

PART EIGHT

LAW AND ORDER

The Convict

Often, on one of those crime programs on television we see all the details of a prison escape. Two of the most recent stories have been of daring escapes from the Folsom Prison. When I hear these stories I always recall two personal experiences our family had with escaped convicts.

The first was of no real consequence. We were up in the ravines above Negro Bar gathering wild flowers for our Easter Nest, when two guards from the prison came by with big shotguns and asked if we had seen anyone go by in the past few minutes. We hadn't heard the wailing prison escape whistle start up. I used to think they blew it until the prisoner was found. So I always felt all right when it stopped.

Another time, for a period of about six months an escaped convict from the prison at Folsom lived under our barn at 8260 Sunset Avenue. Afterwards we all thought, we should have known. He must have been some sort of a good, bad guy because there were many opportunities for him to have harmed us.

Our little home place consisted of a small house that had a room built one at a time over a period of years. Down the hill behind the house stood a granary, an olive pickling house, a tool shed and workroom, a tractor shed and a large sprawling tin barn. The barn was one of my dad's, "build as you go" projects. Built on a hill on the down side were a chicken house, a hay room and a cow stall. On the furthest down side out of view was an opening under the barn where my dad only on occasion would stoop and shove a piece of water pipe under the barn for storage. Upstairs in the barn were two huge rooms accessible from the hay storage. The barn was called the "orange house". Not because of the color, but because it was used to store oranges in the winter. On the one side were stored the graded and market ready oranges and on the other side toward the house was a big room with huge windows where the oranges were graded on a big wooden roller affair for size.

As our family got too big for the little house, my sisters made a bedroom on the morning side of that barn. My sister Laura married and my sister Wanda continued to sleep in the room in the barn, by herself. I remember she used everything she could find to stack against the doors at night. The family used to tease her and say if anybody got her they would bring her back as soon as it got to be daylight.

My sister and I were discussing this recently. She told me that she could hear people talking under the barn at night. She said she often thought they came up into the hay and got oranges in the room next to her at night. She would tell my parents and they would scoff at her.

It is a small wonder that I did not run right into the fellow. I walked the cow home from our ten up Sunset Avenue and came down that side of the barn. I put her in her stall, brushed her, got some milk for the cats and gave the cow some sweet hay. I then turned and went up past the pipe opening in the dusk on my way to the house for supper. Later, at bedtime, one of us would take the dog down to the barn for the night. I wonder about that because she never made so much as a growl. Could be her and Max were good buddies.

I was a child who often had to hide from someone. My best places were a tunnel affair I had made in the hay and in the pipe opening under the barn. Again, I don't know how I was spared running into the man. I remember seeing a Turkish rug under there and had conscious thought of why it was always so bright and clean when everything else was so dusty. I think I decided my dad took a nap down there when it was hot and hid from my mom.

Not so. One day my dad discovered the rug. Next, he discovered a well beaten path through the thick olive grove to the draw and across the small creek fed by bubbling fresh water springs and up to a house that was on the side of that hill. The man's relatives lived in that house.

I don't know who called the police. No one ever told us kids anything. Then one day a huge square touring car, blue and bronze drove down into our backyard. Two men got out wearing jodhpurs and black riding boots. On their heads were fine brown wool ranger hats. They had big shotguns. I was a kid, all eyes and ears and I took everything in. As I stood over on the other side of the peony bushes, I saw them open the back door to the car and there sat a whole row of huge bloodhounds in their baggy skin, stiff and silent as stone. They got the dogs out quietly while explaining to my parents for us to get into the house. Then they held a shirt to the dogs noses.

Apparently the fellow had seen all of this and he took off up through the orchard over the hill. The dogs, I think, sat there and watched him. They all nicely sniffed the shirt and when given the order they took off in the direction the man had run without having to sniff out the trail. They took off with a baying that would curdle your blood, dragging those men behind them, polished boots and all through the mud and tall lush grass. Off they went up through our orchard and over Red Wasgatt's hill and across Chicago Avenue through Roller's, and across Sunset through the oranges on the corner of our ten. They then crossed Chicago again and went through Kroeger's yard and into the back of my grandfather's place and through Julia's cow pasture to about the place where Forestal curves. There they found the man crouching in a corn field. All of this with the "Owoowoowoo, Owoowoowoo, Owoowoowooooo," of the dogs echoing around the hills.

As I sit here this morning I think of the guardian angels that must have shivered in their shoes as they had to follow us around.

THE TIME MY MOTHER HELD UP THE STAGE

Too good not to mention in the history of Fair Oaks was the time my mother held up the stage!

The bus from Sacramento when I was a child was called the Stage. It came by our house about seven in the morning and came back at night about six o'clock. Its main purpose was to take workers in to Sacramento and get them home. It was a long tortuous trip winding out from the downtown of Sacramento to Fair Oaks. It went everywhere in the Town and Country area, then Carmichael, on to Orangevale, and finally Fair Oaks. So by the time the stage driver came by our house he was on his way home and free wheeling. My mother got tired of him coming down the narrow two lane Sunset Avenue at such a speed that it laid the grass flat on both sides of the road. So one night she was ready. Since we did not have a phone she took off to Fair Oaks when he came by. She called the police while the Stage was having a short stop over in Fair Oaks and had the Stage driver held until they came and gave him a ticket for speeding. That is the end of the story, but in researching some early history, I have found some delightful public transportation information.

Among the memories of Dorothy Smallwood McKenny was the story of her Uncle Bill Stowell who had a stage line between Fair Oaks and Sacramento.

Bill Stowell's was one of the first paid transportation in to the city. The Stage was first a Ford touring car and then a Reo. Two trips a day were made, the last stage out was at 11 pm. People rode on the running boards and sat on the hood. There was no law against that then, and Aunt Nora Ward remembered it as great fun.

The Stage runs were started at the Ice Cream Parlor in Fair Oaks, and they stopped at the Old Capitol Hotel on 7th and K Streets in Sacramento. These runs were managed by Mrs. Blanche Bunton.

Bill Stowell remembered one man who used to ride into town to gamble. He wouldn't pay his fare until he made a big stake. Then he would pay off in \$5, \$10, and \$20 gold pieces which resulted in big tips.

The last trip that the Reo made was a short one. One Sunday night in the winter of 1916, Uncle Bill had gone around by the Fulton residence to pick up Miss Lena Watson, a school teacher. It was a rainy, stormy night. The roads were muddy lanes and the Stage slipped off the road and gently tipped over.

Fortunately no one was hurt, and they made their way back to the depot on foot through the mud and rain. It was just about that time that the State

Legislature passed a new law that passengers had to be insured. Bill Stowell did not think it was worth it, so he quit.

Sometime later my Uncle Earnest Vincent, who grew up here in Fair Oaks, drove for the Gibson Lines. He drove the route that came through Fair Oaks for about six years. His best memory was of driving a bus to Tahoe which Will Rogers would often ride on. Will Rogers would sit behind him and tell him stories as he drove. . . . and so when I ride the sluggish Light Rail into the city now I sometimes miss the heavy foot of the Old Stage Driver.

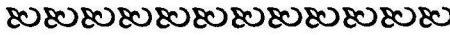


THE BURGLAR

My mom usually took care of all the crisis around the ranch, but one night she had gone someplace and stayed, perhaps with someone who was ill. My dad was home alone. He thought he heard someone prowling about so he got up and loaded the old shotgun.

Guns were not my dad's thing either. He got so excited that by the time he got to the door he accidentally pulled the trigger and blew all the tile off the cement floor. The blast ricocheted off the door and blew holes in the kitchen cupboards and the ceiling.

Shotguns make folks pale and blue looking. My mother came home to find my dad very much in shock.



THE ONE ARMED SHERIFF

Jim Smallwood, an uncle, was the first constable of Fair Oaks. He is seen in pictures always hiding his arm behind his hat or some other object. I found the following story in a history book from his hometown in Collin County, Texas. I suggest that you occupy the children elsewhere while you read it.

You have heard of one armed bandits, but did you ever hear about the one armed sheriff?

".....When Jim was around twelve, he and some boys were hunting on their farm one day, when his rifle accidentally went off and blew about half his lower left arm and hand off. The boys brought him to the house with his hand still dangling by the skin. Of course, they got the doctor from Maple nearby, but all he could do was cut off the mangled hand and dress the wound. His sister, Nannie was a cripple herself and always walked on crutches. Her lower limbs never developed. She was older than Jim and a dressmaker by trade. Her little legs could reach the machine pedals and just fly. So she lined a little wooden box with white silk and put Jim's severed hand and wrist inside. They took it to the Mugg Graveyard where his father and sister, Ethel were buried and interred it in the family lot. A day or two later Jim was in severe pain with his severed hand itching so. Of course, he couldn't scratch it as there was nothing there to scratch - only the exposed nerve of the hand - but he was in such misery they went to the graveyard and dug it up for Jim to scratch. They found the hand covered with big red ants and eating it up. Of course they got all the ants off and reinterred it deeper. "Believe it or not" he said he never had anymore trouble!! The doctor said the nerve was still alive when the ants bit it, when it died he didn't have any more trouble...So lets bury the subject!!

Now don't hold me responsible for this 'far fetched' story - I am only telling you what I heard with my two ears - No! Correction - my one ear - I was deaf in one!

from the ANCESTORS OF THE COLLIN COUNTY
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS

CHICKEN THIEVES CAUGHT

There is a story told by Byron Myklebost who was our constable in Fair Oaks when I was a child that is worth telling.

Being constable for 30 years has provided many interesting experiences for me. I recall one time when hundreds of chickens were being stolen in Sacramento and neighboring counties in a short period of a few weeks.

The Sheriff's Office and all constables were working around the clock. There were only four criminal deputies then; so Sheriff Cox put his off shift jailers and civil men in cars trying to catch the culprits.

We learned that the thieves were using a large Pierce-Arrow which had the outside door handles removed. I finally spotted the car, which happened to be deserted at the time.

I waited a long time for the thieves to return, but heard nothing. It was too dark to see farther than across the road; so I went over and took the rotor off the distributor.

I knew that all of our cars were in the Arcade District; so I then went over and woke up Mr. Clark and asked to use his phone to notify the rest of the cars that the thieves were working in the Carmichael area that night.

There were no radio cars at that time; so Sheriff Cox, himself, showed up with a double barreled shotgun. We sat under a walnut tree until about daybreak and it was as cold as last Saturday night!

It didn't take long for us to discover, however, what the trick was. Two fellows would appear to be asleep in the back seat, and when their buddies came up with an armload of chickens, they opened the car doors from the inside. The chickens were then placed under their beds which turned out to be chicken coops in disguise.

After that we caught about 27 chicken thieves in all.

from Fair Oaks and San Juan Area memories
published by the San Juan Record.

THE SHERIFF

In the early days of Fair Oaks, people were too busy to need a sheriff very often. Up until I was grown there was probably one sheriff in all of our side of the country.

I think the most interesting story I ever heard about the sheriff, was a story my elderly neighbor told me.

Seems she had a husband who did not provide well for the family and they were often without even the necessary food and clothing. This was in the olden days. One day someone told one of her boys that their father was really rich and that he owned a saloon in Sparks, Nevada. This really disturbed the boy so he and a friend decided to go there and get some of the money that he felt was due him.

The boys set out from Fair Oaks and drove to Sparks. They parked their car along the street, got out, opened the trunk of the car and proceeded to put on their disguise there in the street. They then went down a block, into the saloon and took all the money in the register. They walked back to their car, took off their disguises and put them back in the trunk.

Calmly they drove off and were well on their way back to their home in Fair Oaks when just about Verdi, the Nevada State Police caught up with them. The police stopped them and searched the car. They found both the money and the disguises that had been described. The boys were arrested and put in jail in Nevada. Since they were very young, they were released to their parents. However, no sooner than they got home, the drunken father decided to press charges against the boy. The boy was convicted and sent to the Boys School at Ione.

Now this is where my story actually becomes most interesting. He hadn't been at Ione very long when he decided to climb a high fence, coned the guard dogs, went over the second fence and ran across country back to the home of some friends in Orangevale.

After a few days the friends told him he had to go home to his mother in Fair Oaks. She was astounded, but as many mothers might have done without calculating the consequences, she decided to hide him. She hid that boy from the sheriff for months.

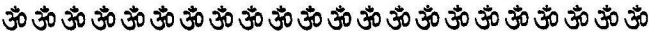
For quite some time he hid and lived in a tree house in a huge oak tree that was some distance across the fields from his own house. He would come over to the house from time to time to get food or other things he needed. On one such day the sheriff came driving in. The boy's mother was out in the goat

house. The boy ran and laid down behind an old lawn swing that was on the ground. His mother was looking into the goat house making the sheriff believe that the boy was in there. The sheriff slipped up behind her with gun drawn. When she could tell he was close enough she began to scream like she was really frightened. The poor sheriff was so flustered he just left on that day.

On another day the boy was in the house sleeping in one of the bunk beds and the sheriff suddenly appeared in the middle of the tiny front room. The boy rolled, covers and all, under the bed. There was in the same room some sort of huge dog, mildest mannered dog you ever saw. He was laying at the end of the bed and didn't even raise up to see who had come in the house. The mother, seeing her advantage, told the sheriff he could search the house. It was alright with her, because the boy was not there. She warned him, however, to not get near the dog because he was very vicious. And so the boy was overlooked.

This sort of thing went on for some time and finally the boy left. I am not certain of the intervening years. I do know this and I think there is a lesson in it. The boy continued to be a person on the run all the rest of his mothers life. She saw him once on a rainy Christmas Eve. He came to the door, he stayed for just a short time and then was gone again into the darkness and the rain.

Nearly forty years later she died, never to have seen her son again.



The Runaway

Children used to run away from home in the early days, just as they sometimes do today.

My little sister, Katherine, got mad at our folks one day and decided to run away from home. Dark came and my folks suspected that Katherine had made herself some sort of shelter and was hiding down in the draw in the willows.

Our good neighbor, Frank Forrest, said "don't worry, I can get her to come out." Frank was a man much more than six feet tall and weighing well over 200 pounds. When it got good and dark, Frank started down through the willows with his big feet cracking sticks and making muffled foot steps. I don't know how many scarey night sounds he even had to make before the little girl came out of that draw and was running screaming and crying to the house.

A Shaggy Dog Story

The land where our house is built was once great fields of grain. During part of the year it was grazed over by cattle. Cattle who laid under great mushrooming oak trees rousting flies and chewing cud's.

In the 1960's the last piece of the wheat field was subdivided. That was all fine until one day I was digging in my garden and found a long gray bone. My heart almost stopped. I thought it might be some person who had been murdered in Fair Oaks and never found. I thought, no it couldn't be. I put the bone down and covered it up.

I didn't think anything more about it until I was digging again in that area. I found more bones. I decided it must have been a deer someone had poached.

Some years later I ran into the bones again. This time I had decided that it was some Indian, who while traveling fell dead and was buried there, and that I should not keep messing him up. So I planted a tree there and I have not dug that place again.

One day I was talking to an elderly lady who had lived in this neighborhood since 1947. We were talking of all sorts of things when she started to tell me a story of the funniest thing she ever saw.

She said that one day she looked out her front window and saw a man pushing a wheelbarrow with a Great Dane dog in it, and that the dog was newly dead and was flopping up and down over the edge of the wheelbarrow as the man went along. The man, she told me was in great agony, crying great sobs, trying to push the huge animal in the wheelbarrow down the side street.

All of a sudden I thought of my Indian. I asked her where he went with the dog. She then told me that he had taken the dog back into the field and buried him under the huge oak tree that is behind our house!

So I gave up my Indian and I have someone's precious animal resting in peace in my beautiful garden

