,

'Round the corners of my cabin

Winds moan out a deep "wooo-oooo!"

In these eerie hours of blackness,

Ghosts from out the past convene,

While coyote howls across the sand dunes

Ominously pierce the scene.

From my cabin lone, in darkness,

As the wind makes dismal wail,

Beams from a flickering candle

Spend their strength to no avail.

Oh, unjust to say the candle

Wastes its glow to make a light,

For it brings a bit of comfort

To my cabin home tonight!

Chapter 34

A MORNING SPRINT

Throughout the first eleven or twelve years of my life here I enjoyed the three-quarter-mile walk across the open, unprotected stretch of country to the mailbox. At times, however, a herd of strange cattle would be brought in from

Mexico to the nearby cattle ranch; and when they were in the neighborhood, I was more or less on my guard while out strolling. One winter morning, after I had picked up our mail and started back home, I noticed that one of the cattle had separated itself from the rest of the herd near Warren's Well and was rapidly moving towards me. It was still some distance away, and I hoped that by running I could reach the protection of a fence with which a former neighbor had enclosed his three-acre yard. Only the burned ruins of the once lovely home were still standing, but I knew that if I could get within the enclosure I would be safe. After running much of the distance, however, I realized that I was being headed off from escape. I turned away from the oncoming animal towards the highway, in hopes that a passing motorist might see my predicament and come to the rescue. It was about time for Johnnie Hastie to drive by in the Twentynine Palms bus, but to my dismay not a soul came within sight! The air was cold. My lungs ached from the unaccustomed exertion. With lowered head the bull came rushing on until it was only a few feet away. I was trapped and I knew it! Escape by running was impossible.

During my excitement I had forgotten to call on the Spirit Father, but now I realized that only by Divine intervention could I escape being trampled. Too exhausted to shout, I moaned a fervent, "God help me!" The beast was so near that one more lunge would have knocked me down. So near was he that, as he suddenly reeled and planted his forefeet in the gravel, I could feel his hot breath. What went on in his mind I shall never know, but a solemn calmness came over him and, lifting his great head, he leisurely ambled away.

I knew that I had been saved, but from sheer exhaustion I dropped to the ground and, little by little, crawled toward the fence that I had been unsuccessful in reaching when I first sighted the animal. My only neighbor, who had been watching from her cabin, thought that I had been trampled



down; but Nora did not drive a car, and there was no one else on our hillside at the time to whom she could appeal for help.

It was through my "Lowly Philosophy" column in the *Banning Live Wire* that I first met this neighbor, Mrs. Nora Stump. She was a woman considerably older than I who, wishing a quiet retreat for study and meditation, had rented Doleta's cabin for the year while the latter was attending Arizona University. Fortunately, most of her days in the valley were undisturbed by such episodes as my encounter with the bull.

When I finally reached my cabin, we discussed not only the harrowing experience through which I had just gone but also the potency and value of the power of prayer! From that time on, may I say, as long as this was an open cattle country, I went for the mail in my car.

## Chapter 35

### REDSKINS TO THE RESCUE

The following spring the rods in the well needed replacing. I called Tom Scarvin, who has a windmill similar to ours, to do the work; he, in turn, asked Martin Fuller, his neighbor and an old-time oil-well rigger, to help him. It would be necessary for me to drive to Los Angeles, they said, to buy 250 feet of two-and-one-half-inch galvanized iron rods for the job. This would not be an easy order to fill, I knew, as wartime measures were making it almost impossible to buy that particular item.

I left the valley early Friday morning and shopped in the city most of the remainder of the day with no success. One company manager, however, who had taken my city

telephone number, called after closing time to tell me that a new shipment had just arrived and that I might have the required amount early the next morning. I had already made arrangements to have it hauled to the cabin in case I was fortunate in obtaining it.

I did not leave Hollywood until mid-day, so that the pipe could reach "The Joshuas" by the time I arrived. It was after four o'clock when I turned off U.S. Highway 99 into Devil's Garden. Tired and thirsty, I pulled over to the side of the road to rest and drink the milk I still had in my thermos bottle. What was my amazement when I tried to start the car to find it would not budge either forward or backward. Unsuccessfully, I tried several times to get under way before leaving the car to appeal for help from one of the infrequent passing motorists. Although I stood there quite a long time, holding out my arm for help, no one seemed interested. At last a car of Indians came by; they were genuinely eager to help me. I learned that they were the Steve Kitchen family living on the Snow Creek reservation and that they had been shopping in Banning. After examining the car, Mr. Kitchen explained that the rear axle had broken. Since the car was by then about thirteen years old, the unpleasant news was not too surprising.

After turning the car around, heading it back to the highway, Mr. Kitchen thought he would be able to push me to the nearest garage about four miles away. I was willing to try, but the steady clang, clanging of the metal on the pavement worried me, and soon I gave the signal to stop. When he came to my car window, I explained how uneasy I was. His response was, "Lady, just keep your head and keep going!" After another stretch, with the same clanging noise, I gave up, whereupon the family drove to the service station at White Water and sent back a tow car. At White Water I phoned to Dennis Lilly and asked him to send Tom Scarvin, who lived near the store, to come for me, as I would have to leave my car at the garage several



days for the repairs. It was dark by the time we arrived at my cabin, and my house guest was becoming alarmed at my delay.

Not long after that incident, while the Kitchen family was again returning to the reservation from Banning, and had arrived at almost the identical spot where they had stopped to help me with my problem, they lost a wheel from their car. The auto overturned, burst into flames, and Steve was fatally burned, while other members of the family were hospitalized for months.

Steve Kitchen has passed over, but I hope that I shall always remember his admonition, "Lady, just keep your head and keep going!" That advice, in its general implication, was worth the unpleasant experience of being stranded with a broken axle in lonely Devil's Garden.

Tom dropped me at my cabin; but before he drove away I asked him to tell Martin that I did not want them back on the job until Monday. I had a deep urge to keep the men away from the well until that time. To my surprise, however, while Nell and I were still at the breakfast table the next morning, the men drove in to work. I went out to try again to persuade them to wait over the day, but Martin was firm in his decision and said, "Go back in the house, June, and let us do the worrying; I have no intention of getting hurt and I intend to stay right here!"

Still weary from the previous day's activities, I was glad to lie down to rest. I doubt that an hour had passed before I heard an unusual commotion; looking out of the windows I saw Martin slumping to the ground as a twenty-foot-long iron rod struck him on the back of the head. Paul, who had been watching the progress of the work, and Tom rushed to Martin's side. He was dazed but conscious. The ugly scalp wound looked more serious than it was, no doubt; but as soon as he felt able to get in the car, I had Paul take him to the doctor in Twentynine Palms.

Naturally I was much concerned about the accident, and it did prove serious enough that Martin did no more work

for quite some time. When I talked to his wife Minnie, who was interested in astrology, about my trying to keep him from the job that day, she said, "Well, June, if he had not been hurt at your place, he likely would have had a more serious accident elsewhere."

### *Our Brain Children*

To be kind and gentle, with wisdom and tact,  
Are virtues we ever have sought;  
But the joy they carry to us in return  
Depends on what prompted the thought.

We nod a greeting and think it enough;  
Now has it to us occurred  
That it isn't the thing we say that counts  
But the spirit back of the word?

We answer a call for help today;  
We go to a neighbor in need.  
But it isn't the cost of the act that counts,  
'Tis the heart we put into the deed.

Our thoughts, our words, our deeds live on;  
No matter how far they stray,  
The path they travel will wind around  
And return to our door some day!



returned from the city he had not only gathered a quantity of flat, colorful rock from the hills about fifteen miles to the east and north but had laid them in a lovely walk leading from the gate to the porch. That act was most characteristic of him; he delighted in giving his family a happy surprise, and always he put much of himself into each gift. This one proved to be his last, so the plaque that Enrico painted is to each member of our family a cherished memento. It pictures in vivid colors the open gate, the walk leading on to the stone steps, the door through which our many friends pass, and the rock chimney of the fireplace. On either side of the painted scene one reads these lines: "I trust that those who tread this walk are friends of mine. It was made by my beloved; to me it is a shrine."

As for Enrico, he later went back to Czechoslovakia and, again, escaped just as the Iron Curtain came down on his homeland.

### The Afterglow

Behind the hills the sun sinks low,  
And in the sky, the afterglow,  
Like cellophane, in soft flame-red,  
Crimson, and purple waves is spread.  
And as it fades to dusky blue  
And darker fawn,  
Darkness deepens; the glow is past;  
The night is on.

I'm almost glad when it is gone,  
I've felt the ecstasy so strong;  
And human words are all too mean  
To paint this ethereal sunset scene!

## Chapter 36

### AN OLD-WORLD CONTRIBUTION

Through my connections with various publications I met many interesting people. Among them was Enrico Molnar, a young Czechoslovakian artist. Before World War II, about the time that Hitler was rounding up and taking prisoners many influential Christians, Enrico was reconditioning manuscripts in Athens. Ten days before members of his family and friends were captured, Enrico made his escape. After his coming to California we met through our mutual interest in *Desert Magazine*. In June of 1943, he spent one week with me while painting desert scenes in the valley. It was at that time he painted on a heavy piece of wood a beautiful scene which rests over the front door of my cabin. The scene on the plaque and the accompanying verse are large enough for anyone approaching the gate to see and read.

It happened that several weeks before Edward passed over I had to spend a few days in Hollywood. By that time the Santa Fe Railroad had, on account of his heart condition, advised his retirement, with full annuity benefits. He was, therefore, enjoying the freedom of the valley and did not want to go to the city with me. I would not worry about his staying behind, I said, if he would promise not to go back into the hills alone. Although Edward was not a complete stranger to the many wiles of the desert, he chose to ignore the fact that at times even seasoned prospectors had gone out alone and, losing their lives, not been found for days.

My admonition, however, had little effect; for when I



he bought one of the first eight houses in Joshua Tree and later became the assistant mail carrier on this route. After making wonderful progress towards health, he sold his home and went back to Los Angeles. The desert fever, however, had got in its work, and he was homesick to return. His story came to my mind as I was driving along, groping for the solution to my emergency.

Once in the city I went straight to my home on Ardmore Avenue and, within a short time, was talking over the phone to Mr. Ohlen. He was very pleased to have an opportunity to get back to the valley, and could, he said, stay in my cabin to look after the place until my return.

This arrangement was a happy one for me, as I wished to remain a few weeks in the city. Evelyn had been spending much of her summer vacation in and near Mexico City. She had had a plane reservation to return home for weeks, but because of so-called "priorities," she learned each day when she went to take the plane that her place had been resold. Finally, through friends of friends, she was able to get a train reservation—always sold out months in advance in those days—and reached Los Angeles on the second day of the school term. Since I was eager to be there to welcome her, and since Guy was enjoying the desert, I was able to remain in the city until she could get back.

September was almost gone when I returned to the cabin. By that time Paul was moving to his new home, and Guy, wishing to stay on indefinitely, moved into the guest cabin. He assumed entire responsibility for the upkeep of "The Joshuas"—a place he loved and called home for ten years.

It was Guy who enjoyed trying to raise the various fruits and vegetables. It was he who watched the fences to learn how and where the little cottontails and tortoise got into the enclosure. Guy was the one who thought of, and installed, a telephone system between the two cabins, an arrangement which was not only a step-saver but a means of communication in case either of us should need help. He

## Chapter 37

### A NEED FULFILLED

Of the eighty-seven acres on this hillside which we call "The Joshuas," only two and one-half acres are fenced. The enclosure was made primarily to protect the shrubbery around the two cabins from the destruction of the animals—the cattle being the worst offenders. Our establishment by this time included the two cabins, the well and tank house, a triple garage and tool shed, and a goat barn that had evolved into a storage unit and auxiliary garage. The upkeep of these buildings posed a problem, since there were very few laborers in the valley to be hired, either skilled or unskilled. There was also the responsibility of maintaining the windmill in good running order so that the big storage tank would be constantly filled. All in all, there was a need for someone to be on the place.

When I received word early in September of 1944 that the husband of my good friend Ethel Thompson of Long Beach had passed over, I left immediately for the city. Even so, I was quite uneasy with the knowledge that while I was away there would be no one on the hillside to handle the routine chores, as Paul was still working on his Yucaipa home. The need for having someone at "The Joshuas" during my absence was soon filled, however, in an unexpected and satisfactory manner.

In 1940, Guy Ohlen, a Spanish-War veteran, had come to the desert on the advice of his doctor to spend what he believed would be his remaining few months. Guy liked the valley, and the desert was kind to him. In a short while



claimed half-interest in "Inky," a large black cat that we adopted when it was a mere kitten several months after Guy came to live here. As soon as our rodent-hunter was old enough to get around by himself, he acquired the habit of eating an early breakfast at Guy's cabin. For his evening meal he came to my back door and, winter or summer, slept on a cushioned seat on my front porch.

Inky was a true desert cat; I doubt if he was inside either home more than a dozen times during his twelve years' sojourn here. All of our previous cats had lost their battles with the bobcats and coyotes, so Inky's life span was a record. His many scars attested to his persistence in hunting even at the risk of those nightly encounters. After twelve years of faithful service, Inky was finally laid away in appropriate style, with a large onyx stone to cover his resting place.

## Chapter 38

### TIME AGAIN FOR LEISURE

Since Guy's two daughters lived at some distance, he seldom had an opportunity to be with them. He had little time for loneliness, however, for his city friends loved to visit him in his desert cabin, and I shared my own house guests with him—as he did with me. In all the family festive days we included him.

One of the most frequent callers during Guy's ten years at "The Joshuas" was the nationally known landscape photographer, Harry Vroman. Harry and his wife Edna had been former neighbors of the Paxtons in Hollywood and through that contact had become interested in the desert. Several times a year we could expect the Vromans to spend at least one week with us. Guy and Harry would leave early

in the morning for the nearby Joshua Tree National Monument, or other scenic spots, to take pictures. About noon Edna and I would follow with a mulligan stew or the makings of a picnic lunch.

On one of these trips the men discovered near the site of his homestead the gravestone of John Lang, an early miner-pro prospector. The discovery of Lang's body alongside a trail which he had been following to get water, perhaps, was made earlier by Bill Keys, another prospector and neighbor, and probably the most colorful character in this part of the desert. Harry took a picture of the gravestone, and I wrote a poem to accompany it for *Desert Magazine*.

### *A Pioneer's Grave*

At noonday when the air is still  
And the vastness void of sound,  
The sun beats down on a lonely grave—  
Six feet of sandy mound.

When the rest of the world has gone to sleep  
In the darkness of the night,  
A coyote waits beside that grave  
And wails at a ghostly sprite.

But the pioneer feels neither sun nor wind,  
And smiles at the coyote's wail,  
For he quenches his thirst in a fairer land  
And plods a safer trail.

Here in the desert, where the atmosphere is clear and clean, the clouds in their changing moods are tantalizing targets for photographers. The Joshua trees, an integral part of this valley, also lend enchantment to a picture. Often, as the four of us would sit down to an evening dinner in my cabin, Harry, the photographer, seeing a particularly



interesting cloud formation with a group of Joshua trees in the foreground, would literally leap for his camera; and not until he had captured that scene would he return to his meal.

### Chapter 39

#### CREATURES, FURRED AND OTHERWISE

Perhaps the best-known creatures of the fur department on the desert are the rabbits. When I first came to the desert, I thought that the jack was the male of the species and the more graceful cottontail was of the opposite sex. They have a way of hobnobbing together and get along so nicely that I supposed they comprised one happy family.

During the winter months of my early pioneering, the rabbits supplied a great portion of our meat; we enjoyed them more than chickens. On a late afternoon John and I would walk into the hills back of our home and return with several cottontails in time to get them dressed before dark and hung up to freeze. The early morning or late afternoon was the best time to do our hunting, as the rabbits usually take a mid-day siesta. They could easily avoid detection if they would sit quietly when startled; instead they spring out and go leaping zigzag fashion across the desert until shot, or concealed again behind shrubbery. If during the long summer there has been no gullywasher or even slight rain, there is, consequently, no forage, so the rabbits become bold and dig their way under the fence into our enclosure to nibble on the growing plants. I would not mind their quenching their thirst at the bird basin if they would be less destructive of our low shrubs and trees. When only a few come at a time, the cat, enjoying the sport of providing his own dinner, keeps them frightened away; but when

they come with all their relatives and friends, his appetite becomes satiated and he simply ignores their presence.

The pack rats, though not frequently seen, are perhaps more numerous than the rabbits. Usually they dig a basement under a prickly pear or other thorny cactus; when that is finished to suit mamma rat, an upper story consisting of several rooms and many tunnels is finished off with thorny brush so that no enemy cares to venture in. Later, when two naked babies arrive, the mother not only nurses her little ones but must provide her own food. As soon as the youngsters are strong enough to hold firmly to their mother, she may be seen dragging them along over the sand to where she knows there is a fresh supply of prickly-pear meat. The babies seem not to mind this mode of transportation and continue holding tightly to their "milk bottles."

Sometimes these rodents are called "trade rats." The title has been earned by their habit of trading some article which they do not value for something lying around that better suits their fancy. Silverware, buttons, bars of soap, combs, tin cans, and any shiny metal piece are a few of their favorites. I know a mother who spanked her little girl because she felt sure that the child had played with, and lost, all of her clothespins. Later, the entire number was discovered in a trade rat's nest. One time after Paul Fober had been away from his cabin for several months, he returned to find that one of these rats had, by coming down his fireplace chimney, built itself a cozy nest in the dresser drawer. This creature must have heard about Mohammed and the mountain, because, having discovered that a large gold watch in the dresser was too heavy for him to take back to his nest, he simply changed his tactics and built a nest around the watch.

Driving down an unfrequented lane after dark, one can see revealed by the headlights of the car a delicately built nocturnal wanderer that is still another rodent. These dainty creatures are neither rats nor kangaroos. When sitting, this little animal rests on his two sturdy hind legs and holds the



shorter ones up under his chin. His ears are shell-like and his tail is exceedingly long, ending in a wide flare. The kangaroo rat lives mainly on seeds, and after filling the little pouches on each side of his face, goes leaping over the sand to deposit his findings in one of his many underground rooms. A startled kangaroo rat can cover four or five feet of ground at one leap.

Over the entire desert, just under the surface of the ground, there is a labyrinth of small tunnels; these are hideaways for countless field mice. The entrance is usually just a few feet from the exit; and, at times, when I pour water down one hole, a scurrying mouse comes out the other.

Almost everyone enjoys watching the antics of a pair of chipmunks. Around my cabin I seldom see one working—or perhaps he is only playing—alone. A pair seem quite devoted to each other and are the busiest, happiest couple of rodents on the place. The similarity in looks and actions between these small creatures and the ground squirrels is very noticeable.

One morning I heard a soft, trilling song and went out to investigate its source. I knew the sound came from near the ground at the foundation of the cabin, but I could see no bird there. I listened again and again and finally could scarcely believe my ears—or my eyes—when I became convinced that the song was coming from the throat of a young chipmunk! I chased it away in order to test further the source of the voice; and, sure enough, while he sat sunning himself on the ledge of the garage door, that young chipmunk took up his quaint little song of praise, putting many a bird to shame.

From out the stillness of a moonlit night comes the varied, raucous bark of a coyote. His preliminary bark is usually followed by low howls from the pack which, later, taper off from sharp staccato to yaps. These howls are deceptive, as it may seem that they come from a dozen coyotes, whereas, in reality, there may be only two or three in that group of nightly serenaders. The coyotes belong

to the wolf family and greatly resemble them. Often one comes alone during the day and sulks outside the fence. I have never seen one attempt to come into the enclosure, but he does become very daring if there are any hopes of picking up some food. One summer morning we saw from our windows two coyotes waylay a calf that had lagged behind the rest of the herd. The coyotes would snap at the calf's legs and attempt to throw it over. They were about to win in that struggle when Guy rushed down and chased away the marauders.

The foxes and bobcats usually keep close to the hills back of the cabin. Ernest and John trapped enough of the former to make both Ida and me a neckpiece. They made the bobcat hides into wall drapes and small rugs.

We have many desert creatures that are neither furred nor feathered. My account would be quite incomplete were I to neglect telling you about them.

As soon as the cold days of winter have given way to those of warmer weather, one invariably sees plodding across the desert floor a cumbersome tortoise. He is then limbering up after his long period of hibernation, and, with no special place to go and no responsibilities, he is just enjoying life in the great open spaces. While strolling along, this reptile is usually searching for juicy green tidbits to eat; and should he be so fortunate as to locate a small pool, he will replenish the water reservoirs that have supplied him during his winter hibernation.

In summer the tortoise uses his shell for his home; and should an enemy attack him, he need only pull his head and four feet into the unyielding shell to feel perfectly safe. In the tortoise mating season a person strolling over the desert may witness a duel between two males. First, they stand and glare at each other; then, after wagging their heads back and forth, they step back a few paces and one furiously lunges at the other. The idea, it seems, is to hook the curved portion of the opponent's breast plate and throw him over. A tortoise is practically helpless while on his back.



Since there is no referee present to count ten, the conqueror turns abruptly aside and goes belligerently on his way. Should neither win, which is often the case, they spit out a few venomous words and amble on.

When it is time for mamma tortoise to lay her eggs, she merely makes a depression in the warm, soft sand and, covering the eggs completely, resumes her plodding. In ninety days the little ones, about an inch in diameter, wiggle out of their shells and, never having seen mamma or papa tortoise, go alone into their world to forage for themselves.

The tortoise in our valley have recently come into national prominence. Many people have never heard of, much less witnessed, a tortoise race, but for the past several years the village of Joshua Tree has sponsored annual tortoise races on the first Saturday and Sunday in May. There are hundred of entrants; baby-size, middle-class, and huge ones compete for the honor of crossing the white circle, first. Human excitement runs high at these races because, just at the time when a person believes his favorite is about to cross over and win the prize, the contestant may decide to relax and take a nap—oblivious of all one's persuasion to the contrary.

Each summer I notice several horned toads within the enclosure. These harmless little creatures belong to the lizard family, and for some unexplainable reason I am happy to have them frequent the place. The backs of their toadlike bodies are covered with spiny bumps, while a little horn sticks out behind each of their two beady eyes. I often wonder why so few of this family put in an appearance while their relatives of several varieties practically take over the place. At times their kin—the restless, scurrying lizards—will take a short nap on a sunny bit of bark or a stone; but most of their time is taken up just running hither and yon. I am always amazed when I see one lizard actually devouring another. The victim may be as long as the conqueror, but as he is being consumed headfirst, he

is digested little by little until the last of his long tail has fully disappeared. I realize that the desert is rightfully the domain of the lizards; so, as long as they stay out of my home, there will be no arguments.

In the hills I sometimes run across a chuckwalla. Though their coloring may be the same, their bodies are shaped quite differently from other lizards. A chuckwalla depends on crevices between rocks for his protection. When an enemy approaches, he scurries swiftly between fissures and pumps so much air into his body that the molester, finding it impossible to extricate his would-be prey, gives up in disgust.

The very thought of snakes causes many people to forego the pleasure of taking hikes over the desert. This is unfortunate because in recent years the possibility of encountering a snake is not very imminent, especially during the daytime. During my many years of hunting for rocks or rabbits over the desert, I have found that a snake is eager to run from, rather than towards, a person. In my early pioneering years, however, I killed many rattlers, but from a sense of duty, not from fear.

Evelyn has never seen a rattlesnake in this valley, though we have roamed many miles over the mountains and sandy washes. As for Adelaide, I must tell a big story about a tiny snake. One day while I was shopping in the village, she and Osa were strolling around the yard. Soon they espied a very small snake and scurried back into the cabin. From their account, however, one imagined that they had encountered something colossal; and in their haste to "escape," they failed to notice whether it was one of a friendly variety that we do not discourage or whether it was a poisonous snake that should have been killed. The next spring on one of my trips to the basement I heard the telltale alarm of a rattler. I at once thought of the little snake that had escaped the girls; this one seemed fully grown. Fortunately, it stayed in a position where I could shoot it with no damage to fruit jars or canned goods, and



then I lost no time in cementing the small hole near a pipeline through which it had probably entered. Adelaide still says that she has no intention of "investigating" any type of snake as long as she has two good feet to carry her away from it!

#### *Desert Sweethearts*

There once were two burros,

Little muley things;

I'm sure they were not angels—

They lacked the proper wings.

But these two shaggy burros,

Sweethearts of desert wild,

Belied their reputation

By being very mild.

Now burros are quite oft maligned

About their stubborn traits,

For these two lovin' burros

Were most congenial mates.

Perhaps a lesson we can learn—

Take heed to it, I pray:

Don't judge a couple's happiness

By what the neighbors say.

## Chapter 40

### PAGING DIOGENES

Because many readers calling at "The Joshuas" had been disappointed by not being able to purchase a volume of my poems, I decided in the spring of 1946 to have a collection of them published under the title, *Desert Peace*. The war had left a paper shortage, so although the volume was not over eighty pages, it was difficult to get enough of the type of paper and binding we thought suitable for this type of publication. By December, however, it was on the market, and the entire edition sold readily. I doubt that any single venture has brought me more pleasure and friends than that book. Many people have requested that I have a second edition made, but I had a greater urge to combine some of the poems and a few of my favorite philosophy columns with a story of my desert experience. I hope this decision, resulting in *My Life on the Mojave*, will satisfy my old friends and perhaps make many new ones.

In October of 1946, Nichols Field Wilson, editor of *Ghost Town News*, became ill and the magazine was discontinued; my page, "Drifts from the Desert," was then taken over by *Desert Spotlight*, published by Ruth and Homer Stuart in Yucca Valley. During the seven or eight years I wrote for that magazine and the local paper, *Joshua Journal* (later called *Desert Journal*), we witnessed the birth and growth of the nearby villages of Yucca Valley, Joshua Tree, Morongo Valley, and, later, Pioneertown. One by one each has applied for and obtained its post office.

Early the following April I found it necessary to go to



Banning on business regarding the sale of *Desert Peace*. After discharging that errand, I chatted for a while with the Stowells of the Banning *Live Wire* before picking up a rocker that I had left at the upholsterer's to be recovered. I carried the chair home in the turtleback of my car. Since I had to keep the lid raised, the rear view was almost entirely cut off. But I kept to the extreme right-hand side of the road and managed so well that, when I reached Morongo Valley, I decided to turn off at the Livingston hillside ranch to call on Clara, one of the earliest residents and my longtime friend. It was then that I discovered that my handbag was not in the car, for when I returned to the car to get pencil and paper from my purse to leave a note for Clara, it was not to be found. Since it was now getting dark, I continued on home, starting out early the next morning to retrace my course. Seeing no sign of the purse along the way, I went into Banning once more to report the incident to the police and newspaper. As a rule, I carry very little money, but on this occasion I did have with me, besides my driver's license, check book, and the heterogeneous collection of things important only to a woman, more money than I could afford to lose.

Two weeks passed and I heard no word about the purse. Practically everyone to whom I spoke of my loss advised my "kissing it goodbye." For some reason I persisted in believing that, sooner or later, I would get good news. At last I was rewarded, for, in the mail one day I received a card from a truck driver saying:

Dear Mrs. Paxton:

On April 24, when coming up the White-Water grade about one mile from White-Water Station, I found a woman's purse. The identifications inside show it must belong to you. I will stop at the Texaco station and cafe at White Water my next trip through and get the

necessary information as to where to send it to you or leave it.

Louie Basse  
Westminster, California

Evidently my handbag, resting on a carton of food supplies on the car seat by my side, had fallen out of the right-hand door of the car, as that door would jiggle open occasionally when I drove over a rough road.

Remembering that John and Virginia Lightburn lived in Westminster, I wrote to them about Mr. Basse's having found my purse; and the next week end they drove up to the cabin, bringing it with them. Everything was intact; not a single penny was missing! And Mr. Basse, bless his soul, refused to take any reward. I had the happy thought that surely he would not mind accepting a book of my poems! Soon I had a gracious letter from his mother saying that even a single poem had fully repaid Louie for all of his trouble.

Now if anyone knows the whereabouts of that ancient philosopher Diogenes, please tell him that he can hang up his lantern and stop looking, for I have found at least one honest man!

Chapter 41

A LETTER TO CORA STRATTON AND  
VYVIAN BALLARD OF DENVER, COLORADO

"THE JOSHUAS"

Yucca Valley, California  
December 12, 1947

My dear girls,

Since we have known each other for so many years, I suppose we shall always say "girls." This is an answer to



each of your long-ago-received letters, but primarily a birthday letter to Cora. I'm sure that since we seldom take time to write, she would prefer a letter to a fancy card. Cora, that you should choose a birthday so near Christmas, and I one just after New Year's, was poor judgment on our part—not so?

First, I'll try to answer your questions so that I'll not take up all the pages in idle chatter about the weather or someone's poor state of health. I thought you knew that we lost our dog Sally some time ago. She was a good mongrel, and many friends have written offering us another dog. But truly I do not want one—at least not under present conditions. Many times during the night Sally's bark would waken me, only to realize that it was the presence of a faraway coyote she was resenting.

We call our present cat "Inky." Inky is the grandson of our famous Señora, the beautiful calico cat we had for so long. It was Señora's and her daughter's pictures that you saw in magazines. All of the calico cats were females, but not all the females were tricolored.

No, Guy did not attempt to raise any vegetables this past summer. Though they were small, we enjoyed the home-grown melons and tomatoes for two seasons, but he found that it required constant vigil to keep the rodents from getting first choice. And gophers killed our two peach trees after they had supplied us with delicious fruit for just three summers. But it was an experiment and worth the trial.

During the summer we did have a flash flood which completely filled the old lake bed below us. We were not expecting Evelyn, so were surprised to see her car parked on the opposite side of the lake just before dark. Taking off her shoes and stockings, she filled her arms with perishable supplies, locked the car, and started to wade across. Guy and I hurried down and stood on this side of the water. The silt in the lake was terribly slippery, and it was an effort for her to keep her footing, much less carry a load

through the current. She made it without mishap, though, and the next afternoon was able to bring the car up to the garage.

We do enjoy as many social events as we care to accept invitations for. Not long ago a group from this valley were luncheon guests of Nellie Coffman in her renowned Desert Inn at Palm Springs. Mrs. Coffman is referred to as the "mother" of that noted village. In reference to our pioneering efforts, she told us, "It wasn't so much what we started with but the fact that we had *started* that counts." I understand that the inn was begun in 1909 with a small group of tenthouses. Today it is one of the famous hostelries of southern California.

The young man about whom you were inquiring must be Kenneth Witting. It was he who, while serving in the jungles of Australia during World War II, was laid low with spinal arthritis. It is true that some doctors gave him the dismal information that he would never walk upright again; but a few weeks ago he was one of our group on a hiking party in the Joshua Tree National Monument. Miracles are still taking place!

In regard to my working on the election board, I will say that I recently gave that up. After serving so many years, I decided to turn my part over to a younger person. Before doing that, the head clerk in San Bernardino asked me to divide our outgrown precinct into two parts and add the necessary board members. We are even getting street signs in the village, which is another sign of our growth!

That, I believe, about covers your questions. Now since you are fond of animal life, you may enjoy a desert tale of two tails. One day this fall, while having a picnic lunch under a huge pine tree up at Dot Sall's canyon retreat, a bird accustomed to sit near her at mealtime flew down as usual and perched very close to her plate. Dot thought she would play a joke on it; so, sliding her hand under the table, she grabbed the bird by the tail. To our amazement,



and no doubt the bird's, Dot sat holding a handful of feathers while the bird flew away *sans* tail. But soon, quite unabashed, he returned, and that time stayed to eat a full meal.

The second tale is about a lizard that was frisking around Vance Danner's studio—the one across the highway. Just for fun, Vance picked up a small stone and tossed it at the lizard. The stone must have been sharp, because when it hit him, off he scampered leaving one-half of his tail. After running a short distance, that wily reptile discovered he was minus part of his anatomy; back he raced, put the dismembered part in his mouth, then scurried like mad into the brush.

During the winter months one of our greatest pleasures is having picnics over at the monument. This preserve is nearby, and there are many places of interest which we enjoy investigating; as at other monuments, the facilities for making coffee and warming food are excellent. We take our own wood for fire and use the carefully placed 'camp stoves. No one in his right mind leaves the grounds without knowing that every fire hazard has been fully destroyed.

On a recent scouting trip for pictures, the Vromans, with Guy and me, drove into Devil's Garden, where we found a thickly populated group of jumping cholla. From this isolated location we drove over the back route to Desert Hot Springs, where we called on our friends Portia and Cabot Yerxa. Cabot is building an extensive Hopi-Indian-type home in which he plans to have his art gallery and trading post. When completed, the Yerxa home will be one of the show places on this great desert.

Although it is not yet six o'clock, the early night is dark; even the stars shine but dimly through gossamer-like clouds. Very faintly I can hear the playful yapping of the coyotes from across the sand dunes. More than one-half mile below, on the 29 Palms Highway, the bright lights from passing cars loom up in the darkness like sparkling jewels on a huge necklace. Soon I will blow out the flame from the gasoline

lamp. To me one of the greatest joys of the evening is sitting in the semidarkness watching the blaze from the burning logs in the open grate. It is at such times that the Spirit Father is very real and near.

And so, my dear friends of thirty-five years, I'll sign off with a parting wish for your good health and a sincere prayer that Cora may have many more happy birthdays. As always, heap big love from

Juneey Joy

### *To a Friend*

No time is wasted when we send a special greeting to a friend. It may be you, or you, or *you*, for friends are judged by feelings true. Days move so swiftly by, and lest I seem to forget, I want to say to you my friend, I'm much in debt.

I'm in debt to you for the handclasp the day I was blue; I'm in debt to you for the pleasant smile and understanding, too. I'm in debt to you for the lilting song that cheered me when the day seemed long, and the time you showed your faith was strong, when the rest of the gang seemed to think I was wrong.

When ugly gossip reared her head, you came at once to me and said, "Old pal, you got a dirty rap, but you're too big to fight it back." And then that time when death hung low, and only God Himself could know my sorrow and despair—I did not need to look, for you were there.

I need you, friend, where'er you are, for friendship knows no near nor far. I need you when the skies are blue; I need you in the darkness, too. I only pray that in the end I will have been just such a friend!



go with him to find some breakfast. If that is his idea, she certainly needs much coaxing, as he utters over and over again his woeful tune. The Say's Phoebe builds its nest in the eaves of the cabin, and at times this has proved to be unfortunate. When the young are ready to try their wings in flight, they have no protection from Inky, our cat, who has watched their progress and is there ready to pounce upon the helpless little things. We have learned to anticipate the flying lessons of the Say's Phoebe and lock Inky up in the garage until the baby birds can take care of themselves.

Still early in the morning, the valley (or Gambel's) quail begin coming in from every direction. From a distance we hear their "Watch your going—watch your going," mixed with constant quail-chatter. A leader flies into a nearby Joshua tree or perches on a fence post in order to survey the situation for any possible danger. As soon as he gives the go signal to his covey, in they trip and completely surround the low bath. At the slightest strange movement, however, off they fly like a small, whirring cloud.

One of the constant residents is the linnet, or house finch. This neat-appearing bird persists in large numbers. At times the breast and head fathers of the male bird are so brilliantly red as almost to mislead one in identifying him. The ladder-back woodpeckers also seem to be with us most of the time. They hammer persistently at the seed pods of the Joshua trees, which, while they last, are their favorite food. Later in the summer these birds do much damage to the bark of the shade trees. Fortunately, their more destructive relatives, the red-shafted flickers, are not with us permanently. A pyracanthus bush full of bright red berries, berries I might hope to use as Christmas decorations, will be completely denuded by the second day after the flickers have put in an appearance. Somehow—perhaps it came down the chimney—a flicker became imprisoned in Geneva Weber's cabin at Powam; before it was discovered and retrieved, it had torn to shreds every drape in the cabin.

## Chapter 42

### WINGED GUESTS

Whether or not one is an habitual bird watcher, he finds himself taking note of the winged residents of the desert—some what because of surprise at finding any bird life in such an austere environment but more because of the touch of lightness and color which they lend. As Evelyn belongs to the Audubon Society, I have come to take an added interest in the feathered creatures. Whenever she is able to spend several days with me during the winter, or a longer period during her summer vacation, her chief delight is in identifying as many species as possible. As I look over her record, I count more than fifty varieties of "residents" and "visitors" on her list. On warm summer mornings we take our second cup of coffee to the front porch and, sitting quietly with our field glasses, study the birds that fly in to enjoy the cool water in their basins. Some birds like the low bath made of rocks and cement right on the ground, while others prefer the safety of the pedestal bath enclosed within a sturdy fence. We have noticed, too, that within as short a distance as ten miles the type of bird life varies considerably. This may be due to changing elevations, and consequently different shrubbery, or to the presence here and there of springs which, in secluded places, offer the birds a better sanctuary.

The first bird that puts in his morning's appearance is usually a Say's Phoebe, one of several flycatchers we have around "The Joshuas." He sits on the clothesline or the fence and calls, "pur-me, pur-me." I have always felt that he is trying to arouse his mate, telling her to get busy and



The cactus wrens are another type of resident. Unlike most birds, they build their intricate homes with halls leading to the main nesting-room. These nests are usually built in, or under, the dreaded cholla cactus and with other thorny material that discourages any unwelcome guest. After the brown-spotted, pale-salmon eggs are hatched, the older birds are kept busy supplying insects and bugs to appease the appetites of their five naked babies. And what appetites! Even after the young are able to fly about, the parent birds continue for a while to bring grasshoppers, crickets, and other large insects to feed them. This type of wren has a tendency to be raucously noisy; yet, at times, the male bird will surprise one with his beautiful, joyous song! They have become so tame that they show very little, if any, timidity when I work around their bath or feed tray. They also watch the cat eating his dinner; and as soon as he walks away, they quickly invite themselves to the leftovers.

The least attractive-looking bird, and yet an interesting one, is the road-runner, called the "cock of the desert." I cannot remember any year when at least one of these awkward-appearing birds has not claimed our enclosure as his domain. One year Mr. Rhody brought his lady friend along; he showed her over the place and told her (I am sure that he did) that all this would be hers if she would look favorably upon him. I had visions of six baby "Rhody's" strutting about the yard; but, alas, something went awry, for the lady came no more to see us. This cuckoo's love song sounds much like that of the plaintive mourning dove. The mamma does not lay her eggs at regular intervals as do other birds; so that, by the time the last bird is hatched, the first ones may have left their nest. Road-runners are not sociable, and as soon as one is able to take care of himself, he leaves home and finds an isolated or unfrequented place where he can be, in reality, the "cock of the desert."

During one fall and winter we had occasion to observe

the ingenuity and resourcefulness of "Rhody." Field mice and kangaroo rats were coming in droves to the enclosure and were eating every vestige of greenery about the place. Guy decided to do something about the nuisance. He set conventional traps around the bushes and, adopting a neighbor's ingenious scheme, put a bucket half-filled with water near the front steps. Both the traps and water bucket took their nightly toll. It did not take "Rhody" long to appreciate the convenience of a ready-caught breakfast. He would take a trapped victim, trap and all, over to a water hose and, using the hose for resistance, manage to pull the mouse from the trap. Then, striding to the water pail, he would cock his head sideways and, with his strong beak, pull out the drowned rat, thus adding to his easy profits. The team work of Guy and "Rhody" proved admirable!

The desert sparrows are permanent residents. The white-crowned sparrows stay with us only during the cold weather. My favorite bird for his looks is the western kingbird, but he makes his summer visits of short duration and then flies haughtily on his way. The mockingbirds appear each spring, but after their young have become self-supporting, they leave, about the first week in July. I enjoy having these birds with me, because their songs have always been an integral part of bird life in California, both town and country.

Often my late afternoon vigil in the summer is rewarded by the arrival of the brilliantly hued Scott's and Bullock's orioles for their bath. Recently I watched one of them bathing alone and felt somehow that he had lost his mate. Our cat was snoozing on the porch swing, but when I asked him if he had ever been guilty of eating a beautiful Bullock's oriole, he only yawned and looked terribly bored.

In the partially dead stump of a Joshua tree not far from the cabin is the nest of a pair of sparrow hawks. Last spring we watched with interest the advent of the two baby birds. As they grew stronger, they would perch near the circled opening, looking exactly like downy yellow ducklings. Later



on, when the parent birds were teaching them to fly, the silence of the late afternoons would be pierced by the shrill cries of the four birds as they flew from one Joshua tree to another.

We keep a tray of small grain swinging from the limb of a tree near the front porch. When there is not a sufficient supply of native seeds, the grain provides an inducement for the feathered friends to come to see us. At late evening, just before the darkness comes on, a Say's Phoebe again sits on our front gate to tell us a last "good night." And from the hills a mourning dove sends out a lonely call to her mate, "Do come home—do come home!"

## Chapter 43

### CHEATING THE COYOTES

It had been several years since we had had a dog on the place, and then Sally, a mongrel, had been born and raised on the desert and knew how to protect herself against the threat of her natural enemies. But when Patricia was about seven years old, she coaxed for a little dog that she could call her own and was given a black cocker-spaniel puppy. Whenever her parents came to "The Joshuas" for a few days, they left Tippiie in a kennel near their home in Los Angeles. During the Christmas vacation in 1947, however, in order to give the puppy a real outing they brought him with them.

As long as we stayed at home, the puppy played contentedly in the enclosure. But one afternoon we left him alone while we took a drive to Palm Springs. Upon our return a few hours later there was a telltale hole under the front gate where Tippiie had scratched his way to liberty and, but for the grace of the gods, to dog-heaven. Patricia

was in tears when she found that her pet had escaped and was probably looking for her somewhere in the strange desert.

The winter day was almost over, and dusk had already begun to settle over the valley. We had no time to waste; holiday traffic was heavy and fast. We knew that if the puppy had reached the highway, three-fourths of a mile away, a passing motorist going to the city might pick him up or, much worse, run over him. On the other hand, if he had become confused and lost in the sand dunes and chaparral, he would be an easy prey for the ever lurking coyotes.

The search began. Charles and Adelaide went in the Doran car; Guy took Patricia in his car; Evelyn went alone in hers, and I did likewise. Evelyn and I planned to keep to the back country while the other two cars searched the 29 Palms Highway. A few miles to the east, Adelaide and Charles heard of a woman who had been told that a lady in Yucca Village had found a dog lost on the highway. They raced there! Yes, but that lady had given the dog to another woman who lived in the village of Joshua Tree about eight miles to the east of there. They rushed there! They could not locate that woman, but a man had seen a strange dog answering their description back of a store. Although it was almost deep darkness by then, they continued the search, calling, "Tippie, Tippiie!" wherever they stopped. Frantically, from out the low shrubbery, a little creature came rushing towards them, his legs crossing each other in his eagerness to reach their well-known voices—and security!

I believe that every grown-up was as happy as Patricia when Tippiie, followed by Adelaide and Charles, came bounding in at the front door! And every one of us learned the lasting lesson of not taking it for granted that a puppy will be contented to be left alone, even for a short time, in strange surroundings!



we built here on the desert, it was decided that, as soon as the men reached retirement age, the Grosses would also move to the desert and again be our neighbors. Now that Charlie had reached the age of sixty-five, he and Mary were staying with me while their new home was under construction.

The arrival of power in the valley was timely for the Grosses, since their household appliances were electric. While it seemed rather expensive to bring the poles all the way from 29 Palms Highway to our homes, the new convenience justified the expense. This time I was not reluctant to say goodbye to outmoded appliances such as coal-oil lamps, which had always been somewhat of a fire hazard.

Mr. C. D. McNeish of San Diego, who was helping the building contractor, stayed with Guy in his cabin. Naturally, we were not prepared for deep snow, so not one of our cars was equipped with chains. Since trying to drive through snow, especially upgrade, was useless, each morning "Mac" and Charlie would improvise ways to keep the legs of their trousers from getting full of snow; and then, with a gummy sack in which to carry their food and other supplies, they would trudge the three-quarter mile to the 29 Palms Highway. When once they reached the highway, they could usually hitchhike the three miles to Yucca Village, as the road crew kept the main artery open for the rural mail carrier and other travelers. Returning, the men found wading in the snow upgrade more tiring than the trip down.

During our "isolation" Mac and Charlie shoveled a path from one cabin to the other, and it was a novel experience walking between the piled-up walls of snow. Before the path was made, Inky, the cat, was sorely perplexed. He would attempt to get from his sleeping quarters here to Guy's cabin, where it was customary for him to eat his breakfast, but when he got his paws in the snow he would stop, shake one foot and then another, and, mystified, look around for help.

## Chapter 44

### THE YEAR OF THE BIG SNOW

One usually associates a desert with heat and drought; snow around here is a rarity. In fact, I have never heard of a real snowfall in Twentynine Palms. At our elevation, however, it is not unusual for us to have a light covering during each winter, although it seldom remains for more than a few hours. When a three-foot snow lies on the ground for two weeks, the occasion becomes history! Such was the unprecedented experience we had during the winter of '48-49. We enjoyed the novel situation but were greatly handicapped by its long duration.

When the storm started, I happened to be writing my regular column for several of the local papers, so I began by telling the readers how the snow was at least one inch deep on the front gate lintel and fence posts. As I continued writing, however, the snow became deeper so that hourly I was rewriting the description of that beautiful scene as I saw it from my cabin windows. By dark every tree was laden with snow, the taller bushes flattened under its weight while the lower shrubs and rock garden were entirely hidden from sight. And still it snowed!

The entire experience would have been more acceptable had the circumstances at that particular time been otherwise. It was the winter when Mary and Charlie Gross were building their desert home about one-eighth of a mile to the west of us. Mr. Gross had owned a meat market in Hollywood where the family traded and had also been our neighbor, so he and Edward were old-time friends. After



When the snow finally began to slide off the roof, great drapes of it would come down and hang gracefully over the windows. And in the mornings we would marvel at the two-foot-long, swordlike icicles that hung like fringes from one end of the eaves to the other.

Again Mary and Charlie have proven to be wonderful neighbors, and I am sure that the spirit of brotherhood in this valley is the richer for their living amongst us.

Each smoke tree and willow, cactus and shrub,

Is holding his cup out today;

For the rain-gods ride on billowy clouds

And drinks will be given away.

## Chapter 45

### MEET THE YUCCA FAMILY

The yuccas comprise an interesting family of desert growth, and various species are native to this valley. Included are the Joshua tree, the Spanish dagger, and the Lord's candle. These, together with the nolina—also native, though not a yucca—belong to the lily family. The Lord's candle and the nolina are similar in size and description, having the bloom stock growing four or five feet straight up from the low clump of sword-shaped leaves. In May and June the huge white bouquets can be seen dotting the slopes of the mountains at about the four-thousand-foot level. The Spanish dagger, on the other hand, is not "up-ish," for it inhabits the lower levels as well as the upper. My observation for years has been that the Spanish dagger does not bloom annually as do the others. Its blossoms make up in quality, however, what they deprive us of in quantity.

Taken separately, each rich, creamy, waxen flower is something fit to adorn a bride's veil, and these multiplied by the hundreds on a long stem are beautiful beyond description.

The Joshua tree, *yucca brevifolia*, is the strange enigma of the desert and grows only in a few places in the United States. It is the tallest yucca in the world, I understand. Many of these grotesque-looking trees reach a height of twenty to thirty feet, while here and there one may be found even taller. Usually the tree grows to a height of eight to ten feet before branching. Should it grow too tall before starting to branch, it often becomes top-heavy and bends almost prostrate under the strain of its own weight. This condition can be prevented if, when the single trunk is five or six feet tall, the center is clipped out. The pruning induces an earlier branching and insures a more balanced development of the tree.

The huge, bell-shaped blossoms of the Joshua tree, which usually appear in March, are formed at the tip of each new arm. A new growth then branches off from that arm, thus resulting in the weird shape of the tree. The blossoms are neither a well-defined white nor a definite green. When I look out at the thirty or more blooms that appear almost yearly on the old Joshua tree near my porch, I think of large cauliflowers. As a matter of fact, at close range one is neither impressed with their beauty nor their scent. In time the pods fall to the ground, where they burst open and the black, watermelon-like seeds are greedily devoured by the rodents.

The Joshua tree depends for its impregnation on a moth which, in turn, depends upon the Joshua. Neither can survive and reproduce without the other. Some people are skillful in sprouting trees from the seeds. I find that I can transplant the young trees quite successfully if I move them when the ground is very dry and then keep them damp much of the time for the first few months. A few people I know have transplanted the full-grown ones with remarkable success, but this is exceptional.



When one sees these uncanny-looking trees on a moonlight night, he can imagine a huge harp, an ostrich, or a dancing girl, a soldier on guard, a slinking intruder, or a ghost in dark apparel. And when the wind blows through the swords, one fancies he hears a song of lamentation, a dirge, or a weird symphony.

In March, 1951, the following article appeared in the *Desert Journal*, a local newspaper, under the heading, "Picnickers Locate Giant Joshua Tree."

About ten o'clock Tuesday morning the Ehlers-Isabelle and Fred—together with Guy Ohlen and this writer, left the Paxton cabin in Fred's 1929 Chevrolet for a picnic: destination, a mammoth Joshua tree high in the Little San Bernardino Mountains to the south.

During pioneering days many of the homesteaders found that part of the country to be an abundant source of firewood. Since then it has been included in the Joshua Tree National Monument, and one is no longer permitted to remove any wood. Natural vegetation and flash floods have combined practically to obliterate the old road. Recently, however, Fred and Isabelle had scouted, foot by foot, in an endeavor to locate the old trail and were rewarded by finding an unmistakable trace which led them to the unusually large Joshua tree. Having had that much success, they suggested that we try to reach the same place in the car.

Fred is an expert desert driver, and the old car belies its looks as regards dependability. The past week's torrential rains had brought down debris that, here and there, covered the floor of the canyon. At times we bumped high over tree limbs and masses of roots. Again and again we shoveled our way out of the soft sand. In several places we built up the trail with more rocks. Occasionally, we left the wash and wound in and out of the shrubbery on higher ground; but the "Chevy" always kept chugging along. At last, after traveling about

eighteen miles in three hours, we reached our destination and had a picnic lunch under that huge tree.

We found the circumference to be about twenty feet at the base, while the diameter is approximately six feet. Higher up, at about four and one-half feet, it measures fifteen feet around. If there is a Joshua tree larger than this one, it will be interesting to hear about it.

After lunch we continued to the summit of the mountain range, from where we could look over the exotic date groves of the Palm Springs-Indio Valley. That sight alone was well worth the efforts expended in road-making and the vigorous joltings which the Chevrolet had administered to us.

Said smiling nolina to Spanish dagger,

"Because you're a yucca you need not swagger;

Don't be proud and don't be silly;

My family also belong to the lily!"

## Chapter 46

### OPERATION PAXTON RIDGE

While my family were at "The Joshuas" during the winter holidays of 1951, we took a hike that we had been looking forward to for almost ten years. When a geodetic survey was made in this part of the country in 1939, the surveyors named the almost barren, rocky mountain to the north and east of us "Paxton Ridge." Perhaps the name was chosen because one of the crew members, with his family, lived in our guest cabin during their stay in the valley. Years later the plaques were discovered by Paul Fober. After being told of their presence, Edward and I were interested



in making a personal inspection; so when Johnnie Lightburn and his brother asked us to go with them to hunt crystals on that ridge, we accepted their invitation with double interest. These "scouting" trips aroused the curiosity of the other members of my family, who had expected from year to year to make it one of their excursions.

It was not until Christmas of that year that plans were fulfilled. We left our cabin about ten o'clock in the morning and drove to Fred and Isabelle Ehler's rock home about a mile or so east of the ridge. We wanted the Ehlers to join us; but not finding them in, we parked our car there and started walking straight west towards the base of the mountain. Of the six of us, Evelyn—who is a member of the Southern California Sierra Club—and Charles were the best hikers. Eleven-year-old Patricia and Adelaide had done very little rough climbing and were not sure that it was much of a lark. Guy and I were also somewhat out of practice and found the steeper slopes hard going.

On the lower levels we saw many small plants: dainty little green mats resting on the sand; courageous wild flowers surprising us at every turn; and here and there, in sheltered nooks, blossoms rare for that time of the year. While the entire ridge is exceptionally barren and forbidding, a few juniper, Joshua, and manzanita dot its rocky slopes.

In spite of the date on the calendar, the day was warm. After covering an exceptionally steep stretch, we would take a short rest on a convenient ledge of rock. At last we reached the top of the ridge where the land stretches out into a long, level mesa. There was no wind—only stillness and the bright sun. The stillness, the feeling of isolation and remoteness, and the warm sand induced relaxation and laziness. In fact, Adelaide and Patricia decided to end their quest right there. The rest of us then began the search for the markers.

Since the way was now easy going, we scattered into various directions looking for likely places to locate them.

The first one was easy to find, as it was enclosed by a cairn, although the plate itself was almost covered by contributions of cholla balls and various small pieces of trash brought in by the pack rats. The others, spaced at varying distances, were less easily discovered. On each brass marker had been inscribed the customary notice that it was a U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and that a fine would be imposed for anyone's molesting it. The name "Paxton" appeared in the center of each circular disc.

We would not leave until our two "pikers," Adelaide and Patricia, saw the plaques; after all, that was the reason for their making the climb. A little persuasion soon brought them across the mesa, where Patricia, especially, became enthusiastic over the find!

As usual, we took a few pictures and, as usual, some of them were disappointing when finished. I am sure that we will remember that trip, however, without a picture, for the day was perfect and we had finally accomplished something that we had planned to do together for more than a decade.

## Chapter 47

### MOONLIGHT FANTASY

In May of 1953, Evelyn obtained a position with the army as a teacher in the officers' dependents' schools in Germany, with instructions to be ready for a port call in early August. At the same time the Dorans were planning an extensive auto trip through the Pacific Northwest to Victoria, Vancouver, and Lake Louise. They invited me to accompany them. Naturally, the family wanted to be with Evelyn until she left, but Charles felt compelled to set a definite date for our departure, in order to make the necessary reserva-



tions. He finally settled on August 8 for our leavetaking and, as good luck would have it, just a week before that date Evelyn's port call came through for August 7. We were all relieved at this fortunate solution of our calendar problem.

Evelyn spent her last few days in California with me at the cabin. She slept in the sunroom, with the windows open wide to the prevailing southwest breeze. About two o'clock one morning she awoke and became aware of voices in the direction of the dry lake bed. Her first thought was that hunters were about. As the minutes went by, however, the voices came nearer and nearer to Paxton Road and finally seemed to be at the south fence of our enclosure. At that point she came to my room and awoke me, thinking that I should know about it.

It was a moonlight night, and the breeze wafted the sounds towards us. We could see no car, but the bits of conversation sounded as if there were two people. A man's voice said, "Well, I've never seen this before." This was followed by some unintelligible mumblings which we took to be the voice of a second person. After several minutes of silence, we heard scratchings at Guy's back door as if someone were trying to effect an entrance. Then we heard a rattling of tins in the trash can.

"This has gone far enough," I said. "I am going to get the shotgun and go out on the breezeway." As soon as I had made certain that the gun was loaded, I shouted, "What's going on over there?"

After calling several times, the answer came, "I'm trying to find a cup." He seemed completely unembarrassed to be discovered.

The disturbance finally aroused Guy from his sleep. Afterwards he told me that he said to the fellow, "Get away from there or I'll shoot you."

This threat sent the man ambling towards the rear of my cabin, where I stood in a white, flowing nightie (a recent gift from my sister), a 4:10 leveled at him, warning that if he came any closer I would shoot.

The trespasser seemed suddenly to realize his plight. His indifference vanished. "How do I get out of here?" he asked in a nervous, confused voice.

"Get out just the way you got in," Evelyn replied—safely through the window.

He wasted no time in finding the south fence and scrambled over the corner post. Of course neither Guy nor I would have fired a gun unless the situation had become more serious.

I reported the incident to Constable Cones the next day; he recognized the intruder immediately. Within an hour he had brought him to the cabin for identification. I saw at once what I had not been able to make out in the moonlight: that he was a local figure, harmless but well known for his tipping. We could visualize how he had left a tavern a few miles down the road at a late hour on foot and, getting off the main highway, had mistaken Guy's cabin for one in which he had sometimes been a guest. The steady stream of his monologue, sometimes coherent but usually not, had given us the impression that there were two night wanderers. And what we had interpreted as persistent mischief was his foggy effort to understand the changes in his friend's home. Neither of us refers to the incident when we meet in the village.

## Chapter 48

### FAN MAIL

Most people who have contributed something of their time and effort to the general public have had the experience of receiving fan mail. Because a great deal of my time on the desert has been spent in writing, I have received my share of such correspondence. The greater part of it has been of



a cheerful nature—expressions of appreciation and encouragement. Some of it has been facetious, or even derogatory. Whether it contained praise or criticism, I have enjoyed every note or letter.

Typical of many was the one written by a lady near Coos Bay, Oregon. Every time she read the column, she said, she hoped that some day she could come this way and spend an evening by our fireside or sit on the east porch to watch the full moon come up over Dead Indian Mountain. Femie Magee and Charlie eventually did move to the desert and do sit quite often by my fireside.

In one column I told how I could overcome a feeling of depression by putting the Beer Barrel Polka on the record player. In a few days I received a card from a man in Hollywood saying: "My dear lady, play the other side of that record; it is perky, too!"

I sometimes related that when Evelyn came up for a vacation, we would sit on the breezeway in the early morning, enjoying our breakfast coffee. I was surprised one day to receive a dainty bone-china cup and saucer from a lady in Port Angeles, Washington, who wanted me to remember her while I was enjoying that coffee. Thanks, Ora Knott!

I am not sure how long a certain doctor on the West Coast had been reading the philosophy column; but eventually I received a unique letter from him, the contents of which were somewhat as follows: "Dear June LeMert: I think I am on the verge of a nervous breakdown, but if you could take me as a house guest for two weeks and hold my hand, I am sure that I would soon recover." I may never know whether he was kidding or was being serious. In any case, I answered him by saying that I was sorry if I had unintentionally led anyone to believe I was conducting a rest home; moreover, being a busy "mamma," I couldn't find time to hold even my own hands.

A picture taken by Harry Vroman of a dead fir tree was published in *Desert Magazine* with my poem, "The Ghost of a Dead Fir Tree." Responses to it were varied. A man

wrote asking if I couldn't find a more fitting picture for my poem. "That fir tree is no more dead than my old car-cass!" he said. In contrast, a woman commented in her letter, "Your verses in *Desert* were fine, especially for me. You see, I just made it a special human tree instead of a fir tree, and received something very vital to me." Those two letters reminded me of a verse I once read: "Two men stood behind prison bars; one saw mud, the other, stars."

A distinguished citizen of Sacramento, California, himself an author of many books, wrote:

Dear Mrs. Paxton:—

If I could envy anyone, I would envy you the privilege of living on the desert. My sweetheart and I, over those forty-two years of wonderful marriage, made it a part of our religion to spend annually at least a fortnight on some desert. If we had time, we would run over to French Africa for a camel trip, to Hindustan to coax a rajah to lend us an elephant to explore elephant paths, or climb the 16,000-foot passes of the Andes into Llama land.

As you say, "Books do have a real companionship for one if, like humans, the choice is wise."

Sincerely,

C. M. Goethe

From San Francisco, over K.Y.A., Ruth Thompson, whom I have never had the pleasure of meeting, used to read excerpts from my page in *Ghost Town News*. Once she commented over the air, "June always makes my heart miss a beat with longing. She seems to have found the ideal life on the desert. There she is in her cabin, working around in what garden she has, seeing the neighbors, observing wild life and nature plus sunsets; the whole thing sets me wild!"

While contributing to the *Terminal Island Topics*, a Federal prison publication, I often received letters from



the editor or other inmates. As I look back over my scrapbook, I am deeply touched by their expressions of gratitude. At the time, those letters did not move me as they do today.

In the village of Yucca Valley there lived a fine, middle-aged man who came to the desert in poor health and felt that he must always remain there. But he met an attractive visitor from New York with whom he fell in love; and since she couldn't imagine herself living on a "horrid desert," he began to think his case hopeless. He sent his favorite lady a book of my poems, *Desert Peace*. That, they both told me later, was the deciding factor in their romance. Through reading that volume, she learned to love the desert and her John.

The greatest reward for my efforts to speak for the desert has been the number of worthwhile people from the Atlantic seaboard, Middle West—and even Alaska—who have come into my life as a direct result. Most of them have been one-time callers who extended their travels through the desert to include my cabin; they chatted pleasantly, signed the guest book, and journeyed on. Some, however, have visited me often, and others have become residents of the valley and staunch friends. The W. E. Thompsons of Medford, Oregon, always run over to see me when they spend time at Palm Springs during the winter. A very faithful and likeable fan was a young man of Springfield, Illinois, who had never seen a desert. It was surprising how very interested he was in reading everything he could find pertaining to it. At the close of each letter he would say, "Some day I'll be coming out to see all of the things that you write about." Dorr Smith and his wife eventually did spend a full day with me here at my cabin.

It was through my "Creed" in *Desert* that Zella Grant and I began a regular correspondence. When she paid her first call at "The Joshuas" I was in Illinois on one of my regular October visits with relatives. However, she made several successful calls later; and now that the Carl Grants

have a permanent home in the valley, we have continued our friendship.

Of all the readers who have been a source of satisfaction to me, the one with the most interesting story is a young man still living in the valley. At the time Johnnie Kobaly drove up to the cabin and introduced himself, he was living and working on the Sherman ranch in Big Morongo Canyon. A Pennsylvania boy recently returned from the South Pacific, where he had served during World War II, he was brought by some turn of fate to the West Coast. Being out of work, he had accepted as a favor to friends the responsibility of taking care of a semi-invalid woman for two weeks until her family in Los Angeles could get a permanent helper. Like many young veterans, Johnnie had returned from service philosophically disturbed and spiritually bewildered, so he welcomed an opportunity of getting away into what was virtually seclusion in order to "find himself." Maud Sherman, the invalid, was one of my old-time desert friends, a woman who had lost her husband about the time Edward had passed over. Having suffered a stroke, she needed a caretaker to do both the inside and outside work.

Soon Johnnie was reading "Drifts from the Desert" and "Lowly Philosophy" in some of the magazines and papers to which Maud subscribed. When he learned that I lived in the valley, he came to see me. Instead of staying just two weeks on the Sherman ranch, he remained there for five years until Mrs. Sherman passed over. He still lives in Morongo Valley and often expresses his gratitude for having read those columns, as they revealed to him, he says, an entirely new outlook on life.



Here on the hillside things are going on about as usual. Strangers still drop by to inquire about the prospects of getting a five-acre homestead. Those just back of our range on section 30 are being filed on, but because of their inaccessibility are soon abandoned.

Marie Ropp of Desert Hot Springs came by one afternoon recently with a station wagon full of artists on their way to the exhibit in Twentynine Palms. She had hoped that I could accompany them, but I had a guest.

I have attended the community square dance only twice since you left. Guy does not enjoy going, so Johnnie Kobaly has come by for me. I meet quite a few friends there that I do not otherwise see. A number of the regular crowd inquired about you. I especially remember Mr. Geil, the Fred LaFerneys, Clara and Al Livingston, Edith and Floyd Peters, Celesta Hollinger, Bob White and his friend Jake . . . Jake . . . I can never remember his last name.

I had a nice surprise one afternoon when Edna and Morris Onderdonk came to see me. Since Morris was so closely associated with your father on the Santa Fe, it always gives me a feeling of nostalgia to be with him. Among other old-time topics, we discussed our 1931 coupes. They had been bought the same week. However, Morris also has a recent model, which he uses on long drives. Guy insists on my taking his car for distant errands, but I still enjoy driving my little "antique." Naturally, I keep it inspected regularly to assure safety for myself and others.

I am enclosing the latest letter from Geraldine. We were sorry not to have more time to spend with her on our trip last summer. Seattle has many interesting places to visit. And this letter from Wichita gives us a happy feeling to know that Virgil has again taken up his organ music and is singing in a church choir.

One more Navajo rug has joined our group of floor coverings. It was a surprise gift from Clarence Reese returning to Los Angeles from his New Mexico vacation.

A few days ago, when I went to the beauty parlor to

## Chapter 49

### A LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER EVELYN

Yucca Valley, California  
December 20, 1953

c/o American School, A.P.O. 69  
Bremerhaven, Germany

Dearest Evelyn,

Our plans for Christmas here at the cabin are well under way; this winter the holidays will not be as jolly as usual, because you will not be with us. There are so few in our family that one absence makes quite a difference. The Dorans will come by San Bernardino and pick up Osa, who, as usual, will be our house guest for the week. Guy, of course, will have his Christmas Eve and Christmas dinner with us. This will be the twelfth year for Osa to be with us during the holidays and the ninth for Guy. We surely would miss them were they unable to join us.

We hope the gifts we sent you will arrive on time. Over the radio we are constantly warned to send the oversea packages early. Already our mail carrier has brought a number of cartons bearing foreign postmarks, and it is quite a temptation to peek in before Santa officially arrives.

Your descriptions of Bremerhaven and your trips to Copenhagen, Heidelberg, Cologne, and Amsterdam were most interesting. And the color slides you bring back will be even more so. What a wonderful privilege it is to be able to teach and at the same time have the opportunity to see Europe!



have Mary Ojala dress my hair, I took along the picture you recently sent back—the one taken for your school annual. After looking at it, Mary said, "Tell Evelyn that with her new hair dress she has already begun to look like a German."

Since many people are interested in your experiences over there, I have promised the *Desert Journal* that they may print your letters from time to time. So be good and write often to your lovin'

Mother

Chapter 50

AGAIN I WRITE LETTERS

Yucca Valley, California  
March 12, 1954

Mrs. Frank Pruitt  
Huntington Beach, California

My dear Minnie Lee,

I have just returned from spending a pleasant afternoon in the village of Joshua Tree. My friends Femie and Charles Magee gave a little surprise party for Guy, who had his seventy-fourth birthday today. Tonight the Dorans will come up for the weekend; each year at this time we celebrate Adelaide's and Guy's birthdays together at my cabin. Patricia calls Guy "uncle," but he really is more like a grandfather and spoils her terribly! His daughter Eloise has three children about the age of Patricia, but they live in San Antonio, Texas, so he seldom sees them. His other daughter, Dorothy, has never married.

Do you ever listen over radio to "One Man's Family"? Father Barbour, J. Anthony Smythe in real life, comes to the valley frequently and has visited Guy and me several times.

Although not a very faithful member, did I tell you that I belong to the "Night Owls"? This is not an organization, as such, but anyone who for one reason or another is awake much of the night from one to five-thirty A.M. and who listens to the Ben Hunter program over K.F.I. from Los Angeles, can get an official Night Owl card simply by writing for it. It's surprising how much good information one can acquire during those hours and how quickly the time passes!

We have a most interesting couple for new neighbors! Arlene and Bob Wadle have bought the former Kiner property and have established their theatrical-wig studio on the lower floor of the hillside home. Already I like them very much!

And I want to tell you about a lovely little chapel made of native rock located in what is called Christ Park here in Yucca Valley. In this park are life-size statues of Biblical characters beautifully sculptured by Antone Martin. The place is already becoming quite famous.

I enjoy going to Twentynine Palms occasionally as it gives me an opportunity to see my old friends there. I have heard that of the twenty-eight veterans who played an important role in settling this high desert, twenty-six are still enjoying life there, though some of them have retired from active work. Do you know, dear, that it is difficult even for me to realize, although I have lived right here, the many changes that have taken place since the time, twenty-five years ago, that I went literally into seclusion to get a new lease on life?

Think how the use of wood for heating and cooking has changed to the use of butane and electrical equipment; the wash basin and tea kettle to running water in the homes. Coal-oil lamps are a novelty! Our one-room schoolhouse



has become a modern institution, while churches, representing many denominations, are within reach of everyone. The square-dance and veterans' organizations have been supplemented by civic groups, lodges, women's clubs, picture shows, home-talent plays, skating, golf, bowling, art centers . . . and on and on until it seems one could constantly be on the go if one so desired.

Years ago I could hear a friend's old car as it rattled up the lane in time to powder my nose and put on the earrings—but not now. These modern cars glide up the grade so silently that the bell on the front gate jingles before I am aware that anyone is near.

Osa's group of San Bernardino church ladies will be coming for their annual day on the desert. I hope that you can join them as usual. Anyway, you are due to spend a week or two with me. I doubt whether many friends have been privileged to keep together for sixty-five years as have our own little group. When you come, I plan on having Virginia Rose of Hollywood here at the same time. Virginia is one of my very dear younger friends—one whom I tucked under my wing, so to speak, before I came to the desert.

But now, Minnie Lee, I must move along, as I want to get in some logs before dark. By the time the Dorans arrive, I hope to have my chores done and a warm fire in the open grate to welcome them. 'Bye for now and heaps of love from

Juneey Joy

## Chapter 51

### PERIL IN THE NIGHT

Our favorite one-day trip has always been to drive the thirty-five miles to Palm Springs and continue south over

Highway 111 to the date ranches near Indio. Of course this is not a summer excursion, since Indio, almost at sea level, becomes oppressively hot in mid-summer. But during the other seasons the weather is likely to be quite balmy, and guests who have never seen the groves of date palms are usually fascinated with the sight. Sales stands and markets in that area have enticing displays of fresh citrus fruit and citrus delicacies, as well as dates in all forms of confection; so that after we have admired these semitropical products for a while, it is appropriate to have a huge date milkshake—a lunch in itself. On the return trip we frequently stop in at *Desert Magazine* headquarters, a Pueblo-type building in Palm Desert, where we enjoy the permanent exhibit of desert art and a chat with the *Desert* personnel.

Regardless of our destination, we seldom made plans for week ends or holidays, since our friends and family were most likely to visit at those times. Guy was proud of his housekeeping and welcomed overnight guests, for whom he prepared waffle breakfasts that won him local fame. For special dinners we liked to ride up three miles of rocky canyon to Pioneertown, where the Golden Stallion Restaurant serves excellent food, especially Chinese dishes.

The spring of 1954 was filled with a succession of such satisfying outings, in addition to a trip with Mary and Charles Gross to Yosemite, where Dorothy Ohlen worked that year. And house guests continued to come well into the summer, among them Oscar Mitchell, one of Evelyn's Sierra Club friends. City neighbors Della and Fred DaVall spent a week in Yucca Valley, on every evening of which we took them for a cooling drive. The Gross' wedding anniversary fell on July 12, so with five of us former neighbors in the valley, we commemorated the occasion by reliving together past events. Life was pleasant in a way that only good companionship in congenial surroundings can make it. We returned the DaValls to the village in a mood of quiet happiness with no signs of storm, within or without, to disturb us.



Some time between one and two o'clock that night I was aroused by the sound of rain dashing against my bedroom windows. I was rather surprised, since no rain had been indicated. Putting on my house slippers, I turned on several lights and, going from room to room, closed all the windows and outside doors. Even as I moved about, the storm gathered ferocity. The rain seemed to be coming from every direction, and the sound of the wind soon rose to a cyclonic roar while the hillside was illuminated with incessant lightning. I realized then that we were in the midst of a cloudburst!

I thought of the Wadles. Arlene and Bob were new to the desert, and their little home, though sturdily built, was near the mouth of a small canyon. As I looked through my north windows, I could see their lights come on, and I was relieved. I went to the west windows and saw that the Gross home was well lighted. There were two of them, also, and they would lend moral support to each other. Guy's lights came on last, but I had no misgivings there, because he was never perturbed during a storm.

As I sat down in the innermost corner of the living-room, away from the windows and fireplace—where I thought the lightning would be less likely to strike—I thought that the storm could not possibly worsen; but it did! The heavens opened wide the floodgates, while the wild wind hurled the water madly against the cabin. Reverberations of heavy thunder added an aspect of terror. It seemed as if nature had lost control of the elements and that nothing would be spared from destruction!

Again I went as near the windows as I thought safe, for I wanted to learn what damage was being done, but I could not see out. The lightning came—not zigzag or in bolts, as I was used to it, but in sheets, like a curtain, permeating the entire countryside, so that the torrent of water seemed illuminated.

I thought of the phone system between the two cabins and wanted to ring Guy in order to talk about the serious-

ness of the situation, but decided it would be taking a great risk. I especially wanted to assure him that I was all right. At last, it seemed, an electric storm had lost its horror for me; I actually felt calm and unafraid.

Towards three o'clock the furor abated, and one by one the lights in my neighbors' homes went out. Feeling safe, I went back to bed. I must have slept soundly, for when I awoke it was almost eight o'clock. At exactly eight Guy would phone, as was his custom. As I looked out, I was happy to see that peace had been restored to the valley; and while my coffee was being made, I opened wide some of the windows. What a refreshing experience! The spicy odor of damp creosote bushes and wild buckwheat rushed into the cabin. Sitting at the service-porch table, from which vantage point I had an unobstructed view of the valley, I could see no signs of serious damage during the night, and I was grateful.

The mantel clock struck eight. I waited a few moments for the usual ring. Had the storm disrupted the wiring? I began to feel a certain uneasiness, and as I looked towards Guy's cabin, I could see Mary and Charlie coming down toward it. When they rapped at his door and received no response, I left my breakfast immediately and joined them. Charlie had come to borrow the wheelbarrow to cart away the sand which had packed against his garage doors during the downpour. Almost seven inches of rain had fallen, he said.

After walking around the cabin and calling, with no answer, we decided to remove the back door. Charlie went in first and then called Mary and me. It took only a second for us to realize that Guy had suffered a severe stroke.

He was semiconscious, so Mary and I did what we could to make him comfortable while Charlie went for a doctor. Since the roads from the hill down to the 29 Palms Highway had been almost totally destroyed, Charlie had to walk that part of the way, as did Dr. Bendall in order to come to our assistance. The San Bernardino road crew were al-



ready at work on the main highway and offered to clear the way so that an ambulance could reach us.

We kept Guy in the Thomas Ince Memorial Hospital in Twentynine Palms for a few days until his daughter Dorothy could arrive; and then, upon the advice of his doctor, removed him to the veterans hospital in Long Beach. He put up a brave fight but passed over on October 28, and his body was laid away in the beautiful National Cemetery for veterans in Sawtelle.

Thus the desert, which had given him twelve years of life beyond the doctors' prediction—ten years of which had been spent here in the cabin home he loved—gave also the signal for his going!

## Chapter 52

### A SUMMATION

This is the California desert. During the past several years thousands of people have become desert-minded; many city dwellers have taken up available five-acre tracts; the gregarious have bought home sites in the ever growing number of communities; professional people have come seeking new fields in which to practice; older people have been attracted by a new community that offers a quiet way of living more to their liking than a bustling, noisy city. From all walks of life the desert is enticing folk for profit or for pleasure.

This influx of people has not changed the desert as such. Bones still lie bleaching under a relentless sun. Sands shift restlessly from one dune to another as they obey the whim of erratic winds. The rattler still enjoys his native haunt; the bobcat lurks behind protective rocks. Buzzards fly low, seeking new prey for their dinner, while every shrub or bit

of greenery is an enticement for the rabbits—jack and cottontail. The tortoise plods unperturbed over the sand, while the quiet of the early morning hours is broken by the cry of the quail leader as he sends out a warning to the oncoming covey, "Watch your going! Watch your going!"

Fall days come as usual, bringing a surcease from summer heat. Seldom does a wind or cloudy sky mar these perfect days—days conducive to following an old trail or seeking out nature's secrets. Winter follows, gradually ushering in the cold, chilling blasts which belie the warmth inside the cabin, where the sun still shines brightly through the window panes. As always, the variable moods of spring bring to the drab desert life and loveliness. Brilliant wild flowers follow gentle showers, while the air takes on the fragrance of herbs and damp sand. Summer succeeds, inevitably, with its noonday heat, sand devils, and searing breezes, endurable because they are broken mercifully by the cool, caressing atmosphere of the mornings and evenings.

Tonight follows a long, tranquil evening at the close of a hot July day. Soon the moon will be coming up over Dead Indian Mountain, and I shall sit here on the open porch watching for the glow through which it will appear. Always the moonlit nights have been a source of great comfort, giving me a feeling of protection and of oneness with Nature.

Unconquerable as the desert may seem, one learns to love and accept it as it is—wild and reckless, or loving and tender! People may come and people may go, as seasons will come and go, but always there is the one abiding Presence who ever watches over this, the Great Mojave Desert!



*Evening Shadows*

Shadow time—and the evening

Falls softly across the vale.

Down from the hills through the chaparral

Comes the coyote's mournful wail.

Shadow time—and the sun sets

Behind flames in the western sky;

And o'er the dome called heaven,

A pageant in colors floats by.

Shadow time—weird forms creep

Cautiously down through the brush.

Creeps also the darkness upon us—

Shadow time, and hush!



