

Romain shares Montana memories

by Alfred J. Romain
1228 timothy Ct
Lompoc, CA 93436

I was born in Fort Benton, Montana on November 7, 1917, which is the infamous day the Communists took over Russia.

My folks had a homestead thirty-two miles northwest of Fort Benton and my dad borrowed a Republic truck with hard rubber tires to haul my mom and I home from the hospital. I'm sure there was a whole lot of shaking going on over those frozen dirt roads, but that probably kept me from freezing to death.

Our closest town was called Marias, which had a population of six; if all four of the Postmaster's kids were home. Marias was just a farm house where we usually got our mail twice a week if the Marias River wasn't running too high as there was no bridge across the river.

Dad's Psychic Dreams

In the early days of homesteading, Dad had a black, long-haired dog named Sport. One day Sport was missing and that night Dad had a dream that somebody, who lived about six miles away had stolen him. The man had a wagon painted green. He had also shorn old Sport. Dad saddled up his horse in the morning and following the directions in his dream and found the dog. The other things in the dream were true.

Another night he had a dream

that his brother in Idaho had died. The dream was so vivid that Dad believed it. He saddled a horse and rode to the post office, but there wasn't any word there. Shortly thereafter he received a telegram that reported his brother's death at the exact time of the dream.

I went to school in a little white school house which had one room and served all eight grades. We lived one and one-half miles from school and nearly always walked. Once in awhile, if it was about thirty below zero, Dad would take us with a team and wagon. I remember one time we had a man teacher whose name was Stoner and lived in a little shack a couple of blocks from the school. He had brought his new bride from back east to live with him. One day a skunk came around and she didn't realize what it was and got after it with a broom. You could say there was a Whole Lot of Stinking Going On.

One year we had a woman teacher who lived a couple of miles from school, and lots of times she would be late. One of the women whose kids attended school had a car and she would sometimes go pick up the teacher. My buddy Johnny didn't like that idea very well, so he took some large nails with a big head and buried them in the road, and sure enough she got a flat tire. Somehow Dad heard about it, and I nearly got a licking with the razor strop. Recently I read in the paper about some people in a

foreign country who drank urine and claimed it helped keep them young and live longer. This reminded me of another story about Johnny.

Sometimes they would have dances at the Marias school and usually the whole family would attend. In the early days they used kerosene lamps but later they used gasoline lamps which was a big improvement. There was no lighting outside. It was still during the time of prohibition but some of the men brought their own bootleg whiskey. Johnny and I must have been in about the sixth grade and while at one of the dances saw one of the men take a drink of whiskey and hide his bottle in the car. When the man put his bottle in the car and went back into the school, Johnny urinated in it. When he came back out later we were hiding in the shadows. He took a big drink, but didn't even notice the difference. I'll bet years later nobody could figure out why he lived so long.

Another time I remember us boys would go play in the barn which was about a block from the schoolhouse. To call on us the teacher would take the hand held bell and ring it. My older brother fixed the bell so the clapper would fall off easily, so when the teacher rang the bell it fell off into a snow bank. We didn't get to miss much school, as the teacher sent one of the girls to get us.

Harry's Revenge

When I was in the third grade my older brother Larry started high school so we rented a little house in Fort Benton and all went to school there. One of the neighbor kids named Marvin was kind of mischievous like my friend Johnny. Marvin and his brother Tom were curious about who was the best fighter in the third grade. I could get the best of Marvin and they figured a red haired kid named Harry was up towards the top. One day we were all down at the skating rink and a lot of the older kids put pressure on Harry and I to fight, so we squared off. He was sucking on a big round candy called a jawbreaker, so I hit him on the cheek and the candy popped out and Harry went crying across the street for home. Now Harry's dad had a rough reputation, so I took off for home. His dad did come to the rink, but I was long gone.

year when I started again in Fort Benton. I signed up for football, but didn't know anything about it as we didn't have any sports in our little country school. I heard the kids talking about quarterback, halfback, fullback, etc. One day Harry and his buddies talked me into asking the coach if I could play chief drawback. I can still see the funny smile on the coach's face when he said I could. Of course Harry and buddies were waiting outside the door to give me the raspberry. Harry had waited five years to get his revenge.

We had quite a few rattlesnakes in our area and there was a big den of them about seven miles from our place on Dug Out Coulee. I was about eleven years old and my brother Ray about nine when we decided to go raid the den of snakes. The den was a big hole at the top of a seventy-foot cliff and we knew the approximate location by hearing several people tell about it. This hole would be filled with snakes during the winter as that was where they hibernated. One day in the spring of the year Ray and I decided to find the den so we saddled a couple of horses and took off. When we got close to where we thought the den was located we tied the horses, grabbed a few rocks and started looking. We were walking along near the top of the cliff and I spied a big rattler. I let fly with one of the rocks and knocked him off the cliff. Ray stepped forward to watch him fall and nearly stepped on another. I let fly with another rock and knocked that snake over the cliff. We then had to make our way to the bottom of the cliff which was nearly straight up. Amazingly the snakes had crawled up the cliff ten feet and one of them had found a hole to crawl in. We plugged the hole and then clobbered the other snake.